

# Nokoko

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**Nokoko**

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*Nokoko* is an open-access journal promoting dialogue, discourse and debate on Pan-Africanism, Africa, and Africana. *Nokoko* brings forward the foundational work of Professor Daniel Osabu-Kle and his colleagues when they started the Journal of Pan-African Wisdom in 2005. 'Nokoko' is a Ga word that means something that is new, novel, surprising and interesting. The journal offers a venue for scholarship to challenge enduring simplified views of Africa and the African diaspora, by providing other perspectives and insights that may be surprising, interesting, and refreshing.

Combining spaces for academic and community reflection, *Nokoko* creates an opportunity for discussion of research that reflects on the complicated nature of pan-African issues. It provides a forum for the publication of work from a cross disciplinary perspective that reflects scholarly endeavour, policy discussions, practitioners' reflections, and social activists' thinking concerning the continent and beyond. Hosted by the Institute of African Studies at Carleton University (in Ottawa, Canada), *Nokoko* provides a space for emerging and established scholars to publish their work on Africa and the African diaspora.

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Typesetting by **Daniel Tubb**





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## **Contributors**

**Grace Adeniyi-Ogunyankin** obtained her PhD in Gender, Feminist & Women's Studies from York University in Toronto, Canada. Her dissertation research examined the extent to which women's urban experiences and socio-political views are excluded from the theoretical and political spaces that inform neoliberal urban projects/policies in Ibadan, Nigeria.

**Wonder Maguraushe** is a music doctoral student with the University of South Africa. He teaches courses in African Ethnography, Transcription and Analysis and Marimba at Midlands State University in Gweru, Zimbabwe. His research interests include folk music analysis, music performance in Africa and marimba music performance. He holds a Master of Teacher Education in Music Degree, Bachelor of Education in Music Degree and a Diploma in Education from the University of Zimbabwe. He has taught music in primary schools, secondary schools and teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe before. He has presented papers at conferences and workshops in Durban, Gweru and Harare on popular music, folktale songs, Zimbabwean music education development, music teaching and marimba performance practice in Zimbabwe. Wonder Maguraushe has forthcoming publications on folk music, music education and gender issues in music performance. Wonder is also a mbira music performer with Zvi-

rimudeze mbira ensemble, and a Marimba ensemble trainer in the Department of Music and Musicology at Midlands State University.

**Treda Mukuhlani** lectures in the Department of Development Studies at the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe. She teaches courses on *State and Politics in Developing Countries*, *Development Theories and Strategies*, and *Gender Issues in Developing Countries*. She holds a Master of Arts Degree in Development Studies, and Bachelor of Arts in History and Development Studies Degree from the Midlands State University. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. on water problems in Zimbabwe with Fort Hare University. Her research interests include contemporary political issues, gender studies, and land issues in developing countries.

**Nduka Otiono** is an Assistant Professor, Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa. He has been honored with a Government of Canada Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship, the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship, and was nominated for the Governor General's Gold Medal for academic distinction at the University of Alberta. Prior to joining Carleton University, he held a one-year postdoctoral fellowship at Brown University, and was appointed a Visiting Assistant Professor. His publications include articles in academic journals and three books of creative writing: *The Night Hides with a Knife* (ANA/Spectrum Prize for Fiction); *Voices in the Rainbow* (finalist for the ANA/Cadbury Poetry Prize); *Love in a Time of Nightmares* (The James Patrick Folinsbee Memorial Scholarship in Creative Writing). He has co-edited *We-Men: An Anthology of Men Writing on Women* (1998), and *Camouflage: Best of Contemporary Writing from Nigeria* (2006). As a journalist in Nigeria, he edited such celebrated publications as *The Post Express Literary Supplement* (PELS) and *ThisDay* Literature and Ideas section. He was a two-time General Secretary, Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA).

**Stephanie Urdang** is a South African living in the United States. Her career has included activist, journalist, consultant to the United Nations on gender equality and gender and HIV/AIDS, and co-founder of an NGO that supports women living with AIDS who were raped during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. She is author of *Fighting Two Colonialisms: Women in Guinea-Bissau*, (Monthly Review Press, 1979) and *And Still They Dance: Women, War and the Struggle for Change in Mozambique* (Monthly Review/Earthscan, 1989), as well as numerous articles - both journalistic and academic. She is currently completing on a memoir that explores the forces that contributed to the downfall of apartheid.

**Wairimu Gitau** is a journalist, a feminist, an activist, writer, author, and an upcoming artist (in painting, song-writing and poems.) She was born and raised in Mathare, an informal settlement of Nairobi, Kenya's capital. She has worked with local and international media including CNN; Aljazeera, Channel 4 and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for over nine years. She founded the grassroots media organization Mathare Radio ([www.mathareradio.org](http://www.mathareradio.org)), which provides local news relevant to #Nairobi slums. Hear more about Mathare Radio at @MathareRadio ([bit.ly/1BUJwxA](https://bit.ly/1BUJwxA)). She is also a former graduate student in journalism at Carleton University, in Ottawa, Canada. She is the Assistant Regional Information Coordinator, East and Central Africa and the Kenya Field Communications Manager for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/Doctors Without Borders in the Regional Information Office based in Nairobi. She has worked with local and international media for the last 10 years in Kenya and abroad. She keeps a blog ([wairimugitau.blogspot.com](http://wairimugitau.blogspot.com)), which she plans on turning into a book. She writes on social, political and economic issues ranging from themes such as colonialism, class struggle, race, ethnicity and social oppression, poverty, gender issues, suicide among others with an aim of highlighting the damage colonial

regimes, neo-colonialism and capitalism have had on the African continent.

**Rose Shayo** is a Senior Lecturer from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) based at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), where she has been working for almost thirty years. Her work involves teaching, research and consultancy on various issues related to gender and development. Her specialization is on Gender Analysis and Development Economics. She obtained her education for her first and second degrees at the university of Dar es Salaam and PhD in Manchester University, United Kingdom. Likewise, she has extensive experience in conducting consultancy and research activities on broad gender issues to international organizations and NGOs based within and outside of Tanzania. Some of these include evaluation of gender sensitivity of programmes and projects implemented by various organizations, development partners, multi-lateral, and bilateral programmes.

The cover photo is by **Tanya Kaur Bindra**, an independent photo-journalist based between West Africa and India. Her work has appeared in publications such as *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, *Time Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, and *Al Jazeera*. She has filed regularly to the Associated Press and European Press photo Agency. She and her work can be found at [tanyabindra.com](http://tanyabindra.com).



*Editorial Notes*

## **Women's rights and gender equality in Africa**

Wangui Kimari, Nduka Otiono, Toby Moorsom,  
Blair Rutherford, and Daniel Tubb

This fourth issue of *Nokoko* explores the themes, challenges, and opportunities in women's rights and gender equality in Africa. The volume celebrates African women's activism and struggles for their rights and social space to contribute to the continent's development and democratization processes. Along with a supportive development community, women's activism has resulted in notable progress in gender-responsive policy formulation, legislative reforms, and program and project design. The activism has also led to greater participation in political and decision-making processes throughout the continent. Still, widespread poverty, conflicts and wars, environmental degradation, drought, food insecurity, sexual violence, human trafficking, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic continue to disproportionately hurt rural women and the urban poor. The global financial crisis has exacerbated these problems. Moreover, African women

themselves do not have a uniform outlook on gender relations, patriarchy, and ways to improve their situation. Although there has been a long-standing focus to "help women" by a wider-range of social forces in colonial and postcolonial Africa (e.g., missionaries, government officials, political parties, women's groups, feminists, and international development agencies), such efforts sometimes cause grief and dislocation, rather than benefits for different groups of women.

This volume sets out to explore these issues, including the inevitable shifts in resource flows that impact women and their families, the implications for national economies and activities that promote women's rights and gender equality, the plethora of African women's organizations and networks responding to these emerging challenges. Clearly, we need more attention on the remarkable resilience and resourcefulness of African women in times of crises. There is an urgent need to further dissect many themes, including women's enduring survival and coping strategies at community level; the technologies facilitating women's organizing within and across national borders; the ways that national and sub-national mechanisms incorporate lessons from women's own efforts into planning and budgeting processes; and the new techniques and tools women use to ensure sustainability of successful efforts and avoid reversals amidst emerging global and national level challenges. For evidently, women's activism in Africa draws on histories in which women have played crucial roles in challenging colonialism and oppression. Women were crucial in the bus boycotts in Apartheid South Africa, in the miners' strikes in Zambia, and their riot against British policies in Aba, Nigeria became known as the "women's war." Women played key roles in resistance movements in Angola, Mozambique, and Kenya's Mau Mau rebellion. Remembering the roles different women played in these events that have defined nationalist narratives of the colonial period is important. It is indeed imperative to examine different women's heroic and quotidian struggles today as a way of under-

standing, and perhaps strategizing over, their ability to exact more influence on Africa's complex political space.

Grace Adeniyi-Ogunyankin examines discourses of women in politics by drawing on newspaper articles and interviews in south-west Nigeria. The article offers a timely exploration of opinions of women in the contexts of male-dominated states and national legislators. With women's limited participation in Nigeria's national and state legislators—Nigeria has never had a female president nor a woman state governor—unsurprisingly, men predominate in most Nigerian institutions and women are under-represented at every level. The author highlights the derogatory perception of women in politics as "spare tires," "second fiddle," and "prostitutes." "Spare tires" because the women are seen as conditional replacements at moments of broken politics; "second fiddle" because women's participation is believed to depend on men's approval; and "prostitutes" because people see women as exploiting their femininity for their own political gains.

Historically, Adeniyi-Ogunyankin notes the legacies of British colonial administrations and policies of indirect rule helped to create contemporary male political domination. While there were previous women leaders, the British excluded women and imposed their Victorian ideas of gender on Nigerian society. British policies cast Nigerian women as invisible. They subdued women's voices through policies of indirect rule that favored native male administrators. British schools trained women as housewives, child bearers, and mothers. While women shared in Nigeria's liberation struggle, as with many anti-colonial struggles independence brought amnesia to the contribution of women. The Nigerian state's gendered formation casts women as "mothers, wives, and reproducers of culture." Citizenship legislation relegates women's participation in politics to depending on her husband or fathers status; this created a mechanism to remove a woman's political rights.

The women interviewed by Adeniyi-Ogunyankin and the newspaper articles she analyzes highlight the belief that politics is a man's domain in which women have no equal footing. Cultural and religious arguments limit women's political roles, and promote the view that women should only be mothers and wives. These culturally grounded arguments cast God as ordaining male political dominance. And, men resist women's participation because they are afraid that women would no longer be under their authority, and that they would threaten gender relations in the home.

Besides, a view of politics as a risky venture that women should avoid is promoted. More so against the backdrop that Nigerian politics has a gendered nature as masculine and violent, a "do-or-die" politics that relies on godfathers and political gatekeepers that make it hard for women, and raises worries of sexual violence, beatings, and kidnappings. This violent gendered male domain excludes women precisely because they opt "out of exercising force." The article thus promotes the view that critically understanding the negative views of women in politics should inform feminist political struggles aimed at creating transformative change.

In their contribution to the volume, Wonder Maguraushe and Treda Mukuhlani shift attention from Adeniyi-Ogunyankin focus on national-scale politics, to everyday gendered exclusions in the ceremonies that accompany marriages in different parts of rural Zimbabwe. Maguraushe and Mukuhlani discuss the Shona conception of marriage through traditional bride-welcoming ceremonies, or *kupururudzira muroora*. Drawing on what the authors call an African phenomenological hermeneutic feminist cultural perspective, they show the ways that Shona cultural practices socialize young women for marriage. Their methods draw on a multi-sited ethnography in six villages, five interviews with women who describe the songs meaning for Shona marriages in a context of male chauvinism and patriarchy, and recordings and discourse analysis of the songs themselves. Maguraushe and Mukuhlani describe traditional marriage



ceremonies, the circumstances surrounding them, and their meaning.

In the ceremony, the sisters and aunts of a prospective bride's husband sing late into the evening to teach a young bride to be subordinate to her new husband. The authors argue that the songs relegate brides to a subaltern position. In Shona culture, a young woman becomes not simply a disciplined wife to their husbands, but also wife to his wider patrilineage. In a culture where female promiscuity has severe consequences, and after different stages of courtship, an important part of marriage is the traditional bride-welcoming ceremony. These events involve music, singing, and dancing. The lyrics impart instructions to the new bride on how to behave properly with her husband, how to be submissive, and how to please him sexually. The authors argue that women teach women how to "properly" behave while married. The "lessons" include not denying their husbands sex, an idea that reifies masculine power and domination. The traditional bride-welcoming ceremony songs thus persuade a young bride that if she does not satisfy her husband, she risks the lonely life of a divorcee. The authors argue that while the performances are not static, and that the performances continually change, as people reinterpret and reimagine them, the songs' contents raise questions of gender equity. The songs themselves transmit forms of cultural knowledge: marriage expectations, norms, customs, mores, and values. The authors undertake a discourse analysis of the songs to show how the lyrics instruct a young bride to be. It is women—the sisters and grandmothers of the groom—who teach a bride to be fearful of marriage. It is women who teach brides to thank their husbands for sex. While grooms have their own preparations for a marriage initiation processes, the uncles and brothers of their bride do not teach the grooms how to subjugate themselves to their new wives. Yet, in the name of "submission", the songs encourage women to be subordinates. The song's lyrics portray a woman as a desperate person, as someone who seeks male respect. The authors ar-

gue that the songs prepare women for subservience in marriage. To round off their discourse, the authors raise questions about how to discourage the oppression of women through feminist teachings and how to compose songs that are life affirming for women. The authors conclude by calling for more work on factors that contribute to the denigration of married women in Shona culture.

Nduka Otiono offers penetrating insights into the life and work of Catherine Acholonu, an iconoclastic Nigerian woman who represents a point of departure from the stereotypes highlighted in the preceding articles. In his contribution, "Catherine Acholonu (1951- 2014): The Female Writer as a Goddess," Otiono combines various genres in a single piece—review essay, personal narrative, and an interview—to celebrate the prolific African intellectual, cultural and political activist whose groundbreaking book, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (1995) has greatly influenced feminist discourse in Africa. Otiono's contribution includes critical analysis of Acholonu's rare poetry books, a tribute to her remarkable life, and the author's own words to shed light on her research and her efforts to go beyond arm-chair intellectual engagements to contest for a space in Nigeria's male-dominated and risky political terrain. Thus, the article bridges the private and public lives of the energetic author of about sixteen books, and demonstrates that African women can pursue their dreams in spite of the debilitating sexual politics that often threaten their aspirations in the public sphere.

Two shorter articles follow Otiono's contribution. The articles critically and movingly reflect on past struggles in their countries and their potential meanings for personal and wider projects. Stephanie Urdang reflects on past anti-apartheid struggles for her own biography and sense of self, as well as for current pushes for transformative change in post-apartheid South Africa. Drawing from her career as a journalist, author of the important book on women and struggle in Mozambique *And Still They Dance: Women, War and the Struggle for Change in Mozambique* (1989), and advisor on gender and

development, Urdang examines how major anti-apartheid protests intersected with her life, and how memories of these events have become the sandpaper used by South Africans today to roughen up sanitized images and proclamations of the post-apartheid era. Urdang invokes the 1960 march in Cape Town by tens of thousands to end pass laws, the 1989 Peace March in Cape Town by equally large crowds demanding the end of state violence (including apartheid itself), and the 1956 women's march in Pretoria also demanding the end of pass laws, and situates them in her own life. She also uses these to underline how they helped to forge her critical understanding of the injustices and her own sense of attachment and belonging to the place and the struggles which define it. She notes how different South Africans work to ensure that these anti-apartheid events are mobilized for the ongoing social justice struggles sorely needed in South Africa, more than twenty years after the end of Apartheid. Urdang's quotation from the great Guinea Bissauan and Cape Verdean intellectual and revolutionary, Amilcar Cabral, cogently captures this sentiment: "When our revolution is over, that is when our struggle will really begin."

The Kenyan journalist, Wairimu Gitau, conducts a similar archeology of public memory in her discussion of the contested remembrance of colonial oppression and different struggles against it in Kenya. She weaves together reflections on a conference in 2011, "Mau Mau and Other Liberation Movements 50 Years after Independence," organized by Karatina University and the National Museums of Kenya in Karatina, Central Kenya. Her reflections cover the memories of, and responses to public displays of the struggle for independence in Kenya by Kenyans of different ages, and her own critical reflections to write a provocative piece on the public silences or selective memories of the past. Gitau brings together these scholarly arguments, personal memories, and reflexive responses to show the powerful potentials and potent dangers of public history. Interestingly, questions about the colonial period and the struggles

against British rule lead to questions about the early years of Independence and the current configuration of wealth and privilege for a few, and exclusion and impoverishment for many. Her short piece describes the shadows of the past which colours the present, and shows how greater discussion and public reflections on the anti-colonial struggles like the Mau Mau, with the important role played by different women and girls can lead to greater questioning and demand for social justice today.

The final piece is by Tanzanian gender and development specialist, Rose Shayo. Although this article is not explicitly focused on African women's struggles, the gendered implications of her topic are not lost on the reader. In this paper, Shayo reflects on international academic exchange programs, her experience as a Visiting Scholar at Carleton University's Institute of African Studies (2010 to 2011), and as an educator for northern exchange students at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. She explores the establishment, financing, and design of exchange programs; the differences between short and long-term exchanges; the benefits to staff and students in both sending and receiving institutions; and the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges faced by these programs. Shayo draws on her experience as a Visiting Scholar at Carleton University, and from other exchanges between institutions with an emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa. She is no uncritical cheerleader, and she notes a lack of data and calls for more research. She also addresses gender issues through her teaching on gender-based violence in North America, students' reflections and classroom research in Canada and Tanzania, and the gendered challenges to access international exchange. The article calls for greater student and staff participation in program design and implementation in Global Northern and Southern universities to ensure their success and sustainability.

Taken together, the articles in this issue of *Nokoko* foregrounds the fact that despite the modest gains made by African women in the struggles for gender equity so much more still needs to be done. This

edition of the journal is coming at a time when Africa's terror gangs have begun deploying innocent girls as young as 9 years old as suicide bombers. The Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria notorious for such dastardly acts, that included the historic kidnap of about 276 schoolgirls from the dormitory, also comes to mind. Elsewhere in Kenya the recent "my dress my choice" protests to highlight and denounce the public stripping and assault of at least four women within two weeks, as well as the numerous others who suffer gendered violence in silence, also highlight the persistence and (re)emergence of the concomitant and contradictory manifestations and intersections of neoliberal political economies, hyper-masculinity and youth "crisis" within this period of women's rights gains. Lastly, at a time when woman activists had begun to celebrate the token representation of women at the highest levels of governance as presidents in a few African countries—Liberia and Malawi—the disturbing new turns that gender victimhood has taken calls for more vigorous engagement with the gender question in Africa.

We also want to warmly thank our editorial colleague, Laketch Dirasse, who came up with the theme of this issue and has helped to shape it.



Female stone figures taken at the University of Dar es Salaam Fine Arts Department, Photo: Wangui Kimari.



## **“Spare Tires,” “Second Fiddle,” and “Prostitutes”?**

Interrogating Discourses about Women and Politics in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>

Grace Adeniyi-Ogunyankin

This paper examines discourses on women and politics in Nigeria and analyzes how the political is gendered in ways that leave women out, and how power operates in political spaces in Nigeria in ways that exclude women. Through the use of in-depth interviews carried out with local women, local politicians, and government workers in Ibadan as well as discourse analyses of Nigerian newspaper articles on women and politics spanning three decades, I show that this perception of women needs to be dismantled. In the paper, I highlight how culture and religion play a role in constructing women as outside of the political landscape and illustrate how women who participate in politics are viewed as “deviants.” I note that when women partake in the political sphere, they often do so in gendered ways. Through this study, I illustrate that women, with regards to politics in Nigeria, are perceived as “spare tires,” “second fiddle,” and “prostitutes.” The paper questions the notion that women are unconcerned with politics and would rather be spectators.

Political participation is essential to democracy; however, in most democratic countries of the world, women are underrepresented in the political arena and key decision-making levels (de la Rey, 2005;

<sup>1</sup> This research was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa, Canada.

Guzman, 2004). As Kethusegile-Juru (2003) argues, "the inclusion of women in decision-making is a fundamental human right and an issue of social justice" (p. 49). Thus, at a very minimum, in a procedural and representative democracy, there should be a balance in the participation and representation of men and women in political life. In this vein, democracy is fulfilled when conscious effort is made to reduce inequalities between men and women through the transformation of "power relations between men and women by promoting the equal distribution of power and influence between women and men" (Kandawasvika-Nhundu, 2010, para. 7).

One theme that emerged from my PhD fieldwork research on gender and the urban political economy during the 2011 elections in Ibadan, south western Nigeria, is the marginalization of women in politics.<sup>2</sup> So dominant was the theme that in a conversation with a male colleague he declared that he would not vote for me if I contested as a politician because I was a woman and politics was not meant for women. I thought he was joking, but as our conversation progressed, I realized he was adamant. This paper is inspired by that encounter, and the need to explore in some detail women's marginalization in colonial and postcolonial Nigerian politics.

This paper examines discourses on women and politics in Nigeria<sup>3</sup> and analyzes why the political is gendered in ways that leave

<sup>2</sup> In Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999 to the present), men overwhelmingly dominate politics. No woman has ever been elected president or governor of any of Nigeria's thirty-six states. There have been a few deputy governors, the highest being six in 2007. In the lower house of the Nigeria's national assembly, called the House of Representatives, the highest number of elected women occurred in 2007 when, of 360 representatives, 25 (7.5%) were women. In the upper house of Nigeria's national assembly, called the Senate, the situation of women's representation is no different. In 2007, out of 109 the highest number of women senators also occurred in 2007 where nine (8.3%) out of 109 senators were women. (see Agbalajobi, 2010; European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria, 2011; Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2004; Irabor, n.d.; International Federation for Human Rights, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Nigeria is a very populous country with various ethnic and cultural groups. This paper, while using Nigeria as an umbrella word, focuses on South West Nigeria.



women out. Drawing largely on in-depth interviews carried out with local women in Ibadan, Nigeria, I argue that women are aware of, and critical about, the gendered nature of politics in Nigeria as a key factor operating against the participation of women in formal politics. They openly speak out against culture and patriarchy but are cautious to criticize their religious affiliations<sup>4</sup> even when they recognize the role religious discourses play in their exclusion. Moreover, though women disagree with hegemonic patriarchal cultural discourses that propagate women's political exclusions, they hesitate to challenge the status quo because of their desire to be perceived as respectable women.

I begin the paper by discussing the influence of Victorian ideologies of gender in the gendered formation of the Nigerian state and the consequent impact upon women's exclusion from formal politics. I argue that these gender ideologies have played a key role in shaping discourses that construct women as "spare tires," "second fiddle" and "prostitutes." I next show that culture, religion, and violence through political godfatherism play a central role in constructing women as outside of the political landscape and women political participants as deviants. I also highlight that when women do partake in the political sphere, it is often in gendered ways that do not challenge hegemonic patriarchal structures. I posit however that allowing women to participate in politics in a manner that values their gendered knowledge, perspectives and experiences is a key step towards gender equality. I conclude by examining

It is probable that there are inter and intra regional differences not captured in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> The women I interviewed were Muslims and Christians. The Christians were Anglican, Catholic and from charismatic African initiated churches. Note that when the Christian women stated their religion, they would most often state their denomination as well. Or they would mention their church/denomination in passing during the interview. The Muslim women would just state that they were Muslim. Note that most Muslims in Nigeria are Sunni. The most prominent sects are Ahmadiyya, Sanusiyya and Quadriyya.

women's proposal for transformative change in gender relations in Ibadan.

In this paper, the reference to women as "spare tires" in politics is when rare exceptions are made to justify women's entry into politics based on essentialised notions about women as non-violent, moral, and caring mothers. "Second fiddle" refers to the popular belief that women are supposed to play a subordinate role to male in politics. My use of "prostitutes" in this paper reflects the commonly held assumption that a woman's primary role is to be a "good" wife and mother who values domesticity. Thus, a woman who participates in politics is oftentimes viewed from a moral perspective as a "bad" woman who transgresses her assigned gender role because she is outside the home, where she does not belong, mingling with men in the political arena.

This paper draws on data from the semi-structured interviews I conducted with forty-eight women, ages eighteen to eighty-three, in two local government areas of metropolitan Ibadan, Oyo state. Within each local government area, I chose twenty-four women through purposive sampling. The major variables of concern for the study were income-level and age. I use data from ten key informant interviews with local government workers in the departments of Community Development and Town Planning and the Oyo State Ministry of Women Affairs, two local politicians, as well as discourse analysis of Nigerian newspaper articles (print and web), spanning three decades, on women and politics to support the arguments advanced in this paper.

## **Culture and the Rendering of Women as "Spare Tires," "Second Fiddle" and "Prostitutes"**

The woman is the helper. By virtue of that, they are to play an assisting role [...] it's like a spare tire so when the real tire is defective, I mean burst or has a problem, then you can pick the other one and put it there (E. Awoniyi, personal communication, July 10, 2011).<sup>5</sup>

During my interviews with women in Ibadan, the most cited reasons (across class, age and educational levels) for the marginalization of women in politics were cultural and religious. All the women interviewed clearly asserted that politics has been created as a man's world and women's right to participate on an equal footing is suppressed. The interviews highlight C. Otutubikey Izugbara's (2004) argument that "Men and women enter national [imaginaries] differently" (p. 25). In this imaginary, in Nigeria, men are viewed to be natural leaders. As expressed by one participant:

It seems [...] men [...] choose to be in the positions. The women, perhaps they look at them and say, what can these people do? What can women do? [They think] that wherever men are, women should not be there to occupy those positions, and that if they get there they won't even know how to do it at all. They come to these conclusions without ever giving women a chance (Ayobami,<sup>6</sup> interview by author, Ibadan, Nigeria, 02 Aug. 2011).

Men's 'presumed' natural right as leaders is predicated on the notion that they have authority and power over women. Many participants highlighted that this apparent inherent political right of men cheats women by presuming that the political is the domain of men.

Women, however, enter the national imaginary as biological and social reproducers who are supposed to stay out of public affairs, or only enter as supporters of men. One participant clearly illustrates this point through her argument that, "They don't like to

<sup>5</sup> This comment was made by one of my male colleagues at the University of Ibadan during our discussion on women and politics in Nigeria.

<sup>6</sup> Real names have been altered to help protect research participants.

hear women's voices in public. Only men want to be the ones who will be talking [and] who will become a big person. The thing that [a] woman [is] for is that, she cooks the food, takes care of the children, that she also eats and takes care of her husband" (Mojisola, interview by author, July 15, 2011). Participants posited that women are often unwanted political participants and they see them as being incapable of making sound decisions or that it is culturally unbecoming for women to expose themselves in public for political activities outside of domestic and supportive roles. They consider women who overstep this boundary to be 'culturally deviant.'

The reason why the Nigerian political imagination excludes women as political subjects, and views them mainly as mothers, wives and reproducers of culture, is partly located in the gendered formation of the Nigerian state. An understanding of the history of gender politics in Nigeria enables an analysis of the construct of women as outside of politics. As Mire (2001) argues, "African social and political thought cannot be understood in abstraction from the history of colonial encounter between European colonial conquest and African society" (p. 4). Contemporary narratives about politics—who belongs and who should participate—cannot be divorced from British Victorian ideologies of gender.

In Nigeria, British colonial administrators implemented indirect rule as a tool of governance. The British believed that leaving local community affairs in the hands of local chiefs and rulers was a means of keeping Nigerian culture intact (Kirk-Greene, 1965, p. 246). The appointed chiefs and rulers were usually male and this system of indirect rule disregarded the fact that female leadership was part of culture in many Nigerian societies.

The British also superimposed the Victorian ideologies of gender on many societies/communities in Nigeria. It was inconceivable to the British that Nigerian women could be chosen as indirect rulers because in Britain, the public duty of women was an extension of private role and as Mba (1982) asserts, the "British

administrators worked for a government in which there were no women at any level" (p. 39). Helen Callaway (1987) also notes that the colonizers "assumed African women generally to be in a dependent and subordinate position to men even in areas where women were noted for their independent trading activities and their political power" (p. 51). Thus, colonial administration was based on the ideology that women should occupy the domestic sphere and men the public sphere. This rendered Nigerian women invisible in the governing of British Nigeria. It made the exercise of control they had over their own affairs in pre-colonial Nigeria irrelevant. Colonial rule subdued the representation and voice they had in decision-making (Mba, p. 38; Petsalis, 1990, p. 197; Okoh, 2003, p. 22). Under indirect rule, the British administrators and the 'native' administrators of indirect rule, "rarely consulted women on matters that affected them" (Johnson-Odim & Mba, 1997, p. 11). Colonial rule relegated women solely to the status of child bearers and housekeepers.

Victorian ideologies of gender and domesticity were not only used as a frame of reference by the British for administration in Nigeria, but also instilled through the colonized education of boys and girls. The 1909 Code of Education was gendered (Okonkwo & Ezeh, 2008) because it emphasized training males to become professionals while females were trained to become good wives and mothers (Denzer, 1992). By the early mid-twentieth century, girls' education had reformed slightly. Girls were allowed to pursue education that would allow them to contribute to the colonial economy. Nevertheless, their education continued to stress the importance of devotion to home and family regardless of economic status or education (Denzer, p. 122).

On the eve of Nigeria's independence of October 1, 1960 there were more women, albeit few by comparison to the total population of women in Nigeria, who possessed tertiary education and professional training. However, the gendered education system

contributed to the “preponderance of the male population in the new emerging social elite, which provided the political leadership of the nationalism of the [mid] twentieth century” (Okonkwo & Ezeh, p. 189).

Women and men collaborated in Nigeria’s struggle for independence from British rule. However, not many women were involved in the nationalist movements and when women were involved it was class based (Pereira, 2000). Postcolonial Nigeria was built on a “male privileging colonial ideology” that quickly forgot women’s contribution to nationalism (Nzegwu, 2001, p. 6). In line with Yuval-Davis’ (1997) and McClintock’s (1995) approach, gender is crucial to understanding Nigeria as a nation. Nigeria was directly gendered through the feminization of Nigeria as a domestication project and through the imported ideologies of gender that shaped colonial society. In the post-independence era, Nigeria became further gendered by the continual exclusion of women from the public sphere and the reinvention of tradition.

In addition, women’s role as gatekeepers of customs and culture shapes Nigeria as a gendered nation. As Yuval-Davis (1997) notes, women’s role as custodian of culture and custom is pertinent in reproducing the nation. This has been exemplified in Nigeria in the post-independence era by the National Council of Women’s Society (NCWS). Elite Nigerian women formed the NCWS in 1959 as a non-partisan and non-political organization (Mba, 1989, p. 71). The NCWS’ aims were to “promote the welfare and progress of women, especially in education and to ensure that women [were] given every opportunity to play an important part in social and community affairs” (Pereira 2000, p. 118). The NCWS was recognized as the only organization representing women’s interest. However, NCWS has mainly served the interests of a sub-group of women. At the organization’s prime, it assured the federal government that it did not desire political power because women had not forgotten their traditional roles as mothers and wives. The

NCWS, as Pereira argues, "employed the discourse of motherhood, and the concomitant responsibility for family affairs and child rearing as the ultimate destiny of all women" (p. 123). Thus, for women, their involvement in national affairs in the public realm is limited to the extension of their domestic role (p. 124). This discourse resonated with Victorian ideology. As such, the NCWS did not make inroads in serving or capturing Nigerian women's interests, needs, and priorities, nor were women included in decision-making processes. Notably, based on Nigeria's pre-colonial history, these women did not uphold the 'traditional' roles of women in Nigeria given that women historically were involved in making decisions.

In light of the preceding discussion, women are expected to honour their duties as mothers and spouses first and foremost. As such, political engagement was assumed to distract women from successfully performing these roles. Even when women are politicians, the validity of their leadership depends on proving that they are "good and responsible housewives and mothers" (Ibrahim, 2004, para. 42). A male politician I interviewed clearly demonstrates this point:

If you say you have a meeting by 6 in the morning and your children will go to school, you have to care for your children and your husband. This will portray you better and show you're a good woman and you can be a good leader. But if your home is not tidied up, you cannot come outside and say you want to be a leader. You have to show them a good example (Mayowa, interview by author, March 16, 2011).

The expectation is that women should be doting mothers and dutiful wives which, according to this discourse, entails being at home. During the interviews, most women said political participation requires attending evening meetings. Fadeke noted that there is gender imbalance in political representation at the local level because "responsible women" rarely partake in politics:

[...] women are not participating in politics like men because of the odd time they meet. You know they always meet at night. It is not easy for a *re-*

*sponsible woman* to leave her home for a meeting at night. *Our religious and cultural aspects [do not] even give the women enough opportunity to participate in politics* (interview by author, March 16, 2011; emphasis added).

These late night political meetings contravene the cultural and religious expectation that a woman will be at home in the evening, and not “gallivant about.” Because of these expectations, it is then assumed in popular discourse that women who dabble in politics are prostitutes. Seun mentioned that, “a lot of people have erroneous ideas about women participating in politics. A lot of people are biased; they think if you go into politics you become a prostitute” (interview by author, March 23, 2011). Jade, also remarked, “but you know any woman that wants to get there... it’s a problem we have in Africa I mean Nigeria. Any woman in top office must be a flirt.<sup>7</sup> They believe that” (interview by author, August 22, 2011). Tobi, further explicated the prostitution narrative below:

**Tobi:** ...if any woman joins politics they’ll be like, “*ah she must have been sleeping with men. How can a woman be having meetings in the night?*” ...

**Grace:** Do all political meetings take place at night or is it just a rumour?

**Tobi:** It’s not a rumour because they think that’s the only time they can [meet]. I don’t know why. But they do it in the night. Okay maybe they allow themselves to go and do their business during the day then they now come and I don’t know why, and they feel a woman should not be there in the night.

**Grace:** That she should be at home?

**Tobi:** Yes (interview by author, July 18, 2011; emphasis added).

Since the political meetings take place at night, there is an assumption in popular discourse that a woman surrounded by several men would be sleeping with them. In addition, given that the

<sup>7</sup> The way Jade talked about being a flirt during the interview included engagement in sexual intercourse.



political sphere is dominated by men, it is believed that for a woman to make it in politics, she must be using her 'bottom power' to rise.

Although women aspirants are not prostitutes, the moral narrative is nevertheless leveraged against them. Many Nigerian women aspirants are subjected "to smear campaigns [centering] on their alleged loose moral standing, [while] some are insulted directly" (IDEA 2006, p. 10). This is problematic because male privilege and double standards obscure the applicability of the same line of questioning to males. As Ibrahim (2004) asserts,

It is well known...that many male politicians go on the campaign trail with girlfriends and/or sex workers. Male supporters see such behaviour as a normal sign of the virility of their leaders. Women candidates, however, even if they are not sexually promiscuous, indeed, even if they are saints, are expected to shoulder the burden of proof to show that they are morally upright. This suggests that the moral standards set for women politicians are higher than those for male politicians (para. 42).

Moreover, husbands are sometimes ridiculed for not having control of their politically oriented wives. The derision leverages the discourse that only "loose" women go into politics. As such, ridicule or the fear of ridicule makes it more difficult for women to obtain their husbands' support. A husband's support, beyond the need for adequate finances, is considered a paramount prerequisite for political participation. Even if a woman has a supportive spouse, it is possible the support may be only transient. As one interviewee explained,

[The husband] will just wake up and tell you he's no more interested or maybe he starts sleeping outside with another woman too and then when you now accost him, 'Why are you doing this?' He will say, 'Hey you don't have time for me again, it is this your career political thing you have pursued.' That's it (Titilayo, interview by author, March 8, 2011).

There also seems to be a palpable fear that if women were to become dominant in the political sphere, gender relations would be ruined. This poses a threat to national stability—as the discourse that males

are head and therefore *de facto* leaders—will no longer be tenable. This narrative was common in the newspapers I read and was also proffered, during interviews, as an explanation for why men are so resistant to women participating in politics. Concerns centered on the fragility of men's natural dominance and the decline of women's role in reproducing proper morals and culture. There is an underlying fear that women will no longer be under men's authority. As one interviewee pointed out, "It may not all go well with a man. You understand? And no man wants to play the *second fiddle*" (Ayo, interview by author, August 23, 2011; emphasis added). Other women during interviews noted that some men have a complex and cannot handle competition from women, and that they view themselves as superior to women. For them, it does not make sense that they would fall under a woman's leadership. In this way, women's leadership is often viewed by men as going against the natural order.

Religious cultural discourses play a central role in propagating patriarchal gender norms because "the belief that God destined men to be in charge and women to be governed by men is evident in many passages of the Islamic and Christian Holy Books" (Izugbara, 2004, p. 13). In this vein, religion is "used as an instrument in defense of patriarchy. Christian and Islamic law gives central place to paternalistic interpretation to women's appropriate roles and socio-political arrangements of the society" (Ndubuisi 2006, p. 2). During my interviews, people often explained leadership as something that is considered by society as inherently male because males have been ordained as head by God. Atinuke and Zahra for example highlighted the blurring of the Yoruba culture and Christianity/Islam in constructing women's political role as unnatural:

**Atinuke:** Yoruba people they want women to respect men in the house even in the society. Maybe that's the major reason why they don't give women opportunity. They believe men have the power to be ruling because from

the Bible woman was created from man (Interview with author, June 30, 2011).

**Zahra:** I think in a situation you know God has made men to be our head so if we look to that as per our culture if we believe in our culture men must always be the leader.

**Grace:** And do you agree with this view?

**Zahra:** I quite agree. Biblically, Islamically if you look

**Grace:** But you yourself do you agree? Let's say for now you have all the qualifications to become President, but somebody now says no you cannot become president because you are a woman like do you agree with it?

**Zahra:** Um, Islamically? Due to my religion?

**Grace:** Hmm. But, lets say religion. Now I know religion is very important so lets say religion put aside. What about your own personal feelings? Like I know that's what it says in the Qur'an and in the Bible

**Zahra:** I know if women if we were given chance. I think we will still be able to perform better than the men [...] (Interview by author, June 30, 2011).

Many women I interviewed think that the ordaining of male as head and female as submissive is unfair because of the male tendency to exploit this designation. The women participants consequently called for increased participation of women in decision-making and governance. However, they did not want to challenge the dominant patriarchal cultural and religious discourse. Inasmuch as women acknowledged the egotistical<sup>8</sup> behaviour of men and a male fear of losing control over women if women were to enter politics, they did not critique the Bible or the Qur'an. Although women understood the position of their religious texts on gender relations, some women did not wholly believe that politics is not a place for women. They

<sup>8</sup> By this, I mean some males' inflated idea of their own importance and selfish reluctance to include women in the political sphere.

used religious teachings to highlight that women should not be excluded:

**Ebun:** [...] Women don't have high positions [because the men think] women will be the one making rules for them [especially] when the bible says women do not have custom to make rules [...] That's what they are quoting. But, the world is more modern than that now. God left [the] command for everybody to love each other<sup>9</sup> (Interview by author, July 7, 2011).

**Nike:** Why should I be in the kitchen? I can be in the kitchen to take care of my family. That is what God sent us to this world to come and do. But it's not the only thing. You see when I traveled to Jerusalem [...] the guards that were taking us to the places where we were supposed to go and visit, when we were in the bus we were discussing the bible and discussing [that] women are next to God. In that sense, God has made women. We are mothers. We are the ones taking care of these children that he has sent to this world. Not men. How many men can put diapers on their children? How many men can take his child and feed the child like a mother? So we are next to God. And they misuse it. Our men. That is the reason why God is taking it away from them (Interview by author, July 12, 2011).

As illustrated by Nike's comment, sometimes even when women's place in the political sphere is justified, the interviewees ensured that they did not stray far from cultural and religious notions of women's role. They seemed to do this because they want to be, and also desire to be perceived as, a good woman, wife, and mother, who is respectful to her husband and cherishes her matrimonial home.

### **Violence, "Thuggery" and Intimidation: The Masculinization of Nigerian Politics**

The most cited reason that my interviewees provided for their non-participation in politics or lack of interest in political participation was the issue of violence that pervades Nigerian

<sup>9</sup> She means that focusing on loving each other would reduce the propensity to promote women's exclusion.

politics.<sup>10</sup> Many research participants, like Damilola, highlighted the "do-or-die"<sup>11</sup> nature of Nigerian politics:

**Damilola:** I see politics in Nigeria like do or die.

**Grace:** What if it wasn't do or die? Do you want to become president?

**Damilola:** If there was no do or die .

**Grace:** So you are interested?

**Damilola:** Ah, ah! I like it (interview by author, August 30, 2011).

In another context the following exchange occurred:

**Vivian:** [...] There was a woman sometimes ago that they killed, the politicians want[ed] people to vote for them [...] We can't have women there. The men won't accept it.

**Grace:** Why?

**Mary:** They will kill her (interview by author, July 13, 2011).

Godfathers, political gatekeepers, in Nigeria dominate politics and dictate who participates in politics. They are also responsible for most pre and post election violence. Politically motivated violence is synonymous with politics in Nigeria. This violence affects women as well. Nigerian women electoral candidates have been "kidnapped, beaten up, sexually assaulted, and shot at in order to deter them from participating in elections" (Denny, 2011, para. 6). United Nations Women (UNWomen), in collaboration with a coalition of Nigerian civil society organizations and activists, spearheaded a pilot study in response to the issue of electoral violence against women. The study tracked incidents of violence against women aspirants in

<sup>10</sup> Note that violence was the most popular reason cited by women during the interviews, other cited reasons, which are beyond the purview of this paper, include low-levels of education and high cost of elections.

<sup>11</sup> A popular phrase used to describe politics in Nigeria.

real-time during the 2011 elections (UNWomen 2011, para. 3).

Preliminary findings reveal

75% of the field monitors report[ed] an incident or incidents of violence that were targeted specifically at women. The largest number of these incidents reportedly took place during political campaigns or rallies, while others occurred at political party events. The perpetrators were identified as primarily party supporters and agents (Coalition of civil society Nigeria/UNWomen/UNDP, 2011, p. 1).

As such, women do not like the insecurity of politics (Akindele et al, 2011, p. 192). Women would rather avoid politics altogether than face the violence. Since politics is “do-or die”, it becomes gendered male through the discourse that “those who possess the wherewithal take politics by force when force is required” (Agbalajobi, 2010, p. 78). Women are excluded because they often opt out of exercising force. The pervasiveness of violence thus gives more credibility to the discourse that the political is a male prerogative and domain. Solape pointed out that women are unable to contend with the violent nature of politics:

There are too many risks involved in Nigerian politics that I have to admit when it comes to physical strength, women are not as strong as men definitely [...] and that’s one admission I’m not ashamed to make. We’re not built that way (interview by author, July 26, 2011).

Moreover, there is a fear to speak out against the government because they believe that the godfather’s foot soldiers are always “around the corner”, ready to harm critics:

The person who talks and says this [and] that concerning politics—they quote them and kill them—that’s why nobody wants to talk. Try to understand. And I want you to really understand. Ah ah! If we both do it, it will be good. Do you understand me? If we both do it, it’s for it to be good. But when they are killing people—who wants to die? Why don’t you just wait until it’s your time to die? Focus on your work... That’s why I don’t see some women who will [contest]. As for me, they can never call me to contest. I don’t want trouble (Sike, interview by author, July 16, 2011).

Politics is gendered via violence because violence is associated with masculinity. Violence is not considered a deviation but an accepted part of masculinity and there is a growing connection in society between being a man and being violent (Jhally et al., 1999). The danger in accepting violence as a masculine norm is that in Nigeria, the validation of violence also allows politics to continue to be gendered and normalized as masculine. Accordingly, because violence is gendered masculine, and politics in Nigeria has become synonymous with violence, it is easy to say women do not belong. In this vein, since violence is gendered masculine, it is normal when men engage in politics and by this logic, when women participate in politics, it is considered abnormal. Thus, there has been a normalization of political violence in Nigeria. Terms such as 'tough', and 'strong' are used to describe 'real' men while the antithesis is often ascribed to womanhood. Using this reasoning, since political power in Nigeria is often attained through violent struggle, 'real' men then belong in politics, and 'real' women do not. This explanation normalizes and masculinizes violence and praises women for staying true to their nature by fearing violence and not participating in politics. The women who transgress risk having their womanhood called into question and are often labeled negatively.

In sum, not dismantling the notion of violence as natural and politics as masculine, and restricting women and men to a particular gendered script does not change anything; it only continues to situate women as outsiders and foreigners to the political terrain. Rather than problematize violence and condemn it as unnecessary, it condones it. Masculinity and femininity needs to be recognized as performances learned via socialization in order to disrupt the notion that politics is the purview of men.

### **Does More Women in Politics Equal Meaningful Change for Women?**

So far I have tried to demonstrate the marginalization of women in Nigerian politics. Now, a pertinent question needs to be asked: Does having more women in politics mean that things will get better for women? Not necessarily. Women politicians do not necessarily support women's rights. For example, Nigerian Senator Eme Ufot Ekaette, a high profile woman politician, proposed an indecent dressing bill in 2008. The rationale for the bill was that a dress code is a solution to rape and sexual violence against women. However, the bill's proposed discourse blamed the victim, rather than recognize the existence of gender inequalities that promote a culture of violence against women.

The existence of a *femocracy* in Nigeria serves as a potential impediment to gender equality. Amina Mama (1997) defines *femocracy* as "an anti-democratic female power structure, which claims to exist for the advancement of ordinary women, but is unable to do so because it is dominated by a small clique of women whose authority derives from their being married to powerful men" (p. 81). In a similar vein, Jibrin Ibrahim (2004) posits that the:

First Lady phenomenon has opened doors for women that had previously been closed. At the same time, it has created a dynamic in which political space has been appropriated and used by the wives and friends of men in power for purposes of personal aggrandisement, rather than for furthering the interests of women (para. 1).

The primacy of wives of men in leadership also means issues concerning Nigerian women are often not part of formalized decision-making, and are instead placed under the purview of the wives. This is a gendered and classed process. It is "gendered" because it makes it seem like women's issues are not significant enough for formalized decision-making and politics. It is "classed" because it limits who participates in contributing to what is considered and/or what is done about women's issues.



During my interviews with staff in the Women Affairs Division of the Department of Community Development and a senior official with the State Ministry of Women Affairs and Community Development, it was mentioned that there are frequent liaisons between the governor's wife and the wives of Ibadan local chairmen. For example, on issues pertaining to women at the local level, the Women Affairs branch of the Local Government Community Development Department hold meetings with the governor's wife. When the Local Government Women Affairs staff meets with the State Ministry of Women Affairs and Community Development or the Commissioner, the wife of the Chairman is usually present. Whenever there are top-down initiatives that the State Ministry of Women Affairs and Community Development want to pursue, the State Ministry discusses strategies with wives of the chairman. Moreover, the State Ministry of Women Affairs and Community Development uses the wives of the chairmen to hold local governments accountable to women with regards to programming and initiatives. This genders politics through not accounting for how women's issues might be taken up if woman assumed leadership roles. It assumes that leadership is male, and that women will always be by the leader's (their husband's) side.

Despite the foregoing negative analysis, there have been cases in which First Ladies have been instrumental in advocating for women's increased involvement in politics. An example is Patience Jonathan, the current First Lady of Nigeria, who worked to increase the number of women in decision-making her project during and after the 2011 election campaigns. Rumours suggest she pushed her husband to choose a 'large' number of women as cabinet ministers. Should politics be played out via influence, especially bedroom influence? Though gains are made for women, bedroom politics of this kind does not begin to address the root causes of women's marginalization from politics.

Women's success in politics is often questioned in popular discourse, and some people have noted that iconic female politicians gained their posts via patronage. Reuben Abati (2011), writing in the Nigerian *Guardian* newspaper, notes, "many of the women in politics are in public positions not because they merit them, but because they have been put there by their husbands, parents, or Godfathers. In that wise, they are agents of male domination, and not flag bearers of women empowerment" (para. 13). A few interviewees, especially professional middle class women, shared this opinion with regard to political appointments. The following expresses this sentiment:

I have seen a few women like this Okonjo Iweala who has been brought back a few times and other women who are doing well. But, unfortunately again, apart from this Dora Akunyili, who was [in charge of] NAFDAC<sup>12</sup>, you find that those ones who are now ministers, I'm sorry to say so, many of them are political appointees more on connections than on their own ability (Solape, interview by author, July 26, 2011).

Even when women are in the political sphere, it is possible that they may not serve the best interests of women. They may make anti-democratic decisions and they may be accused of using godfathers to get ahead. This does not mean that all women in the political sphere are tainted in this way. It also does not mean that it is hopeless to agitate for increased participation by women. Rather, it means being more critical of narratives that assume complacency when a token woman is represented. We need to ensure women in leadership roles do not move us in a backward direction, but a step towards promoting gender equality.

<sup>12</sup> The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC)

### **A Woman's Touch?: The Case for Women's Political Participation**

Despite the negative and dominant narratives on women politicians, there are some discourses that promote the participation of women in politics. Some of the newspapers<sup>13</sup>, when they had positive things to say about women, were usually within a particular discourse about women that continues to gender politics. This discourse posits that women will bring sanity and decorum into politics and therefore they should participate. Their participation is based on the possibilities of what women will do to reduce the pervasive violence and corruption rather than on the fact that they should be given the equal opportunity to participate regardless of what they will do or not do for the political landscape.

Some of the women I interviewed strongly believed that because women are wives and mothers and conversant with domesticity as well as compassionate, caring and more moral than men, they will perform better in politics than males. Below are three examples from the interviews that illustrate the foregoing narrative:

We women are not so stubborn or hard-hearted as men [...] [We] will do it well because people use to say you women are our mothers [...] though we haven't seen any woman who has been maybe head of state or head of anything, [...] I know that if women come to power they will do well (Toni, interview by author, August 23, 2011).

Let the women try even this Presidency [or] governor[ship] let us see what we have [...] [Women] have the fear of God in them more than the men [...] and I pray that one day we [will] get there in Jesus' name (Fadeke, interview by author, March 16, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Women in Government (*Sunday Tribune*, March 31, 1991); Who shall go for us? (July 16, 1992); Are you ready for a female leader? (*Sunday Times*, July 27, 1992); Women to the rescue (*Guardian*, July 7, 1994); and That Iyabo's Interview, Nigerian women and 2007 Nigerian elections (*Nigeria World*, July 15, 2006).

You know women. Women are different from men. We are more kind, right? We are close to our children so we will do better than men (Sade, interview by author, August 23, 2011).

However, the women's narratives do not redress the current patriarchal discourses surrounding women and politics in Nigeria. Rather, the narratives proffered by my interviewees fit neatly into the patriarchal discourse on women and continues to gender politics as masculine as it remains exclusionary and expects that women can only be painted in the political landscape in particular ways. The male-female binary is retained and only serves to further reinforce patriarchy and gender roles. The narrative also privileges specific forms of femininity as well as obscures the fact that it sets particular barometer for evaluating women politicians. Moreover, if this narrative is prevalent, when a woman deviates from these expectations, she may not be seen as the exception but rather a wake-up call to re-evaluate whether women should continue to participate in politics. For example, there is a prevailing narrative that women are more moral, and therefore less corrupt. Since Nigerian politics is known for its high level of corruption, some people have called for women to take on their "spare tire" role to reduce corruption. However, when the first female speaker of the House of Representatives, Patricia Etteh was impeached in 2007 on allegations of corruption, the usefulness of women in politics became questionable in popular discourse. For example, in an article on the news website *Nigeriaworld* Bayo Omolola (2007) wrote,

The heart-disturbing news about the involvement of such a highly placed female politician reduces the hope that the masses have for a better country that women are expected to build when they have the chance to be at the helm of affairs. The news also signals that women can be as guilty as men in doing damages to the nation (para. 7).

Nigeria is infamously known for its corruption, yet Patricia Etteh's level of corruption is situated within a gendered discourse while countless corrupt men have not been judged in a similar manner

that discriminates against the male gender. A perfect example would be the outgoing speaker of the House of Representatives, Dimeji Bankole, who was accused of corruption towards the end of his term. The judgments levied against him were on an individual basis, not on his gender. As such, it is important that women are not included in politics on the basis of gendered notions. Otherwise, they will never be valued as 'true' politicians but rather viewed as foreigners with special entry visas to the political landscape.

However, arguing that women should play a significant role in decision-making and governance on the basis that they have different experiences and perspectives, alongside the democratic argument, is more relevant (de la Rey, 2005; Kamau, 2010; Kethusegile-Juru, 2003). Some of the women I interviewed also engaged with this discourse when I asked them if Ibadan would be different if more women occupied decision-making and political positions. Some reasons proffered for why women would be better were that they have better knowledge about the city, food security issues, and water and sanitation issues. Therefore, their inclusion in decision-making processes would entail investment in infrastructure and a reduction in the 'reproduction tax'<sup>14</sup> on women (Chant, 2007, p. 52). Here is a sample of my exchange with one of the women:

**Adeola:** If a woman is councillor or governor [...] She may look at all the things that—like right now you know for us to fetch water and throw out the garbage that is women's work, not men's. [...] So a woman may think, people are suffering from things like this. Like the water, I said we don't have right now, she could find a neighbourhood and provide water for them. She may look at things and say, "ah, the women they don't have where they will be throwing trash." She'd provide a vehicle that will be throwing the waste away for them (interview by author, August 1, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> This refers to the social reproductive work women engage in such as the collection of water, house work, cooking and unpaid care work in addition to their income generating activities.

Such reasoning was more common among low-income class women because most of these issues are connected to the socio-spatial inequalities present in the city and their social-reproductive work, which have little resonance for middle-class women. For example, the major challenge Bukky, a middle class woman, identified in her life is:

**Bukky:** You know the challenges I face now as a housewife really have to do with staff. You know as I said, I'm out of the house all day. I can wake up in the morning and the housekeeper may not turn up. [...] Now I have a running battle with my gardeners. I have two of them. I've not seen them and my flowers are due for trimming. So you know you don't have people who can do it. The quality of services that you get now is very bad (interview by author, August 26, 2011)

In contrast, Tayo, describes her challenge as: "We don't have a toilet here, we also don't have water here. We have to go to Oke Ado to get water" (interview by author, July 20, 2011). Thus, the low-income women argued that because of their experience, they would have more insight on how to formulate, plan, and implement policies and programs to address these issues. This is clearly a more productive narrative because it places more value on women's experience and also provides a stronger argument for the inclusion of women.

## **Conclusion: The Road Towards Social Transformation**

We need one another [...] we need to complement one another we must both be there we must both develop the nation, it must not be a one sided issue and I believe if we have that in mind we will be able to go far [...] (Funmi, interview by author, July 14, 2011).

You know they are just starting. And one day they will get there. At least we now have women commissioners, women ministers, women senators, women honourables women as deputy governors [...] (Ayo, interview by author, August 23, 2011).

Although, my interviewees were not impressed by the ways women are excluded from politics, they were still optimistic that things would improve. Some praised the incumbent administration for its progressiveness in selecting the most number of women cabinet ministers (13) that Nigeria has seen to date. However, while an unprecedented in-road has been made with regard to the appointment of women to key posts, we must not celebrate too soon. As Lisa Denney (2011) has argued, "It is doubtful whether the top-down changes that President Goodluck Jonathan has made through political appointments of women will transform the role of women in politics without similar results achieved from the bottom-up" (para. 10). Thus, it remains pertinent to continue to challenge the discourses and factors deterring women.

Fortunately, many gender activists and organizations have been, and remain, active in challenging the marginalization of women in politics and advocating for change in Nigeria. Groups such as Women Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), Gender and Development Action (GADA), and Forum of Nigerian Women in Politics (FONWIP) have done a lot to raise more awareness among society and government. Their current priorities are for the government to follow through on the National Gender Policy's aim to advance 35% affirmative action for women in all governance processes as well as the domestication of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

However, in the push to reduce the marginalization of women, there is a disproportionate focus on sensitizing, educating and empowering women. For example, the Oyo State Ministry of Women Affairs and Community Development as well as the Women Affairs branch of the Department of Community Development usually target women for their sensitization programs. But is it possible for transformation to occur if only half of the population is being sensitized? There is a need for "a political environment that

empowers women and simultaneously sensitizes men and transforms masculinist structures and processes on the importance and strategic relevance of increasing the role of women in national and sub-regional political decision-making processes for the advancement of democracy" (Mensah-Kutin, 2010, p. 30). Tola, suggested that men can become more sensitized once they actually hear what women have to say and recognize that women have contributions to make:

**Tola:** You know that men act and behave in a way that asserts that they are the head of everything, so they use that to cheat women. Men would think that they are the ones who can plan and make everything work so that's the reason that I would give for why it is usually males who do it.

**Grace:** What do you think we can do about it?

**Tola:** *As women, we are the ones who know how things work in the city. We are the ones who know what's going on in the city very well.* If they leave some room for women to occupy some positions, that would be good.

**Grace:** What are the steps that you think we can take to get there?

**Tola:** ... so let's say they do a meeting they say that those women who have the opportunity or the time, they should please come o. ... And [when] they allow women to talk or be part of the meeting, you know from there they would observe the intelligence of the woman that if she's in office, she will also succeed and do good things for the city ... (Personal communication, August 2, 2011; emphasis added).

The women I interviewed noted that the way forward, with regards to transformative change, starts at a young age:

We should correct it from the home front.... they should let the boy-child and the girl-child perform the same role so that there won't be discrimination in the workplace about the position to be occupied by a female or a male (Seun, interview by author, March 23, 2011).

We should not discourage our female children. You know these things started from when we were young, if the men are talking, a woman should



shut up - even if they are talking nonsense. Anytime we have the opportunity to contribute to pour our mind ...we should not allow inferiority complex to pull us down. If we continue like this...hmmm...I am afraid. But we should start it from our home. We should encourage our female children to be even [participating in] school politics (Fadeke, interview by author, March 16, 2011)

My interviewees also emphasized that in addition to teaching their daughters to be confident and telling them that they should not play the "second fiddle", they will also socialize their sons in a way that deviates from prevailing gender stereotyping and norms. Hopefully, this type of socialization will pave the way for gender equality in the political arena. As one interviewee cogently remarked, "Things like that should change. They should be saying it in stories that 'once upon a time o, men were the only ones who were doing politics. But now, women are also doing it'" (Tola, interview by author, August 2, 2011). Clearly, women envision equal access to Nigeria's political landscape where they would no longer be considered "spare tires," "second fiddle" and "prostitutes."

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## **Kupururudzira muroora songs in Muzvezve**

**Bride welcoming ceremony or relegation of  
women to the subaltern?**

by Wonder Maguraushe and Treda Mukuhlani

The institution of marriage is a place where Shona women have often suffered oppression instead of fulfilment. Women have lamented Shona cultural practices that are not cognisant of human rights despite Zimbabwe being a signatory to the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. Practices which are harmful to women and tantamount to gender inequality need to be discontinued in Shona culture. We notice that the impact of patriarchy and the vulnerability of females have been perpetuated in Shona culture through the performance of traditional bride welcoming ceremony songs.

Folk songs are an important element of Shona culture in terms of women's construction of their personal identities. *Kupururudzira muroora* (traditional bride welcoming ceremony) songs are part of

Shona people's folk musical cultural performances. These are songs that are sung for a bride on the day when she officially joins her husband-to-be's family. As she enters her in-laws' homestead, members of that community welcome her through song and dance to mark the arrival of a new member of their community. Her husband-to-be's sisters and aunts particularly get very active during this ritual as they celebrate their brother or nephew's achievement. The singing can go on until late into the evening sometimes.

In this paper we first discuss Shona conception of marriage by outlining the expectations, norms and values that they socially construct. We go on to examine the context of bride welcoming ceremony songs basing on information gathered through interviews conducted with brides and senior womenfolk. In the last section of this paper we present a lyrical content analysis of ten bride welcoming ceremony songs performed in Muzveze for women arriving at the husband's home. The analysis reveals that these are in essence songs of subservience sung by women for fellow women. The songs perpetuate the perception that women are dispensable, and the misfortunes they suffer in marriage are brought by their refusal to be subordinate to, and to please, their husbands. The findings steer a discussion in which we argue that, in theory, Shona bride welcoming ceremony songs prepare women for subservience in marriage, making them unreservedly submissive to their husbands.

However, in practice not all Shona women are submissive. Notwithstanding the negative ideologies peddled by the songs, from an African phenomenological-hermeneutic feminist cultural approach, the paper exposes ways in which the space of *kupururudzira muroora* song performance practice can be reclaimed to provide more life-affirming self-images for brides based on equal rights. The conclusion points to a glaring need to socialise brides with songs that embrace contemporary feminist perspectives during young women's orientation into the institution of marriage.

### **Theory and Method**

In this qualitative study we conducted a multi-sited ethnography in six villages in Muzvezve Resettlement Scheme from August 2011 to October 2012. We purposively sampled ten bride welcoming ceremony songs that were performed at different *kupururudzira muroora* events. The song performances were video recorded and their lyrical content was analysed in an effort to interpret the gender meanings connoted in the songs' messages. The recordings were replayed and the lyrics were converted to text format for subsequent analysis. We also purposively sampled and interviewed five women to solicit their views on the meaning of *kupururudzira muroora* songs. In reality not all women are docile in marriage in these changing contemporary times. Generally speaking, African women are the subaltern of the subaltern with or without the *kupururudzira muroora* songs but male dominance in Shona society is still embedded in the lyrics of bride welcoming ceremony songs in Muzvezve.

We argue from a phenomenological-hermeneutic feminist cultural perspective (Kanyoro, 2002) that the ten *kupururudzira muroora* song analyses portray patriarchal power dynamics in the institution of marriage which ought to be evened and understood better. We also discuss how sexual relations in Shona marriages portray male chauvinism. By patriarchy we refer to an ensemble of cultural, social, economic, political and moral forces that connive to naturalise and uphold male chauvinism as an entitlement and privilege. Society exerts a lot of energy to maintain this seemingly natural yet socially constructed mind set, whose removal is critical to pushing the agenda of gender equality in marriage. This patriarchal 'norm' needs radical reconstruction if the continual mystification of compulsory female subjugation is to be overhauled.

We argue that there is a need to see how attitudes have contributed and perpetuated subordination among women in general, and Shona married women in particular. Firstly, the

phenomenological-hermeneutic feminist cultural perspective gives women the power to reject any life-denying aspects of the culture. Secondly, it gives them ability to identify life-affirming aspects of the culture (Phiri and Nadar 2006:11). This study raises the questions: Whether and in what ways the Shona bride welcoming ceremony songs have contributed to the relegation of brides to the subaltern in Muzveze; and in what ways can the *kupururudzira muroora* space be re-claimed to promote more life-affirming marriages?

### **Shona Conception of Marriage**

According to oral narratives people who live in Muzveze 1 Resettlement Scheme are originally from among the Karanga people of Masvingo and surrounding areas in south-eastern Zimbabwe. They were resettled in 1984 and came mostly from Mhondoro, Gokwe and Sanyati Communal Lands into formerly white owned farming areas between Kadoma and Sanyati in north-western Zimbabwe that were divided into about twenty villages. Like many African peoples, these people in Kadoma District in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland West Province have high regard for marriage, which is why when a bride goes to her husband's home as a newly married woman, they sing songs to show her the reality of the institution of marriage which she is getting into. Among the Shona, which includes the Karanga, a woman is not simply married to her husband, she is also a 'wife' of the wider patrilineage.<sup>1</sup>

For many Shona people, like people of many other cultures, believe that marriage has divine connotations and promiscuity can lead to serious misfortune. For instance, there is a Shona saying that a good wife is a gift from God (*mukadzi akanaka anobva kuna Musikavanhu*). Some of the brides and grooms who experience the

<sup>1</sup> Some Shona people still view their bride as a new member of the immediate and extended family, though others are now only valuing their immediate family members only in their appraisal of the bride's role.



*kupururudzira muroora* performances might actually go on to have a Christian wedding ceremony some years after the bride welcoming ceremony if they want and can afford it, but others may not. This is a practice which is happening in contemporary times but in pre-colonial times it did not happen. Marriage is perceived as an intertwining of the married couple's souls and connection of their two families, a spiritual bond which is only broken by either death or divorce. When a married couple divorce *gupuro* is supposed to be given as a token of divorce.

It should also be noted that Shona conception of marriage goes beyond a Christian view of marriage as a covenant relationship that ends with the death of one of the spouses (1 Cor. 7:10). In Shona traditional belief, the couple's spiritual bond continues long after the death of one of the spouses. The spirit/ghost of a wronged deceased partner can linger around and bring misfortune if the surviving partner breaches the sacred bond before or after death (Graves, 1988).<sup>2</sup> There are some houses that are haunted by ghosts and spirits of deceased spouses who, when they died, were angry about some aspect of their relationship or disposal of their belongings. Cleansing ceremonies maybe needed to make such houses habitable again. This makes marriage critical and central to the social well-being, health and survival of a community. Thus, marriage is accorded great respect because it is sacred and central to the well-being of the members of a community and sustains the patrilineage as couples reproduce.

There are gradual stages of courtship and solemnisation that are observed before marriage is finally reached. Grooms and brides who formally marry have to take time to know each other and each other's relatives and their family's public image. Introductions to the bride's natal family demonstrate the groom's seriousness with the

<sup>2</sup> The Shona people believe that upon death one's spirit (*mweya*) leaves the body and continues to influence the community in the realm of the living-dead.

relationship and intention to marry. A man pays lobola to appreciate the child bearing role that his wife plays. To a small extent, lobola is also about the exchange of the female labor from her natal family to the husband's. Lobola may be paid in full or in part payments before the bride is brought by her natal aunts to her new home (*kuperekwa*) for the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony to be performed. Grooms who marry informally have the obligation to settle lobola payments later on in their marriages.

In Shona culture songs are a fundamental mode of teaching so that the woman is prepared to understand different signs of both dangers and blessings in her marriage. Shona people use songs that they relate to particular situations that may arise. Songs are a very important part of the Shona people's daily lives and they punctuate all stages of life. Songs are used during many occasions such as initiation rites, young people's socialisation outings, etc.; in short, from birth until death. In the context of marriage initiation rites, songs become even more crucial because they are used as a tool for creating the identity of the married woman, as well as depicting the behaviour that is expected of her. Thus, it is vital to critically look at some of the songs that are used in issuing marriage instructions to young brides in order to assess the ways in which Shona brides are welcomed into the groom's home. This is significant because the *kupururudzira muroora* songs remain a reference point of a woman's life in marriage as they reinforce what the paternal aunts from her natal family (*vanatete*) would have taught her.

Shona people raise their daughters with the view that one day they will go through the process of proper marriage rites in which teachings are passed on to the bride by her paternal aunt on how to keep her marriage and observe marital rituals. The bride is taught how to welcome her in-laws and visitors, how to take care of her husband, with the most central teaching being how to please her husband sexually. There are no written sources on the history and origin of *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony except oral information

from culture bearers who also affirm that nothing has been written on the history of the ceremony. According to the oral information from the old Shona people, the ceremony goes way back to the *pasichigare* era, well before the inception of colonial rule in 1890. When the Shona people migrated from Guruuswa (Savannah grasslands) in northern and central Africa, they brought the ceremony with them to areas south of the Zambezi River (Beach, 1994).

During the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony there is much singing, drum beating and dancing which is performed. However, the music and dancing is a celebration for the new bride, the lyrics of the music are also meant to impart marital "knowhow" to the new bride. The bride does not have any say on what the welcoming crowd and her in-laws are doing and is not even consulted nor asked to respond on any matter. In fact, if the bride/initiate asks questions during this time, she may be seen as ill-mannered. This is a sign of lack of *unhu* and she might be perceived as one with a potential to be difficult to handle. Thus, throughout the ceremony, the bride should not make eye contact with the people around her. This might also be a result of her shyness. She might only whisper to her aunt but must not voice any concerns. The bride pays obeisance to those who are giving her a husband as a way of showing respect and appreciation and this is the rightful behaviour she is supposed to adopt.

Just before the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony, a bride can even receive a beating from her paternal aunt depending on what the aunt thinks about the girl's character, as well as if she had not elongated her labia minora (*kudhonza matinji*)<sup>3</sup>. Elongation of the

<sup>3</sup> Kudhonza matinji is a practice of pulling and elongating the labia minora. It is believed that men enjoy sex when a woman has elongated labia minora and that it opens the birth canal, making it easy for a woman in child birth. Nowadays even some married women who do not have elongated labia minora attempt to 'correct' this by applying Vaseline to soften their labia minora and then pull it.

labia minora is done prior to the bride welcoming ceremony and is done for the benefit and sexual enjoyment of the husband. The bride is consistently told to please her husband in bed and elongating her labia minora is very important for this cause. Kanyoro (2001) argues that the accountability of women in taking responsibility for their lives demands that issues of sexuality be discussed openly. However, in Shona culture this can only be done with the appropriate people such as aunts and uncles but when they are not available brothers and sisters can stand in for them. This will help women deal with elongating their labia minora for men's enjoyment. The World Health Organisation (2000) listed it as female genital mutilation that subjects women to unhealthy conditions for the sake of sexually pleasing themselves and their husbands, and Perez and Namulondo (2011) associate the practice with health risks. This is a contentious issue because other researchers have argued that it is genital modification (Koster and Price, 2008) and women regard the practice as a positive force in their lives.

When the bride welcoming ceremony ends the groom is called into the hut to collect the bride. He does not necessarily have to be present during the singing and dancing. This is an act, as Maxwell (1983) reveals, symbolising the man claiming his wife. The *kupururudzira muroora* teachings go on until the next day. Songs play a huge role throughout the bride welcoming ceremony performance. They are not just part of the ceremony but the ceremony's essence which embeds the teaching, values, mores and *unhu*. Thus, to understand the subordination aspect that a woman is prepared for by these songs and teachings to experience in her marriage, it is crucial to do a content analysis of some of the songs that are performed during the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony.

In Shona culture a bride is taught by her aunts how to behave sexually in her marriage. She must not refuse to be intimate with her husband without reason at any given time. If she does, the reasoning goes, he may look elsewhere and it will be considered "her fault."

This means that even when she is tired, she is obliged to have sex with him. There is no reason good enough for a wife to deny her husband sex. Even when she is menstruating, she is taught that she can give her husband thigh sex. A woman is treated as a person who has no sexual needs of her own but her husband has to be sexually satisfied at all costs. Phiri and Nadar (2009:13) note that “the value attached to marriage is more than the value attached to one’s own life”, and this is evident among Shona people. Even if the wife knows that her husband is having extramarital affairs, many Shona say she must sleep with him unreservedly. Generally speaking, extramarital affairs may not be seen as enough grounds for the wife to deny her husband sex. Sex might help her secure or preserve her marriage, whatever the consequences. In fact, when a man is having extramarital affairs, the first thing a wife is asked by her aunt is whether or not she had been giving him sex whenever he wanted. Her role is to keep the marriage going by giving as much sex as possible. Some Shona women whose husbands are promiscuous end up insisting that *ndinogarira vana vangu* (I will stay in this marriage for the sake of my children’s welfare) in a desperate bid to sustain marriage. This is unsafe in the context of the HIV pandemic. It seems that the value of the woman is dependent on the extent to which she satisfies her husband sexually. Kindness and care for her husband is gauged on submission and fulfilment of his demands, preparing his meals, and doing his laundry among other things.

A woman is treated as ‘a sex slave’ by her husband. Slaves have no rights and in the same vein, Shona women do not have sexual rights. A woman can complain if sexually dissatisfied and say to her aunts that *handina kuvinga sadza pano* (Literally meaning that I did not come here just to eat thick porridge, also implying that I came here to be sexually satisfied by my husband) but most of the time Shona men do what they want, not what the women want. Their husbands have sexual rights hence whatever the man says, the woman is expected to obey. Sexual and reproductive rights of Shona

women lie with their partners, who usually dictate the number of children the couple will have, although it is the women who bear labour pains.

One could even say that some marital sexual relations among the Shona can be equated to cases of rape, though there is no crime called marital rape in Zimbabwe. Shona women are not to deny their husbands sexual pleasure no matter the circumstances. The woman should be submissive since denying her husband sex is seen as disobedience. This implies that a wife does not have to think twice when the husband wants sexual intercourse; she simply has to do it. As a slave master, her husband must have sex whenever he desires. This shows that the wife is owned by the husband, or regarded as her husband's property. Even if the wife is sick or tired, the bride is taught that she should be able to make love because, as some say, "her vagina is not sick" (Rasing, 2001: 286). Sickness or tiredness is not reason enough to refuse sex, therefore Shona women can be coerced into sexual intercourse. The fact is that a woman is not supposed to refuse to have sex with her husband. Women oblige for fear of losing their husbands to fellow women in desperate need of men, which emanates from socially constructed views amongst the Shona of unmarried women as prostitutes. Husband snatching makes women their own worst enemies, especially by 'small houses' (single mothers/women who secretly date married men in adulterous relationships). This kind of thinking and action puts women in a subservient position since they have no power over their own sexual lives. If a woman refuses to have sex, the teachings warn her that her husband might leave her for another woman. Also men in Shona culture marry to have children, hence when a woman cannot have children a man may want to remarry.

After sexual intercourse, a bride is taught that she should clean her husband using a piece of cloth and not vice versa. Cleaning her husband is considered to be a blessing and encourages a foetus to grow in the womb. After this, then she should kneel on the floor and

clap her hands to thank him for sex. Phiri and Nadar (2009:13) made the same observation and pointed out that there is no mutual ownership of each other's bodies between married couples. If one wants equality, then sex should be for mutual enjoyment and satisfaction, but in Shona culture it seems to be one-sided. The woman is the one who should thank her husband for sex which he demands. She cannot demand sex. The Shona wife is told to pay obeisance to her husband after every sexual act as if her husband derives no gratification from the act.

We seem not to find a distinction between a wife and a sexual client here and the teachings by the aunts tend to prepare brides for a submissive role in marriage. She is depicted as worthy only as she satisfies her husband sexually and as long as she can bear children. If she refuses to have sex with him at any given time, she risks going back to a lonely life and some women may suffer without husband, depending on their financial status. This means that without making herself sexually available the woman has no value, implying that a woman's value is when there is a man with her. Rakoczy (2004) argues that a woman ought to have intrinsic value on her own as a human being but distressingly the common trend for Shona peoples, it is women (the aunts) preparing another woman (the bride) for a lifetime of subjugation in marriage through these teachings. It is a sad truth that once a husband dies, many women begin to suffer as they have no employment and very little education if any. It is quite distressing for whom marriage and prosperity is meant, because apparently is it just for the man.

If the couple divorces, it is the woman who is usually blamed although oftentimes men behave promiscuously in marriage. Statements such as one which equates a man to a hunter who never gets satisfied sexually are at the foundation of much of the dehumanisation that Shona women endure in their daily lived experiences. The wife is not allowed to refuse him sex but a man has a reason to refuse his wife sex. If the wife does not listen to her

husband's instruction, he has the right to starve her of sex. The woman is given no reason to refuse her husband, but the husband can, on the account that she has not followed his instruction. Clearly, the man has complete power over his wife's sexuality. The man owns his wife's body and not the other way round.

This section provided a normative view of the gender relations within a Shona marriage from our lived experiences which provide an emic perspective since we are part of that culture. In the following section we provide evidence from our research that reinforces this perspective as well as show forms of resistance by Shona women.

### **The Context of Bride-Welcoming Ceremonies**

When a teenage girl has biologically matured and is on the verge of getting married, her paternal aunts start educating her about her impending marriage. In some instances the teachings used to occur in the past (and even still occur today) as part of the preparation of brides for marriage, though not all couples go through that rite in contemporary times. Without the preparatory teachings, a bride is presented as unfit to handle marriage and she is also portrayed as an uncultured or untaught woman. The common assumption is that she may encounter marital problems later if the elders do not prepare her for the institution of marriage by telling her what to expect and how to handle situations that may arise. Some senior female members of the family also give instruction through speeches, demonstrations and/or dramas.

A bride can move into the groom's home either formally or informally. The formal way is when lobola (bride-wealth) is paid for her to her family and both sets of in-laws are in agreement, which is referred to as *kukumbirwa*. The bride's aunts or sisters take her into the groom's home in broad daylight (*kumupereka*). The informal way is *kutizira mukumbo* (literally meaning to run a leg) which occurs when the bride decides that she will go to her lover who may or may



not have impregnated her. In other cases it might be because during their dating the groom may have committed *madarikanhumbi* (having premarital sex with her) and consequently he may have broken her virginity. Some of the women we interviewed said they eloped to their husbands when they were not pregnant because they felt that their suitors were dawdling.

Our respondents narrated varying experiences and circumstances surrounding *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony performances. Most couples who marry within the rural environment usually experience the performance of bride welcoming songs. This could be a sign that rural community dwellers still value this traditional cultural practice. Some but not all newly-married urban couples find time to visit their rural homes during public holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and state holidays to have the bride welcoming ceremonies conducted by their people as a sign of accepting the bride. The bride is usually accompanied by her *tete* (paternal aunt) but sometimes her sister can play the same role.

The bride welcoming ceremony can be performed either in the afternoon or at night depending on the beliefs and principles of the groom's family. If the bride comes through *kuperekwa*, the ceremony may be performed during the day. Our informants said that usually the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony is performed during the evening and into the night if the bride comes into the groom's home through *kutizira*. The ceremony is the traditional way to introduce the new bride into both the groom's home and the village community. When the bride comes at night, those whose construction of marriage has been influenced by Christianity might be heard saying *achatiswa nemazizi* (literally meaning that her wedding has been conducted by owls), meaning that she got into the institution of marriage nicodemously.

The ceremony may begin about three kilometres away from the groom's home, the bride usually walks for a few steps and sits down,

waiting for her husband's sisters to do *kushonongora*<sup>4</sup> (give her money or a token) for her to continue walking. The groom's sisters may give her a stick symbolising the money they will give her later. However, the bride is usually advised to not accept such tokens because her husband's relatives may deceive her. If they do not give her anything or they do not give her enough, she remains seated.

Elderly people sit curiously in the round kitchen hut of her husband's parents' home in anticipation of the bride's arrival. Upon her arrival, she is guided into the kitchen where the in-laws and some members of the community would be waiting for her. They prepare *sadza* (a thick porridge commonly made from maize or sorghum, the staple food in Zimbabwe) and chicken for her and plead with her to eat. In Shona culture, the bride should not promptly accept the food offered; she should initially refuse and accept later. If the bride accepts the food there and then, her in-laws will conclude that she lacks good morals (*unhu*). She is not expected to get acquainted unexpectedly too quickly with the new environment, despite the fact that the groom may have opted for a bride *wematongo* (from the locale or same area where he lives).

The ceremony comprises singing, dancing and ululating as the groom's family and village community welcome their new bride. The groom's aunts and sisters (*vanatete*) and members of the village community sing the bride welcoming songs which are sometimes punctuated with teachings, mockery and denigration. They sing in jest and sarcasm. The *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony usually runs from dusk until late into the evening. The bride is told to cover her face with a white cloth. The white cloth is usually a symbol of purity. Throughout the ceremony, the bride says nothing and remains draped in the white cloth until her husband's relatives give her some money, again an act of *kushonongora*. After the ceremony during the

<sup>4</sup> The bride can use the money that she earns to buy what she needs for her new home after giving her aunt or sister some.

first evening, a bride who has been formally introduced by her paternal aunts (*aperekwa*) joins the groom and they go to sleep. If she has eloped (*atizira mukumbo*), the first night is not treated as a ceremony since she will have joined the groom's family informally.

The following day the bride, with her sister or aunt, wake up very early in the morning and sweep the yard, wash the plates and do all household chores before the in-laws and everyone else wake up. They pile up the rubbish in small heaps and again wait for *kushonongorwa* (small gift of money or token). Very early in the morning, the bride and her sister or aunt are accompanied by a fellow *muroora* (daughter-in-law) of her husband's family who is well versed with the way her husband's family conducts itself. The trio move around wearing *madhuku nemazambiya* (pieces of cloth that women wrap around their heads and their waists) giving the husband's relatives water to wash their faces. The relatives in return should also give a token of appreciation either in cash or kind. The exercise is seen as a way of introducing the new daughter-in-law to members of the immediate and extended family. After the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony, the bride is supposedly assured of happiness and a fulfilled life as the daughter-in-law of her new home.

The varying circumstances surrounding the performance of songs at the *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony show that this performance, like all cultural productions, is not static but is continually reinterpreted and reimagined in the Shona community. This is evidence of the continuity of change (Nettl, 2005) in which an important cultural trait persists through various permutations in different contexts. The Shona continue to perform bride welcoming ceremony songs because they are important in the transmission of social knowledge about marital relationships. The patriarchal nature of the Shona society is now being questioned with the advent of an influx of new ideas on gender equity. Apart from welcoming a bride, the performance of Shona bride-welcoming ceremony songs

transmits cultural knowledge of expectations, norms, customs, mores and values.

### **Kupururudzira Muroora Song Analyses**

A bride welcoming ceremony is punctuated by singing, dancing and ululation. In this section we analyse the songs that are used in welcoming Shona brides into their in-laws' homestead and marriage. There are songs that specifically refer to how the woman should view and respect her husband. The focus of this section is on the interpretation of ten of such songs which depict the power dynamics in marriage. It is also important to mention that some of these songs may carry both an explicit and an implicit meaning. The bride's aunt bears the responsibility to explain the meaning to her niece. The songs are generally short and have a chorus. It has to be noted that the order in which we present the songs below is not necessarily the order in which they are performed. Individual performances may or may not include all the songs presented here.

We must begin by contending that power dynamics in marriage between men and women are culturally constructed. Songs are an element of culture and we notice that there are songs that show patriarchy among the Shona people. *Kupururudzira muroora* songs provide valuable insights in understanding the subservience that Shona women are supposed to endure in their marriages. It is possible that Shona men do not intentionally and directly subordinate their wives but the socialisation and welcoming brides go through sets them up for an inferior role in their marriages and men are the supposed beneficiaries (Maluleke, 1997). In the *kupururudzira muroora* marital ceremony a woman is made to think (intentionally or unintentionally) that she has no significance and her only duty is to satisfy her husband both morally and sexually, yet in reality she might work industriously. If she fails to achieve that she is susceptible to losing him.

In the past<sup>5</sup>, as the bride arrived at the groom's home she was carried on her paternal aunt's back naked. A song is sung; *muroora tauya naye muroora tauya naye nemagumbeze* (We have brought the bride, we have brought the bride, we have brought the bride with her blankets). The song says that we brought her with her blankets signifying that she is not going back to her natal home because even her blankets have been moved to the new home. One of our respondents said that the bride might also be wrapped in blankets as a sign that she is a virgin and it is up to the groom to break her hymen. At the groom's house after sexual intercourse, the groom would give the bride's aunt a blanket pierced with hot ashes to make a hole in its centre if the girl was not a virgin. The groom throws hot *mavhunze* (charcoal) the next morning to the excitement of all his family members. This means that the groom was strong and as Chondoka (2001:96) puts it, it was a test of the man's virility rather than a girl's virginity.

The next song portrays the bride as desperate and out of sorts; *Dai pasina hanzvadzi yedu iwe waitoorwa negudo remugomo* (Had it not been for our brother, no man was willing to marry you and only a baboon from the mountain would have married you). This song is sung as a playful mockery of the new bride. The welcoming party teases the new bride by suggesting that had it not been for their brother no man was prepared to marry her (implying that she is ugly) but only a baboon would have had the courage to propose marriage to her. To the groom's family, his decision to marry her has liberated her since they think she was desperate. In terms of gender equality, there is need to fight against the notion that women are lower in dignity and need men to complete them as human. This song illustrates that in Shona culture a bride only gains value when a groom chooses to marry her.

<sup>5</sup> There might possibly be some people who still do so today but nudity is rare

Another song goes *Muroora amire-e, amire, muroora amire nemadziro papata* (The bride is standing, she is standing, the bride is standing stiff by the walls). The literal meaning of this song is that the bride, after eloping to the groom's home, waits anxiously by the eaves to be escorted into the house since she will probably be shy. In some cases she might actually hide behind the kitchen door with her face covered. *Papata* means a state of being stiff or frozen, usually a frightened status, and it can be quite stressful physically. The hidden meaning of the song is that the bride can resist sharing the same kitchen with her *vamwene* (mother-in-law) and standing by the wall is done in protest. It can be interpreted as a quiet resistance. Her message is that she wants to use her own kitchen, probably basing on prior knowledge about her *vamwene* which she might have gathered from gossip or rumours.

There is a song which goes *Kuno kwedu kunogaiwa mari veduwee, kunogaiwa mari. Kwawakabva kunonhuwa nhamo veduwee, kunonhuwa nhamo* (Here in our family we make money, we make money. Where you come from stinks of poverty, stinks of poverty). This song actually places the bride's family into a lower social status than the groom's family which is putatively more successful based on wealth. It gives the impression that the groom is a financial saviour to the bride. It implies that the bride has made her decision to marry the groom on monetary terms and it is sung by the aunts to denigrate her in a joking manner as she comes to join their family. She automatically is deemed to be ever grateful, voiceless and servile in the relationship because that is the usual predicament of a poor person. They cannot decide anything and that is why we argue that such lyrical content in the bride welcoming ceremony is tantamount to relegating the bride and according her otherness rather than warmly welcoming her and showing her rightful place as an equal partner in marriage. The culture in which these songs are sung treats *varoora* as 'other' so songs could not have been any different.

Another song is *Dai uriwo mugariro, pasi pangagare mugariro* (If only the humble character she shows at the time of her arrival would be always like that and a true depiction of her real self it would be a better world). This song implies that the family of the groom view the humbleness of the bride on the first encounter with their people as pretence. The bride is actually capable of displaying a rude character and it is only a matter of time before she reveals her true colours. Whatever her real character is, they are sceptical and suspect her to be of loose morals. They are prewired to receive her as a bad character intruding into their family. Notably, this song is sung by her husband's aunts who will one day end up in their own in-laws' homes. It is actually women subjugating one of their own. Prejudging a bride's character and expecting her to be rude and unmanageable in the future is rampant amongst mothers-in-law as well. In this scenario men just innocently benefit from the women treating each other with suspicion. That is how patriarchy works here, a *tete* when in her natal home is treated as a husband by the new *muroora*.

The next two songs portray the bride as an immoral and ill-mannered person who should be treated with suspicion. *Hanzvadzi chenjera mukadzi wako anoruta takamuona achichachura rongo renyama kwavamwene* (brother be careful your wife is greedy we saw her stealing meat from her mother-in-law's clay pot). The meaning of this song is that the husband must watch out for the bad side of his wife's character. Whatever her character's disposition, the members of the groom's family already have a template against which to measure her morals; the register portrays her as so terrible a person that if left unattended to or unguarded she can steal even foodstuffs. Though the song is intended to mock the bride, one bride we interviewed said such mockery embedded in the songs can make women feel morally and socially inferior to their husbands and consequently, rob them of their self-worth and self-image. The impression given is that the groom is good and there seems to be

nothing good about the bride, which is wrong. Patriarchy emerges from denying women chances to develop their own self-worth (Maimela, 1995). This is clearly the teaching in the song. Women are taught to believe that they are worthy and valuable just as long as they can give images of righteousness to their husbands. The next song cautions the bride not to voice her concerns in the new family.

*Muroora ibonga, atipedzera huku. Mumadzira kwati kwati ungati karukodzi wena* (Bride is a wildcat, she has finished our chickens. Standing by the walls she looks like an eagle). The singers sing lyrics to show the bride as a greedy character who finishes their chickens. Despite the hard work that awaits her, she is a predator/bird of prey before she starts any interaction with the members of her new family.

Another song goes *Muroora usaite mhere mhere pamusha pevanhu Uri muroora usaite mhere mhere pamusha pevanhu* (bride do not cause havoc by being quarrelsome at the in-laws home). This song is interpreted as the woman is coming into the in-laws home and therefore should not be a cause for concern in any way. This implies that only her husband has the voice and mandate to solve the most difficult problems and make all decisions in the house but it is the woman who makes him the head. This implies that the wife in the home is to be seen only and not heard. She is expected not to take part in decision making even if it concerns and involves her. She is alienated as a *mutorwa* (an outsider in the family). Phiri and Nadar (2009) say that women express resignation to traditional worldviews such as the one that it is their destiny to get married and fulfil their husband's needs because marriage is an essential part of womanhood. Accordingly, in fulfilling their husbands' needs they overlook their own needs and as a result, they might tend become docile in marriage. In a number of cases women who challenge men's views risk getting divorced. The message in this song that she must not be vocal places her on the periphery of decision making thereby portraying her as subordinate to her husband and his family.



It is no wonder that even when a woman goes with a complaint about her husband's behaviour to her maternal mother, the mother usually advises her that in marriage she must endure and commands her to go back to her husband.

The next two songs encourage the bride to work hard. *Muroora usaringe zuva yuvi usaringe zuva pakuita basa, pakukuya, pakubika nepakuenda kumunda, nepakuenda kutsime* (bride do not sit and consistently check the position of the sun for the passage of time when you are working, when you are grinding on the grinding stone, when you cooking, when working in the field, or when you go to the well to fetch water). The meaning of this song is that a married woman should be industrious. She should work hard the whole day and the non-stop work entails suffering. She is the one who prepares all meals for the family. The woman should be grateful for the food although she is the one who tills the land, plants the seeds, weeds and harvests the crops. She must create time in between to dash to the well or river to fetch water for domestic uses. She is the one who pounds the sorghum or millet and grinds it into mealie-meal. She should not find time to sit and watch the sun but toil until the sun sets. The song resonates well with the Shona belief that success of a household depends on the industriousness of a woman (*musha mukadzi*) and this helps to sustain the married couple's children. She works hard to make the man succeed but she does not need to be concerned much about herself. After working hard she will not rest because her husband, who is not compelled to do the household chores, will demand sex later on at night.

*Muroora auya, wekutsime nekuhuni. Mazimhino fengu fengu, enge datya rashaya mvura.* (our bride has come, she is the one to fetch water and collect firewood. She has big nostrils that flap up and down, like a frog out of water). One respondent commented that the reference to her flapping nostrils sounds like an insult about her looks but brides cannot do anything about it. The bride is portrayed as a most welcome labourer coming to do the household chores

such as going to the well to fetch water for the family's domestic uses such as drinking, bathing, doing the dirty dishes and washing the dirty linen. In this particular community boreholes are located far away, about a kilometre from the village and fetching water is quite a tedious task as women balance twenty litre buckets of water on their heads several times before they collect enough water for a day's use. Firewood is their only form of fuel for cooking and is found at some distant forests about four kilometres from the residential area, making it quite a laborious task to collect it and this is the bride's duty as well. Such a song prepares the bride for a life of servitude.

### **Conclusion**

We observe that fellow women (sisters, aunts and grandmothers) prepare brides to be fearful in marriage. They kneel down and thank their husbands by their totems (*kutenda nemutupo*) after their first sexual intercourse and throughout their marriage. Some men end up asking their wives to tell them everything they were taught so that they decide to choose what they want. Although they also undergo some preparation for marriage conducted by their uncles, men do not go through preparation for subjugation which women experience, so men benefit from the subservience that their wives are prepared for by older women. Although men do not go through such subjugation, they know how their wives should behave, because if they do not behave to expectation, women are taken back to their families as having not been taught properly. Nwachuku (2006:66) notes that such dehumanising acts are taught to young women by "elderly powerful women for the purpose of female discipline in the areas of wifely submission... and for maintaining the aura of femininity." In the name of submission, women are subordinated and indeed Maxwell (1983:89) is right in stating that women are prepared to endure life graciously in a patriarchal society. It is also clear that if practices such as

performance of these songs, amongst other actions, were not used as tools for oppression of Shona women; patriarchy would not have a hold over Shona married women.

This discussion has shown that songs are not just a significant component of *kupururudzira muroora* ceremony but also the essence of it. These songs are crucial because they are used as a tool for constructing the identities of proper womanhood and they also determine how women behave. The lyrics portray a woman as a person who is desperate to get a marriage partner, and therefore should respect a man, should work very hard and not be vocal in marriage. Thus, the songs are a reference point of a woman's life in marriage. If a married woman forgets the teaching on a certain aspect of marriage, the song related to that teaching helps her to remember. We argue that these songs contribute to the perpetration of subordination of Shona women in marriage as most of the songs encourage women to take care of their husbands even at the expense of their own lives.

This study has shown that *kupururudzira muroora* songs have been used to set women for subservience in marriage. We conclude by noting some questions that arise from this study. First, there is the question; how can *vanatete* (aunts) be discouraged from promoting the oppression of women through exposure to contemporary feminist pedagogical teachings? This will help them to find ways of integrating and applying emancipatory principles in their teachings. Second; how can women compose *kupururudzira muroora* songs that are life affirming for women in marriage? Third, there is a need for more empirical studies on factors that contribute to the denigration of Shona married women. Since the chief cornerstone of feminist work is women's experiences, this study of the impact of bride welcoming songs on married women among the Shona people remains essential.

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## Catherine Acholonu (1951-2014)

### The Female Writer as a Goddess

Nduka Otiono

The goddess that is everywhere  
streams into my veins  
that I may live  
that you may drink  
I am the goddess  
Of the market square.

—Catherine Acholonu, “The Market Goddess” (*The Spring’s Last Drop*)

By the time she died on March 18, 2014 at the age of 62, Nigerian writer, scholar, and political activist, Catherine Obianuju Olumba-Acholonu had established a reputation as a goddess of the intellectual market square. She achieved this reputation through her enigmatic persona and interest in esoteric ideas, as well as through her provocative and eclectic publications.<sup>20</sup> Catherine Acholonu first

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that in one of the earliest critical engagements with Acholonu’s work, Obi Maduakor (1989) compares the poet to a “priestess” and a “di-

caused a stir in the Nigerian literary firmament when, in the mid 1980s, she launched eight books at the same time. It was a Nigerian publishing record that only Ken Saro Wiwa, the writer and environmental rights activist who was hung in 1995 by the dictator General Sani Abacha, surpassed. Within the same decade, Acholonu sparked another literary squall when she queried some winning entries for the literary prizes of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), especially one awarded to another female writer. But it was in the political terrain, where she doggedly earned considerable recognition in a field dominated by male gladiators and chauvinists, that she proved her mettle as a fearless fighter and promoted her irrepressible spirit of a goddess. People still tell stories of her controversial bids for Presidential and Gubernatorial tickets in the past, and on one occasion squaring off with her then husband who had been the Deputy Governor of Imo State. Her activism fetched her appointment as Senior Special Adviser on Arts and Culture to President Olusegun Obasanjo. Not surprisingly, she resigned the position at a critical stage to contest the senatorial election against one of Nigeria's dreaded politicians, Senator Arthur Nzeribe. Feeling short-changed when she didn't get the ticket, she resigned her membership of the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and joined the National Democratic Party (NDP) to challenge the dominant politician. She lost the election and later told journalists that her rival had sent her death threats via her ageing mother. Afterwards, Acholonu was appointed Nigeria's Cultural Ambassador to the United Nations.

Between her audacious political activism, perhaps the best known example of a Nigerian female intellectual who has dared to

viner" (p. 78). For a more detailed list of her intellectual achievements see the Igbo Hall of Fame web site: [http://igbohalloffame.org/people/details.php?id=17&name=Prof.-\(Mrs\)-Catherine-Obianuju-Acholonu&cat=Education,-Research-and-Literature](http://igbohalloffame.org/people/details.php?id=17&name=Prof.-(Mrs)-Catherine-Obianuju-Acholonu&cat=Education,-Research-and-Literature) Accessed January 13, 2015.



wade into Nigeria's male-dominated treacherous political waters<sup>21</sup>, Acholonu sustained her passion for scholarship, and remained prolific throughout her productive life. This is understandable for a writer whom *The Guardian* of June 14, 1985, awkwardly described as "The most notable woman poet among the new additions to Nigerian poetry ..., a very gifted ... poet". At the 2002 International Convention of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) in Asaba, her academic background served her well. Her Keynote Address, published as a monograph, was an impressive intellectual output on the theme Literature and National Development. She earned a standing ovation for her presentation entitled *Africa, the New Frontier: A truly Global Literary Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

Born in Orlu, Imo State, as the first of four children, Catherine Acholonu obtained her Doctorate degree in English and African Literatures from the University of Dusseldorf, Germany. She is the "author of over 16 books, many of which are used in secondary schools and universities in Nigeria, and in African Studies Departments in USA and Europe."<sup>22</sup> Her first monograph was a seminal study, *The Igbo Roots of Olaudah Equiano* (1989), which investigated the origins of the great slave autobiographer Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa). Although University of Benin Professor of English, Steve Ogude, has challenged her thesis, the study served notice about Acholonu's radical intellectual ambitions, and opened fresh insights into our understanding of the narrative on slavery.<sup>23</sup> She soon fol-

<sup>21</sup> Although some gains have been made with regard to women representation in Nigerian politics, Udodinma Okoronkwo-Chukwu offers more revealing critical insight into the situation. See "Female Representation In Nigeria: The Case Of The 2011 General Elections And The Fallacy Of 35% Affirmative Action" published in *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No.2, 2013, 39-46, is very revealing. See <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/viewFile/4407/4475> Accessed Jan 15, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> See [catherineacholonu.wordpress.com/about](http://catherineacholonu.wordpress.com/about).

<sup>23</sup> The book sparked debates on the roots of Equiano, with Vincent Caretta (1999, 2003, 2005) and Steve Ogude (1989) being some of the most strident critics, and Paul E. Lovejoy (2007) supporting Acholonu. Acholonu evidently took the

lowed with her most influential work in Women Studies, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (1995), rightly described as "Africa's alternative to Western feminism" (Nayer 2008:135). The book originated as her Fulbright Scholar project, and an early draft was delivered as a Hitachi Public Lecture at Manhattanville College, New York on April 23, 1991.

With a remarkable appetite for intellectual storms, Acholonu earned a special commendation letter from U.S. President Bill Clinton not long after she interrogated former Vice President Al Gore's views on the search for alternative options for development. Restating her position in an interview with me, Acholonu said that Al Gore was not courageous enough to identify the Third World as the missing link in the world's search for solutions to further development. Hence, she undertook a holistic research to rediscover Africa's "lost knowledge" in her book, *The Earth Unchained, a Quantum Leap in Consciousness: A Reply to Al Gore* (1995). This perhaps accounts for her intellectual interest in the provenance and significance of the South-Eastern Nigeria stone monoliths at Ikom.<sup>24</sup> The research provided a more spiritual framework for her thesis in the book *The Earth Unchained*. At the ANA-Enugu conference and first Eastern Nigeria Book Fair in 2003, during which she was presented with an award

challenge seriously that in an email to me on February 5, 2008, she revisited the controversy: "You might wish to check the Internet for ongoing controversy on Equiano. I made a response in a public lecture delivered last year at the Community College of Southern Nevada and at our Equiano Conference in IMSU [Imo State University] also last year. It's all on the Net. Ogude has retracted his position on an Edo-born Equiano and now favours an Igbo origin, which nullifies him as a voice to be reckoned with in that discourse. I attach a copy of the paper." The lengthy paper entitled "Caretta-Gate and Igbo-phobia: The Facts, the Fallacies and the Grand Conspiracy to Deface Olaudah Equiano" is published in Acholonu's blog: <http://catherineacholonu.blogspot.ca/2007/09/caretta-gate-and-igbo-phobia-facts.html>

<sup>24</sup> For a brief expose on the monoliths see Apollos Ibeabuchi Oziogu's easily accessible article, "The Mystery Called Ikom Monoliths..." Vanguard Online, on March 08, 2012. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/03/the-mystery-called-ikom-monoliths/>. Also see Keith Ray's "The Ikom Monoliths." In Andrew M. Reid, and Paul J. Lane, Eds. *African Historical Archaeologies*. New York: Kluwer Academics/Plenum Publishers, 2004. 192-194.

for outstanding contributions to humanity, Acholonu gave a two-hour presentation on the Ikom monoliths, and afterwards conducted collaborative projects with the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.<sup>25</sup>

Acholonu's intellectual interest in the Ikom stone monoliths evokes the mystical overtones of *The Spring's Last Drops*, her poetry collection which I shall closely examine here. Her other creative works include *Nigeria in the Year 1999* (poems); *Abu Umu Praimari and Children's verses*, and the plays: *Trial of the Beautiful Ones*, *The Deal*, *Into the Heart of Biafara* and *Who is the Head of State?* Her poems are included in the Heinemann Book of African Female Writers. The volume also features her as a short story writer with her often anthologized story with the arresting title, "Mother was a Great Man." Acholonu's provocative, non fictional works include the oft-cited radical feminist study, *Motherism: the Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*, and *The Earth Unchained*, which argues that positive thinking can unchain the earth.

Acholonu's creative works evince her versatility and restless spirit as she boldly explores her themes and engages in stylistic experimentation. *The Spring's Last Drop* has been rightly introduced as "a collection of poems that glow from the depths of the soul. The theme of cultural awareness is spiced with mystical profundity and social criticism"<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, the epigraph to this article excerpted from one of my favorite poems of hers, "The Market Goddess," immerses us at once into the world of the writer. The metaphor of the goddess, served up early in the collection, conjoins with the two opening poems, "life's head" and "the way" to read like an Introit. The metaphor reminds one of the opening lines of Christopher Okigbo's collection of poems, *Labyrinths*, with its tribute to the goddess, Mother

<sup>25</sup> Acholonu's work with the University culminated in the Catherine Acholonu International Conference, November 17th – 19th, 2012, hosted by the University of Nigeria Institute for Africa Studies, Nsukka, Nigeria.

<sup>26</sup> From the book's blurb.

Idoto. But here, Acholonu's ritualistic evocation is not purely spiritual or votive, but also both "womanist" and sociological. Interestingly, in the preceding poem, she prepares the reader for this domestication of the spiritual: After introducing the reader to "The way/that is the tree" from which the poet-persona can climb and pluck cotton seeds, she notes: "these beads of coral/drag me down/take off this regalia/ these ivory anklets/ cripple me with weight" (p.12). In the final, stanza she laments that she be set free "to paddle/my astral canoe". Evident at the outset, therefore, is the tension between the astral (spiritual) and the physical planes. Hence, "the market goddess" reigns over a recognizable place, a most 'common' place which in stereotypical and traditional perspectives are seen as the domain of the African woman, and which is a source of survival for humanity. For what is life without the marketplace!

Significantly, Acholonu humanizes the market goddess in a manner that some devotees may consider sacrilegious or profane:

Listen to the stirring  
Of her limbs  
Listen to the heaving  
Of her chest  
Eke the market goddess  
Squats at the village square  
Breast resplendent with milk...

Beyond the enchanting lyricism which overlaces Acholonu's poetry, the poet here sows the seeds of her theory of "Motherism" which celebrates matriarchal powers:

Market deity squats in readiness  
Immense thighs thrown  
Wide apart  
Come my children  
Come to the one  
That brings life  
Food  
Your daily needs... (p.14)

Apparently, cultured irreverence is permissible in Acholonu's poetry. The image of thighs thrown apart with its amorous connotation is transformed into an enduring metaphor "that brings life/food/.....daily needs." In another poem from her book *Nigeria in The year 1999*, she speaks of forms of slaughter occurring during the Biafran War "when rods of aggression / rip through sealed valves/ of flutes of reed (p.32). This image has become somewhat a recurring trope in our literature. Those familiar with the performance of the polemical poet, Odia Ofemum, would better appreciate the point being made here by recalling his refrain in the memorable poem "*Thighs fall apart, the General (dis)appears*". In the same vein, the popular columnist and publisher of *Classique* magazine in Nigeria, MEE Mofe -Damijo of blessed memory, had written a searing satire on men under the title "*Thighs Fall Apart*", deliberately parodying Chinua Achebe's celebrate novel, *Things Fall Apart*.

For Acholonu, naming the private aspects of her femininity is a celebration of the distinct features of womanhood. In "lost virtue", she speaks of painting the "breasts/with red camwood", polishing the "ivory fingernails" and "ebony face/which soon shall be corroded/by modern cosmetics". Thus then, a poem that seems to delight in the physical appearance and beautifying routines of women, is finally translated into a neo-negritude intervention: "you may be happy/ with a colour/neither white nor black" (p.21).

Throughout the three sections of *The Spring's Last Drop*, the poet establishes her familiarity with African and Western civilizations. Perhaps the poem that best exemplifies this is "the dying godhead" (pp 44-47). One could hear a skilled "speaking voice" rich in traditional resources and Western allusions to food and drinks. Like a priestess, the voice is oracular: "he who eats without defecating/gets the belly swelling" (p.11). There are also strong evocations of the African intermingling of the living and the dead: "The souls of the dead/dwelt on my branches/ at nights" (p.52).

Although no pantheon of gods as one may find in the works of other African writers such as Okigbo and Soyinka is identifiable in this collection of poems, the collection ripples with ritual elements, and is occasionally processional in rendition. In the long poem "*the message*", Acholonu writes:

You have completed  
My midday offering  
Freeing me from the gods of air  
Now the gods of light  
Receive my offering ..... (p.57)

There is a muted obsession with the gods in this collection. Far from the seeming Christian influence identifiable with a monotheist belief, the poet-persona proves to be at home with Africa's many gods. This is in tandem with the poet's philosophical musings in some of her non-fictional works. Nevertheless, the use of local expressions for words with easy English translation is sometimes distracting. In spite of the use of italics and footnotes, one comes away with the impression that the poet was a victim of the anxiety of early modern African writers to localize their works through such vernacular referencing. Fortunately, this is not the case with her other collection of poems, *Nigeria in the Year 1999*. A searing, poetic exploration of the ravages of war, the urgency of the theme of conflict doesn't seem to offer the poet the space for such indulgence.<sup>27</sup>

Taken together, Acholonu's poetry, accentuated by her gifts as a fine artist and the cover illustrator of the collections, draws attention to her artistic temperament. Her drawing on the cover of *The Spring*

<sup>27</sup> Ogaga Okuyade offers a more detailed contextual analysis of the poem in his essay, "The Re-Articulation of Hope from Grief: Nigerian Civil War Poetry as Ledger, published in *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 2010, 4 (2), 201-215. See especially pages 211=212. Remarkably, Okuyade evokes another useful study, Funso Aiyejina's "Recent Nigerian Poetry in English: An Alternative Tradition". In *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature*, Ed. Yemi Ogunbiyi. Vol. I, Lagos: Guardian Books Ltd., 1988. 112 - 128.

suggests an influence of the Igbo Uli art form. At the time of her death, Acholonu was the founder and Director of the Catherine Acholonu Research Center, Abuja (CARC). The Centre focused on "research into Africa's pre-history, stone inscriptions, cave art, and linguistic analyses of ancient symbols and communication mediums from the continent."<sup>28</sup> The Centre published most of her later works between 2005 and the time of her death. The significant titles included: *The Gram Code of African Adam, Stone Books and Cave Libraries, Reconstructing 450,000 Years of Africa's Lost Civilizations* (2005); *They Lived Before Adam: Pre-historic Origins of the Igbo, The Never Been Ruled* (2009) which won the International Book Awards, USA, and two Harlem Book Fair Awards; and *The Lost Testament of the Ancestors of Adam* (2010). Thus, the recipient of numerous awards and honours, including the Africa Renaissance Ambassador by the Pan African arm of African Union, gravitated more from her creative writing stream to largely esoteric scholarship in History, Archeology, Cultural Anthropology, Sociology, and Geophysics. This much is evident in the following interview which she granted me in October 2005 while she was the Senior Special Adviser on Arts and Culture to President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2002). The interview took place in her office in Abuja, Nigeria.

## The Interview

OTIONO: What, really, is the driving force behind your intellectual project in African Studies?

ACHOLONU: I'm into Fundamental Studies. There is a new discipline that is called Fundamental Studies and this is an area where you think deeply about the origin of things. You don't deal with effects; you deal with causes. I am a humanist, and as a humanist, anything concerning the human condition, the progress of man, civilisation, the human thinking, knowledge especially, are some of the things that I take very personally.

<sup>28</sup> See <https://catherineacholonu.wordpress.com/about/>

**What are the circumstances surrounding the letter President Bill Clinton of the US, sent you?**

It was sent in by the American Embassy. Actually, I wasn't in town then. I was on leave and when I came back, saw the letter. When I read it, I was very, very pleased and I was wondering how his Presidency had gotten to know me. But then, I remembered that my works have been in circulation, especially after my book, *The Igbo Roots of Olaudah Equiano* was published in 1989; it was distributed to libraries in the U.S., including the Library of Congress. After the publication of the book, I was sponsored to visit the U.S. as part of the international visitors program. The USIS (United States Information Service) in Nigeria organised for me to travel to several U.S. universities to give lectures and do readings from my work.

**Your works demonstrate considerable commitment to thinking about humanity and the environment...**

Yes of course. But mine is an environmental philosophy. And my suggestion is that we should have a holistic approach, that all sectors should come together and work together for the progress of humanity. And I am essentially a thinker. I think all the time. I'm always trying to work out solutions to problems. Once I see a problem I don't leave it there. No matter what aspect of life, I analyse it. Even if it's in science, religion, philosophy, theology, the arts, culture, you name it. Whether it touches youths, children, parenting, education, any problem I see goes home with me and I don't rest until I find a solution to that problem, including political issues. I take them home with me and I keep thinking, brain-storming with myself, working it out: thinking, dwelling on it. So these things have a way of getting right into my soul and I continue to seek for answers and I'm always researching. I was doing my doctorate degree and the topic was the clash of culture/civilization in African Literature. I took the Igbo example. I studied in Germany. It was when I came back to Nigeria and I decided to go into African studies that I stumbled upon Equiano, and the moment I read about him and the materials he gave and the story he wrote, I started having a suspicion of you know...I thought that with the instances of culture and language he gave, it shouldn't be difficult to trace him. So I said I was going to do something about it. I finished my doctorate and then attended a conference, the Ibadan conference on Pan Africanism. It was the first conference I had ever attended in my life. I presented four papers! [Laughs] I was hungry to learn and to get knowledge. One of the papers was tracing the pioneer of Igbo literature. The Equiano thing, I can't remember. So I gave some instances and added my own voice to the debate. I knew there was a debate. Then I sent the paper to the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* in London. They read it and said I should go and do more research on that because I was suggesting that archaeologist should do it. They said, no, no, you go and do it.... [Laughs]. So I now decided to go further. That was how I got into this [the Equiano book]. Then, the *Motherism* work



was... you know... I'm not a feminist, I'm a humanist. Being in Women Studies and being in African Studies and being a woman, you often find this discussion coming to you.

**Looking back several years after, and in relation to the way Gender Studies have evolved, how do you feel about your central thesis in your often cited book, *Motherism*?**

The thing I always do in any field I go into—any topic I pick—I give it my all. I never give halfheartedly and I find that when I say it, people don't fully appreciate it when I say it. Years after, I always have a way of saying things long before time. Because thinkers are those people who are able to pierce into the future and catch glimpses of light and bring it down. Many people do not often see what you are seeing until years and years later. Every year it opens, some aspects opens from year to year, decade to decade, until it fully blossoms. But the joy in it is that you challenge people to think, open up to see, and it's a gradual process. The thing is that any work of art that has something in it will always challenge people: Some, in one respect; the others, in another respect. But you will find out that people keep on going back to that work because there is always something challenging in it. That's the thing with Christopher Okigbo's work. It is a bud, you go in there to take any part you think you can digest, you go with it. But the real thing is still unopened. The poetry of Okigbo is yet unopened and that poetry is a process of initiation which the poet went through himself and until you go through what initiation that he went through and hit what he hit, you can't open it all.

**Okay, in proposing the idea of "Motherism," was there an immediate dominant idea or scholar-- say Alice Walker or Elaine Sholwalter-- that you thought you had to challenge while promoting your own African perspective of feminism?**

Well, you see, I went through the different perspectives [on Feminism] we had at that time. The person who appealed to me more among black women feminist would be Philomena Steady. I don't think she has a book but I know I read her essay; I appreciated her work, her perspective, I thought she was objective enough but Alice Walker....

**What about Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi?**

She hadn't written her book then. But we had Alice Walker, we had Amata Aidoo. Those were the people making a lot of waves at that time. Amata Aidoo was okay but she was too extreme.

**And Buchi Emecheta...**

[Laughs]...And Flora Nwapa...She was really very bitter, but we can't train our daughters hating men. We just can't do it. Give them the opportunity to love, let them have their own experience. Don't tell them men are dis-

tasteful or evil; don't do that. I can't do that to my children. I want my children to know that the world is full of love, even if there is lots of hate around. The light is there and invariably, the light will overcome darkness. And if you arm your children with love, love conquers evil all the time. If you arm them with hate, you've already defeated them—you destroy them.

**In other words, through *Motherism* you are operating both as a scholar and as a mother?**

Oh yes, oh yes, I'm a mother to the core. If you see my children, you will know I'm a mother to the core. I give my all to child upbringing. I give every minute of my life because I don't have a social life. All I have is a family life and a working life. I don't have time for social life because if I should have time for social life, I won't have time for my children. I work a lot, I write a lot, I think a lot. The remaining part of the time I sit with my children: we chat, talk, laugh, I lie on their bed. If they have questions, they ask me. I give them my time and it's not wasted, because when they grow up anybody seeing them will know you planted a seed in them. More so because you know they won't have you all the time. You have to plant all the seed, give them all the knowledge you have, and all the love you can give; make sure that they know love from you so that they can extend it to others in their life.

**Now, how correct would it be to describe you as a restless scholar because you are always moving on to new areas? Apart from being engaged with Fundamental Studies, I am thinking about your current research into the Cross River State stone carvings, and so on.**

Yes, I'm very restless [*Laughs*] because I move from field to field. The reason being that I know there is a lot of work to be done in African Studies. There are so many untouched areas. And one thing that makes me unhappy: African scholars don't research these untapped areas especially in the arts. There are very few people doing deep research. When our people get a professorship, they relax. How many of our professors are working? They are all gone to gone rest, once they get Professorship, they now go to rest. I don't feel that, that is right. Years ago I said it when I was still in the university. I was saying we have a lot of need for new materials. Nobody is giving it to us because our professors are no longer working. They will go and rest. But fortunately we still have scholars like Ernest Emenyonu. But you won't hear [Romanus] Egudu, I don't know where he is now, and a number of them. It's really worrisome because I know they have a lot to offer, and I feel that they should still come out there and start working, give us what they have so that our children can grow with it.

**Couldn't it also be attributed to the parlous state of the country and the deterioration in the Ivory Tower?**

Many of them live outside the country as I'm talking to you. I experienced

this during my two-three years lecturing in the university. I started publishing a journal, using my paltry pay as Lecturer 1 to finance the journal.

**What was the name of the journal?**

*Afa: Journal of Creative Writing.* I started it so that my colleagues could publish. I have that knack to find solution to problems. I'm restless with academics. Now you find me in History, Environmental Studies this moment, the next moment you find me in Women Studies, Language Studies--I am a linguist also--you find me in Education. We have just brought out a book on "Youths and Non Violence in Nigeria" towards a culture of non violence for youths.

**How did you get into this new direction with regard to the stone monoliths you're now researching?**

I went to Lagos for one program and I used that opportunity to visit our installations at our Ministry's parastatal in Lagos. I was at the museum. I had been seeing the monoliths in pictures for years but I always said to myself, there is something there. I felt this whenever I looked at the monoliths, it blows my mind. I would ask myself how did these things come here? What are these things? So when I saw them face-to-face, I was like trapped. I touched them for the first time. I looked, and went from one to the other, looking at the symbols. I took some pictures. I went home and couldn't get them out of my mind. I would go to bed dreaming of them. It was like an obsession. I kept asking myself what are they? When it kept worrying me, I called the museum and told them to send more pictures. They did. I looked at the photographs and saw some things which began to give me some messages. I saw a symbol like a multi-cross. What is the multi-cross doing on the monolith? If by archaeological results/explanations we are told that the monoliths go back at least to 1200 BC, can you tell me what the multi-cross was doing on the monoliths. Christ was not born yet. You see, you have million dollar questions on these monoliths. I went into deep meditation and then I began to see the light, it started opening for me and I began to study it. It was as if old women who were no longer bearing children or seeing me would go along with a virgin, they would go and take their different colors of chalk and trace those symbols on the monoliths. They are dressing them for the new yam festival. And on the D-day, they will bring food and feed them and pray for progress and protection. I kept asking, they told me "Madam, since the history of Ejagham, no foreigner has ever dressed the monoliths. I was the first foreigner to dress the monoliths.

Also, they said nobody ever dressed the monoliths on any day other than the 14th of September; it's never done. So as they said so I was tracing the monoliths by myself and taking the pictures. There was one they called the Wisdom Stone. They all have names, e.g. Queen Stone, King Stone, etc. with various significance. As I was tracing the Wisdom stone they told me I

was imbibing wisdom. The monolith gives people wisdom. People come from far and wide to touch the Wisdom stone to obtain wisdom. They told me a story of a British commissioner who had gone to Ikom. He was leaving Nigeria and he wanted to visit Ikom before leaving. He went with a former British army colonel. They said when the colonel saw the Wisdom Stone, he said this is Israel in Africa. He went and embraced it three times, saying, I have obtained wisdom before people know the meaning of this thing and the whole world will be coming here. That was what they told me the British Colonel said. I said to the monoliths: "Give me wisdom..." [Laughs] But I understood better the significance before then because I already connected with the monoliths even before visiting there.

**Having established these foundational ideas, how long would it take you to complete the research?**

I started about four months ago. I finished before presenting it at that event. I went to Ikom after seeing the monoliths in the museum in Lagos. I decided to go deeper. Initially I wanted to do the interpretations only. But after visiting Ikom, I thought of going deeper. I started looking for similarities between those symbols and others in other parts of the world. And nobody had ever studied the monoliths in detail. Artists mention them but nobody had ever gone into it. When I found out this was the place of origin, I said I have to go deeper to find out what more we could know about the stones and the people. I already suspected that the Olmec (of Mexico) were from there. I asked them [the Olmec] to give me some of their words. And I was seeing this stool, it kept on coming and that is one truth that you find in almost 90% of the words, among the Olmec, it surpassed Mayan language. All their names ended with TL. I see a connection because the TL I encountered in South [Central] America and here, I see a connection. The man was surprised that I knew so much about it. There are things they know and don't tell people. I lectured him about the monoliths, who made the monoliths, when they were made, what they stand for and so on and so forth.

**Are you concluding the research now?**

I'm about to. But when I came back from my trip to Ikom, I went into meditation again, I had questions. I said, God, open it for me, because I'm very religious.

**How religious—orthodox or African?**

I told God. So I was led...I gave a friend my book *The Earth Unchained* to read. After reading the book, he brought another book and said, Madam have you read this book, it was the Hebrew Kabala. He said, Madam have you read this book, I said no. He said, it looks like you are breaking into some fundamental secrets of life. I said to him, the book *The Earth Unchained* came to me in a dream and I wrote it in two weeks. And it was at a

time when I was going through excruciating difficulties in my life. I couldn't even have done anything but the book kept pouring and would not be stopped. I had to give two weeks of my life: It was pouring and pouring. I wrote it in a stretch, no correction, no revision. I sent it raw to the publisher. I have my publishing company, if I have to subject what I have to institutional publishers, politics would come in, and anybody who does not want Africa to make progress, will not publish me. So I publish myself. I don't subject my creativity to any politics, definitely not international politics of knowledge production. The book was a revelation from God. So the man went home-- and brought me a book titled "Kabala". I was afraid to open it but I kept it. One day when I was meditating on this, I was led to go and bring that book. I opened it, and behold, I could see how the monoliths jammed with some elements of the Kabala. After I saw more, when King Solomon came and he prayed to God to give him wisdom. These were in the monoliths, and also in the Kabala. I saw the Kabala signs in that place. You can now see that these things go further than we think.

**How much longer would we have to wait to see this book in print?**

The second part will be on the Ejagham people [of northern Cross River region], the place of origin of the monoliths and Nsibidi symbols... Maybe by December [2001], the first book will be out. The second one will come out around February [2002].

**There is a connection here between the work you are doing as a scholar and your present public appointment. In what official ways have you been able to use your position as a Senior Special Adviser to the President to advance arts and culture in Nigeria?**

I do design projects for different ministries and for the parastatals. I give them ideas. I don't want to talk about my advice to the president.

**What has been your essential vision?**

The new thing I want to add to knowledge is: I want to connect culture and education, science and technology. I have seen the link between culture and science, culture and education, culture and technology, and that's what I think I can establish.

**Could you please open up more on your research findings?**

My research goes in two parts. The first part of it was that after seeing the monoliths, I said I'm going to zero in on them based on what I see. I do Fundamental research all the time wherever I find literature that can help me. Fundamental Studies take me to the root of things; to the origin. But I've been seeking for answers to Blackness, to Africa: Who we are? There was once I was in the U.S., I think it was in Boston. It was at an exhibition of African masks but it was done by an American, raffia and all that. All the masks were black. It was a masquerade, whole masquerade regalia. About

four or six people, all of them were Black. The whole raffia was black, but there was no human being inside, they position it as if someone was inside. I looked at these things; I saw some of our works there. Those things like Ikenga, like the ones they get from the shrine. I saw those things in the museum. And when I looked at them, each of them commanded presence as if they would take you back in time if you could let yourself go, you would see them in their original setting with the whole village surrounding them, playing music. There was such presence, such silence you would cut with a knife; such presence, such power in each of those things especially the Egungun [masquerade] man. That thing kept haunting me. I said these things are not just pieces of wood. There and then, it dawned on me that these people were just taking away our soul. These are things that were taken away from here; they took everything. These were all we had. This was us. Our ancestors had put in so much energy into these symbols. They had put in so much collective energy into it and somebody came and took it away and we are left with nothing. No wonder our people are wandering. So when I saw those masks, I had this feeling. At that moment I said there is.... in blackness. Blackness goes beyond light. Blackness was before light. I felt that it was too deep, it's indescribable. There was such awesome power, I could feel, even in the silence, it was too much. It went beyond time and light. You could feel the statement: In the beginning, there was Blackness, Blackness belonged to time before the beginning...So these things make you want to know who you are, want to know what is the meaning of Blackness, why we are dark and who we are, why we are talented. And I know also that the intelligence we have that is in-built is beyond the knowledge that you see being valued about right now. Our knowledge is beyond the technology that we study. It is higher than that. If we were to expose what is in us, there would be no comparison between this science and that science. The science that we embody, we carry it, you see it on the dresses we wear, the way we move, the way we speak, the way we dance, smile, everything we do! If you take a Kente or an Adire cloth, or whichever, you will appreciate it.

**You are beginning to sound like a neo-Negritudist...**

When you look at all those things, you will know there is something overwhelmingly powerful than anything we can imagine. And if could translate what we have into portable technology what we are seeing here would be nothing.

**So by the time you see all these monoliths, you'll establish a reconnection.**

I could see that the monoliths go beyond our time. They don't belong to our time. There is nothing anywhere that has the appearance of the monoliths. If you look all over Africa, all African art, people will always make cubic kind of structures, if you see the statues our ancestors made, you will

see a human kind of figure. The anthropomorphic head, neck, etc, even if they look geometric... With the monoliths, you have the eyes, the mouth, you see something that looks like a hand, but none of them has a leg.

**Have you been able to establish any connection with either the Adinkra or the Nsibidi symbols?**

Yes, I have now found out that the Nsibidi symbols originated from the monoliths. Many of the Nsibidi symbols are on the monoliths but many are not on the monoliths. But one could see the Nsibidi connection with the monoliths that they originated from the same source. Whoever carried the monoliths gave the Nsibidi signs. And also, I found out that the community, the clan, the tribe where we have—geographically—where we find these is the Ejagham clan, and it is the original home of Bantu language. Many words in Ejagham language have this tone. You don't find it anywhere else.

**What is the phonetic symbol?**

It is TL. It sounds like "eti". Nobody else speaks like that in Africa: That you have two consonants and no vowel in-between. Even the Bantu have lost that, but we still find it in South [Central] America...

***What does it mean?***

It is in my notebook. So I found this similarity and also find the connection to "red Indians" [indigenous peoples in the Americas].<sup>29</sup> The major thing you find in their attire is the feather. That's almost the first and last thing. It's unique to them. It is also the same with the Ejagham people. If you make one achievement, you wear one; if you make two, you wear two.

***The Igbo have that also?***

If you kill 10 people in battle, you wear ten feathers. If you are portraying leadership, you wear a different kind of feather, e.g. eagle feather to prove leadership in battle or that you are a business magnate. They clothe themselves with feather. Also in South America.

***How has this fashion diffused over time?***

Originally, the Ejagham people were well travelled, to Guinea, Angola, etc. There is some place where you have very strong ocean currents, that easily lifts a boat and throw it within a matter of days into South America. It has

<sup>29</sup> Many Africans in former British and French colonies continue to use this term innocently, without awareness of the derogatory connotations that have inspired opposition to the term in North America.

been reported a number of times by geographers and oceanographers. When you read these things you find out how people migrate. Christopher Columbus was travelling to India and landed in America, before he was diverted somehow. It was Ejagham people that populated South America. They brought civilisation there. Olmec were the first, and it has been proved by writers and scholars that the Olmec were West Africans from the Delta part of Nigeria... Language is a weapon for connecting culture and people. How did scholars know that the Bantu language is spoken all over Western to Southern Africa? South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Kenya Congo, Angola, Sudan, name it, they speak Bantu. It was the Ejagham people that populated the whole place. They made the other tribe become small. They rendered them redundant. These people have always been migrating from time to time because the place is small and does not contain them, and they are very enterprising people. They introduced agriculture to different parts of Africa today. The iron culture came from Ejagham. If you go there today, you will still find pieces of iron or metal that shows that there must have been a prehistoric melting and mining centre there.

**How much of archeological work have been done that you've been able to utilize?**

Some have been done. I know that Ekpo Eyo have done some, but not much have been done. I knew that there was iron there before I went there, and I could tell.

**How?**

By looking at the monoliths, I knew it was not done by human hands. There was some sort of technology that was able to melt the rock like volcanoes do and remould it or use a tool to bore through the rock. A tool that melts the rock as it is moving and gives specific symbols that are very sharp, and the circles are perfect. No human hand created by God can ever make a perfect circle.

**How have you been able to establish that they are perfect circles?**

Oh you can see it. You find concentric circles that are perfect. I use my compass and math set to measure it. I approach it from a very scientific point of view: equilateral triangles, squares are perfect. What human hand makes that, especially for a rock that is very demanding? Only a sophisticated tool and mind can make that. And I find that sophisticated tool among the Olmec.

You could see some image holding something that looks like equipment and you would see fire coming out of it. At the Olmec week in South America in 3000BC they made perfect heads, giant heads. I also found that in the olden days they had dens, so everything is...in place.



**Would you consider these preliminary findings or do you have enough authority based on your research to say that these findings can be put up to any kind of test?**

Like I said, I had finished writing my book before I went there for the first time. I wrote based on what I saw at the museum. And I presented it at the UNESCO (Badagry) meeting. After that I went Ikom. But it was like I just went there to prove myself right. I was telling the curator that my thesis is that they were made with some sort of sophisticated technology. He told me that they had iron which he showed me. He told me that it has been there scattered all over the place and nobody knows. And also, the very notion that there was no connection between the people who made the monoliths and the present people living there and their ancestors speak volumes. If ancestors hand down tech from age to age, then it means that there was a major interruption. No, break in transmission. That interruption can only happen with a major event like the "deluge" which destroyed history and mankind started afresh. These are things I'm trying to trace. I go as far as I can and leave it for others to continue from where I stopped. I don't make sweeping statements unless I have to.

**What is the next level for your research in this area?**

I finished the first phase of my book and went to Ikom and found more things. Something interesting happened; I prayed for sunshine when I was going because it was in the rainy season and I know that it rains a lot there. When we got there, just as we were approaching Ikom we had sunshine and we were there for four hours. At the first location, cameras could not snap the images very well so I requested for native chalk so that I can trace the line. They seem not to understand what I asked them. They said nobody does it. It's a taboo, only our people do it and only on the 14th of September before the New Yam festival.

**How has it been like, advising the President on Arts and Culture?**

Not easy, because the President [Olusegun Obasanjo] is a person with very strong ideas... [Laughs] But he has respect for good ideas. And he will respect you if you know what you are talking about, and you have to convince him. He is a good listener. I've been able to get quite a number of ideas across to him. The priority is trying to organise the national cultural program. If you operate everything in an ad-hoc manner you achieve nothing, waste time, opportunities, etc. You must have a long-term programme. We want to set up a national cultural programme on a 4-5 year plan in Culture. It will involve every aspect of culture. I have this program on the table and UNESCO is cooperating with us.

**Being an artist and a scholar, haven't there been times when you've been embarrassed by some of the President's acts, for example the sale of a national artifact which was reported by *TELL* magazine?**

That is where some of the frustrations come in, some of the things that can't change immediately. You need time. All African countries have been robbed. As an adviser, I can only advise. And the museum, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments has also been working. They've travelled all over the world trying to identify those Nigerian artifacts that were stolen. They brought some back. And are still working to get more...Recently, *Time* magazine published a report on that. The problem we have here is that our people are not aware of the significance of culture. That's why people like me are here. It's a slow process but we'll get there.

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The Ikom stone monoliths. Photo: Ikechi Uko, *African Travel Quarterly*.

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## **The Story of Cape Town's Two Marches**

### **Personal Reflections on Going Home**

Stephanie Urdang

**March 30 1960:** 30,000 Africans march on Cape Town from the African townships on the outskirts of the city, a distance of over eight miles. They head for Parliament but detour to the Police headquarters at Caledonian Square when they hear that the army has surrounded it. It is a call to end the pass laws, to end apartheid. This march took place nine days after the notorious Sharpeville massacre.

**September 13, 1989:** 30,000 South Africans of all races march on Cape Town, from St. George's Cathedral to the Cape Town Parade, a Peace March. It is a call to end the unbridled state violence, to end apartheid.

The first contributed to my leaving South Africa. The second contributed to ability to return to the country I never ceased to consider home.

It is early March 2011 and I am back in Cape Town, back “home”, for three months to work on the book I am writing about the confluence of forces that demolished apartheid. Day by day I get to know the city I grew up in, the city I left in my early twenties. With no specific agenda than to absorb post-apartheid Cape Town, I do something different each day. A few days after I arrive, I enter the newly opened exhibition space in the crypt of St. George’s Cathedral, the Cathedral of Arch-Bishop Desmond Tutu.

I stop before a floor to ceiling blown up photograph that captures the 1989 march. At the head are religious leaders, Christian and Muslim, providing gravitas to the event. There are other prominent leaders that represent a swath across South Africa’s political and economic life– trade union, the Mayor of Cape Town, business leaders, community leaders, academics. The march was sparked by the recent killing of 23 people in Cape Town’s black segregated townships in the aftermath of yet another violent response by the South African police to the resistance that was at its height throughout the country.

I am moved, emotions wrenching as I stare into the dense mass of thousands upon thousands of Capetonians, black, white, men, women, young, old, in business suits with ties, in shirt sleeves and t-shirts, serious faces, smiling faces, somber faces, glowing faces Christians, Muslims, Jews, non-believers. Faces of a people who know they are winning although they could not know that just five months later Nelson Mandela would be released. The ANC would be unbanned and the stage set for democratic elections.

As I stare the memory of another march numbering 30,000, twenty-nine years earlier, flashes into my mind when country-wide anti-pass protests were organized in African townships all over South Africa. It was when, on March 21 1960 69 peaceful demonstrators were killed in what has become known as the Sharpsville Massacre. Nine days later 30,000 protestors set off from the African townships



on the edge of the city for an eight mile silent march into the center of Cape Town.

The pass laws forced all Africans living in urban areas to carry pass books in the land of their birth to prove that they had permits to be there. These laws defined every movement and aspect of their lives. Relegating them to no more than units of labor, they provided a draconian means of controlling and directing a cheap—*very* cheap—labor force. The pass laws were one of the main pillars of apartheid and the fuel for a vibrant South African economy. In 1952, four years after the apartheid government came to power, the laws were extended to include all male Africans over the age of 18 regardless of whether they lived in the towns or the rural areas; four years later African women were lassoed into the law.

The call went out: Leave your passes at home, present yourself to your local police station and be arrested. Township after African township throughout South Africa responded. In Sharpeville, calm and cheerful protesters sent jitters down the spines of the skittish police, young and inexperienced. They fired wildly into the crowd. Most of the victims were shot in the back while trying to flee, including ten children, some on the backs of their mothers. The killings caused reverberations around the world, bringing with it unprecedented shock and horror at the extent of the brutality of the apartheid regime, which the world had largely managed to tolerate and ignore. The Johannesburg stock exchange went into a tail spin to be saved by a consortium of US banks.

The protests had been confined to the areas proscribed for Africans. Such demonstrations could be contained by the local police. Not so Cape Town. The specter of 30,000 Africans walking deliberately and silently out of the townships of Nyanga, Langa and Gugulethu scared the bejeebies out of the white government.

At the head was Philip Kgosana, looking even younger than his twenty-three years. Kgosana, one of the few Africans admitted to the University of Cape Town lived in the all-male sub-standard barracks

built for grossly underpaid 'migrants' (foreigners in their own country) as 'temporary' (they were in fact permanent) housing whose wives and children were not permitted to accompany them. Becoming steeped in their stories of suffering and witnessing their living conditions, Kgosana dropped out of university to work as a political activist.

At the head of 30,000 strikers crammed into the narrow streets of Cape Town, Kgosana demanded a meeting with the Minister of Justice to present their demands. The police spokesman agreed to a meeting later that afternoon on condition that Kgosana tell the marchers to return home. Fearful that the police would begin to fire and cause life-threatening havoc he knew he had no choice but to ask the protestors to turn around and retrace their steps.

When Kgosana arrived at the designated time, it was not the Minister of Justice who was waiting for him but police reinforcements. He was arrested. After nine months in jail he was released on bail. He fled his country and went into exile. (He is now, like many exiles, back home.)

I was in my last year of high school the day of the march. Our school went into virtual lock down. All five hundred students were instructed to go to the auditorium where we listened as the ominous words of the principal explained the threat outside. Fear rippled through the boys and girls sitting cross-legged on the wooden floor. I caught it full force. My father's law practice, in keeping with his left politics, was not in the center of the town where most white lawyers attended the needs of white clients, but in Athlone, a so-called 'Coloured' area, where he and the young black lawyers he mentored attended the legal needs of a black community. I feared for his safety.

Later my mother, sister and I waited anxiously for his return. I was struck by my father's uncommonly quick and light step, lacking any of his usual end-of-day draggy tiredness. He was positively glowing. No sooner had the news of the march spread to him in his law

office, than he was in his car driving to a vantage point to view the extraordinary phenomenon.

*"This is the beginning of the end!"* he announced at the dinner table. *"The government cannot deny what has happened today. The passes have to go."* Unlike my principal, my father saw no threat. What he saw was a disciplined and a determined mass of African workers taking up the struggle, flexing their collective muscle to protest the scurrilous pass system, warning the oppressive ruling class that they were ready to take on the revolution. The workers had risen. There could be no turning back. Or so, on that day, he fervently believed.

He underestimated the might of the apartheid machine.

A State of Emergency was declared that afternoon, presaging a severe clamp-down on political activism and activists for decades to come. In short succession the Unlawful Organizations Act was passed, which declared the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress illegal; the Terrorism Act was passed, which allowed for indefinite detention without trial; the Communism Act was more stringently enforced. Thousands fled into exile. Thousands were arrested and tried, meted out harsh sentences; or detained without trial and often tortured. Others were banned and/or placed under house arrest. The tyrannical state was bent on crushing any resistance and for a while it succeeded. For the next eight or nine years, the revolution was in the doldrums and South Africa experienced a hiatus in open political activity.

I recently found online black and white grainy photographs of the 1960 march that were banned from publication in South Africa at the time. African men, I discern no women, packed tight as they walk silently into the center of the city to add their protest to the anti-pass campaign. Looking at the power captured in these photos and reflecting on what followed to crush it I am reminded why I am not a face in the crowd in the photos of the 1989 march. For me as a young white South African caught in these hiatus years, I

could no longer tolerate the brutality of the South African regime, nor could I continue to live under perpetual privilege. I could see no alternative but to leave.

Twenty-nine and a half years would separate the two marches and almost thirty years before the combination of forces—the end of Portuguese colonialism, heightened armed struggle, intensification of internal resistance, and international success in isolating the apartheid regime—would render the walls of apartheid so porous they would topple down. By the time the pass laws had been repealed four years earlier in 1986, 20 million Africans had been arrested and charged, and then either imprisoned, fined or ‘deported’ to the so-called Bantustans, the cornerstone of apartheid policy which assigned 13 percent of the most non-arable territory of South Africa as ethnically-based “homelands” for the 80 percent African majority.

It was only after I emigrated to the United States in 1967, that another march caught my imagination and attention. On August 9, 1956 African women marched on Pretoria, the seat of the apartheid government, to protest the expansion of the pass laws to include African women. Their call to the Prime Minister Strijdom became a rallying cry beyond South Africa: “Now you have touched the women, Strijdom! *You have struck a rock!*”

As a new feminist, involved in the vibrant women’s movement, I could appreciate how the march was a catalyst for challenging the prevailing stereotype in South Africa—and beyond—that women were tied to their families and disinterested in politics. It sparked my interest and I began to learn about the strong role of women throughout the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, a role that became a source of inspiration to me and to others activists in the solidarity movement in the US.

The march, numbering up to 20,000, brought women from all over the country from all backgrounds. While the majority was Afri-

can, the only one of apartheid four designated racial categories to be affected by the pass laws, the protest included a significant number of whites, Coloureds and Indians, a diversity reflected in the leadership. The marchers, resolute and dignified, gathered in front of the Union buildings, the seat of the South African government administration. When the Prime Minister refused to meet with the leaders, they placed a petition with over 100,000 signatures at his office. A particularly moving moment was when the women stood for half an hour in perfect silence.

As successful as the event was at rallying so many South African women it failed to stop the extension of the law to include African women.

After leaving the exhibition in St. George's crypt I am invited to have lunch with the Cathedral's Sub-Dean Fr. Terry Lester, Lynette Maart, organizer of the exhibition and Josette Cole, a researcher focusing on the current struggles of the informal settlements. They are committed to educating the next generation about what happened under apartheid and about the role St. George's Cathedral played in supporting the resistance, as Maart states it, "to excavate the social history of the Cathedral, using its role in the struggle against apartheid as a lens through which to view current social justice issues." As I listen I reflect on the words of Amílcar Cabral: "When our revolution is over, that is when our struggle will really begin."

They talk about how Cape Town is being transformed into a city for foreigners, for tourists to enjoy.

They talk about resources being poured into making the centre of Cape Town safe and beautiful, a magnet for the privileged.

They talk about lack of access to resources for those who continue to live in dire conditions on the Cape Flats which apartheid had relegated to the so-called Coloured and African people.

They talk about how those continuing to live in these inhospitable outskirts of the city are trapped there, given Cape Town's exorbitantly high property rates.

They talk about iron shacks, and crowded tiny brick houses, and lack of water and lack of electricity; of inferior education.

They talk with concern about what they see as the lack of political will on the part of the government to forge change, so that for too many what they had marched for, what people by their thousands had died for is still in the realm of dreams.

What I hear too is that what was learned in resisting apartheid continues to fuel protest for real transformation.

I know, and knew, that the South Africa I would return to, would be a complicated and often distressing place. Without living here, without being engaged in specific aspects of working for change, can I, I wonder, regard South Africa as home?

'Home', imbued as it is with emotion and feelings and personal perspective, is a fluid and often mercurial concept. While it can be attached to more than one place and space, for me Cape Town, the city of my birth still resonates as "home." Or as African friends would say, "home home."

Meanwhile, as the days of my visit stretch forward, I continue to be captivated by the history of struggle in South Africa, to be inspired by the tenacity of those who lived through it and won and by those who continue as activists to struggle against continued inequalities, a new form of privilege and a growing injustice. I am moved in a way that seems only possible because I was born there. Being raised and socialized in Cape Town and South Africa became intrinsic to who I would become, as part of me as genetic makeup.

I cannot give it up or give up on it.



## **Kenya's Silence on Colonialism**

Wairimu Gitau

Fearless and barely armed, the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) Soldiers from across Kenya met clandestinely in the early 1950's to discuss the many afflictions-past and present- faced under British colonial regime. Hence goes the story from historians and in memoirs written by the freedom fighters themselves who became the revered Mau Mau. But why isn't colonialism a mainstream topic of discussion? I found this a question often asked by most foreigners- from Africa or abroad- who wish to understand Kenyans' dormancy in dealing with the country's past, so crucial in influencing the present running of community and state affairs. One Kenyan scholar I spoke to who asked to remain anonymous said, "history of Kenya has been politicised and to open any part of it is to re-awaken deeply held grievances - the ensuing conversation is generally polarised around politics. There are Kenyans who benefitted under colonialism, others benefitted from the confusion and ignorance of Kenyans at independence and still others benefitted in the years immediately

after independence creating a new set of grievances that had nothing to do with colonialism."

Sixty years following the uprising and fifty years since Kenya's gaining independence, now disputable, self-rule from the whites, the discourse on the Land and Freedom Army remains murky despite thousands of works of literature, films and research papers. Born in 1940, Jane Nyaruai recalls clearly her unaware involvement during the struggle, "my parents were keen on informing me what was happening in our country. With other children, we used to carry bullets from one location to another. We were never told what was in our sacks. My mother would ask us to take maize for grinding. On the way, we would meet other women who would distract us and insist on taking the maize for grinding themselves. Only later on did I learn why. Our parents were protecting us." She adds the reason that such critical history is not everyone's cup of tea is due to greediness and selfishness, "we want to own so much and have people working under us, yet there is no one who wishes to slave under anyone. People are hating each other immensely. And what can now work is doing work together. And if only when one earns a little and share it with others but if when am hungry, will I love you? Will there be any peace?" She notes in deep thought.

To continue with the scholarly discourse, on December 2013, Karatina University in Central Kenya in alliance with the National Museums of Kenya hosted the first ever Mau Mau conference dubbed, *Mau Mau and Other Liberation Movements 50 Years After Independence* (<http://bit.ly/1t7tc70>). Different Kenyan scholars presented astounding research topics. Among the thorny issues overtly downplayed in most mainstream media, film, and literary narratives but examine at the conference includes: the role of women in the struggle for independence; the question of whether Mau Mau was a nationalistic or a peasant farmers' revolt against white land-grabbers ; what happened to land dissemination and distribution following independence; why did it take over forty years for the Kenyan gov-



ernment to formally recognize these freedom fighters; what was the catalyst for former president Mwai Kibaki to lift the bar on the fighters as an outlawed group; and, was the struggle a Kikuyu-only affair? Professor Othieno Nyammjoh, referring to his candid understanding on the subject and quoting from Ngugi wa Thiongo's book *A Grain Of Wheat*,\* categorizes the struggle as instigated by two very varied groups- the homeguard and the fighters, "In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi's 'hero' Mugo is the one who betrayed Dedan Kimathi; but because people do not know this, they fete Mugo at the independence eve celebrations (where the book ends). But the book asks an implicit question: that if we start off by celebrating Mugo (the homeguards), how will we ever go right? On the eve of independence, Odinga turned the Governor away when offered the Prime Ministership, arguing the colonial government had first to free Kenyatta before independence, leaving people like Gichuru and Mboya shocked by Odinga. Immediately into independence, Kenyatta betrayed every aspiration of the nationalists, even going to the extent of detaining ex-MauMaus who had asked where their land was." His analysis then begs us to further explore the conspiratorial question, if giving Kenyan independence was part of the British Regime plan as implied by the 1960 speech by then British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, the, "Wind Of Change"? As scholars have documented that the British used ethnicity as a divide and rule policy, some scholars believe independence was among the many calculated strategies for them to maintain power- even if it meant sacrificing a few souls while at it. So then, should the June 06 2013 "apology" and the GBP 20 million reparation be a cut and dried deal allowing all Kenyans to collectively forget the torturous physical and mental experiences of colonialism? (see <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-22790037>) And finally how do we "soberly" teach our children and youth about colonialism? Why did most veterans end up living in despicable conditions in rural and urban slums following independence? I believe these last two questions were not fully explored at the conference. To this, Professor Othieno Nyammjoh proposed "Yes, Kenya's history needs a thorough rewriting if we are to understand "where the rain started beating us"! One of the reasons

*why that re-writing is not 'urgent' is because it will expose the turncoats who captured power at independence, like Jomo Kenyatta." To a greater extent most queries above were thoroughly discussed at the conference. In her paper, "The Impact of Nandi Resistance: 50 Years after Independence," Dr. Prisca Tanui says that during the colonial period the Nandi lost large tracts of land near the railway and some members of the Talai Clan were kicked out and forced to occupy Kapsisiywa, "a region not economically viable" as other parts of Nandi were taken over by the colonial administrators. In the Kavirondo Region, in Western Kenya different groups responded variedly to British encroachment as discussed by Dr. Paul A. Opondo, a lecturer at Moi University. Some groups collaborated while some out-rightly rejected the imposition brought upon them. For most young people, this colonial history is often forgotten or lodged in the sub-conscious as the painful, horrendous accounts so often muddled and riddled with ethnic turmoil, poverty, corruption, police impunity, injustices, poor living conditions and ruling class setting the priorities and perspectives of the nation. As the first president so candidly declared when he came to power, "Where there has been racial hatred, it must be ended. Where there has been tribal animosity, it will be finished. Let us 'NOT' dwell upon the bitterness of the past. I would rather look to the future, to the "GOOD" new Kenya, not to the bad old days. If we create this sense of national direction and identity, we shall have gone a long way to solving our economic problems."\** Does forgetting right a wrong? Can forgiving the most recent "bad" past where a few people took charge of 70 percent of land from communities in Kenya's coastal area of Lamu, for example, enhance the country's economy or quell animosity?

Irrespective of continuing oppression of poor people, pervasive corruption and lack of critical perspectives on colonialism, one Nyeri youth group is hopeful that Kenya is becoming a better developed country. One said the Thika Superhighway is a project he is proud of. The group had an afternoon off to relearn this history. The nine youth of the Thuguma- Nyeri County's Children and Youth Empow-

erment Centre (CYEC) visited the Nyeri Museum - a former colonial court- in Central Kenya where there is an ongoing exhibition of the struggle for independence. The walls are full of historical portraits consisting of Tom Mboya, Pio Gama Pinto, the "Kapenguria six" (the arrest, trial and imprisonment of Jomo Kenyatta and others in 1952 during Mau Mau), women queuing for permits, women voting, women protesting including Wangari Maathai, Mau Mau fighters, Port Florence (Present day Kisumu), Home Guards among other regalia. This group of nine youth was excited. It is their first time to visit this Museum. Seventeen-year-old Sammy Muraya says, "I am looking at some regalia the Mau Mau used and how hardworking they were. I could also defend my country." Tom Mboya's work and project of taking young people to study abroad resonated especially with one young man. As 19 year old Wilson Ekeno says, "I am looking at Tom Mboya who was a trade unionist. I understand his history well, he was a workers' leader. I feel we had good leaders whom I can emulate."

In retrospect of the Karatina University conference last year, the role of women was presented by a few scholars including Prof. Catherine Ndug'o, Director of African Studies at Kenyatta University, who spoke on, "The Unsung Heroines: Women's Role in the Mau Mau Liberation Struggle." She argues women have remained "unsung warriors" who played a pivotal role in bringing down an oppressive regime and "little is written in recognition and memory" of these bold souls. Additionally, In her paper "*The role of Women in Kenya's Liberation Struggle: The Literary Perspective*," Muthoni Gachari, a senior lecturer at Daystar University, also makes a few recommendations. She encourages us "to correct the 'wrong' perspective given in our history books, recognition of women liberation heroines and establishment of structures that directly address contribution of women in all aspects of Kenya's development."



Anthony Maina speaks to CYEC at Nyeri Museum. Photo: Sam Kairu.

Anthony Maina, the Assistant Curator of Nyeri Museum, talked about the vital role played by women before and during the struggle for the country's independence. "The women were preparing and giving the freedom fighters food, they were used to pass information as they were not easily suspected as being part of the Land and Freedom Army, there were also women who were fighters. I can remember one by the name Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima who is still alive here in Nyeri. The first Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta had to send for her when the country was granted self-rule as she was still hiding in the forest and did not believe the war was over." The group of nine from CYEC visiting the Nyeri Museum had much to say about the contributions of women prior to Kenya's independence. "I love history and I am excited to learn about Wangari Maathai and Wanjiku Florence who also fought for our Independence," says twenty-year-old Esther Ndegwa. Fifteen-year-old Agnes Wanjiru says she's learnt much more than she had already known. "I did not know

Wangari Maathai was involved in the Mau Mau and I feel good because now I understand what I did not." While eighteen-year-old Jackson Olemereu acknowledges women's involvement in the struggle for independence is news to him. He said, "one thing I have learnt is that when the Mau Mau were fighting, it is not only the men who were fighting, I see women also contributed; fighting in the forest, taking food and clothing to the fighters and I have also learnt that it is not only the Mau Mau who fought for our independence, but also that Kenyans contributed wherever they were."

On the issue of reparation for the Mau Mau veterans, mixed responses from the CYEC group came to play. Muraya says, "to be tortured and oppressed is an awful thing. I will feel bad if I am oppressed and even if I am paid, the pain will never go away. I will not even want to be paid." Wanjiru opts for the remedy of putting the oppressor behind bars. Meanwhile Olemereu says he would want the compensation, "because even if he is jailed, I will not gain anything, but if he pays me, I can start my life afresh." While nineteen-year-old Ekeno sees compensation unnecessary, "This issue of being oppressed and paid should not exist; the oppressor can get used to violating you and might later torment you much more knowing they will be able to pay you off."

As the visit to the Nyeri museum with the group of nine from CYEC comes to an end, one daring youth, sixteen-year-old Beatrice Wanjiru, has a short message to President Uhuru Kenyatta and his government. "I want him to help all the poor people and those who are not able-bodied."

Conclusively, as the Jubilee government preaches a nationalistic agenda, it is becoming increasingly critical to correct our wider understanding of Kenyan history by openly talking about the impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism. And adds 74 year old Nyaruai, do something about it: "If it is possible, I would like the people with huge farms to just have a look and even if it means giving out ... There are people with 20,000 or 30,000, or 400,000 acres worth of

land. I wish they can stop loving themselves this much because eventually we will leave all this wealth on earth. If only they can only share even an acre each so that the people who are so troubled by poverty and lack food to eat, if they are given soil, they can at least work on it for food for themselves and their children. And even get a place to be buried. I have heard the public grave yards are filling up ... will we now get buried where we live?"

A conversation around struggle for independence and all the queries aforementioned here and all these questions by scholars and young generations of Kenyans should generate a nation-wide discussion if societal cohesion is to be expected. My anonymous scholar is optimistic, "I have no doubt that history will one day become popular discourse. What is missing is the environment that does not stifle the expression of differing perspectives and that enables Kenyans to deal with the realities that are unearthed," she concludes.



Jane Nyaruai, participated in the struggle for Kenyan independence as a child. She demonstrates the needle-pricking practiced by the homeguards to coerce the people into admitting taking the Mau Mau oath.



Mau Mau female veterans at an event to remember veterans of the Mau Mau in April 2014. Photo: Wangui Kimari.





# **Prospects and Challenges of International Academic Exchange Programmes between Universities in Northern and Southern Countries**

Reflections from a Visiting Scholar from an African University

Rose Shayo

This article examined prospects and challenges of International Academic Exchange Programmes (IAEP) between selected universities in Northern and Southern countries. More specifically, the article examined various issues including major reasons for establishing IAEP, processes and procedures involved, advantages and disadvantages as well as major problems and challenges. In addition, the article presents gender issues of concern as well as key lessons and best practices. The article used data available from both secondary and primary sources of data including own personal experience from participating in more than six different forms IAEP for a period of ten years. The article concluded by providing recommendations for strengthening IAEP especially for universities in southern countries.

As a starting point, it is pertinent to indicate that for many decades most universities in northern countries have established various international academic exchange programs (IAEP) involving staff and students with their counterparts in universities in southern countries, including those in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries. Thus, this article, in addition to discussing general reflections from staff and students experiences, it presents author's own reflections from participating in several international academic exchange programmes between universities in Europe, America, Canada and Africa as a visiting scholar. Hatcher and Bringle (1977) define reflections as "the intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives." In the context of this study therefore, reflections are used to refer to views and ideas of actors involved concerning own attitudes and perceptions towards IAEP. Generally, reflections offer space for actors involved to critically considering both positive and negative issues emerging from participating in various IAEP available in universities located in northern and southern countries respectively.

This article begins by presenting an overview IAEP including history and practical examples. In its second section, the article presents most common forms of international academic exchange programmes. Included in this sub-section is information on processes and procedures used by most universities especially those in the northern countries to establish IAEP with universities in southern countries. In its third section, the article presents and discusses major problems and challenges staff and students encounter at different stages of IAEP implementation. In its fourth section, the article presents major lessons emerging from the implementation of various academic exchange programs both within and across universities in northern and southern countries. In this sub-section, the article includes a discussion on the gender dimensions of IAEPs. Finally, in the last section, the article presents future prospects for strengthening IAEPs between and across universities in northern and southern

countries including calling for thorough empirical research to provide evidence based facts for influencing policy changes. In particular, the article argues that in the future, concrete measures should be taken to ensure reciprocity and mutual collaboration among participating universities. This implies that respective universities in the northern countries should consider engaging fellow staff and students from universities in southern in all phases of establishing IAEs including the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. To date, the rapid expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs), globalization and commercialization of knowledge offers lots of opportunities for enhancement of IAEs among universities worldwide. However, most universities in southern countries ought to be more aggressive in this regard.

### **An overview on International Academic Exchange Programmes**

Abundant literature is available in most universities websites particularly in northern countries showing different types of IAE that exists worldwide. For instance, the Office of International Affairs at Western Ohio State University (WOU) has maintained academic relationships with more than 100 strong and vibrant study abroad programs in more than 40 countries worldwide over the past two decades<sup>1</sup>. In particular, nearly 20 percent of undergraduate students at Western Ohio State University have directly benefitted from such programs. Likewise, at Ohio State University both foreign and local students have had opportunities to study abroad, including business-related studies in France, Spanish studies in South America, field research in Iceland, student internship programs in Switzerland and volunteering work in Honduras. Further, since 2008, approximately 65 percent of third year undergraduate students at Queen's University in

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.owu.edu/> viewed in July 2011

Kingston have participated in various study abroad programs offered by universities both in northern and southern countries<sup>2</sup>.

Likewise, since the 1990s, the Douglas College International Programs and Exchanges in the United States of America (USA) has supported more than 1,000 students from over 60 worldwide to participate in various overseas programs such as teaching, academic research projects, cultural exchanges and attending high profile international symposia<sup>3</sup>. In particular, this program targets diverse actors from the Douglas community including faculty members, students, College Board members and administrators. For instance, available records show that every year approximately 500 international students enrol in academic and professional courses available at Douglas College. However, the majority of these foreign students come from China, Thailand, Japan and other Asian countries.

Likewise, since the early 1950's, most universities in European countries have been implementing different types of IAEs with universities in northern and southern countries. For instance, in 2009/10, a total number 405,805 (slightly more than 16 per cent) were enrolled for various overseas courses outside the United Kingdom (UK) whereas about 2,493,415 students were enrolled on degree programmes at UK HEIs. The latter comprised of students from more than 200 countries including China and India supplying the largest proportion, followed by Nigeria, the United States, Malaysia, and a number of EU countries<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, since the 1980's, approximately 540 students from University of Turku from Finland have been participating in various IAEs, particularly short term academic exchange programs lasting for a minimum of three months.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, between the years 2010-2012, the School of Business at Car-

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.queens.ca/learn/programs>. Accessed in July 2011

<sup>3</sup> See: [www.douglascollege.ca/...douglas/International-std](http://www.douglascollege.ca/...douglas/International-std). Accessed in July 2011

<sup>4</sup> See A Guide to UK Higher Education and Partnerships for Overseas Universities - p. 6 Accessed in September, 2014

<sup>5</sup> See: [http://www.utu.fi/en/studying/studies/information\\_guide/exchange.html](http://www.utu.fi/en/studying/studies/information_guide/exchange.html). Accessed in July 2011.

leton University in Ottawa introduced a one-year compulsory study abroad program for its third year undergraduate students enrolled in the International Business Program (IBP). Similarly, most universities in Asian countries have established IAEF and other academic networks with other universities both within and outside the region. In Australia, for instance, the University of New South Wales manages various IAEFs with more than 200 universities in 32 countries in Asia, North and South America and Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, although international academic exchange programs plays a profound role in enhancing the quality of education among partner institutions, the involvement of African universities leaves much to be desired. This disconnect is due to the fact that only a few universities in Africa have established IAEFs with universities in northern and southern countries. For instance, the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa has enrolled about 22,000 students from 200 countries<sup>7</sup>. However, it is pertinent to indicate that this is a rather unique experience as there are very few African universities that operate IAEFs that originate from within. This phenomenon is attributed to the fact that the majority of African governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as opposed to their northern counterparts, do not set aside funds for supporting staffs and students who wish to study abroad. This suggests that the majority of academic staff and students from most African universities, who participate in IAEFs both within and outside their respective countries are sponsored by either Development Partners (DP), donors (including bilateral and multilateral organizations) and international non-governmental institutions such as Fulbright, the Commonwealth, the German Academic Exchange Service

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.international.unsw.edu.au/inbound-exchanges/exchange-option>. Accessed in June 2011.

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.clemson.edu/academics/programs/study-abroad/programs/exchange-programs/>. Accessed in July 2011.

(DAAD) and philanthropic organizations, mostly located in northern countries.<sup>8</sup>

### **Factors responsible for the establishment of International Academic Exchange Programmes**

For many decades, IAEs have been promoted as a strategic component for strengthening academic curricula of most northern and southern universities. These supposedly, mutually-beneficial academic exchange programs have been motivated by several factors including cultural, social, economic, and technological. First, in terms of promoting culture, international academic exchange programs offer unique opportunities for beneficiaries to explore, appreciate and understand different academic and non-academic cultures both within and across universities in northern and southern countries respectively. Such social and cultural knowledge is necessary for eliminating, minimizing and demystifying misconceptions, fears and prejudices among students and staff, especially those from the northern countries regarding the real-life conditions of people (including fellow students and staff) in universities located in southern countries. On the other hand, at an individual level, most academic staff and students exchange programs especially those from universities located in southern countries get opportunities to broaden not only their own personal academic competencies and qualifications but to also contribute to building strong institutional academic links and social networks with their northern counterparts. By so doing, these international academic links and networks tend to be beneficial to respective universities and countries in many diverse ways. The explanation on the cultural factors are best captured in a statement that was made by Michelle Obama, at Howard University,

<sup>8</sup> See [www.sarua.org/file/Internationalization of Higher Education Final Paper-ProfPaul Tiyumba Zeleza.pdf](http://www.sarua.org/file/Internationalization%20of%20Higher%20Education%20Final%20Paper-ProfPaul%20Tiyumba%20Zeleza.pdf): Accessed in September 2014

Washington, D.C., when encouraging American students to register for courses outside their region:

Getting ahead in today's work place isn't just about the skills you bring from the classroom. It is also about the experiences you have with the world beyond our borders, with people and languages and culture that are very different from our own.<sup>9</sup>

Further, in supporting the above arguments, Meeth L. (1966) argue that international academic exchange programs are necessary for breaking racial barriers both within and across universities particularly those affecting university staffs and students from different continents. More specifically, he indicated that providing opportunities for students and staff from universities in the northern and southern countries to meet regularly or in certain periods promotes better global understandings on diverse development issues among participating actors well as among the institutions and communities in which these students or staffs comes from. In supporting the above fact, Mohamoud (2003) argues that the acculturation process undergone by many of the African Diaspora in the Netherlands has enabled them to learn and adopt the idea of the voluntary association from Dutch society, which they subsequently exported to their respective home countries.

Third, both Irving, C (2008) and Zeleza T.P (2012) argue that universities in northern countries promote IAEP for economic purposes. However, they argue that economic benefits from IAEP accruing to different categories of actors involved are not uniform neither consistent but it varies from program to program and place to place depending on the length of study as well as specific type of roles performed by direct and indirect beneficiaries. For example, the direct beneficiaries of IAEP include participating staffs and students from respective universities whereas indirect beneficiaries include travel

<sup>9</sup> First Lady Michelle Obama Speech to students who graduated from to George Washington University College in December 19, 2010

and health insurance companies, hotels/hostels and host families with whom staffs and students reside in the recipient countries located either in northern or southern countries.

At this juncture, it is important to note that most students and staff involved in international academic exchange programs in northern universities are required to pay huge sums of money when travelling abroad for covering tuition fees and other direct expenses such as travel, accommodation and medical insurance. However, significant differences have been observed with regards financial costs incurred by staffs and students from northern universities as well as methods of payments<sup>10</sup>. For instance, in most northern universities, a larger share of those funds tends to be paid directly to host institutions and students as well. On the contrary, in most universities in the southern countries, those funds are given to the direct beneficiaries including staffs and students who are directly involved.

Further, it has been noted that financial costs incurred by individual foreign students or academic institutions sending or receiving students from abroad are not uniform. In most universities both in universities in the northern and southern countries, financial costs tend to vary from time to time and place to place depending on a number of factors such as type and length of the study abroad program, type of accommodation, level of economic development and quality of life in the receiving country. In addition, in some northern universities, students are required to pay for additional expenses such as social and cultural tourism, as well as risk management.

Additionally, it has been noted that students from northern universities who undertake short term academic exchanges in southern universities are permitted to pay their tuition fees to either their home or host institutions. Surprisingly, it has been established that most of the time, most students from northern universities prefer to

<sup>10</sup> Most universities worldwide have separate fee structures for local and foreign students whereas the latter pays almost three times more compared to the former.



pay their tuition fees in their respective home campuses for purposes of maintaining their foreign money within their home universities. This implies that universities in the northern countries who enrol many students from abroad end up generating reasonable incomes for their respective universities and countries. In supporting this, Philip Steenkamp (2008) reported that the Province of Ontario in Canada has greatly benefitted from the economic dividends of IAEPs. However, without disclosing the exact figures, he reported that, *"Each international student was estimated to contribute more than \$25,000 to the economy – thus making education for international students a \$900 million industry in Ontario."*<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Zeleza P.T (2012) quoting from NAFSA report of 2010 reported that in the year 2009-10, the United States of America (U.S.A) raised about in \$18.78 billion from 690,923 international students who enrolled for various academic courses. In addition to this, it was reported that international students and staff bring valuable diversity to the classroom, the campus, and the larger community which translates into improved academic experience better understanding of the world. Zeleza, T. P. 2012 added another dimension showing that in the long run IAEPs have proven to be the highway for preparing students and staff for a variety of professional careers in the globalized world that is linked with enhancing national development and competitiveness as a means of generating extra institutional incomes.

In most cases, most staffs and students who participate in international academic exchange programs from universities in southern countries get financial support (either full or partial) in the form of academic scholarships<sup>12</sup>. Full academic scholarships covers direct

<sup>11</sup> Deputy Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities for Ontario State, Canada available in the website as quoted in July 2011

<sup>12</sup> Most universities in northern countries provide a range of financial awards and academic scholarships for assisting prospective and on-going students to pursue

expenses such as return flight tickets, local transportation expenses in the foreign country, accommodation, food and other daily necessities as well as health insurance. On the contrary, a partial academic scholarship caters for either tuition fees or travel and accommodation expenses. However, it is worth noting that in some rare occasions, governments in southern countries (especially those in Sub-Saharan African countries) provides full academic scholarships to its staffs and students to participate in IAEs available either in universities located in northern or southern countries. This implies that staff and students from African countries receive financial support from governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, and philanthropic organizations as well as universities in northern countries. Thus, it is evident that such organizations have developed the culture of setting aside specific funds for promoting IAEs with similar institution both within and outside their respective regions. For instance, some of the international organizations that are known for supporting IAEs include the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Commonwealth, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) Global Youth Organization (GYO), Ford Foundation, Carnegie Corporation and Fulbright Scholarships and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the Swedish Agency for Research Collaboration (SAREC) and ERASMUS programme<sup>13</sup> just to mention a few. The fact that most of these organizations are located in northern

studies in various disciplines including those from Africa. A good example is the Erasmus Programme and , the Commonwealth Scholarship Programme

<sup>13</sup> Since the established of the ERASMUS programme in 1987, it has supported 200,000 students to study and work abroad each year. The primary objectives of Erasmus are to benefit students educationally, linguistically and culturally through their experience of living and learning in other countries; promote co-operation between institutions; and help develop "a pool of well-qualified, open-minded and internationally experienced young people as future professionals".

countries suggests that a larger portion of financial support for IAEPs for staff and students in southern countries is available in these countries. Thus, it is evident that IAEPs create great opportunities for raising government revenues in northern countries that are later used to supporting both short and long term IAEPs including those with universities in southern countries.

Fourth, it has been observed that some universities in northern countries have established IAEP for academic purposes. In very brief terms, most IAEP involving academic staff and students from universities in southern countries in particular are established in order to develop and strengthen capacities for designing internationally-competitive academic courses and joint /collaborative activities during this era of globalisation of knowledge. To-date, the growth of Information, Communication and Technology (ICTs) has greatly facilitated faster academic cooperation between universities in northern and southern countries. In particular, on-going advancements in ICTs such as e-services and facilities have strengthened the coordination of IAEPs both within and across respective universities, countries and continents with few difficulties. This coordination is possible because most universities in northern countries have flexible learning systems that allow students to transfer credits from courses abroad to their respective northern programs.

It is pertinent to show that to-date, the implementation of IAEPs has become much easier to organize due to three major factors, namely, improvements in technology, the rise of the internet, and globalization of knowledge. All these factors individually or combined have created opportunities for universities in northern countries to create and maintain strong and healthy IAEPs as well as academic networks with students and staff in southern countries. Some of these include academic chat boards and Web CT-related programs. Further, it has been observed that through IAEP, most academic staff and students from universities in southern countries acquire other necessary skills and competencies related to ICT such

as internet proficiency and access to current journals, publications as well as improved writing, analytical, communication and advocacy skills. These competencies are necessary for the improvement of the quality of education at their home universities in southern countries<sup>14</sup>.

Unfortunately, this growth in ICTs has been accompanied by significant discrepancies in terms of access between and across universities in northern and southern countries. Some of the major factors for the non-uniformity of IAEPs include low and uneven socioeconomic and technological development especially in southern countries particularly those in SSA. In more concrete terms, most academic staff and students in universities in northern countries have better access to ICTs compared to their southern counterparts, particularly those at Sub-Sahara African universities. Whereas, most staff and students from northern countries have access to computers at early age, this is not necessarily the case for their southern counterparts. As a matter of fact, the majority of university staff and students in most southern countries, particularly in SSA, including those who are enrolled in public schools and universities, are highly disadvantaged in this regard. Only the few staff and students who attended private secondary schools and universities have access to computers and ICT services/facilities right from kindergarten levels. Further, Huyer, S., and Hafkin, N., (2007) have observed t huge gaps in relation to men and women access to ICT by arguing that "gender in relation to ICT use and access remains largely an uncharted domain" (p.36).

<sup>14</sup> During the implementation of the project between IAS Carleton, IDS UDSM and University of Sierra Leone students gave those ideas as some of the major outputs of this academic link

### **Advantages of IAEP**

First, as far as academics are concerned, international academic exchange programs involving staff and students from either northern or southern countries have many advantages including the potential of bringing diversity into classrooms, to campuses, host cities and communities at large. For instance, diversity in classroom interactions happens especially when a foreign tutor teaches topics related to his or her country or region of origin. For instance, during the 2011 winter semester, I taught a one semester course on Gender and Development with a focus on Africa (AFRI 4050) to fourth year students enrolled at the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at Carleton University in Ottawa. In short, in their course feedback session, most students expressed great satisfaction with having been taught by a tutor from Africa. Indeed, most students indicated that they were highly inspired by first-hand information from a professor of African origin. In addition, the same students reported that they were impressed by both my teaching and presentation styles, my rich experience in conducting research at local levels as well as my outreach activities. Most students confessed that such an experience enabled them to clarify and clear some myths, misconceptions and stereotypes ideas about African people, including the intellectual ability. Indeed, some few students indicated they knew African students and staff did not know how to communicate in English or French<sup>15</sup>.

Second, the evolution and usage of English language as a medium of communication in most universities in southern countries has made it easier for university staff and students in northern countries to cooperate with their counterparts in southern countries particularly on research, training and other academic activities such as meetings and workshops. Overall, increased exposure to the English language and ICT in particular, has accelerated the pace of knowledge

<sup>15</sup> These views were echoed by students who have not participated in any IAEP during class discussions

sharing between partner institutions and has stimulated the growth of ideas through IAEP and finally resulted in improvement of national economies. Thus, it is worth noting that in the long run, IAEPs have the potential to minimize brain drain if well-tailored and nurtured. In supporting the above argument Pires et al., ( 1999) and Ndulu, B (2000) showed that over the past four decades a high proportion of students and staff from universities in southern countries (especially those from African universities) who participated in IAEPs in universities in northern countries did not return to their home countries for social, economic, political and institutional reasons.

Third, in addition to improvements in communication, there are other indirect advantages that accrues to actors in southern countries who are directly involved with IAEPs including host families, local communities, hotels and national governments. For instance, research findings from a study by Mohamed (2003) on the African Diaspora in the Netherlands concluded that

Financial remittances provide a lifeline for many of Africa's poor. At the micro-level remittance has become a much needed and reliable source of stable income to many marginalized families, extended families and local community groups. Financial remittances also act as a safety net to the poor in many developing countries whose governments lack the means to make such provision. During natural disasters, for example, increased contributions from African Diaspora effectively provide a form of insurance which helps families and communities cope during crises. As such, remittances from the African Diaspora not only help provide relief for the poor but also, increasingly, serve to guarantee economic stability in many poor countries in Africa. Empirical evidence clearly shows that remittance is a form of pro-poor finance and yet it still remains an under-appreciated flow of funds.

### **Types of academic programs for staffs**

There are two types of IAEPs that are most favoured by universities both universities in northern and southern countries, namely, short term and long term exchange programs. Typically, most of the-

se academic programmes are designed and implemented by academic staff from the two partnering universities and are either individually or jointly taught by the same academic staff from northern or southern universities.

*Short-term academic exchange programs*

There is no standard definition of what constitutes a short term IAEP. In very simple terms, a short term academic program can be defined using three variables, namely: type of beneficiaries (staff and students jointly or independently); duration; and expected outcomes (including obtaining a certificate of attendance or grades for one or two semesters). In terms of duration, for most northern and southern universities, short term academic exchange programs last from one week to three months that run consecutively. However, for some other universities' short term exchanges programmes refer to those courses offered for a period shorter than six months in one university. Yet for other universities, short term exchange programs refer to programs that do not require students to stay at one foreign university for the whole programme period but it encourage student to participate in student internship placements available at different phases of the academic study period. Under the latter arrangements, students from either northern or southern universities are exposed to an intensive program that increases their understanding of other cultures, communities and languages<sup>16</sup>.

On the other hand , for students especially those from universities in northern countries, short term academic exchange programs include enrolment in one semester courses abroad, attendance at summer courses or participation in intensive cultural exchange programs that focus on home stays, development of language skills and

<sup>16</sup> This refers to the academic exchange between University of Dares Salaam (Tanzania) and Helsinki University and Jyväskylä University in Finland

local community service and cultural events. Under these arrangements, students (in most universities in northern countries) who want to participate in such short term exchange programs are not obliged to find counterparts from universities in southern countries. Likewise, such short term academic exchange programs are favoured by students from all disciplines from universities both in the northern and southern countries. For instance, between the period 2006 and 2010, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) based at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), used to select two best performing graduate students to attend a one semester courses in Masters in International Development at the Jyväskylä University in Finland. Sadly, as earlier mentioned, this program did not last long due to lack of financial support.

On the other hand, short term academic exchange programs for academic staff from universities in northern and southern countries, refers to a variety of academic activities. Some of the most common ones include planning and teaching one or two semester courses abroad, conducting joint research projects and/or organizing international workshops and meetings in either northern or southern countries. To a large extent, funds for implementing such activities come from northern countries. However, a token contribution (mostly in kind) is provided by universities in the southern universities including office space, working equipments.

#### *Long-term academic exchange programs*

Generally, in most universities both in northern and southern countries, long term academic exchange programs are defined as courses or academic activities that last at least six months and run up to more than one full year or more. More specifically, for students, they involve staying at least one full academic year abroad doing a two semester academic program or pursuing graduate degree programs that result in earning post graduate awards such as Masters or



PhD degrees. On the other hand, for academic staff, they involve participating in various academic activities such as sabbatical leaves, part-time teaching, doing joint research and other related academic activities preferably at universities abroad. Indeed, the past few decades saw high academic staff mobility from universities in southern countries to northern countries, labelled as brain drain. However, for most universities especially in southern countries, both short and long term IAEPs involving temporary intellectual migration of staff from southern universities to northern universities is either welcomed, tolerated and/or promoted due to its many advantages already discussed above. In other words, fears of brain drain are minimized because the majority of academic staffs from universities in the southern countries involved in IAEPs are full-time employees who are expected to take up their respective jobs after the completion of such programs.

### **Processes and procedures of establishing international academic exchange programs (IAEPs) between northern and southern universities**

In this sub-section, the main interest is to discuss institutional processes and procedures for establishing and managing IAEPs. Generally, most universities in northern and southern countries have special departments/units responsible for coordinating study abroad programs/including both short and long term. Although these offices are given different names but in most universities (both in northern and southern countries) they are responsible for managing various issues concerning staff and students involved in IAEPs including offering guidance on academic courses and placements, accommodation and social and recreation activities. More specifically, international student offices/departments prepare specific detailed information on types of international scholarships and other opportunities available abroad, application procedures as well as opportunities for funding. In terms of procedures, students in most universities in

northern countries who wish to participate in academic exchange programmes are required to apply for long courses preferably ten (10 months) in advance of departure, whereas at southern universities this process generally takes a minimum of four months to most universities except Canada<sup>17</sup>. Further, some universities in northern countries require applicants to show proof of preliminary application forms and evidence of financial support before arranging individual interviews and submitting a longer application. All these processes are tedious and time consuming.

For instance, most universities in northern countries demand a full application from the beginning of the process. After receiving application forms, formal interviews are scheduled for further discussions before filing application forms. Likewise, there are other conditions that must be fulfilled by the respective applicants including having a GPA of around 3.0 or higher in order to qualify for academic scholarships from abroad. This means potential applicants are selected on merit based criteria basing on individual performance as well as results of personal interviews and evidence of financial support and accommodation. Further, in some academic programs, prospective exchange students or staffs are expected to demonstrate some ability to speak the host language of the country as well as computer literacy. However, some universities in northern countries are not very strict on the two later conditions because they believe that such candidates will get the opportunity to learn and develop host country language competency on the ground.

As far as accommodation is concerned, most students from universities in northern countries going abroad for academic exchange programs have two major options to choose from namely, living on or off campus. In some universities in most southern countries, for-

<sup>17</sup> The process of getting a visa for Canada from Tanzania in particular can take more than four months. This is due to the fact that the visa office is in Nairobi.

foreign students prefer off campus accommodation due to a number of reasons. First, in most cases foreign students opting to live on campus are expected to compete with local students for a place-ment.<sup>18</sup> However, some foreign students opt to live off campus either with host families or in university rented accommodations owned by private institutions. For foreign students who opt to leave with host families, they are expected to contribute to the daily subsistence of that family, pay for their room, food and other provisions. Interestingly, the latter accommodation arrangements are popular among staff and graduate students on long term academic exchange programs. Others foreign students and staff studying in universities in southern countries prefer to live either in shared houses in private owned houses/apartments or in private owned student apartments and hostels. However, the latter types are less popular in most countries such as Tanzania because they often require such students/staffs to sign six months or longer contract depending on the length of stay at the institution or in the respective country. In view of the above, respective students and staff are advised to search for accommodation as soon as they receive their acceptance letters and student visa. At the same time, students on long term IAEP are advised to have a back-up plan just in case the type of accommodation they are interested in is unavailable. Other alternatives include, making arrangements for temporary accommodation in motels or hotels and or student hostels where they can live until they find a permanent place to stay.

In terms of type of exchange program, there are no standard rules or regulations governing the design and implementation of IAEPs between universities in northern and southern countries, including courses to be offered by international visiting professors. However, in most universities in northern countries, the process of

<sup>18</sup> At the University of Dar es Salaam, the policy favours foreign students in terms of access to campus accommodation.

establishing academic exchange programs starts with an application for internationalization of the existing curriculum. This was the case with the Department of Women Studies, University of Florida, and the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at Carleton University. In the former case, responsible professors are required to indicate the course they wish to teach during a particular semester, amount and resources required including human and capital. In addition, respective professors are required to show sources of such resources as well evidence showing how such resources will be used for developing academic materials including online course components, video conferences, field work, travel, graduate student assistance, software and other related course materials. On the contrary, in later case, the process begins with an application for financial support from university and other government or international NGOs to support visiting scholars from African universities. After raising the funds, the IAS sends applications to selected African universities asking them to nominate potential academic staff who can participate in teaching two courses at the university over the course of an academic year. Further, the potential applicant from an African university is also required to propose two undergraduate courses to be taught one in the IAS and the second in the Department of Political Science, Carleton University respectively<sup>19</sup>. However in some other universities in Europe<sup>20</sup>, such as the Helsinki University, the process of developing a graduate degree program in Development Studies involved staff and students from the University of Helsinki in (Finland), University of Dar es Salaam (in Tanzania) and University of Zambia (in Zambia). This means the beneficiaries were directly involved in the design and actual implementation of this IAEP between the three universities

<sup>19</sup> The author taught two courses at Carleton university including AFRI 4050 in the IAS and PSCI in the Department of Political Science during the second semester

<sup>20</sup> The author participated in a two months visiting scholarship at the Helsinki University from June to August 2008

including one from northern countries and two from southern countries.

On the other hand, some African universities operate less common forms of international academic exchanges involving the administration of one semester courses to foreign students. For instance, since 2008, the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) has been hosting approximately twenty students from OWU for a ten (10) weeks course titled “Women, Development and Environment” (BWS 300.4)<sup>21</sup>. In principle, this course, which was designed for foreign students by professors from the OWU, is executed by Tanzania professors. Local students are not allowed to attend this course due to the mismatch between the duration of academic courses in these two universities. Academic courses at the UDSM’s semesters run for two semesters comprising of 15 weeks each whereas OWU’s run for 10 to 12 weeks respectively. Overall, it is evident that processes and procedures followed by universities both in northern and southern countries in establishing and managing successful IAEPs are not uniform neither consistent. In fact, there are noticeable variations both in terms of modalities and technical aspects both within and across universities in northern and southern countries.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of international academic exchange programs**

Box 1 below provides a summary on reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of IAEPs that were drawn from my own experiences as well as those of students involved in my latest visiting scholarship at the IAS, Carleton University during the 2010-2011 academic year. More specifically, while at Carleton University I taught two courses: Gender and Development with a focus on Africa (AFRI 4050) and Gender and Globalisation (PSCI 4500). Towards the end

<sup>21</sup> The course is still running up this year (2014).

of the semester, students were asked to provide reflections on both the strengths and weaknesses of courses taught by visiting scholars from African universities. In total, the two courses were attended by 29 final year undergraduate students. Overall, the all students 29 (100 percent) emphasized the positive aspects as summarized in Box 1.

*Box No 1: Positive reflection from students*

- Satisfaction from teaching methodology that reflected first-hand information and wide experience on topics covered.
- Ability to link theories, policies and practical issues happening at global, regional and national levels.
- Enjoyed knowing African views on Africa's development that confirmed and or complemented what is written in text books.
- Exposure to alternative learning perspectives that enriched our common understanding on various development issues in Africa.
- Gained knowledge and skills on how to identify and interpret Africa's development using a gender lens.
- The richness of the experience from a professional and personal viewpoint.
- Satisfaction from participating in group discussions and reading journal articles that provided more insights on issues that were reflected in the course outline.

On the other hand, a few students identified several negative issues, which affected the effectiveness of the staff exchange programme. These are summarized in Box 2:

*Box No 2: Weaknesses of staff exchange programs*

- Unfamiliarity of foreign staff with host university academic/administrative procedures such as WebCt, etc.
- Last-minute cancellation of semester one course due to technical reasons on the side of the foreign staff.
- Limited outreach activities and application of visual aids.
- Language barriers and cultural differences make some of the students feel uncomfortable in the class.

**Personal reflections on advantages and disadvantages of**

### IAEPs

Overall, there are more advantages of participating in IAEPs than disadvantages. These advantages can be examined at both institutional and individual levels. First, at the institutional level, the UDSM saw my participation in this type of IAEP as an opportunity for me to pursue part of my sabbatical leave. At the UDSM, academic staffs are expected to take a sabbatical leave every four years after completion of their PhD studies. In the past, there were many opportunities for sabbatical leave outside Tanzania but over the past two decades, things have changed and it has become increasingly difficult to secure the required scholarships. Also, as is the case in most universities in northern and southern countries, the culture of “publish or perish” is very strong. So, one of the UDSM expectations was for me to publish least one or two articles in internationally-recognized journals. In this respect, the acceptance of this article for publication by the IAS at Carleton University is highly appreciated. In the same vein, I was also able to publish another journal article on “Prospects and Challenges of Increasing Women’s Access to Higher Education Institutions in Tanzania in the *African Women’s Journal*.”<sup>22</sup> In addition, while at the IAS, I presented four academic papers to different audiences, one in a public seminar that was organized by the IAS<sup>23</sup>, Aga Khan Foundation<sup>24</sup> and another at a public seminar that was organized by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)<sup>25</sup>. I also participated in several meetings in

<sup>22</sup> African Women’s Journal Issue 03, July-December 2011 pp 15-20.

<sup>23</sup> The title of the paper is “Enhancement of Women’s Capacity to Participate in Competitive Elections in Tanzania” IAS, Carleton University (April 2011).

<sup>24</sup> The title of the paper is “Towards Enhancing the Role of Civil Society Organizations in Promoting Stability and Change in Challenging Social and Economic Development in East Africa” for Agha Khan Foundation in Ottawa, Canada”, February 2011.

<sup>25</sup> The title of the paper is “Is the Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming Strategy in High Education Institutions in Africa Making a Difference at all? The case of University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and Makerere University (Uganda) (August 2011)

North America to discuss development issues pertaining to Africa and the world at large. Some of these included the 2011 Canadian Association of African Studies conference at York University, just to mention a few. At these academic events, I acted as an ambassador for the university UDSM, promoting it to participants from across the globe.

At the individual level, I was able to widen my experience of teaching foreign students. Although, there are some minor differences when comparing teaching of foreign and local students, it was striking that both student and staff (including foreigners) encounters various gender-related experiences in learning and accommodation environments. For instance, issues related to sexual harassment and gender-based violence, while often not openly discussed, were found to be common among northern and southern staff and students. As an attempt to concretize these issues, we designed a new course for students at Carleton University and UDSM titled "Gender Violence in Higher Education in North America" (WSGT 4910). This course was taught jointly by Professors from Carleton, UDSM and University of Sierra Leone. At the UDSM this course was made part of course known as "Gender and Sexuality" (DS 664). Being the first tutor from an African university to design and run this joint course expected to run for at least three years (until 2014) is a great achievement for me and for UDSM at large. During the first year of teaching this course, our students both at UDSM, University of Sierra Leone and Carleton conducted empirical research studies at their respective institutions on GBV related issues that came up with stunning research findings confirming the prevalence of different forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, among students and staff. Sadly, this violence takes place despite explicit anti-sexual harassment policies at both universities. Last but not the least, other direct benefits of IAEs includes remittances to the families of visiting scholars abroad.



### **Gender aspects related to IAEs involving universities in northern and southern countries**

First, there is dearth of official data showing actual numbers staff and students who have participated in various forms of IAE especially from universities in southern countries and SSA countries in particular with respect to sex<sup>26</sup> and gender<sup>27</sup>. The same applies for data showing actual number of foreign students who have benefitted from IAE over time. Probably this is due to the fact that most universities in southern countries (SSA countries inclusive) have not given sufficient consideration on the need to establish strong and vibrant international academic exchange programs (Mlama, 2000 and Zeleza, 2012). In particular, Mlama (2008) argue that it is mostly universities in northern countries that prepare official data showing actual numbers of its staff and students who participate in diverse forms of IAE, including those originating from own universities and from universities in southern countries.

Second, although there is no concrete gender- disaggregated data showing the actual number of academic staff and students from universities in southern countries (an in particular from SSA countries) who have been involved in IAEs but anecdotal evidence suggests that the proportion of female staff and students from southern universities involved in IAE is relatively lower than that of their male counterparts. Basically, this is due the fact that the proportion of female staffs and students in most African universities except in South Africa and Nigeria is relatively lower than that of male staff and students.<sup>28</sup> As a result of low enrolment s of female staff and

<sup>26</sup> Sex refers to the biological make up of men and women and it is used as a unit of analysis to show quantitative aspects

<sup>27</sup> Gender refers to the social identities, expectations and privileges different cultures construct for members of the different biological sex. It is used for reflecting qualitative aspects among men and women in their diversity

<sup>28</sup> For instance in Tanzania, female students constitute only 34 percent of total students enrolled in higher education's institutions including public and private. Likewise, the proportion of female staffs is even lower than that.

students in most universities in southern countries (and Africa in particular), more male staffs and students have accessed IAEP opportunities available in universities in northern countries. This situation is caused by various factors, including institutional and technical. Some of the associated institutional weaknesses include a lack of explicit gender policies within IAEP's and in particular study abroad programs, limited publicity of available opportunities as well as a lack of financial resources and mentors. On the other hand, technical problems include limited knowledge of ICT at the individual level, inadequate exposure to IAEP and limited awareness on potential funding opportunities available in northern countries. Most of the information on the latter is publicised in the internet and other publications which take longer to reach most universities in southern countries including Africa. Some studies have confirmed that female staff and students do not access the internet as frequently as men.<sup>29</sup>

Third, it is pertinent to indicate that most universities, particularly those located in northern countries, advocate for the establishment of IAEs because of the many related advantages, most importantly an enhanced quality of education and cultural development among staff and students. On the contrary, most universities in southern countries have failed to benefit from IAEs in northern and southern universities due to both technical and financial constraints (Mlama, 2000; Zeleza, 2010). In conclusion, it can be safely argued that staff, students as well as participating universities in northern and southern countries, greatly benefit from the establishment and maintenance of IAEs. However over the past two decades, most academic staff and students from African universities -- including those

<sup>29</sup> Huyer, S and Hafkin, N (2007), *Engendering Knowledge Society: Measuring Women Participation* Orbicon : ISBN 978-2-922651-10-2 and Gilwald; Stork C; and Mileak, A (2010) *Gender Assessment of ICT Access and Usage in Africa : Towards Evidence Based ICT Policy and Regulations: Vol. 1, 2010, Policy Paper No. 5*

in Tanzania have not been able to fully utilize available opportunities for various reasons that will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

### **Problems and challenges facing staff and students involved in IAEP**

Four major problems and challenges have been identified in connection to the effectiveness of IAEPs, especially with regards to African universities. First, staffs and students from most universities in southern countries and African countries in particular, participate in IAEPs as unequal partners for various reasons. This is caused by the fact that most universities have limited resources (such as computers, rooms and IT experts) necessary for the successful implementation of effective international staff and student academic networks. As a result, most universities in southern countries fail to sustain international academic student/staff exchange programmes once they have been established.

Second, some students from universities in northern countries who have participated in academic exchange programs in some African universities have raised concerns about their African counterparts' ICT knowledge including computer usage skills and internet proficiency which is crucial for effective participation in e- discussions and academic e-chat boards<sup>30</sup>. Second, some students from northern universities have been raising concern on several issues such as worries about delayed graduation, few role models within family and respective faculties who have studied abroad as well as safety and security especially those who enrolled in African universities. However, it is worth noting that insecurity incidents to foreign students in African universities are rare and no empirical study has

<sup>30</sup> In 2012, IAS at Carleton University sent a student to o UDSM to assist students with ICT related issues including use of the Web CT.

been conducted to ascertain the magnitude of this safety problem as well as its relationship with sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Some universities in southern countries such as the UDSM were obliged to introduce anti-sexual harassment policies and other regulations to ensure the safety of local and foreign students and staff.

Third, students from both universities in northern and southern countries have expressed that most IAEs are quite expensive and even if students and staff are able to secure academic scholarships, parents and respective institutions are expected to contribute towards extracurricular activities. However, due to inadequate support from parents and guardians, most students from universities in southern countries tend to look for temporary jobs in order to generate incomes for such extra curriculum activities.

Fourth, to-date, participation of staff and student from universities in southern countries in IAEs in northern universities is increasingly becoming a big challenge because as time goes such opportunities are not only shrinking but they are also irregular<sup>31</sup>. This means only few lucky students from universities in southern countries get opportunities to participate in IAEs. Fifth, from my own experience, I have noted that students from universities in the northern and southern countries are not involved directly in the design stage of IAEs. Rather, most students and staff, both in universities in northern and southern countries, are brought on board during the implementation stage, especially at undergraduate level. Therefore, this article asserts that the outcomes of student academic exchange programs have not been fully satisfactory for students particularly those from African universities.

<sup>31</sup> Since the onset of the financial crisis in the western countries in the mid 1990's financial support to Third World Countries has been reduced drastically

### **Emerging lessons and best practices**

Four major lessons have been established from the reviewed literatures concerning IAEP between universities in northern and southern countries as well as best practices that can be emulated in the future. First, as earlier mentioned above, although IAEPs have been found to be beneficial to all participating institutions, but there are some complex and technical issues that tend to limit mutual involvement of universities particularly those in southern countries. Second, there are both direct benefits and indirect benefits that staff and students from universities in southern countries in particular get by participating in IAEP available in northern countries. At individual level, most staff/student from southern countries acquires both technical skills and knowledge on various development aspects not popular in their respective home countries. Third, it also became evident that to a larger extent participating universities from southern countries have benefitted from improved career development among its staff and student as well as increased access to financial and human resources for institutional development. Some of these include access to funds for running joint research, academic courses, consultancies and meetings/conferences and symposia programmes as well as academic scholarships. More specifically, the involvement of academic staff from universities in southern countries in organizing and implementing joint academic activities such as teaching, research and consultancies contribute to the visibility of respective individuals and their institutions in particular. It also results in the enormous growth of practical skills on the part of the participant, with an impact on local development.

In supporting the above argument Freudenberg S, et al 2007 showed how medical staff and students from universities in Tanzania and Germany benefitted from each other through sharing and

exchanging of best practices used for teaching on medical students<sup>32</sup>. Through such IAEP arrangements, medical students and staff from German medical universities were given opportunities for teaching and assessing fellow local students studying medical related studies in Tanzanian universities. In particular, he showed how this type of teaching arrangements enabled staffs and students from German universities to learn many new things including teaching in an under resourced environment with inadequate facilities, resources and capacities. Thus, through such experiences students and staff from universities from German universities obtained first-hand information that was used for designing new collaborative projects. In much more broad terms, such opportunities are eye opener to both students and staff from participating institutions because on the one hand, it enabled them to know what to expect from either side and on the other side it enables them to seek for solutions to observed problems as well as other related shocks including language, culture and climate issues.

For instance, the above source reported how the participation of a senior Tanzanian surgeon in a six months intensive medical training in Germany enabled him to improve his basic knowledge in ultrasonography. Further, it was reported that at the end of such training period, the surgeon purchased a compact Ultrasound machine for the Surgical Department in Muhimbili National Hospital (MNH) in Tanzania.<sup>33</sup> Prior to having this equipment, the hospital used to do ultrasonographic evaluation of its patients in the congested Radiology Department within the same hospital. It was further reported that, after the completion of his first short-term staff exchange visit to Tanzania, one experienced Germany Surgical Ultrasonologist from Mannheim University continued to provide back-stopping ser-

<sup>32</sup> Retrieved from [www.bioline.org.br/request?js04027](http://www.bioline.org.br/request?js04027) in July 2011

<sup>33</sup> Muhimbili National Hospital is one of the four referral hospitals in Tanzania which was established immediately after independence in 1961.

vices at the Muhimbili National Hospital through organizing short-term capacity building courses on diagnostic and Interventional Ultrasonography. Similarly, the first-hand experience of this surgeon who worked under unsatisfactory conditions, including limited infrastructure and materials, enables him to appreciate the value and cost-effectiveness of alternative options in health care interventions. In supporting this initiative, the Muhimbili University College of Health Sciences (MUHAS) (which is a teaching hospital) organized joint capacity building sessions to teach more local experts about the "Ultrasound Project," as it has come to be known locally. Through this project, which was borne out of an individual IAEP staff member, tremendous improvements have been recorded in relation to timely patient care at Muhimbili Hospital.

Third, the participation of staff and students in IAEPs from universities in southern and northern countries has the potential for creating long-term relationships and social capital among the immediate actors and beneficiaries, as well as tangible positive outcomes. As mentioned earlier, as a result of a visiting scholarship program, a new academic connectivity program between one North American university (Carleton University) and two African universities (University of Dar es Salaam and University of Sierra Leone) was established and implemented up to 2014. It is most likely that similar academic connectivity programs with universities in the southern countries will be established<sup>34</sup>. Thus, it is evident that through these different types of IAEP it is possible to guarantee continuity and sustainability of associations for many years to come. To this effect, the joint project teaching and action research project on sexual harassment on university campuses in Canada and Africa will hopefully continue for some time.

Fourth, at the individual level, the participation of experienced and senior professionals from universities in northern countries in

<sup>34</sup> In 2012-2013 the IAS recruited a visiting scholar from Ghana.

various types of IAEs has also resulted in creating long-lasting personal relationships and friendships with their southern counterparts. These mutual relationships have been found to foster long-term cooperation and further exchange of academic goods and services including through joint research projects or publications. In this respect therefore, IAEs will continue to contribute to both individual and institutional growth even after their official completion.

Fifth, as argued Zeleza (2012), if properly organized and utilized IAEs can have multiple advantages such as helping students especially from universities in Sub Saharan African countries to develop cognitive skills for critical, comparative and complex thinking, cultivate capacities for cross-cultural communication, adaptation, flexibility, tolerance, and empathy, and enhance their ability to recognize difference and deepen their understanding of themselves, their society, and learning styles. This will later enable them to design effective and sustainable IAEs that include a range of challenging activities and practical field study visits to areas outside the university and cities. Such opportunities will enable foreign students and staff to put into practice the theories they learnt in class and compare them with the real life conditions in the respective country. For example, the German surgeon who worked under low-resource conditions in local Tanzanian communities enabled him to gain skills for dealing with neglected and less common diseases using new and more advanced pathologies.<sup>35</sup>

Last but not the least, it became evident that for students and staff from universities both in northern and southern countries (Africa in particular), participation in IAEs is a gateway to other local and international opportunities. For instance, although DAAD offers a special program for the promotion of university partnerships, it also has links with other organizations that provide programs for specialized surgical exchange with the Tropical Health and Educa-

<sup>35</sup> Retrieved from [www.bioline.org.br/request?js04027](http://www.bioline.org.br/request?js04027)



tion Trust based in London and the Canadian Network for International Surgery. Through these two links, Tanzanian universities have fostered partnerships with many sister institutions in northern countries.

### **Conclusion and way forward**

In concluding this article it can be safely argued the history and origin of IAEPs involving staff and students from universities in northern and southern countries have existed for many decades. In addition such IAEP have been to be beneficial to various actors who are directly or indirectly involved including individuals, institutions, governments and respective universities. Further, it has been noted that the involvement of universities from southern countries (especially in the SSA countries) in terms of sponsoring its own academic staff and students is rather limited. Further, no concrete and up-to-date data disaggregated along gender, region, type and period of involvement lines is readily available to provide evidence based facts showing the involvement of men and women in their diversity. As a result it was noted that most IAEPs, especially those in northern universities attracts students and staffs particularly from European and American countries in particular. In the same vein, it was established that very few students from universities in northern countries prefer to study long term courses available at universities in southern countries including Africa, the Middle East and Asia. In view of this trend, there is a need for educational actors in northern countries to create a levelled playing field for universities in northern and southern countries so they can operate a reciprocal and mutual-sharing platform. By so doing, this will result in creation of more effective and sustainable IAEPs that are not only more relevant but also more contextual attuned to the reality 'on the ground' and transformative in nature.

So far, it also became evident that past efforts to establish and maintain successful and sustainable IAEPs have largely resulted in the expansion of academic networks between and among universities in northern countries, rather than with and among their southern counterparts. As a result, most universities in southern countries are still grappling with various factors weakening establishment of successful IAEPs. However, until recently, many of these individual and institutional challenges have not been fully addressed through comprehensive empirical research. For instance, in the year 2009, the United Nations Alliance of Civilization (UNAOC) in close collaboration with key actors dealing with IAEPs in the US, EU and Organization of Islamic Cooperation organized a dialogue in Istanbul, Turkey comprising of various institutions and organizations from around the world to explore obstacles and opportunities in expanding IAEP. One of the major outputs of the 2009 Istanbul Forum was the creation of an embryonic academic network charged with proposing ways to advocate for efficient IAEPs and improve publicity and dissemination of available opportunities both within and across regions.

In this respect, this point to the need for undertaking a comprehensive, holistic, inter-disciplinary research starting at individual country level to examine factors that limit the establishment of effective and sustainable IAEPs between universities in northern and southern countries and in particular those in SSA countries. Thus, the research findings from such a study will be used for influencing review of academic policies and guidelines used by universities, governments and development partners especially those in southern countries.

In addition, these proposed studies can examine southern universities' modalities in promoting or advocating for the establishment of IAEPs and in choosing their type and duration. They can also cover emerging and/or potential gendered outcomes and impacts on the participating institutions, staff and students and identify

and analyse major strengths, weaknesses and challenges associated with implementing IAEPs with northern universities. Further, these studies can review the relevance of existing IAEPs including the type and amount of human and non-human resources required for implementation. In the same vein, this research can examine institutional mechanisms for handling and managing IAEPs, coordination arrangements as well as monitoring and evaluation systems. Last but not the least, these proposed studies ought to offer best practices and suggestions based on practical measures for promoting effective, sustainable and gender-sensitive international staff and student exchange programs between and across universities in northern and southern countries.

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