



African Women's Voices

Women's WORLD has been networking in Africa since 1996. In 1999, we established partnership projects with Femrite in Uganda, Mbaasem in Ghana, and WEAVE in South Africa. We are posting some writing by members of Femrite and WEAVE, both groups of Black women writers who have formed publication ventures. We are also posting a few recent essays by African feminists Gertrude Fester and Patricia McFadden, and an interview with Amina Mama, as a first attempt to make their important work more widely available to the global women's movement.

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Women's WORLD has been networking in Africa since 1996. In 1999, a delegation to the Zimbabwe International Book Fair held two brainstorming dinners with a diverse group of African women writers, who identified the following as obstacles to their creative expression:

- General social problems, particularly structural adjustment, AIDS, and war, which close up the space available to women writers
- Informal censorship of women activists, found in traditional social attitudes towards women, often reinforced by governments, the media, and the growth of various fundamentalisms, with illiteracy acting as another kind of silencing
- Specific barriers experienced by women writers, who suffer from lack of resources, training, and access to publishing opportunities, as well as discrimination by male publishers and critics
- Co-optation of the women's movement by governments and the establishment, so that the women's movement itself encourages censorship and betrays progressive women

Participants felt that their concerns as writers could not be isolated from other social problems, and that an African women writers' network must deal with all these issues. In the course of discussing programmatic ideas, they identified four main needs:

- A different kind of women's movement, that includes poor, young, and rural women, and promotes a vision of development that supports cultural change
- More women cultural activists, including publishers, who can develop new markets for women's writing, and feminist critics, who can support new writers
- A network of African women writers' groups, with groups that already exist helping the new ones
- An emergency action network through which African women writers can defend one another within the continent, to avoid situations in which human rights concerns are labeled "Western."

Women writing for their rights

Gertrude Fester

GERTRUDE FESTER asserts that inequality continues to privilege white women's writing. The ideas, visions and voices of black women and their girl-children need time, space and exposure. For now this means 'barefoot publishing'.

'But where are the black women writers?' one often hears. All too soon the commission has to be assigned, the same well-known white writer gets the contract and so the cycle continues. But black women are all around—washing dishes, cleaning floors, typing in offices, rearing children and nursing the old and infirm ... doing everything but writing. As in most professions and careers, the position of black women writers starkly reflects the inequalities of the broader society. Black women are on the lowest rung of the ladder of power, privilege and opportunity. The majority of black women are still uneducated and concentrated in jobs like farm labourers, domestic workers and 'unskilled' work. I want to explore why there is this dearth of women writers and how the black women's writing collective in Cape Town, WEAVE, is making their own intervention and asserting their right to write despite the odds of demanding jobs and family and community tasks.

Writing was, until very recently, a man's game. The world was run by men and written about by men who consequently wrote us, our role and our place in the world. But now, women have stormed the literary bastions en masse and seized the right to write themselves, define themselves.... We have broken out of the stereotypical scheme of madonnas, child-women and whores to portray real human beings, rebellious, anxious, concerned advancing together = women that love, fear, and hate. (Isobel Allende on women writers in Latin America, quoted by Baird (1997:9).

Vanessa Baird (1997) has compiled an impressive anthology of writing of women from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. The book celebrates their diverse and dynamic traditions, which differ starkly from the literary conventions of the West. These voices make the invisible visible with a freshness and innovation that definitely appropriates its space on the literary scene. It is this unique anthology, with an

introduction by award winning author, Anita Desai, and richly illustrated by striking photographs, that led Baird to agree with Allende, and she adds that the same applies to women in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Yes, the texts are great literary works but these women writers are a minute percentage of the women of their countries. Sarah Penny (1997:109), freelance journalist, book critic and author of *The Whiteness of Bones* asserts that:

[South African] women have been seminal in the development of the country's canon. Today women still strongly shape the fictional landscape.

I cannot endorse these positions wholeheartedly. Yes, more women, black and other previously historically disadvantaged women, are writing today, but under trying circumstances. It is definitely a tiny percentage of black women who are writing.

Women are not a homogenous group. Penny obviously refers to white middle-class women writers, although they are fewer than 50 percent of South African writers. In South Africa and in many parts of the third world, the majority of women do not have the luxury of education, let alone the ability and time to write. Moreover, even though it is difficult and challenging for the average woman to write, it is even more challenging to publish in a mainly male and white-dominated publishing world.

With the exception of Miriam Tlali, very few black women in South Africa have had the time to write novels.¹ There are quite a few black women poets. Many women have said that it was easier to write poetry and short stories because of time constraints. In the 1970s, there emerged a few worker and struggle poets. A Natal-based trade union, FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions), published the work of Nise Malange and the ANC (African National Congress) Women's Section in exile published the anthology *Malibongwe*.

In this essay I will explore my own writing and that of various women's writing groups of which I have been part, particularly WEAVE (Women's Education & Artistic Voice and Expressions), which was initiated in Cape Town. I will briefly touch on the role of writing and performance in women's grassroots organisations in the 1980s.

There are numerous reasons why very few black South African women write or even think of themselves as being able to write. Apart from our class and race position, our socialisation was patriarchal. Nice girls became good and dutiful wives and mothers. For most of us, middle or working class, growing up in apartheid South Africa meant we dreamt about perhaps becoming teachers or nurses, never writers or TV personalities. Some of us who had committed teachers were encouraged by them to read but never ever to write. Maybe our teachers too, could not dream beyond the harsh reality of the apartheid limitations. The options open to us were bound once again by the writers we were exposed to—there were the inevitable Shakespeare, Donne, Lawrence, T.S. Eliot and the rest of the male European and North American writers. In 1971, as university students at the University of Cape Town, we protested this selective choice of texts and demanded to have African writers on our curriculum. This was the Black Consciousness period and we were exposed to black writers from the United States, Nigeria and other African countries but still not black women writers. Yes, I really enjoyed creative writing

at school—it was fun, beautiful and aesthetically satisfying but nothing was ever to develop from it or so I thought.

As a young child, I always had a sense of wanting to tell people about my experiences. When I saw a very beautiful view or any object or had an experience that really touched me, I found myself formulating words to 'tell' this story. I never understood what this voice was or recognised it as the storyteller in me. I just ignored it. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s I was mainly occupied with the national and women's struggles. During those years I always kept all the pamphlets and organisational documents, as I thought the stories of these struggles had to be told one day. A concern for many of us organisational women at that time was that there were frequent visitors, from Europe and North America mostly, wanting to interview us. They would interview us women activists, sometimes for only 30 minutes, and then return home to write books on us and become the 'experts' on South African women's struggles. It was disturbing to read how they sometimes distorted what we had shared with them. We felt the need to write our stories from our perspective but of course, there was never any time. All these women interviewers were white. Later, South African white women also started interviewing us and writing about our stories. We had some ambivalence about this: on the one hand, it was important that our stories be told but, on the other hand, it seemed to us to be fitting into the apartheid mould: white women were writing about black women's struggles and getting their degrees or publishing books. Black women's lives remained unchanged. Mildred Holo, women's struggles activist and veteran from the 1950s, once commented about her interviewer in conversation (personal communication):

She always interviews me and every time I go to her house she has more and more pillows and I still live in this hovel.

Was this exploitation? Were we being used once again by white women as our mothers and grandmothers had been exploited in their homes as domestic workers? However, it was not a cut and dried case. Later there were white women who were working with us to write our stories and there were fellow white comrades in United Women's Organisation (UWO) and United Women's Congress (UWCO) ² who were working 'shoulder to shoulder' with us to fight against apartheid.

The membership of these two organisations ranged from grassroots to academics. We explored various means of mobilising women and people in general. We held rallies on various commemorative days like June 16 (now Youth Day) and August 9 (subsequently Women's Day). Copies of speeches were dispersed with poems, songs and plays about the struggle. I wrote a play performed by the Kensington branch, for the 1982 Women's Rally at Bonteheuwel Civic, depicting the march of the 20,000 women to Pretoria to protest the carrying of passes. The Observatory branch of UWO was particularly prolific in their creative work. Among other programmes, they wrote and performed an exciting play about the Koornhof Bills ³ and held a creative writing workshop facilitated by novelist Menan Du Plessis.

There were a few incidents during the 1980s that provided some sort of niche for creative writing and the arts. The Community Arts Project (CAP) held creative writing courses facilitated by Annemarie Hendrickz and Anne Schuster. It was with great enthusiasm that some of us participated. There we used the poems of Alice Walker as models and wrote our own. In 1985, the state of emergency was declared and none of

our organisations could meet. There were various cultural programmes arranged. WECTU (Western Cape Teachers' Trade Union) held a concert at the Luxurama bioscope. Mavis Smallberg read her poetry inspired by the school boycotts and Tina Schouw sang her songs. The Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) organised the First Cape Women's Festivals in 1988 and 1989. Black Sash had a hilarious play about the Special Branch (a tree), the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) did a play about domestic exploitation and UWCO celebrated black women writers and artists like Miriam Makeba, Bessie Head and Gcina Mhlope. Here culture was used initially as a weapon as all political activity was banned, but what developed was the love and celebration of our creativity and aesthetics. The Arts Festival '86 created and co-ordinated a range of cultural activities but it was banned just before it was to commence.

Penny (1998:106) focuses on the central question, 'Is the colour of a writer still significant in a rainbow nation?' For her it is a definitive yes.

The answer can only be yes, when the critical response is mediated through an awareness of the author's racial identity.

We are in the process of nation-building. However, race still permeates many aspects of our lives and there are often many strong sentiments expressed by black women when white women write from the perspective of black women.⁴ As long as there is inequality and it is the rich and privileged (and mostly white) who can write full time about poor and/or black women, there may be anger and feelings of being exploited by those black/poor women who would like to write more often.⁵ Andre Brink puts this rather eloquently:

Certainly, it would seem that where power acquires a stake in representation, an invisible boundary is crossed, and the adoption of another's voice comes to be perceived as an act of appropriation. Such a situation can all too easily become just another instance of the powerful exploiting the weak (Brink, 1998:110).

However, he also asserts that:

without that act of assumption, that one can imagine oneself into the world or mindset of another—whether the 'other' is someone older than yourself, or of a different race, or different language, or race, or gender there can be no fiction (Brink, 1998: 110).

Penny (1998:109) concludes that if South African writing is undergoing a renaissance, 'this rebirth must encompass a sounding board for the voices of all her children.' However, it will still be a long time before all these voices can be heard. Many black writers and aspirant writers believe that the more privileged writers do not support them in any way. I do not believe that black and/or aspirant black writers want to be pampered by white writers but there could be some form of support. I am sure that there must also be some poor white aspirant writers needing support out there. A black writer (of Indian origin) shared how in the COSAW (Congress of South African Writers) days she felt there was little support for black writers by some white writers. She asked a very famous white COSAW woman writer for a letter of support for her writing fellowship application.

The white writer then asked the black writer why she did not sell her house. Incidentally, she did not have a house and still lives with her parents today.

It was at a New Year's Eve party in 1997 that the idea of WEAVE, a black women's writing collective, was born. Women were complaining about Pamela Jooste's novel *Dance with a Poor Man's Daughter*. According to many persons at the party, some passages about District 6 in the book just did not ring true for people who had lived there. There was also concern expressed about the depiction of the only 'African' character in the book. So the challenge was articulated amidst the toasting with sparkling wine: 'Stop complaining, write your own story!' Some of the WEAVE members had been part of the CAP group, COSAW and an informal group that met periodically over several years. These writing groups were mixed:

Meetings were a space of mutual exchange in terms of creativity, skills sharing and moral support for these women, committed to pursuing their passion for writing (WEAVE pamphlet for Cape WOW festival, August 2000).

WEAVE was formalised in 1997, primarily to promote the writing of black women in the Western Cape. It is seen as a means of directly addressing the limited exposure and production of written works. WEAVE members participate collectively and individually in poetry readings on radio, stage performances and international performances. We sometimes do poetry readings and performance poetry with movement and music.

Group members inspire one another. Initially one member had a one-woman play. She then invited another to join her to do her own solo performance. At the recent Cape Town One City Festival, three women did solo performances. There is also inspiration about content. One member explored the life of Krotoa and the Khoi ancestors, then others were inspired to write about their slave and Khoi San ancestors. Krotoa was a member of the Goringhaikona tribe who worked for the Jan van Riebeeck family in 1692. They renamed her Eva and she later became a skilled translator/mediator between the indigenous peoples and the European settlers. At a poetry soiree held at painter/sculptor/artists Evelyn and Willie Bester's home in April this year, women read poems on the life of Sara Bartman. Willie was so inspired that he began a sculpture of Sara Bartman, which he completed in July.

WEAVE had three one-day workshops last year with the specific aim of enhancing already completed work and also exploring themes for those of us who had not written before. These workshops were facilitated by Anne Schuster. The atmosphere of the workshops was encouraging throughout. All our feedback to one another was supportive and constructive. Among the specific feedback guidelines for writers were:

- * Mark with a tick all passages and phrases that you particularly like.
- * Mark with a "?" where something seems confusing or does not ring true.
- * What did you like most about the writing?
- * What do you want to know more about?

During one feedback session, a comment was made that maybe a particular short story could be explored as a play as the content had dramatic features. The story was subsequently rewritten and the piece works very well as a one-woman play.

For one of the first performances, a member self-published her anthology and encouraged others to do the same. At each performance, we now sell our 'barefoot' publications. Individual group members and other writers have experienced problems having their work published. Gladys Thomas was told by a white male publisher that she should stop writing about apartheid because they want new work. What we write about was also brainstormed at the workshops. Some issues discussed were:

- * Who says apartheid is over and that we need to write other, more transitional stories about South Africa today?
- * How come the few white 'struggle' children have been able to write their stories and the thousands of black 'struggle' children cannot or did not?

Some of the most riveting literature published and films produced today are about the Holocaust, which occurred more than 50 years ago. I have not heard anyone state that enough has been written about it. Of course, it is crucial that the atrocities of the Holocaust are recalled in literature and other art forms. They must serve as a lesson so that these evils are not repeated while we work towards a world in which each person can live with dignity and integrity. Today our lives are still permeated with the legacy of apartheid and racism and we, as writers, must therefore explore these themes.

WEAVE is currently self-publishing its first anthology, a collection of poetry and short stories entitled, *ink@boiling point*. It is edited by three WEAVE members, Shelley Barry, Deela Khan and Malika Ndlovu. The anthology includes work on various themes like spirituality, sexuality, menopause and old-age, disabilities, labour history and relationships. Although WEAVE is committed to encouraging black girl children and women to write and publish, this year has been devoted to improving our own work and the publishing of our book.

No story of WEAVE is complete without mentioning Joan Baker. Joan was one of the founder members, a short story writer par excellence. Her short story, 'Undercover Comrade', has been published in three major anthologies. It was Joan who gave the acronym WEAVE its content. Joan died in June this year. It is a fitting tribute to Joan that WEAVE continues to exist and inspire black women to tell their side of the story. We in WEAVE are not saying that white women cannot and should not write about black women. What we are arguing for is that there should be more, new and different voices, especially those of marginalised persons—black women, disabled, gay and lesbian and other minorities.

REFERENCES

- Baird, Vanessa. 'Foreword'. *Eye to Eye - Women*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1997.
Brink, Andre. *The Art of Literary Ventriloquism*. Leadership, 1998, pp.17, 4.
Penny, Sarah. *The White Scribes of Africa*. Leadership, 1998, pp. 17, 3.

NOTES

1. Black South African women in exile or living in foreign countries, because of their material realities, have written and published much more than their counterparts who live within South Africa.

2. UWO was formally launched in April 1981 and UWCO was established with the amalgamation of UWO and Women's Front in March 1986.

3. Also known as the Disorderly Bills. African people who were found to be 'trespassing' in areas reserved for whites, were depicted as 'disorderly' and would therefore be endorsed out to the homelands.

4. Penny (1998:106) refers to the article written by Dr. Zimitri Erasmus in *The Sunday Independent* (undated). Comments were made at various workshops, articulated most vehemently by unemployed black women writers, that although people admire the work of Antjie Krog, she had been privileged in the past and was once again privileged in the new South Africa when she was commissioned to cover the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Antjie Krog, an Afrikaner white woman, is a well-known, award-winning and respected writer. The TRC process is probably one of the most sensitive, central and meaningful processes to promote nation-building in this fledgling South African rainbow nation. It was indeed a privilege to work with the material generated in this cause and to have been part of the TRC process as Krog has been. Krog creatively uses the TRC material to explore her own personal narrative and that of her family. The juxtaposition of the personal narrative with the TRC material captures the complexity of the South African landscape. This book has further cemented Krog as one of South Africa's foremost writers. The black writers felt resentful that more attempts were not made to use more black writers during this process.

5. The varying responses to the question: "What is your next book?" from the panel of women writers at a *Weekly Mail* Book Week, held at the Baxter Theatre in the early 1990s, were remarkable. The white writers all responded, enthusiastically outlining their writing plans, while the one black writer on the panel said she had no time to write because of the demands of her work (wage labour).

Gertrude Fester is a political activist and aspirant poet and playwright. One of her greatest achievements is that some of her ex-students are now professional writers and grassroots women with whom she worked are now seasoned politicians. They ascribe this to Gertrude's encouragement and inspiration.

Forthcoming in issue #54, *African Feminisms II*, *Agenda*, a quarterly feminist journal, published in South Africa.

Talking about feminism in Africa

ELAINE SALO speaks to PROFESSOR AMINA MAMA, one of Africa's leading contemporary feminist activist scholars whose critical contribution to African feminism is drawn from her work across the academic-activist divide.

Amina Mama is the Chair of Gender Studies and Director of the African Gender Institute (AGI) and was based in Nigeria before joining the University of Cape Town. She has worked outside the academic mainstream, as a researcher and consultant to various international and governmental bodies, as well as an array of non-governmental and women's organisations. She holds a doctorate in Organisational Psychology from the University of London. Her current research interests centre around bringing gender analysis to bear on subjectivity, social relations and politics. Her major research projects

have addressed women in government and politics in a variety of African contexts, militarism, women's organisations and movements, race and subjectivity.

Her major publications are *The Hidden Struggle: Statutory and Voluntary Sector Responses to Violence Against Black Women in the Home* (Runnymede Trust, 1989, republished: Whiting and Birch, 1996); *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity* (Routledge, 1995) and *Engendering African Social Sciences* (co-edited with A Imam and F Sow, CODESRIA, 1997). Amina lives in Cape Town with her life partner, a daughter aged seven, and a son aged five.

Elaine: Tell us about your personal journey into feminism and the point in your life when you consciously identified as an African feminist?

Amina: My early life, like most peoples', was not consciously political and I did not grow up identifying as either 'African' or as 'feminist'. However, I was made aware that I did not behave the way I was expected to as a young girl growing up in one of Nigeria's northern states. I studied too much, played too hard, and was much more assertive and confident than most of my peers. I also had different ambitions, nurtured by the kind of family I grew up in. Many members on both sides of my family were relatively highly educated, and they all firmly believed in education as a crucial aspect of upbringing, upward mobility and nation-building. On the Nigerian side, several of my uncles were involved in establishing the post-colonial education structures in the '50s and '60s; much of this was motivated by the enormous optimism that accompanied the attainment of nation statehood. My mother was a school teacher. I accompanied her to school from a very early age, which meant I was always the youngest in the class. Perhaps I was always trying to compensate for this by being the first to finish and move on, which was not expected of a small girl. One consequence was that I was often out of synchrony with my peers, especially the other girls. Come adolescence, my peers were interested in clothes and hair and make-up—matters that did not interest me at all. When many of them left secondary school to marry suitable husbands, my family urged me to carry on studying. I went away to university, and then just kept going, largely because I did not relish the idea of being kept at home: the world was just too exciting! Of course that was talked about a lot. But my family supported me and did not begin to get concerned until much later, and by that time I had my own head, as it were.

I have often been called a feminist. I always recall Rebecca Mae West on the subject: whenever I do anything that differentiates me from a doormat, people call me a feminist. Naturally I took the trouble to find out what this allegation was all about, and the rest is herstory. We have had to fight for our own meaning to be kept alive, as the Western European and North American women have taken it up and filled it with their realities. Sometimes the term has been appropriated by anti-democratic interests. The debate about imperial feminism was our response to that. At other moments, African regimes have tried to do funny things with gender politics and misrepresent feminism, and our societies have not always been clear about the meaning of 'feminism' and its perennial presence in all our societies. I have never felt offended by being addressed as a feminist, but rather humbled and daunted at the responsibility it bestows on me. Feminism remains a positive, movement-based term, with which I am happy to be identified. It signals a refusal of oppression, and a commitment to struggling for women's liberation from all forms of oppression—internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical. I like the word because it identifies me with a

community of confident and radical women, many of whom I respect, both as individuals and for what they have contributed to the development of the world as we know it. These ancestors include many African, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern, European and American women of all colours and creeds, past and present. Among my favourites are the Egyptian feminists like Huda Sharaawi in the '20s, organising an occupation of the Egyptian parliament, the anti-war suffragettes and suffragists fighting for the vote in England in the same era, the early African-American heroines like Sojourner Truth, and for that matter, the women freedom fighters all over the African continent. Closer to home there are women who remind me of my own aunts—the likes of Adeline Casely-Hayford, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Gambo Sawaba, not to mention my present-day friends and fellow-travellers.

Elaine: There have been many debates about whether feminism exists in Africa. Patricia McFadden and Gwendolyn Mikell are two key thinkers who have written on African feminism. Yet their descriptions of what constitutes African feminism differ markedly. Whilst McFadden argues that gender hierarchies have existed in African societies and that the subsequent power inequities were exacerbated by colonialism, Mikell argues that contemporary gender inequality is primarily the result of 'traumatic colonisation by the West'. She argues that African women were integrated into pre-colonial structures and that contemporary gender inequities are primarily the result of colonial processes. What are your insights on the two perspectives?

Amina: These two women certainly display different understandings of African feminism. These differences are partly informed by their different positioning *vis-à-vis* Africa. Patricia McFadden is an activist and self-identified African feminist with many years of experience of political activism. Like many of us on the continent, when she uses the term feminism she refers to political praxis that emanates from a very cogent analysis of political, economic and social conditions which shape African women's lives. She herself is a courageous, outspoken individual who doesn't pull her punches and is unperturbed about her appeal, popular or otherwise. Gwendolyn Mikell, on the other hand, is based in Washington DC, and has indeed conducted research and toured in Africa, interviewed and worked with African women, presumably of her own choosing. She has done worthwhile work as an international academic scholar, but her definition of African feminism is different from McFadden's. Mikell's definition is based upon deductive generalisation and observation. She therefore describes African feminism as she sees it from the outside, from a physical and analytical distance, rather than from the perspective of someone engaged in feminist activism on the African continent. More disturbingly, the content of Mikell's definition, namely that African feminism is 'distinctly heterosexual, pro-natal' and concerned with what she refers to as 'the politics of survival' seems to me to be deeply conservative. Her definition may describe something about fertility rates and poverty, but it is not about challenging the status quo, or about describing the ways in which the contemporary patriarchies in Africa constrain women and prevent them from realising their potential beyond their traditional roles as hard-working income-generating wives and mothers. It is a use of the term 'feminism' that elides all the other aspirations you and I know African women to have, as if in being African, we forgo all the things that other feminists struggle for—respect, dignity, equality, lives free from violence and the threat of violence. It seems obvious to me that African women do have aspirations that go far beyond securing their survival: political, economic, social, intellectual, professional and indeed personal desires for change. It may be true that most African women are trapped in the daily business of securing the survival of themselves, their families and their communities—but that is merely

symptomatic of a global grid of patriarchal power, and all the social, political and economic injustices that delivers to women, and to Africans.

Elaine: Would you say that womanism has any relevance for African feminists?

Amina: I believe the term was invented by another American woman of colour, Alice Walker, as a critique of and in response to white-dominated feminism. In the USA white domination is the most visible thing to women of colour like Walker. It is quite understandable that the most salient thing to black women living in the West is racism, and that they feel a need to distance themselves from things that look white. In white-dominated contexts, feminism looks white, and who would want to collude with northern based, white women's monopoly of feminism?

However, the historical record tells us that even white women have always looked to Africa for alternatives to their own subordination, since the days of the early anthropologists. Look how the English dispatched anthropologists like Sylvia Leith Ross and Judith Van Allen to try and make sense of the Women's War of the '20s! So we have always been part of the early conceptualisations of so-called 'Western feminism', even if not properly acknowledged as such. More importantly African women have always defined and carried out their own struggles. African feminism dates far back in our collective past—although much of the story has yet to be researched and told. I mentioned Egypt earlier because of the Egyptian Feminist Union and the actions that they undertook at the time against Egyptian men's monopoly of political power. I have no problems with womanism but changing the terminology doesn't solve the problem of global domination. I choose to stick with the original term, insist that my own reality inform my application of it. Words can always be appropriated—for example there is not just womanism, but Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism and Catherine Achonulu's Motherism—but this does not get away from the main problem, namely white domination of global politics and northern-based white women's relative power to define. We should define our own terms. To put it bluntly, white feminism has never been strong enough to be 'enemy'—in the way that say, global capitalism can be viewed as an enemy. The constant tirades against 'white feminists' do not have the same strategic relevance as they might have had 20 years ago when we first subjected feminism to anti-racist scrutiny. Since then many Westerners have not only listened to the critiques of African and other so-called third world feminists—they have also re-considered their earlier simplistic paradigms and come up with more complex theories. Postcolonial feminism owes much to African, Asian and Latin American thinkers. Western feminists have agreed with much of what we have told them about different women being oppressed differently, and the importance of class and race and culture in configuring gender relations. Having won that battle why would we want to abandon the struggle, leaving the semantic territory to others, and find ourselves a new word?

Elaine: Is the distinction that is made between women's movements and feminism still helpful in the African context?

Amina: It is still useful to separate the two in the African context—we need to be able to identify reactionary women's movements. The reason for this is that the African experience includes all manner of women's mobilisation, not all of our own design or choosing. Recent history has demonstrated clearly that in Africa even the most undemocratic regimes do not hesitate to involve women. Indeed many of them make

particular efforts to mobilise women on their behalf. Women danced on the streets when Mobutu Seseko celebrated women within their traditional roles as wives and mothers in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Nigerian military wives have sponsored massive women's protests to mobilise support for the corrupt dictatorships run by their husbands. These are examples of women being mobilised or taking to the streets themselves to support an agenda no one would describe as feminist. So there can be movements of women, which are not autonomous and not about redressing gender injustice or transforming oppressive gender relations. So in this sense it is useful to have a clear idea of what we mean by a gender politics that is geared towards the wholesale liberation of women.

Women-focused gender politics would work for transformation at three levels, namely at the level of our subjectivity, at the level of our personal lives and relationships and thirdly at the level of political economy. Women's liberation requires addressing gender injustice all the way from micro- to the macro-political level, and not shying away from any level of struggle.

Elaine: Would alliances with men be necessary to succeed in overcoming gender injustice?

Amina: We need to form alliances, but these do need to be strategic. If we want a multifaceted struggle to be successful then we must be prepared to form alliances both locally and internationally. There have been many instances where women have thrown their weight behind broader struggles both nationally and internationally. Very often it has been the right thing to do. But with hindsight, we have realised that these struggles have worked with gender and power in ways that have not transformed gender relations as we might have hoped they would. So we need to be more discerning about the alliances that we make.

Elaine: Do you think that the exploration of gendered subjectivity in the African context is a worthwhile feminist project?

Amina: Even our most radical political scientists have failed when it comes to addressing the intellectual and political challenge posed by the problematic nature of gendered identity. Postcolonial feminist theory has a great deal to teach our leading lights in contemporary political analysis. The complicated phenomena currently being grouped under the rubric of 'identity politics', for example, have not been adequately theorised, and ignores all the feminist theory on the gendered nature of identity. Yet it has been clear since the days of Freud that all identities are gendered, whether one is talking about identity at the level of individuality, sociality or politics. Feminist theory also has much to contribute to our understanding of statecraft and politics. At the very least it alerts us to the partial and limited manifestations of individuality, sociality and politics in patriarchal societies. It leads us to ask interesting questions, such as whether there is a link between male domination of social and political life and the prevalence of war and militarism? We can draw a good example from Somalia where warring factions were killing each other on the basis of clan identities. Because these clans are exogamous, women do not have a clan identity in the same way. Their ties with brothers, husbands, sons and fathers extend across clans. Somali women's gendered identities transcend clans—they are therefore less likely to fight and kill on the basis of clans. That is why Somali women are telling the men to step aside after slaughtering each other. They are

tired of paying the price of male-driven conflict. Similarly in Rwanda, it was very common for Hutu men to marry Tutsi women. During the genocide Hutu men often killed their own wives because they were Tutsi—yet these very women bore children fathered by Hutu men. Surely an analysis of the manner in which gender identities can mitigate or consolidate ethnic identities would be informative?

Elaine: Recent development in the social sciences suggests that the analytical power of the concept gender has diminished in the African context. For example the founders of the e-journal, *Jenda*, have suggested that gender is a western construct foisted upon the African reality and that gender has not much relevance for understanding the African reality. In yet another development a recent history workshop in the US was held which suggested that we go 'beyond gender in Africa'. What is your response to this?

Amina: It is entirely outrageous to suggest that 'we have done the gender thing and now we can move beyond it'. If US-based people are talking about 'beyond gender', perhaps it is because they feel that in the US the gender struggle is over? Given all the empirical evidence that women are not equal to men in the US, it seems to me that this is more a case of rhetoric rushing beyond reality. Perhaps it is a characteristically American thing to produce layer after layer of rhetoric, rhetoric that addresses rhetoric and loses touch with reality? Maybe gender struggles no longer matter in California (although that does not match my observations of American life) but even if it were so, African societies are so clearly demarcated by gender divisions that it would be strategically suicidal to deny this and pretend that gender does not exist, or worse still, that gender struggles are a thing of the past.

Elaine: In South Africa we have seen a disturbing trend in anti-intellectualism among some women activists, partly in response to the fact that often more privileged women, whether white, black or middle class, still dominate the representation and analysis of gender struggles here. How do we address this issue?

Amina: We women are in no position to deprive ourselves of the intellectual tools that can assist us in pursuit of gender justice. The arena of the intellect has been used to suppress us. We cannot afford to ignore the importance of intellectual work, especially in the 21st century when knowledge and information define power more than ever before. That is why we at the AGI place so much emphasis on getting women to engage with theory and analysis from an activist perspective, and to develop strategically useful skills and make sure they make good use of information technology, research and writing skills, training, teaching, and communication skills. I do not see the pursuit of knowledge, or working in a university as un-African or anti-feminist. On the contrary, these are arenas that we must imbue with our own concerns, transform into places that serve our collective interests, instead of leaving them to continue perpetrating intellectual and epistemic violence against us.

FOOTNOTES

1. Women in Nigeria protested against British imposition of taxes.

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From Agenda, (<http://www.agenda.org.za/focus.htm>) African Feminisms I, no.50 (2001), pp. 58-63.

**WEAVE's ink@boiling point:
A Selection of 21st Century Black Women's Writing from the Tip of Africa**

Forward

Weave's selection of black women's writing offers fascinating reconfigurations of the genres of short story, poetry and drama. While these categories broadly organize the anthology, the eclecticism of the writing demonstrates how the creative impulse can shift conventional barriers and create new ways of seeing, new ways of writing, and, for readers, new ways of thinking about their world.

Past and present are constantly connected in this anthology. One of Beverley Jansen's poems challenges the reader with an insistent question: "Is our collective recall/ so brief and fragile/ that we unlearn/ so easily/ the lessons of our pain"? Stressing the urgency of "collective recall", the anthology counterpoints work written in the eighties with writing produced in the nineties to emphasize that our past will always shape our present. Gertrude Fester explicitly shows in "Two sides of the story", her selection of prison writings, contrasted by some of her poems dealing with positions of power in the democracy era, that the past can never be sealed off as that which we have left behind. In the face of a belief—currently almost a national obsession—that South Africans live in an age that is distinctly post-apartheid, these writings provide a much-needed intervention.

At the same time that the anthology insists on the relevance of past to present, it is often joyously optimistic. Beverley Jansen's story about a young man who is surprised by the humanity of the whites in a typical rural context is a case in point. Avoiding the glib myth of a reconciled South Africa, the story suggests that the prejudices of both the formerly oppressed and of the former oppressor are deeply ingrained. "New" relationships don't simply happen; they are constructed painfully out of past ones.

One of the successes of the anthology is its inclusion of a range of themes. While the anthology includes eleven writers, their voices testify to a variety of social, emotional and psychic experiences. These voices do not speak univocally about what is often reduced to "black women's experience". The exploration of, for example, learning to drive, of aging, of death, or of spirituality, makes it clear that these writers are concerned with the breadth of human experience. They write boldly and persuasively. Inventively using humour, pathos or outrage, they refuse to confine their imaginative vision simply to testifying to an oppression by patriarchy, race and gender.

Mavis Smallberg's exultant celebration of childhood springs to mind here. Recalling a joy made palpable in her language, she writes: "The rhythm of being ten is the/ Bounce bounce bounce/And the slap slap slap/Of the thud of the rope on the road/ As you skip and you hop/And you duck and you dive/And you swing and you soar/ And you scream for more!"

Many of the writings also deal with the everyday, with the comic fragments that are so central to life experiences, even though they are often not deemed adequate subjects for creative attention. In her short piece on learning to drive, Carmen Myles Raizenberg explores an anxiety about driving with humour and compassion, while another prose piece deals with a new house-owner's interesting encounter with a dagga-consuming mouse. It would be misleading to see these prose works as providing light relief from the seriousness elsewhere. What the anthology does is to break down the conventionally rigid barrier between what is acceptably literary and what is not. In this way it helps to open up paths towards a more expansive understanding of how multi-faceted meaningful social and personal experiences really are.

While the writings in the anthology demand to be read from the perspective of their human relevance, the politics that shapes the writers' creative struggles insistently resonates in the stories they tell, language they use and the worlds they open up. Poems such as "Inheritance" by Shelley Barry, "Recognition" by Mavis Smallberg and Weaam Williams' "At peace with the world" are but a few poems which bring to the surface another prominent theme in the anthology, the excavation of family and ancestral ties. These pieces reflect a reawakening of pride in who we are, shaped significantly by where we come from, particularly as South Africans. Elsewhere, a sense of community among women is invoked as an invaluable healing force in the face of social and emotional suffering. Malika Connling Ndiovu's "Gigi's Hands" traces both women's common suffering and their capacity for growth in relation to a supportive women's lineage.

Deela Khan makes visible the trauma that is often hidden in relation to writing with her acute observation of a woman's unnoticed pain at a writing workshop: "What does one say to a fellow being who has suffered so much psychic and physical abuse; a co-artist whose agony is perpetually resuscitated with the flick of a switch, with the start of a dream". Many of the stories and poems in the anthology try to unearth experiences and emotions that seem to defy language and verbal expression.

Illustrating a determination to interpret raw experiences, they challenge the idea that acute suffering can lead only to silence and submission. Instead they insist that writing about these experiences is an invaluable act of empowerment. The testimonial "I" in many of the stories is insistent and forceful. In Pat Fahrenfort's "My First Job", we hear a historically-subjugated yet vocal "I" telling a story that is usually told by others. By telling her own story, she lays claim to it and asserts her right to interpret her own experience.

This empowerment also involves an emphasis on address. Refusing to accept that women's writing should target only other black women, the writers often make it clear that they are taking up positions of authority in relation to those who have historically oppressed them. The poem, "Black Woman Poet: The Eternal Outsider" registers this with its powerful assertion of a defiant and independent "self" that is often seen only in

terms of stereotypes: Ken jy vir my?/ (Do you know me?) Kaffir-Coolie Meid/ Hotnot-Moor/ Kaapse Boesman, Dogsboddy Half-breed, Vitriolic Afrikan-Know-all!"

Even in writings where a concern with gender is not explicit, we are reminded that, as black women, these writers have faced particular oppressive circumstances. As a group excluded from the worlds of power and privilege that underpin creative writing, black women have had to overcome myriad difficulties. This is not only because they defy the mainstream's dictates of what is and what is not acceptably literary, but because they face singular obstacles in finding publishers and markets for their work.

This anthology testifies to the determined spirit of those who believe that, in the face of the dominant voices that seek to drown them out and the social relationships that work to suppress them, they do have the authority to speak assertively, they do possess the vision to write what is new and compelling and they will discover ways of communicating with their readers.

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Alien in Amsterdam

Malika Conning Ndlovu

Will I ever peel this black and white
veil from my eyes
blinding polar view
Dutch sites and scenes
nauseatingly familiar
boer faces, names and places
a blurring recurring image
die klein vasberade volk
fixated with the fatherland
violators of one after another
motherland

Against this dense cityscape
colours and shapes blend
below a shadow-grey sky
often I must step back
resist being sucked in
remember to look up
knowing that in this very instant
another reality lies
beneath the same awesome sky
a magic blue free of shadows
way across the equator
in a city not built on water
but where two oceans meet
where the history of my world
begins and ends
wind woven
polarised
vine vallied
intoxicating
blasted and blessed
Cape Town

25 to 45 degrees there
some days maybe 10 degrees
but most days below zero here
same day
one hour's difference
yet opposite poles
on the flipside of the equator
two halves of the whole

There are no seasons for grapes
oranges, mangoes, strawberries
or bananas here
they import everything
from almost anywhere
for consumption
gratification all year round
shipping them in
carting them out
like the Savannah giraffes
or the three Asian elephants
in the Amsterdam zoo
cargo cut out of their cycle
uprooted from home
now part of a splendid display
day after day after day

I try
to balance the scale

question veil upon veil
though the silence hangs thick
in contact our eyes make it clear
no matter how much we travel
no matter how much we touch
too much is missing

I speak
they do not hear
I am making African noises
not to them
but at them I think
they think

I do
they do not see
I am making African gestures
not toward them
but for them I think
they think

I tell myself
It's no longer true
there must be more
we couldn't possibly be back
at this invisibility black
the abc boxing of humanity
our weakest
saddest
lowest point
even monkeys are more evolved

Joeseph & Trinesha

Maganthrie Pillay

There's nothing quite like summer in Durban. The sun shining brightly, the humidity caressing your skin. Food and sea smells intermingling and assaiing one's senses. People riding colourful rickshaws, shrieks of laughter as young and old greet each cool wave.

Trinesha stares into the sea from her vantage point of the wall that borders the sand from the paved area. She has opened her sandals and her feet are making elaborate designs on the sea sand. She is recollecting when she was five years old and swimming in the children's pool with only white children in it.

A lanky, stern white man in a uniform with a big ugly mustache is shouting unintelligible words at her. The sun is warm on her face and the water is deliciously cool. She had

been there for about fifteen minutes before he had noticed her, so she had a small victory. No one explained why we could not play in the water with the white children, but we knew that we could not, she thought.

Just a mere two years ago she was not allowed to put her feet on the sand as she is doing right now. There were security guards with batons and maybe even guns. She remembered, as a child, looking longingly at sun-kissed bodies laying on the beach, outstretched, little children building sandcastles. One day I will do that too, she thought.

Who have thought that today, 15 years later, a dream, a longing in the heart, had become a reality. It is not really different to the beaches that we went to, the Indian beaches, except that this is close to town and close to shops, at the fun fair and paved as well. What angered the adults was that even if they wanted to go there, it was not a choice, that beach was out of bounds.

A bald voice interrupts her reverie. "Give me some money." It is a young African boy, maybe eight years old. Only one of the many children who have run away from home in the townships and live on the streets of Durban.

I'm a student, I don't have any money, but I can share my lunch with you. The boy looks thoughtfully at the outstretched hand, "As long as it is not curry."
Trinesha makes like she is cross, "What a bloody cheek you have, suits me fine." The boy, "Just jokin an' ol' man."

He tries to mimic an Indian accent. Trinesha gives him a slice of bread, which he ravenously eats. She looks out at the ocean again, but is quite curious about this very bold and funny little boy. "Where are you from?"
"Kwamashu" the boy replies.
"And what are you doing here all by yourself?"
While dusting the last breadcrumbs from his mouth he mutters, "I came to swim in the sea."

He looks intensely at Trinesha, it is his turn to interrogate her, "What is that in your mouth, is it Jewels?"
"No it is railway tracks," she retorts.
"Can you kiss with it," he asks saucily.
"No, it is to guard against men and naughty boys!" She flashes them close to his face, and he recoils from that much steel on teeth.

"You speak very good English for a boy from the townships", says Trinesha, who has not bought his line about swimming in the sea. She wonders if he can even swim in the first place. She smiles at this.

Joeseeph shifts uncomfortably, "I...I...learn it from friends."

"Do they live on the street here in town, or do they also come into town for a swim? Where are your parents?"

At this Joeseeph is thrown. "None of your business", he whispers softly under his breath. Trinesha expects him to leave. Gently she says, "My name is Trinesha, Ubani

igamalaku?" He laughs at her pronunciation. "Joeseeph," he says. "I like you, Miss India." They sit together watching the ocean now and Trinesha tells Joeseeph about her childhood and her run-ins with the security. Joeseeph can not keep up the story of living in the township. Trinesha discovers he has been living on the streets for the past two years and learns about his adventures. They part firm friends.

Since Trinesha is staying in town for the weekend as opposed to going back to Phoenix, where she comes from -- the all Indian Township, riddled with gangsterism, and the constant threat of invasion from the squatter settlement, growing rapidly in its midst --she goes back to the 3-star hotel she is staying at.

Rita, Trinesha's roommate, has learned all about Joeseeph. She is riveted while Trinesha recounts some of Joeseeph's adventures. They decide to go and watch "Fisher King", which is playing at The Wheel shopping mall, on Point Rd, known for its "ladies of the night" and its vibrancy.

They step out boldly, commenting on how much the streets of Durban have changed since the eighties. Immersed in their conversation as they are, they don't see the four big Afrikaners, their big stomachs hanging grossly in front of them, who are standing on four corners of the street ahead of them. Three of them have sjamboks (whips with rubber, long, snake like and phallic), one has a shotgun. As Trinesha and her friend Rita pass through, one of the men puts the tip of his sjambok between Trinesha's legs. While he does this he speaks in Afrikaans.

He seems to be the leader of the pack. He wears ammunition across his broad chest, decorated with the Nazi flag on one shoulder and the old South African flag on the other. He is also the largest of the four. He says, "Hey Coolie, die weer is lekker vanaand. Wat doen a mooi coolie miesie soos jy uit so laat?"

Still pushing the sjambok between her legs and following them. The other big-belly Boere low and loud, like hyenas or demons, their eyes glowing with excitement.

Trinesha and her friend, who are holding hands, tighten their grip and start to walk faster. Silently reassuring and conveying the need not to incense these hate-filled men. Having seen the shotgun and being two young Indian women alone, they realise that their best bet is to get out of the situation as fast as they can.

Trinesha turns around to face them. "Excuse me," she says as politely and neutrally as possible, whilst she takes the ship from between her legs and throws it away from her. In her head and eyes however, "You bastard, we are going to get you one day! We'll see who'll be laughing then!" They are still laughing. Rita has started to cry.

One of the Boere say, "Ag shame moenie huil nie, jy is better as 'n kaffir, coolie miesie."

Joseph, undetected, has witnessed this whole scene. It makes him angry that these monsters have attacked his new friend. Not too far away, around a little fire, are six other boys sitting and talking. He runs to them, his posse, and plans their revenge. Soon they are armed with sharp instruments. They identify the car belonging to the Boere by the bumper sticker, which proudly states "WHITE RULE FOREVER." It seems this is the

sport the Boere have planned for the evening. A black family passes by, a man, a woman and two children. One Boere quotes from the bible in Afrikaans. Another Boere grabs the man and wraps a whip around his neck. " Kaffir, lick my boots!" he booms, pushing the man's head to his dirty, smelly boots. The woman's eyes are dull and expressionless. The man's family stands very still. It's like they have been here before and wait for it to pass so that they can continue on their way. This gives the armed boys even more incentive to attack. Quietly, they rip the tyres, letting the air of all of them.

The girls, who made their escape earlier, are now at The Wheel, out of breath since they had run all the way, till they were certain that they were out of range. Rita is panicking and close to hysteria, " Let's call the police.

"To tell them what?" asks Trinesha.

Rita calms herself. "You're right, maybe they're cousins or something.

Trinesha takes a deep breath, "I can't wait for the elections, then this bullshit won't happen."

They walk to the ice cream parlor. Suddenly Joeseeph runs up to them. "We...we took the air out, and ripped..." He is laughing, telling of their act of revenge. "Silly bunch of potatoes," says Trinesha, "now they won't be able to leave and they'll play their sick games all night long. Were you following me?"

Joeseeph looks shyly at his feet and then looks at her with a naughty smile. "See you tomorrow, thanks for the ice cream," he says and runs out.

"Joeseeph...!" Trinesha calls out, then laughs and orders another ice cream.

The next day, Joeseeph is nowhere to be found. It is lunchtime and Trinesha stands outside the hotel basking in the December sunlight. From a distance there is music approaching and cymbals going. In the corner of her eye, she sees a colourful procession. It's the circus passing out of town. The streets are now filled with onlookers, waving and cheering the acts.

A little boy catches her eye. It's Joeseeph with a clown's nose on, holding balloons and poking the clown in his stomach. The crowd cheers. He does not see her, but waves as he passes by into his future.

I.C.U.

Groote Schuur Hospital

Shelley Barry

Another day

Nurses wash me at 5am,
Tired, as night duty reaches
End
They talk. Laugh. Avoid my dead
Eyes.

Some say I'm pretty
Say it's a pity

Clean now

Shapeless blue gown
2 more hours before breakfast
Light shines on bedsheets
CPA, CPA, CPA, CPA
Cape Provincial Administration
Sheets, pillows, smells

They turn me

1, 2, 3
over to face the mountain
Animals have arrived
all day they will graze
or just stand staring
like yesterday and the day before
I have learned just to stare
Like them

Visitor

My mother is here
Running out of ways to make me smile
Can't I crawl back inside her womb
I ask. Never know this life?

TV

Afternoon cartoons.
I look, see nothing, but the mountain
The day is clear
Birds flap by
It is summer
Life screeches outside

Dream

I leave the boxed room
I am spirit, grazing with the mountain herd
The mountain welcomes, protects.

More visitors

How am I feeling?
Am I in pain?
So-and-so sends their regards
And Jesus loves me

Lights fade

Mountain pulls on her blanket
Of night
Animals move off the slope
Out of sight
Where do they go?
I don't know.

I'll be here

Waiting for them
Tomorrow and the day after
Wishing I had a secret place to go
Wrapped in mountain
But where do I go?

Where can I go?

In this zoo,
With long night haunting
No view.

Return to Groenfontein

Beverley Jansen

Lewis stepped out of his almost new car and locked the door on the driver's side. Then he remembered that this was rural Calitzdorp. No one stole cars here, especially not in broad daylight. The locals also had respect for the property of strangers. He walked across the wide main road towards the white washed cafe and glanced at the signs displayed —"Volstruis Biltong"—and Sonskyn droe perskes en rosytjies. He looked at the buildings for a moment and realised that not much had changed. The post office was still there. The old Van Eck tailor's shop had been bought by a farmer and turned into a curio shop. The police station still had the ox-wagon wheels displayed on the lawn in front of the door. Little had changed. He stepped inside the cafe and took in the smells. Nothing had changed in this regard.

The large Boer woman behind the counter looked at him unsmilingly. He reminded himself that this was rural South Africa. A black was a black and nevermind the new constitution. She asked in a tone reserved for out of town visitors whether she could

help. "May I please have a packet of Rothmans and a bottle of fresh orange juice"? The woman looked intently at him and then suddenly a smile lit up her leathery face. "My hemet Lewesie—after all these years! How could she forget? The child was often in here when he came to buy supplies for the Van Eck woman the tailor's wife. Those eyes so bright and penetrating. That face so fine and sensitive. Those high cheekbones. Her brother on the farm used to say the boy thinks he is an Ethiopian prince. "Are you coming to visit your family on the farm?" she asked. Lewis smiled kindly. He really did not expect this. He had his protective armour on in case she asked insulting questions or made remarks which insulted his dignity. "No," he answered, "my mother has passed away. I am here for her funeral." "Siestog my kind, I didn't know she was ill. I am sorry to hear about ou Siena, but God knows best." She then proceeded to ask endless questions about his life, his family. He was patient. He did not feel she was invading his privacy. He understood about loneliness. He understood that this was the highlight of her day. After the transaction he stepped into the bright sunlight and was momentarily almost overcome by the oppressive Karoo heat. He crossed the street and thought what life had been like in this dorp and on the farm, as a child of a farm labourer. He remembered the paralysing poverty, the slave-like laws and the cruelty of farm life...if you were black. He unlocked the car and climbed in, reversed for a short distance and sped off in the direction of Groenfontein.

Lewis knew that he should keep his mind on the road, that he should concentrate, but he could not help himself. It just kept on coming back. He saw his ma, a large woman always tidy with cornrow plaits and white apron. He saw his father, frail and persistently coughing with nicotine stained long bony fingers. He saw his brothers and sisters. Then he thought of the day during the December school holidays when he decided to take charge of his own life. He slowed the car and pulled over to the side of the road. At a distance he watched a mother ostrich strolling with her chicks and thought, "It's almost thirty years ago and yet it seems like yesterday."

He stared at the windscreen, into the past. His mother came into the tiny yard carrying a bundle of clean un-ironed washing. "Lewesie," she shouted in a stern voice, "Lewesie, the Baas wants to see you." He did not stop stacking the wood, did not look in her face. "Ma you know I have nothing to say to that man." She put the washing down on the wooden bankie outside the door and folded her arms across her wide chest. "If that man wants to see you, you will go. Do you want your father to get into trouble again?" Lewis scratched behind his ear and continued to concentrate on the task he was engaged in. After an awkward silence he ventured, "Ma, my Pa is already in trouble...he is always in trouble. Look around you—what do see? Have you heard him saying—Ja Baas-Nee Baas-prys die Here Baas. I hate it Ma and I hate them all." Siena wiped her hands on her apron as was her habit, looked at her eldest son without blinking an eyelid.

"If the Baas wants to see you, you will go and talk to him. Where do you think we'll go if he tells your pa to pack the donkey cart? For your pa's sake, for the sake of your brothers and sisters you will go and talk to the man," she hissed. Lewis knew when she had had enough. He did not argue further.

At half past five that evening, he waited for the farmer at the barn where the evening ration of cheap wine would be distributed. The men stood in the queue, each with a tin mug in hand. Um Karol, the chief laborer poured. The farmer noticed Lewis standing next to the tractor and said aloud to his father, "Lood, that boy is getting big and also too

big for his boots. Look at him standing there looking at the boys as if they're cow mis. Come here you moerskond! I want to talk to you." Lewis stepped forward slowly, his heart beating violently. He did not lower his eyes, he stared straight ahead of him at the farmer. When he came face to face with the powerfully built white man, all the workers stopped talking and laughing. The only sound was that of the chickens cluck-clucking. The farmer looked around for a moment and then saw the spade. He grabbed it with both hands. "This," he said, "is a spade. Do you hear me? A spade. This is what you need—a spade, not fokken books. You were born to use this. You are a Hotnot. You are going to use this spade to dig this ground. You are going to plough the fields like your father and your grandfather."

He pulled Lewis towards him by his threadbare green jersey, a cast-off of his nephew. Lewis noticed the beads of perspiration on the farmer's top lip. As he tightened his grip on the frail fourteen-year-old he continued his tirade. "You have enough schooling, I told your father two years ago. Standard five is over enough. You can read, you can write. What more do you want?"

There was no fear in the stick-legged boy. He just gazed at the farmer and smiled—a strange cynical smile, a smile he reserved for those who filled him with contempt. His ma could not understand him, he always smiled when he was angry. When the farmer released his grip, Lewis took a few steps backwards and turned suddenly and strode off.

His ma never closed an eye that night. She worried about the boy. He never came home. Then came the news weeks later that he had enrolled himself at the dorp school. He was now in standard six. The girls and boys back home on the farm envied his guts and arrogance. They did not understand why he had to be different. Weekend shoppers gave regular reports of his progress to those left behind. He had found a place with the old tailor, Van Eck. He helped the old man in the shop after school. He scrubbed the floors, swept the yard, cleaned the windows and in return they gave him three nourishing meals a day and a warm clean bed at night. His teachers only had praise for the boy who only spoke when spoken to. The one complaint they had was that he had so much anger in him. So young...he must learn to forgive and forget, they said.

Lewis realised that he had gone very far back in time and noticed that the sun had set. He remembered why he had come to Calitzdorp after all this time. He put the key in the ignition and slowly pulled away again. He had driven for about fifteen kilometres when he decided to put on the radio. Music always soothed the demons in him. He drove until he saw the grave, which would eventually take him to Groenfontein where his family lived. He wondered if things had changed. The journey on the gravel road was bumpy, dusty and tedious. Eventually he saw the farmhouse in the distance, large and affluent in comparison with the workers' cottages.

As he neared the house, the farm dogs began barking and running next to the car. He passed the house and saw a curtain moving. He knew someone was watching. He drove slowly. The stretch between the farmhouse and the cottages was very uneven. That was still the same. He remembered how they hated going outside after dark. He brought the car to a gentle halt outside his ma's house. He thought, "I'm coming to bury my mother but was far away when my father died. Away in cold, grey, unfriendly London. Studying."

He switched off the engine and sat still for a moment. Then the front door opened and his brother Koos came out smiling. "Dag Boetie, so glad you could make it. Ma called for you every day since she got ill." Lewis shook his brother's hand warmly. He noticed that he looked just like their pa, nose and all. Soekie, his wife, came forward and planted a shy kiss on his cheek. All the children stepped into the small front room to greet their educated uncle from Cape Town. In an instant Lewis knew that little had changed. The people had not changed, the poverty had not changed. The chains had not been broken. Not here at least. Koos told of Ma's last days and how Soekie took care of her. Then he said, "Boetie, the Baas asked after you. He is very proud of you. He even cut your graduation picture out of the *Banier*. He said after the funeral you must come up to the house for a chat." Lewis remembered that fateful day thirty years ago and he smiled his special smile. "Koos if that man wants to see me he can come here. I still have nothing to say to him." Koos frowned as he thought of his brother's last remark. "Ja Boetie, the same thing you said thirty years ago."

The funeral would stay with Lewis for a long time. It brought the past to him. No smartly dressed mourners. No embarrassment at grief. Simple, yet dignified. Ma was placed in a pine coffin with brass handles. The dominee, a youngish man with small round specs on his face drove up from the dorp to bury ma. He spoke of her courage in the face of adversity, of her love for her children and her pride in her son Lewis who had left the land of his birth to study so far. Lewis, who had left the farm so he could be someone. After the service they went to the house for tea, biscuits and gemmerbier. Lewis did not feel uncomfortable. He was glad to be amongst his people. He chatted to his uncles and long lost second and third cousins. They did not notice the door opening. There was no knock. In the doorway stood an old man leaning on a stick. "Dag Baas," said Koos. All the others greeted him politely, except Lewis.

The old man moved forward and opened his mouth to speak and the words came slowly. Lewis listened out of respect for age as he was taught. "I thought if Mohammed would not come to the mountain, then the mountain should come to Mohammed." He smiled a little awkwardly. Lewis felt nothing—not pity, not hatred, just plain nothing. For a moment the two looked at each other in silence and the old man stepped forward with his hand outstretched. Lewis looked at the gnarled, weather-beaten hand. He took it and shook it without a word. "I came to say I am sorry," the old man said softly. The younger man could not believe what he had heard. The old man had come to apologize. "I know I had been hard all those years ago. I now know I was wrong. I have been reading about Mandela. He forgave. Can you forgive me?" Lewis felt a dryness in his throat and lifted the glass he held in his hand. The ginger beer was no longer cold. But it did not matter, any liquid would now help him to get rid of the dryness. The old man went on, "I am old now and will soon be gone. You must talk to the young people here. You must talk to all the people, they must learn. They must change." Lewis smiled. This time he smiled with his eyes. Not a smile of contempt. Just a smile-smile.

Lewis drove back to Cape Town the next morning, impatient to get home. Impatient to tell his children and his students that there was hope, because somewhere in the Karoo an old man had said, "Forgive me."

Two Sides of the Story

Gertrude Fester

DAY 1

What a bizarre sense of relief! No more being on the run, no more watching the rear view mirror, no more moving house every third or fourth day!

I look around to swallow my environment. I do so meticulously, as if I'm presenting an inventory to an arrogant official:

Floor-cracks, dark grey cracks in grey cement floors, mottled with blotches of dark shades of grey dirt. Beige gloss painted wall, and again light and darker blotches of dirt and where obscenities have probably been scrubbed off. Probably also phallogocentric comments. Gosh, if the worst have been scrubbed off...

Faint light from the centre of the ceiling, covered with chequered wire. "Fokken manjiesligte" a fellow prisoner had shouted a few days ago probably as he too did his inventory on arrival. Small barred openings for windows, covered on either side with dust-veneered wire on either side of the bars blocking any bit of pale winter sun. I'll sit here on the cement block alongside the wall. At least I'm out of view from the 24-hour a day guard. And it's so cold. Just my luck to be detained this time of the year. And the toilet, ja ne, deliberately dehumanizing us prisoners. Imagine the toilet opposite the barred doorway, and that bloody guard sitting there smirking at me all the time because I'm an 'artikkel neen-en-twintig'... Are you safe, my love? Did they arrest you later?

18 May 1987

Dear Diary

They arrested Sandra at 5 this morning. We didn't even have a chance to say goodbye. What brutality! What intimidation, with all their big guns and big boere bodies! Oh, I just have a headache thinking of it! But what about you, Sandra? Where are you? What are they doing to you? But why didn't they detain me? Is this their strategy to unnerve me? To detain you first and then me, much later? To confront me with things you supposedly had admitted? And then give each of us the impression that the one had informed on the other? Divide and triumph over us lovers? Keep strong, my love. Try to have a good night's sleep—you'll need it for interrogation tomorrow, that's if they're not interrogating you now. What a day, lawyers, priests, comrades, changing all plans, venues, going through what we'd say if one is arrested. Going through the 'Know Your Rights chart...' Are you suffering, my love? I don't want to think of what you're going through. Good night, Pumpkin.

Thanks Dear Diary for the solace you give me
In sisterhood
Madge

DAY 10

So many empty hours. Well at least I can have a rest here, whatever rest means in a prison cell. Outside I would have been going from one meeting to another, doing one task after the other. Up early for the 6am pamphleteering stint at Salt River Station, dash

to work, back again for a lunchtime picket...oh I really should stop crying. I can hear the keys. Wipe your tears. Don't let the enemy see that they're getting the better of you. Ah, medication time...

Gosh, I never thought this would happen to me. Even though we prepared ourselves for it. I remember that Silvermines picnic cum 'Know Your Rights Workshop'. Even the UDF wasn't allowed to meet then; how our Area Committee came up with then idea of going to restaurant-meetings, an expensive undertaking. You really had to order something to eat after five cups of coffee and three hours later.

I remember how remote all the issues seemed at the 'Know Your Rights Workshop'. We didn't actually take it too seriously, but well, just in case:

DON'T ANSWER ANYTHING FOR 24 HOURS!

Not bad, Sandra, it has been ten days now. Listen to the questions, analyze them. Work out what they pretend to know. That's an old strategy. So glad our other comrades informed us about this when they got out. Make certain admissions to obvious things only. Pretend you're co-operating if the torture becomes too unbearable.

Ah exercise time. Not anyone can boast a private exercise yard with wired mesh on top!

12 June 1987

Dear Diary

For the third successive morning I parked outside Loop Street Security Headquarters from 6 to 8am and no sign of her. According to Joann's sister, she's being brought here for interrogation. Oh, just to see her and know that she's well. I should get a hold of myself. I drive around aimlessly for hours. Maybe it's a solace to be alone, so that I don't have to answer so many phone calls, to comfort her family. And to listen to those macho brothers of hers, before her detention deriding her for spending so much time and energy on 'kaffirs', "Are those people worth it?" they'd ask. Oh those hypocrites made me sick! And those parents of hers! They're the pits! First the divorce and now it's politics, politics, politics! And then there's that woman friend of hers. "It isn't normal, you know. We're a decent family. God-fearing and respectable coloured people. We know our place in society. God knows best. "Mens wik maar God beskik!"

As for those sisters of hers. "You really should look after your hair. You're so lucky, you've got the straightest hair out of all of us. But you don't even blow-dry it. And no make-up. If you wore make-up you could pass for white." And here I am. Her lover for ten years, longer than her marriage lasted—unnoticed, unacknowledged, unsupported. Well, at least this anger gives me strength. How are you, my sweets? Keep strong and well, my love.

Goodnight, pumpkin

Madge

DAY 30

Have faith, Sandy, they can't keep you here for more than six months. Yes, **THEY CAN!**
THEY CAN RENEW THE SECTION 29!

I'm just another statistic. What is it now? 35 women in Section 29? Is there speculation about where I'm being held? Do they talk about me? Do you miss me, sweets? Maybe I'm mentioned at support group meetings or at a political rally focusing on women political detainees? It's quite ironic, my sitting here. How often have I made speeches stating: "We demand their unconditional release! Section 29 is a Draconian law. Detainees are held who knows where, cutting people off from their loved ones and families." (I'll make a point of saying loved ones!)

Dear God, where is she? Is she well? Or detained? Why did Old Le Fleur say that I should make my sister power of attorney and not Madge, he knows how close we were. Where is she Lord? Please God, keep her safe from these brutes.

The Lord's my Shepherd, I shall not want... Tho' I walk in the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no ill. I shall fear no ill...I shall fear no ill. Is this your way of punishing me? You, God of Love I must get out of here. I must. I cannot stand it. I can't breathe, I can't breathe!

DAY 40

What a stupid way to have acted! Imagine being shy and hiding the handcuffs. There I was being escorted, by my two security police. Passers-by give me casual glances. But everyone's really too busy with their own lives. What a rat race! They do not see how eagerly I'm taking in their faces, even smiling occasionally, and yet, being shy. My track top partially obscures my handcuffs. And I see a familiar face. Granted I don't know him very well, having seen him on the other side of the pews at church. He's walking on the other side of the street. His face creases into a smile. I return the smile. Why am I shy? Does he know I'm a detainee? Does he read newspapers? He doesn't know I'm under Section 29. He probably doesn't even know what it is! That's the problem with some of these Christian types. Everything's God's will so that they can ensconce in their political apathy! How does it go again? Yevtoshenko's 'Telling lies to the young is wrong, telling them that God's in his heaven and all's well with the world is wrong...'

Let's reschedule the roster for the day. After exercising there's Poetry Time. I'm quite impressed with myself. Doing all that in my head. Back to the roster: then I'll wash my clothes. And then I'll hang my clothes on top of the bed frame instead of on the bars of the door. Let's see what that old Jantjies has to say when I obscure her view of me on the fucking toilet! t

1 August 1987

Dear Diary

Today I feel even more depressed. I've just come from a Church Service for the families of detainees—note FAMILIES! I feel empty with humiliation and pain. Imagine, I was questioned by her lawyer why I was lighting the candle for her. My eyes welled up with tears. He knew about my relationship with her. Fortunately Jenny overheard this and told me to go ahead. Still, lighting the candle afterwards meant nothing to me after that. I need to take a good look at myself. Why can't I operate without her? Maybe this is a blessing in disguise: I have to fend for myself. Does it mean that I became too dependent on her, despite our alternative relationship? I don't even know where to pay the car. I have to administer business and I'm at a complete loss. Have I allowed myself

to become a 'passive wife'? I who started the youth club, the teenage magazine, the study aid club, co-ordinator of the women's groups...

Oh, you'd hate me sweetie, but your family's so bloody selfish, they boss over your things. We had a joint banking account and you make your sister power of attorney! Fuck you too... Oh, what the hell. I'm too depressed to write any longer. I must be getting hooked on these sleeping pills.

Night Now
Madge

DAY 60

This fucking Jantjies really irritates me. She's a bloody arse-creeping coloured, yes, COLOURED! Sycophantic, servile, servant! Probably ingratiating herself for fucking promotion. I suppose. Of all the guards, she's the only one who insists that I sit on the bed so that she can see me all the time. "Hoekom?" vra ek. "Omdat Kaptein so s!" I have to sit there and see this sell-out fucking coloured police-woman. Imagine all the other fucking boere, blue-eyed, blue-eye shadowed guards simply sit with their one-pearl-one-plain or Rooi Rose which they hide when their superiors come. I'm sure they must be bored too. Watching this terrorist all day long. But this fucking coloured bitch... (sjoe, Sandy, don't use such sexist language, you're always admonishing others not to speak like that) Yes she's a bitch, BITCH, bitch, bitch...oh stop all this crying, fucking crying all the time! Don't let them do this to you! She's a fucking bitch, bitch...Oh God, where are you? Please be with me and comfort me. Oh God, even you've left me...I've never been so lonely in all my life. Now I'm left alone with this bitch, BITCH...

Pull yourself together, man. Come on, say one of your poems or sing your songs, you're so fond of singing.

I'm so alone and very very cold
What are you doing out there in the sun?
It's part of life this struggle and strife
With me in here and you out there
Winnie and Nelson have been apart long
Irene and Wilson had no nuptial bed
And all their courage and commitment too
Inspires me, so strong I'll be.

CHORUS

I'm so alone and very very cold...

I'm sure there were 5 verses. One with other couples, then the heroines, Dora Timana, Dorothy Zihlangu...Then the women in prison, Mama Mfacu... If I could be as brave as them. But they were under Section 3. Section 29's worse! Stop feeling sorry for yourself...now don't start all that tjanking again!

28 August 1987

Dear Diary

I haven't written to you for a long time. That's because I'm sorting myself out and actually living. I have moved house and am sharing with a wonderfully kind woman who listens to me while I rave about my life with Sandra. Sandra, where are you? Some say you're being kept at Ravensmead. Others say you are going to be part of a big treason trial. Have you given in to your interrogators? Sandra, have strength, my sweets! I'll support you whatever you do. Don't be too hard on yourself. Remember you are human and fallible, even though you like setting high standards for yourself. But then again, not only for yourself. For others too, especially me. And I couldn't always reach your standards. I remember how intolerant you sometimes were of me. You have-been-overseas-types are all the same. You get impatient with me if I don't understand something. We all haven't had the opportunity to study overseas, like you bourgeois Fairways coloureds. My word. Lil's brought me Milo and wonderfully fresh-baked muffins. She's so considerate. I really like her.

Until next time, my sweet!
Madge-Padge

DAY 93

Yippee! The sun's almost reached the 20th brick. If I stretch enough, I can almost reach it. How I miss the sun! How I miss life.

Keys, again! Medication time! I'm getting quite good at pretending to swallow the Voltaren. That makes 30 in my secret hiding place. I'd better find another place, they nearly were discovered during last time's search. I definitely need them in case. . . I can't stand it much longer. All I want is to get out of here. But I can't betray my comrades, there's too much at stake. They already got half of the cell before I was detained and the work must go on!

I hear someone coming. Who's that? No, it can't be you Oupa, you're Dead. Oupa you're dead! I'm seeing things . . . Madge, is that you? Come let's go for a walk on Camps Bay beach. You know how I love walking these . . . Mary, Mother of God, Please intercede on my behalf . . . Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with you . . .

30 August 1987

Dear Diary

Lil and I are going to a gay club tonight again. It was wonderful dancing with her. Gone were all my problems. No state of emergency, no being on the run, no being undermined, unacknowledged, no Sandra in detention. No Sandra . . . just warm wonderful feelings. She's a friend in a million. I feel so guilty, in fact I can't even write it down! Or shouldn't in case it falls into the wrong hands. I feel whole again. I haven't felt like this in years. She's really good for my ego and she's in love with me. Lil respects me. Yes, Sandra, we've had many wonderful years but they haven't all been roses. I miss you sweetie. I'm lonely here but I suppose you're worse off inside there. Are you cold? You were always such a cold person. Love you

Night-ti-night
Madge

5 September 1987

Dear Diary

I feel shit guilty. Golly I had such a WONDERFUL time with Lil, a caring, gentle, wonderful woman! And to think I'm in love. What must I do? Sandra, how long are you going to be inside there? The lawyers have confirmed that a 7th accused will join the trial. They're convinced it's going to be you. Do you know that it'll be years before you'll get out? Be strong, woman, be brave. . . Your family has managed to track me down, so I can do them some favours naturally. They're even better than the security police, finding me out at my new hideout. Thank goodness for Lil. But why am I feeling so guilty? I must learn to consider myself for a change. By the time I get around to considering my needs, I don't have any energy left. Firstly, it's the struggle, then Sandra, then my family, then Sandra's, then the school kids, the area committee, the women's groups, Mama M, Mama H, and so on, and so on . . .What about me, ME, ME, ME!

Night now

From a new assertive

Madge

DAY 100

How strange to be back here after the clinical and communicative Hospital! Gee. I'm glad I survived. Thank you God for letting me live! Now I have extra energies for those boere! I wonder why the Major wanted to know whether Barbara and Cass are lesbians? Did I give him hell! What has that to do with the security of the state? It's amazing how quickly the tables turned. I had to laugh when he reminded me that he was the interrogator and not me! That I should know my place! I am feeling much stronger now. Still a bit weak on the tummy though. Force yourself to eat woman, you musn't allow them to break you down again. Do vigorous exercises, both mentally and physically. My collection of poems is growing. Maybe I'll have enough for an anthology when. . .

Sweetheart, I am going to make love to you now. Onto my cement block in the corner, where inquisitive eyes can't see me. I wonder what she thinks I'm going to do when I fetch my pillow. Ag, they can imprison my body but not my ideas, they can rob me of my freedom, but they cannot take away the pleasure that my body can give me. Come into my arms, my love. Let me fondle you and hold you.

The Newcomers

Joan Baker (1934-2000)

Choekoe watched the newcomer through half-closed eyelids. He knew that the two of them would start conversing soon. The newcomers were always asking questions about Harfield and the people who used to live in the houses they now occupied. He waited. Always leave the icebreaking up to them.

At first they passed with furtive, sometimes guiltily downcast eyes. Choekoe looked so at home, sitting on the pavement with his back against the corrugated iron fence, opposite the newly renovated grocery shop.

On their first walk to the shop, the newcomers often looked back to make sure that the man propped against fence was not a threat to them. After passing him regularly, they got used to him and the friends who joined him in the late afternoon. They would all leave together at the same time every evening.

Familiarity set in slowly. First the newcomers' eyes would meet his without discomfort or hostility. Then there would be a formal nod, and later a smile to match the cheery, 'Good morning.'

There was always another batch of newcomers to break in. The process amused Choekoe. They never stayed in the cottages for long, the way the old residents did. There was talk that the whole place was haunted.

Some of the elderly newcomers brought Choekoe leftover food in margarine tubs or wrapped up in foil. He always refused it with a look that left them in no doubt that they had insulted him.

Once they learnt that Choekoe and his friends were former residents of Harfield, the newcomers accepted their presence and tolerated the loud conversation and raucous bantering that sometimes led to very unnerving mock fights.

Choekoe liked the look of the man who had just passed, his casual friendliness. He could see the man now through the front window of the shop. Choekoe knew that he was an artist, and he knew the house that he had moved into exactly two months ago. He did not know whether he had a wife and children.

On the spur of the moment, Choekoe decided to overturn the normal icebreaking procedure. To his way of thinking, this was a special case.

'Good morning to you Sir.' He raised his hand in greeting as the man came out of the shop.

'Hi, good morning,' came the naturally warm response. 'How are you?' The man's pleasure at being hailed in such a chummy way indicated that he too wished to progress beyond the everyday greetings.

'So how are you?' he repeated. It looked as if he felt foolish for having to repeat himself, as if it made him feel inferior to this pavement fixture he passed every morning.

'Nay, I'm lekker. Are you a artis?'

'Yes, I'm an artist. How do you know?'

'Nay, I check you artis' around here, ek sl. You ouens always wear cawderroys wit' paint vlekke on it.'

'Very observant of you. I suppose you know a lot about this place?'

'Ja, the pas' and the presen'.'

'Where do you live? I didn't know there were still coloured people living here.'

'I still live here, because my heart is still here. I jis take my body to Hanover Park every night, because my bed is there. But otherwise I is still a Harfield boytjie.'

This answer made the man squirm uncomfortably. Then he sat down on the pavement next to Choekoe—and rose a bit in the latter's books. Their shoulders touched as the artist rested his back against the warm fence.

'By the way, I'm Dudley.' His handclasp was firm.

'I'm Choekoe.'

'Choekoe? Is that your real name?'

'Nay, they call me Choekoe because I had three wives already, but I couldn't give them laaities.'

'I don't know that I'd feel comfortable calling you that. It's rather insensitive.'

'Then you can call me "Sir".'

Their laughter drew the attention of the shopkeeper, and he scowled at the mismatched pair through the window. Then he came to stand in the doorway. The glare he directed at Choekoe was meant to put the stamp of disapproval upon him.

'Why is Mr. Mamacos so angry with you?'

'Ag, fok him. I was here first. He can do me nothing. If he want to vriet his soul up over old grudges, then it's not my worries.'

'What old grudges?'

'Nay, is Pang Goldmines what started the shit. He pitch up here one day by me and my chommies. He's a big brag-gat that bought him a house in Grassy Park when 'he was chucked out here. He come to brag about his property by us sometimes.'

'Now he use to live in that house that the Potjie live in.'

'The Potjie bought the house and the shop, and he knock through the wall. Now it's what you call "interleading", ek sl. But the Potjie don't know Pang Goldmines because he don't come a lot and he don't hang long.'

'Pang Goldmines is a ou like that...he is now a big brag-gat and all, but he's full of sports. One day he bet us ten rands that he will go and drink tea in his old house. Ten

rands is a lot of money, but we think he will never get it right, you check, so we take him on.'

'He waarlik go to the front door. He turn the handle, but the door is locked. So he knock hard on the door. When the Potjie's wife open the door, Pang Goldmines jis walk in. We run round the side down the lane so we can check out the moves through the little window there.

'This is Pang Goldmines: "Mama! Mama! Ek is hier sweetheart. Waar is julle mense?"

'He go to all the rooms. "Mama! Mama!" he call all the time.

'The Potjie go to get her husband. And here the Potjie come out wit' his gun, I tell you. "Who are you?" we hear him ask. "What do you want?"

'Now you must know, hey, the Potjie can't talk Afrikaans and Pang Goldmines can't hardly talk English.

"'Never min' who are you ... who is you?" Pang Goldmines ask the Potjie. "Where is my mudder and my farder and my sisters and my brudders? Where is my fambly? I jis come from de sea and now what is going on?"

'The Potjie let sak his gun, because he start to feel sorry for Pang Goldmines now. Pang Goldmines is crying snot en tranen. "Mama! Mama!" The Potjie put his hand on Pang Goldmine's shoulder. He is only shaking now wi't upsetness, hey. The Potjie tell him, "We don't know where your family is, my boy. You'll have to go to the Community Development. Maybe they can help you."

'You know, Pang Goldmines got the vuil pluck to sit down on the couch. He put his head in his hands. "Mama! Mama!" the ou is still crying in his hankiechiff.

'The Potjie talk to his wife in their language. She go out the room. Then she back wit a glass of water.

"'No t'anks," Pang Goldmines say for the water. But he tell the Potjie and his wife that whenever he use to come from the sea, his Mama always give him a nice cup of tea, because he don't drink the dishwater what the ship's cook make.

'The Potjie talk again to his wife. She go make Pang Goldmines a cup of tea. Pang Goldmines offer to drink it in the shop, so that business can go on, and we run back down the lane and sit right here on this corner. And there is Pang Goldmines, posing in front of the window, drinking his tea nogal posh, wit' his pinkie sticking up in the air.

'When he come to collec' his ten rands, the Potjie see us laughing and patting Pang Goldmines on his back. The Potjie knew we made gaai of him, you check. I tell you, the ou come running out wit' his gun. "I'll kill you! I'll kill you, you skollie bastards!" His wife had to drag him inside.

'Next thing, the cup and saucer Pang Goldmines did drink out, come flying out the door!'

The artist laughed for a long time.

When he had recovered he said, 'God! It makes me wish I was a writer.'

Choekoe decided not to tell the Oxbury Street story right away. He was enjoying the company. Besides there was lots of time before his friends arrived to fetch the Hanover Park taxi.

'If you think that's funny,' Cheokoe said, breaking a short, thoughtful silence, 'then you must still hear what happen to the man from the Group one morning.'

'Please tell me.'

'Isn't your wife waiting for the groceries?'

'I don't have a wife, I live alone. You must come round for a drink some time.'

The thought of one person having that big house to himself eliminated the qualms Choekoe was beginning to feel. 'Sure, I'll come for a drink,' he said. 'You never know, your place may be one of those houses where I had many drinks wit'out an invitation. Maybe I walk out that door many times wit' a thick slice of bread and jam when I was laaitie.'

Choekoe turned the subject away from houses. He had learnt that conversation had a way of tricking one into revealing secrets. He protected himself by plunging straight into the story about the Community Development official. The man from 'the Group', as he was known by all in Warfield.

'You know, every now and then, always in the morning when the men were gone to their graf', the men from the Group come to check up on their tenants.

'They use to check to see if any coloured people was moving into houses what other coloured people moved out of. Because if they did ... ag, never min' the fac's, you know it already.

'Anyway, one morning a short ou ballie wit' a lot of papers knock on a door in that street over there where the blue car is turning now. Those boertjies wit' their SAP gedagtes, they mos like to knock hard on a man's door. From knocking so hard, the door open wide, ek sl. The vark mos got the pluck to jis walk in. That was his mistake, ou pel.'

'Because why? Because the sixteen-year-old girl that lived in the house was standing in the bedroom wit' only a panty and a bra on. When she see the mon, she shout, "Mama, daar's 'n man in die huis!"

'Her mama come running out like a buffalo bull wit' a petticoat on.

'The two of them charge him down the passage ... out by the gate ... and into the street. They shouting, "Rape! Rape! Rape!"

'I tell you, Mr. Artis', quicker than you can swaaai a pill, gates go flying open and in nighties and petticoats and whatnots come borrelling out. They donnered that ou balie up, hey! They got him down to the groun'. You just see boure and tits. One woman was wearing her husband's construction boots. One tramp on the ou's gold-rimmed specs—Gwa—and they unreckonizable. I promise you. I was there.'

'The ou ran to his car, two streets away, wit'out his shirt, wit'out his pant and wit'out his important papers.'

'And you know what? In two ticks, sharp-sharp, all the evidence is gone.'

'When the boere come for statemins they go first to the mother and daughter. Those two was cool. It was "meneer" here and "meneer" there. "Yes, meneer, we did chase a man away here this morning. We thought he had bad intentions, so we chased him away, but just as far as the gate, meneer. We were not dressed, so we came in and locked our door."

'Then the boere took statemins from the other women. They all said they heard a skandaal in the street, but they weren't dressed yet, so they stay inside.'

"When the boere leave the last house, the lady of that house hear one boer say to the other, "Hulle lieg almal, hulle's gewoont om half kaal te loop."

'The lady shout, "Lieg se moer! Dink julle dis Clifton diE, war julle tiewe kaalgat loop?"

'The one boer wanted to arrest her, but the other one said, "Los hulle. Hulle dae is kort."'

The policeman's parting shot brought the artist's gurgles of laughter to a sudden halt. 'You really must come around for a drink, Sir,' he said. 'You've convinced me to swap my easel for a typewriter. I'd like to record some of your stories.'

'I don't think so.'

'But why not? Do you think it would be exploiting your people?'

'I don't know what that word mean. It's jis that we don't know where we'll be tomorrow.'

'Have you intentions of leaving Harfield for good?'

'Maybe I will. Maybe you will. People move.'

Choekoe's strange, philosophical mood created a silent space.

The artist opened the grocery bag. He took out a packet of cream crackers and unsealed the two ends. The crackers dominoed across the wrapper as he laid them out on the pavement. Then he produced a wedge of cheese and broke it in equal halves. Choekoe took his half. It was the first time he had taken something to eat from a newcomer.

Nudging Choekoe with his elbow, the artist spoke through a mouthful of cracker and cheese. 'You know, Sir, I don't want to sound patronizing, but your people have an amazing knack for overcoming their problems with humour. I envy you that.'

'Not always Mr. Artis', not always. Some of us have very not-so-nice ways of overcoming our problems. And some of us never overcome it.'

'Like the family that use to live in that big house in the street there.' With a toss of his head, Choekoe pointed to the street the artist walked down every morning. 'That is a very big house. A family house. Three families use to live there, for years and years.'

'Two weeks before they suppose to move to Hanover Park, the great-granny went to bed. She refuse to eat or to wash or to talk to anybody. She refuse to move to Hanover Park. She wasn't sick or anything, but four days before they got to move, she die.'

'Her family couldn't even invite the people back from the cemetery for a cup of tea, because they already pack up all their stuff. That night her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren cursed the house. They didn't know any thing about bad maglc, but they put their guts into those curses. They stamped on the floors and they banged on the walls. And they shouted, "May no bloody whitey have a peaceful night's sleep in this house!" They said it over and over.'

'Now people say that the old lady must hove done her bit too. Maybe she cursed the house when she was lying in bed, dying.' Choekoe stole a sly look at the artist.

'Why do you say that?'

'Because every month, or two months, or so, people moves in and out of that house. They say if you lives there too long, you can go mad. Nay, Mr. Artis', I don't want to be the white person that live in Number 9 Oxbury Street.'

'Hey, look, here come Pang Goldmines. Now you can meet Potjie's krank.'

Pang Goldmines approached with a smile that displayed the wealth of the land. But before he could reach them, the artist got quietly to his feet and walked away.

"Wie's daai ou?' Pang Goldmines asked.

'Hy's daai artis' wat ek jou van vertel het, man. Hy bly mos in Nommer 9 Oxbury Straat.'

'Choekoe, jy's daarm 'n vark, wiet jy? Issie 'n wonner die ou is so wit geskrikie. Lossie mense, man, let bygones be bygones. Wat spoek jy nog soe hier innie Haarfiel?'

Choekoe's mood sagged as he watched the artist turn into Oxbury Street. He was sure that his mission had been successful. But for the first fime, he did not feel triumphant.

'Daai ou het sy snek vergiet,' Pang Goldmines pointed out, flashing a nine-smile that failed to raise his friend's spirits.

Choekoe decided to leave for home. He had no desire for the company of the rest of his crew, who were due to arrive soon. Munching the crackers and cheese, the two men passed the shop together and then went their separate ways.

'Skollie bastards.' Mr. Mamacos muttered in his thick accent as he watched their departing backs.

Recognition

Mavis Smallberg

*For Garth and Robbie
and the Sons of Table Mountain*

He made a music bow that
the Khoi and San had played;
and in the playing of it, evoked
the spirit of an ancient people.

I see them running across the vlei.
over the hills, running. Always running.
First they ran to hunt the elephant.
Then they ran to save their lives.

Now we are running from ourselves.

The music soared, wailed, crooned, picked out
the rhythm of our dormant hearts;
cracked out a sudden, urgent warning:
Shake the sand out from your ears;

You are the sons and daughters
of a mountain, born from the earth,
adjusted to the seasons,
capable of travelling with the stars.

I watched the sax bring out the moon,
the guitar sprinkled down the moon beams,
the bass opened up the pathway,
the drum drove the beating of insistent feet,
and the bow kept picking at our hearts.

Is ja!
That's us!

Kaleidoscoped from East and West,
We brighten with the ghoema beat
We've been searching all over*
but the light is here within ourselves.

Look! There's Oujoema! and Coree,
and Domoa and Eykamma!
Conjured up with music,
They are here, dancing with our souls.

Ah, ancestor man, we've got your style.

When the San bow played,
I recognized that thing inside us
fragile, tiny like the mantis
but growing all the time.

And then I felt Krotoa smile.

*Line from Robbie Jansen's song:

Where are you been?
I've been searching all over
Freedom, where are you hiding yourself?

January 2002

A Plea from Zimbabwe

Lucia Matibenga

Dear Sisters,

I write to you as women committed to social justice and ending the suffering of women and children.

As you know Zimbabwe is preparing for presidential elections. But, instead of this being part of a celebration of 21 years of independence, many of us feel betrayed by a liberation that has brought our people increasing hardship and little freedom.

Our election process is marked by increasing violence. And please understand we will not ask you to support our political organisation, or any political organisation in Zimbabwe. We seek support for peace.

Young boys have been trained by ZanuPF in camps such as Border Gezi, and these militia have now come home to townships and rural areas where they are beating and

stealing from us their parents. ZanuPF is destroying African families and traditional African customs of respect. Conflict in Zimbabwe not only hurts us, it hurts the region. These are injuries none can afford. They are wounds we seek to avoid. May I present a few examples?

* People throughout the country are experiencing political intimidation and beatings. On 30 December last year, as an example, I was struck on the head with a machete and beaten up by ZanuPF supporters while trying to canvass support in my constituency.

* Women are being raped and abused. In Mberengwa West during election campaigns a woman MDC supporter was raped by ZANU-PF officials who also used an iron rod to rape her. The woman's husband was forced to watch and afterward he was killed in front of her. Their crime was signing MDC nomination forms. This resulted in a trial where Judge Ben Hlatshwayo warned the woman that if it was found she was lying she would spend seven years in jail. The truth of her testimony was proved.

* Houses, crops and kraals are being burnt. Evelyn Masaiti, who is presently an MDC MP in the Eastern Highlands near the Mozambique border, lived in her parent-in-laws' home with her husband and five children.

During last year's elections ZANU-PF supporters burnt her in-laws' home-- and the homes of 80 other MDC supporters in the area. For a period of more than four months those 81 families shared a single tent, a single tap . . .

In addition to overt acts of violence, government regulations were recently passed that effectively disenfranchise married women, the unemployed, farm workers, those sharing accommodation such as the rural or urban poor and young people who have never voted before.

Fear is the invisible shawl every woman draws tight around herself in Zimbabwe today. Women and children, as you know, are always the victims of conflict. We humbly ask you to please use whatever means you have to press for peaceful elections in Zimbabwe.

We are honoured that you took the time to read this letter and hope you will consider our request to stand in solidarity for peace with other women in southern Africa.

We have initiated prayer meetings across Zimbabwe and we ask you to join our prayers for peace. God Bless Africa. God Bless Zimbabwe.

Yours sincerely,

Lucia Matibenga
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Homeless in Harare Another Day

Patricia McFadden

It has become a daily occurrence—I find myself headed towards the intersection between Tongogara Ave and Second Street, almost on the 'edges' of the city of Harare, because it's the easiest route to take to my son's school, each day of the week. It is also the quickest route given that I am almost always invariably late leaving my office, which is about a mile from the school. And so each day as I approach that intersection, I realize that I will have another encounter with 'the homeless', one of several, seemingly unavoidable meetings, each time I go into town.

The 'homeless'—and here I am using the term homeless not only in relation to the absence of a structure or place of domicile, especially as the limited research that exists on children who beg on the streets of Zimbabwe and some African capitals shows that many of these beggar children do have an adult in their lives, and they have a shack to which they return each night. It is most certainly not a home as the middle class or working class and/or rural person might define a home, but it is a place of location at the end of the day, as un-homely as it might seem. I am, however, using the notion of homelessness in relation to the absence of a set of civic rights which each and every society is assumed to endow to its constituents, particularly to its young; a set a civic rights which have been assumed to be inalienable and to lie at the very core of what makes a society decent and dignified. Human—in other words.

These are the civic rights that have come out of a long, precarious and innately collective struggle by humanoids to become persons in a social sense, through the construction of an aesthetic of living which is essentially inclusive of all who are born into such social moments. What we call societies. In all these social moments, over time, humans have prided themselves with having crafted the most special and most revered place of existence—a place we call home. It is a place that is supposed to be the natural site of love and kindness; where we are received when we enter this planet, and where we are guaranteed safety, security and survival. That is the theory, of course, which the state, for example, is supposed to translate into reality for all who live in human societies.

It is the ideal for which women are prepared throughout the first years of their existence—to aspire to become a wife/mother/home-maker. In all patriarchal societies, young females are molded and shaped into 'homemakers'—it is the core of femaleness and the highest status that a woman could possibly achieve—patriarchally, that is. 'Home is where the heart is', the heart of a person/a community/a nation/a species. Making a home has become a critical instinct in all living creatures, and for humans who claim that they are above all other creatures in terms of intelligence and the ability to survive, home is the true marker of having arrived, of being there and having lived.

Therefore, to me 'the homeless' are not simply persons who bother us on the streets and who make us feel annoyed that the lights turned red just as we approached an

intersection, and we will have to deal with their being there, swarming around us while we pretend their absence and drum our fingers on the steering wheel or reel up the window as we approach those 'stupid' lights that have trapped us for a few seconds in a place of anxiety. These are people who have been denied their civic right to live a dignified life and who have been driven onto the streets—into the public—as beggars; persons who are dependent on the generosity and kindness of other persons who are going about their business in the public—going to work, to school, shopping, passing through to another destination and so forth. In the midst of all this traffic we meet 'the homeless', and they come in all shapes, sizes, ages and conditions of life.

Some of the homeless persons I meet each day are recent arrivals into our society, and they basically have 'landed with a thud', so to speak. At a guess, and using my limited maternal experience as a female who has bred and raised children, I would say that the youngest child I have seen on the street as a homeless person was about two weeks old. She/he was strapped onto the back of probably a sister, although I have often seen babies of a few months older on the backs of young boys as well. What strikes me each time is the realization of how poverty erases the gender divide in moments of extreme crisis; how it does not really matter, in its conventional sense, within situations where the presence of a baby is supposed to elicit the sympathy and material response of a better endowed person—usually riding in a car—instead of signifying the reproduction of an age-old gendered socialization process that has naturalized the social reproduction of humans as a 'female chore'.

And this expectation of sympathy almost always works with me. If I have to choose whom to give that last ten dollar note from among the children who are crowding my window just before the light turns green, I will definitely give it to the girl with the baby on her back/or to the boy who is still trying to negotiate this new identity and quickly learn the skills of moving in and out between the cars; carrying his baby sister or brother on his back without getting run down. Much later, when I think about an encounter and the faces of the children flash across my memory, I wonder how those little girls and boys—often not older than six or eight years—manage to keep hungry babies quiet on their backs. I have yet to see one of those babies awake, let alone hear her or him crying, as most babies do (even the well-fed often over-fed middle-class ones scream frequently).

Maybe I should ask their caregivers how this feat of human ingenuity is achieved, although on second thought, those little ones are probably in a state of coma from the hunger into which they are born. Starvation does have the effect of lulling one to sleep, especially after it becomes a constant state of being, and while those babies could be described as 'good babies'—they sleep as much and as often as possible and every mother knows how wonderful it is to have one of those—the reality is that they are probably starved into silence. For their sisters and brothers who lug them around all day, themselves starving from the lack of food and basic necessities, a quiet baby is a necessity because it makes the arduous task of begging a little easier, I suppose. It also probably frightens those anxious motorists less if the 'homeless' are not accompanied by the screeching cries of a hungry baby. I suspect that between starving, a whiff of glue and the basic instinct of survival, those babies have simply accepted the reality of being without a home—they have learnt to survive from day one.

Either way, they are on the street begging for a living. And as I approach the intersection, I go through a whole gamut of feelings and motions. Sometimes I feel

prepared for the encounter; I know that I have some small notes in ten or twenty dollar denominations, in that little pull-out compartment most cars come with, which was made for smokers to use; to dust their cigarette ash into and or stub that incorrigible cigarette out when it comes to its often too rapid end. Because I am no longer a smoker (although I will always be a nicotine addict and now and then I still long for one of those tubular hazards twenty three years later), I use my 'smoker's drawer' as a little safe for my philanthropic resources, because that is basically what it is—philanthropy. I am often in a good mood—I love living in Zimbabwe, the country of my choice in terms of putting down my roots (being the wanderer that I am, I have an instinctual need to roam); I like my job working as a radical feminist in a regional organization, and even if I still have to growl now and then to protect my intellectual turf and insist on feminist ideals and principles, for years I have enjoyed doing the work I do and having the professional status that I have achieved.

Therefore, I am usually feeling generous towards other human beings, particularly those human beings who are obviously in need of sympathy of some form—material and otherwise. That is why beggars and so-called street children do not frighten me, as such. If I am in the queue to turn left onto Second Street from Tongogara, which means I have about three minutes to turn off from the daily hustle and bustle of being a busy activist/household manager/radical feminist/research coordinator etc, I can chat with the children who come up to my window; ask them questions—simply things like a name, the gender of the baby on her/his back, who the unsighted woman or man is that he/she is leading around the intersection—things like that. In that way, maybe, I come to terms with my personal status as a privileged person/black woman living in an African society that is clearly failing an important segment of its people; maybe asking their names makes me feel better about 'homelessness' and about being philanthropic. I am not sure. What I do know is that I am not always willing and or ready to enter this experience—albeit only for a few minutes once or twice a day, five days a week.

Some days I am fed up—with something, and as I drive up towards that intersection I find myself cursing—annoyed that I did not take another route, because I simply do not want to have to be nice. The problem with philanthropy (one of the problems, that is) is that you always have to be the same to the person who is receiving your generosity—because the relationship is so fragile, and on the street, the tensions around poverty and begging make the milieu even more fickle. A frown or the sign of a bad temper can ruin months of work (on one's part to be received as humane). Then (if you are interested, that is) you have to start from scratch, building up the relationship block by block, getting the confidence back—that look that says I am not an enemy; don't be afraid of me; I am actually a friend even if I am sitting in this car 'looking rich and hostile and uncaring'.

So, when I am in a bad mood, and it shows on my face and in my body language, I would like to avoid the Tongogara/Second Street intersection, simply because I like to keep the friends that I have made. Many of the children who beg there have become 'sort of familiar' to me. I try to remember their names and faces and sometimes they get to my car just as the light is turning green, and we can smile at each other knowing that the next time is not so far away, and they will get that twenty dollars later in the day or tomorrow—we both feel the better for it—well, that is how it feels for me. For the beggars it is probably a farce because twenty dollar in hand is most certainly better than twenty dollars later or whenever.

But, to get to the point, I am not always happy and friendly, and homeless people make me aware of my temper. So at those times when the lights turn green just as I approach the intersection; or I am able to keep moving between the light before the intersection and my chance to turn, and the lights are green all the way, and I am in a bad mood; or I realize that I do not have ten dollar notes in my 'philanthropy drawer' or will have to find my bag, rummage for my wallet, open it in full view of those pleading, expectant eyes (sometimes I pull out a five dollar note and as I turn to give it to her she says, 'madam, why not the twenty dollars?' and I feel ashamed because why not?—but I have to maintain control, whatever that means)—if I am able to avoid the interaction, I breathe a sigh of relief and feel freed from something I have voluntarily taken on as a social obligation.

Why do I feel that being humane to beggars is a social obligation when I know full well that the state in every society is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that every citizen lives in dignity—and by that we all know that poor people simply want a roof over their heads; the possibility of a fair paying job; basic education for their children; minimal health care—an antibiotic and a bit of friendliness is basically what most working people would really appreciate; and the possibility to live with a sense of security that they will not be evicted or murdered with impunity. In poor communities, which are usually centuries old and under-girded by a sense of self-preservation and autonomy that is not dependent on the gratuitousness of the state—poor people learnt long ago that the state exists largely for the rich although it owes them some kind of accountability—after all they vote those mandarins into power every so often—have a sense of existence that other classes have no idea of.

Therefore, as a person who decided many years ago that the most productive ways in which I could live my life were linked with the struggles of poor people for dignity, I know that although giving ten dollars to a beggar child does not change anything; it simply reproduces her disputable social reality; because I refuse to take on the responsibility of the state to care for its citizens, I give her/him something, knowing that it does not really make a difference. Unlike the person beside me on the street or in front or behind me who refuses to even confront the reality of homelessness as it presents itself at the window of her/his car; who has convinced her/himself that giving beggars ten dollars (or one dollar, which I think is disgraceful) is 'totally wrong' because 'these people are parasites; they don't want to work; they are drug addicts', they are a damned nuisance and a public liability; I am not obliged; why don't the charities take care of them; why did they vote the damned government into power; they are thieves and liars; they just like being on the street; they are whores who should be shot; it encourages irresponsible behaviour; etc, etc.

These are the sanctimonious 'citizens' who know that they would not put their children out to bed—unless they had reached rock bottom; they know that these children have nowhere else to go but on the street; they know that if the children don't beg they will have to sell their bodies or their bodies will be used to sell sex as a commodity—and there are lots of 'uncles' out there ready and willing to buy young, sweet little girls and boys—yet they look the other way; pretend that the children's yearning faces are not only a few inches away from the metal that separates them and the street; that they cannot recognize the human need of a little five year old who would rather be playing care-free in a school yard, with the sounds of laughter of her peers ringing in her ears. How can we pretend that our children are monsters simply because they are poor and

living in crisis. What makes that little boy different from your little sweet boy—except that yours is clean, well fed and safely tucked in, while the child of a homeless woman or man is roaming the streets in search of something to keep body and soul together? How can we, as Africans, proud and beautiful people who have lived for millions of years; built amazingly modern societies when everyone else was living in the dark ages, become the uncaring and inhumane caricatures of what is life and Ubuntu?

As I wave good-bye to my little friends—most persons on the street are children because children, especially young ones, are able to invoke a sense of pain and feeling that modern society has taught us not to even imagine let alone feel—it hurts me each and every time when I see a black Zimbabwean turn away from a child on the street; pretend that they are not there, or even have the gall to scold them for daring to be there—disturbing them in a place where they should not have to have feelings. This is not to say that white Zimbabweans (the notion of being Zimbabwean encompasses black and white and any other 'colour'—because citizenship is supposed to include all the specificities that divide and segregate us, and in that way the notion is greater than the part); yet, we still are African, and black and ethnic in our own sense—and we like being black and what that feels like, has been like, sounds like, tastes and is still—so maybe my passionate resonance of anger is linked to being an African in that way. I feel that Africans should respond to the plight of an African child because we have African children in our lives, our homes, our schools—we were African children once—and that while someone of European ethnicity and identity might empathize with the crisis in the life of an African child—being African is about loving that person who is you on the street; who needs your help, your heart, for as long as it takes to put one meal in her/his mouth every time you stop at an intersection where a mirror image of yourself presents itself in dire need.

And while I know what most people who will read this article have recited many times—that the state is there to serve the people and we must find a way of making it serve us because we are the citizens and we are never going to give up that demand as long as the state as an apparatus exists—we also know that our continent is in terrible trouble and we know why. We have allowed the hyenas and the bandits to take over our land, our birthright, our promise to our children. We have been careless and casual about democracy, and our children; those who are most vulnerable are paying the price for our carelessness. We know what Africa needs and yet we wait for someone else to take the first step. Many of us have become fat and self-interested even as we proclaim that we are radicals and angry about the violence and the shame that marks our continent as a place of despair and hopelessness. But we also know and feel the passions of a people who have survived because we are proud and we love freedom. The love of freedom is what sets us apart; marks us as a people who can never be conquered and enslaved indefinitely—and that is where our future lives.

These are the echoes that I take away with me each time I see myself in the face of a homeless Zimbabwean—in the sleeping face of a three month old baby; a little girl wading uncertainly through the traffic—terrified—with an ear-shattering scream bursting through the corners of her tightly held, three year old lips and her heart-breaking innocent eyes; in the still defiant shoulders of a nine year old girl, hair unkempt and skin still glowing in spite of a prematurely depleted youth (I dread the thought of seeing her in five years time, my heart has broken already even though I cannot even imagine the horror that will destroy her in the dark and pernicious alleys and piss-filled lanes of the

city); I see myself in a strange way in the eyes and attempted dignity of the boy who had to become a man at eleven—leading his tete, blind, or was she deliberately blinded as an economic strategy that works because I always find a dollar to give her; and of course the angry young man—he is twelve, maybe fifteen (it seems to work better if the males are young because they are perceived to be less threatening—remember the 'black peril', angry black men who are instinctively violent). The neo-colonial petty bourgeois has imbibed the crime fantasies of the settlers well and a young black man on the street is definitely a real threat (as a woman, how could I contest that, but I do nevertheless). And so I look into his eyes, and I see him a few years from now—from this moment, taking his anger out on the most vulnerable in our societies because patriarchy allows him to do so, and that is the bottom line.

And as I head down Second Street to collect my son from what is appropriately an elitist school, my world becomes 'normal' again, and even as we head homewards, and he asks me 'is your door locked' the moment he enters the passenger side of our car, and I still feel the twinge of resistance because this is not the Zimbabwe I chose to live in but that has become our reality, I know that most likely at the first stop light he will be persuading me to give the beggar child who approaches us the fifty dollar note which is the smallest denomination I can find in my wallet having already disbursed the smaller sums earlier at the Tongogara/Second Street intersection—my intimate public space. And I also know that I will not argue with him (which I do a lot these days) because his humanness is a political and aesthetic quality I have nurtured for the last fifteen years and it echoes a beauty about being African which I totally embrace and desire.

Political Power: The Challenges of Sexuality, Patriarchy and Globalization in Africa

Patricia McFadden

Paper delivered at a seminar hosted by the Mauritius Women's Movement (MLF) and the Workers Education Association (LPT), Port Louis, Mauritius, February 12-17, 2001.

Let me share with you some of the reasons why I think this moment—this time we are living in—is special, because these ponderings provide the context of my reflections on how power intersects with the notions of sexuality, patriarchy and globalization—the subject of our conversation this evening.

The specialness of this moment lies in its being the culmination of many long and difficult struggles, especially within Southern Africa, for dignity and peace. Each and every one of us is the custodian of a sacred memory, drawn from the long battle to free ourselves from colonization, racism, bigotry, backward feudal practices and conventions as well as the so-called 'civilizing' agendas of capitalist modernity as they have unfolded, often with great pain and heart rendering loss, these past five hundred years. This moment brings together all the energies and desires that we have whispered quietly or shouted out in great anger across the landscapes of this place we call home. Many times we have found ourselves at the place of great mourning—as did those enslaved foreparents who

threw themselves off the great heights of the mountain rather than return to the indignity and denigration of enslavement—a choice they had to make given their knowledge of the monster that pursued them to that end; and it is at those times of great challenge that we have to step back, take a deep breath and pause in order to be able to review the past so that we might understand the present and through that craft a new and different future. And this moment gives us the opportunity to do exactly that.

Most significantly and in a very intimate way, this is a moment which is finally of our own making; a time that has come out of the imperative to be Africans in our own ways; an opportunity which we have crafted and nurtured through an unfailing belief and conviction in our ability to change our worlds/our lives/our futures as women; as workers; as citizens of our national and continental spaces and increasingly as citizens of the world.

So this evening, I want to lean back and reflect upon what it means for those of us who believe in freedom to accept the challenges which patriarchal privilege and exclusion present, and I would like to use three key issues—the notions of the political as personal and inclusive; integrity and personhood; and rights and citizenship—to open up the terrain of discourse in the hope that this short sojourn will take us one step closer to a resolution of the century old problems of injustice and oppression in all our societies.

I will first of all assume that this audience does not require my re-statement of the consequences of globalisation in economic and political terms because the evidence is clear for all of us to resist—the threats to basic services like health, education, affordable transportation and shelter, access to dignified and safe employment and the guarantee of our rights as citizens without exception. Therefore, I will refer to the notion of globalisation as an ongoing context made up of historically recognizable forces that are once again attempting to restructure the world in order to maintain hegemonic systems of exploitation and privilege.

However, this is only one side of the notion of globalisation. I think that we need to explore another, often less recognized side of how our world is changing or has changed—that of the emergence of international coalitions and movements of resistance around the lives of women and poor people. These are the coalitions to defend the ecosystems and environments that have sustained our livelihoods and very ability to exist as a species; the movements for the rights of people who move and or are coercively moved around the globe in search of political and economic security, fleeing religious fundamentalist persecution, or simply exploring the immenseness of this planet. There are also movements, almost a century old, to resist the militarization of the world and the ever-present threat of nuclear destruction which knows no boundaries; these are movements which have made the issue of peace central to our understanding of what globalisation means for all of us in a much more diverse and less defeatist way.

This is my context—to locate some of what I think are the most pressing issues facing us as Africans within a context of modernity that requires that we envision a new and different future, even as we remember the lessons and mistakes of the past.

Power and Democracy as Historically Exclusionary Practices

Throughout the human narrative in all but very exceptional cases, which are rare and often romanticized, power and notions of freedom and justice have remained deeply class based and androcentric, reflective of the opinions and interests of ruling class men, regardless of their colour or location in spatial terms. And even when such systems aspired to be inclusive and socially expansive, they remained essentially exclusionary and patronizing of those who had been constructed as Other in relation to power as the most critical resource in that society. Across our world we struggled for what appeared to be collective visions of freedom and justice, and while it is critical to acknowledge the opportunities that nationalist liberation struggles and anti-colonial resistance provided to those groups in our societies which had been up till then excluded from the public, for example women, we must also critically evaluate the implications of nationalism as an ideology which is fundamentally sexist and exclusionary of women, particularly during the neo-colonial period. However, the very notion of the public space emerges as an expression of the development and existence of surplus pegged largely on the unpaid labour of women in the home and the unremunerated labour of enslaved communities in the wider society.

It is within this milieu of exchange that new relationships of property and power rise which are institutionalized in new structures that over time become known as the public—a space and a concept which reflects the new relations of production and civic interaction. It is here that the state and the key institutions of the society are located and dominated by men as a gender and as the owners of wealth—both material and social. Juxtaposed to the public space where men are 'free' to roam, always of course in relation to their status, the notion of the private arises out of the definition of women as the private property of males, located in male headed households. Even to date, women cannot form a family on their own, as a legal entity in all our societies. They have to marry men in order to create a legally and socially recognized unit called the family. Through rituals and practices that have become euphemistically understood as 'cultural' and 'traditional', women's capacities and abilities to labour and to reproduce are institutionalized in the patriarchal family as the private property of their fathers and husbands. It is at this interface between human creativity and the existence of surplus that the most crucial relationships of power and control become embedded, especially in relation to women.

Over time, women, like poor men and the young, became excluded from the resources that were located in the public, and a dualistic system of rules and regulations were formulated which have kept women largely in the private—working long hours without remuneration for their labour—which is one of the main reasons why women remain the poorest people in the world, and like the slaves, women have been excluded from the rights and civic entitlements that emerged out of the various struggles enacted in the public. Therefore, while it is important to show the linkages between gender and poverty across the female/male divide, it is even more important to recognize that poor men have always had access to the public sphere where they are able to engage in struggles for fairness and economic and social justice, while women have remained largely tied to the private sphere where they continue to be treated as the slaves of men in the heterosexual family, even in the families of those men who struggle against economic enslavement.

In all our societies across this continent, men have colluded to keep women out of the public sphere where rights and entitlements are located (we know that there are no

rights in the family, only privileges and benevolent gestures and much violation, exclusion and death), and even as we laud the struggles against colonization, we often shy away from the acknowledgement that most black men colluded with the colonial state in the exclusion of black women from the cities and those sites where the possibility of becoming free was located. To date, even after almost fifty years of independence, all African governments have retained the vicious socio-legal and coercive practices that exclude and suppress women and female children, which characterized feudal African societies and were further refined by the colonial state with the assistance of privileged African men. The present re-institutionalisation of traditional courts and traditional statuses in the political and legal systems of a country like South Africa speaks most tragically to this ongoing collusion between men of different classes and colours to exclude women from the democratic institutions and practices we have fought so courageously to build.

The maintenance of the public/private divide through claims of cultural authenticity and the need to hold onto so-called 'traditions'—which we all know are basically practices and value systems that privilege men in the home and in the key institutions of our societies—has inhibited the greater participation of women in the transformation of Africa to the present day. Notions of what is political and public are still fundamentally tied to the claim that what women know and do is best suited to the production of use values for household consumption and the reproduction of the species. Even in societies where women have excelled as professionals and knowledge producers, they are faced with a continuous backlash, often premised on fundamentalist beliefs that so easily mobilize communities to participate in the undemocratic exclusion of women from their rights. One has only to look at the issue of taboos around the sexuality of women and how these taboos are perpetuated through fundamentalist claims that are centuries old and viciously misogynist—allowing, for example, women to be raped and violated by claiming that women bring such violation upon themselves through the ways in which they dress and by the very nature of their female bodies as 'unclean' and 'sexually dangerous.'

In all our societies we find the blatant justification of the victimization of women by men in key positions—within the judiciary, in organized religion, within families, and in social and cultural organizations, which deploy ancient patriarchal myths of exclusion and privatization to defend impunity. By impunity I mean the deliberate, socially sanctioned violation of rules and systems of human conduct that are the collective possession of a society, and which have been designated as the markers of human dignity. The notions of integrity and personhood lie at the core of human dignity and decency, and we all learn these from the moment we enter a human space. Every human being is born with the inalienable right to physical, emotional and sexual integrity, and the nurturing process in all our societies recognizes the importance of not only protecting the integrity of another human being, particularly while they are young and vulnerable, but is also anchored on the transmission of these notions to the individual as untouchable and inalienable rights. This is why we abhor slavery and fight to the death to remain free.

Yet the very people who understand the centrality of human integrity as a civic right are often those who engage in and support practices and so-called 'customary laws' that violate and undermine the physical, emotional and sexual integrity of women and girls—in the name of culture and male supremacy. In my opinion, and through my work as a radical feminist who is totally uncompromising on the rights and entitlements of women wherever they live, this impunity, which lies at the heart of violation and social injustice in

all our societies, is embedded in the privatization of women within the key social and political, religious and cultural institutions across this continent and the world at large.

Therefore it is critical to understand that in as much as the private/public divide, which has facilitated the construction of power in essentially class and masculinist terms within most of our societies, continues to be challenged and resisted by women's and other social movements, the major difficulty in making the political inclusive of everyone lies in the persistent exclusion of women as citizens of our societies. Unless we are able to see the interconnectedness of impunity as it is culturally, politically, economically, religiously and legally framed and sanctioned we cannot begin to respond effectively to the imperative of restructuring our societies in sustainable and democratic ways.

We have to see the culturalized expressions of impunity (through female genital mutilation, male child preferences, unfair eating practices, incest, witch-hunting women, especially older women and widows, child marriages and coerced marriages, and feminized altruism) in order to debunk them and declare them criminal offenses against citizens in each and every instance. Only in this way can we begin to replace them with new democratic, life-enhancing cultural notions and practices.

We have to reject outright (and not try to reform) those legal systems that are partial and often blatantly patriarchal: for example, the persistence of notions of male conjugal rights; refusals to recognize marital rape as a crime; allowance of polygamy and rampant sexual mobility; notions of paternity which define children as the property of the man rather than emphasizing the responsibilities and obligations of parenting in democratic family relationships; inheritance practices that allow men to inherit women as a form of property/as slaves of male controlled families; and a myriad of injustices that are allowed to circulate and reproduce themselves through the often deliberate misrepresentation and or insistence by judicial officers that women cannot be considered persons in the ways that men are.

We must critique the exclusionary economic practices (which globalization is reinforcing and extending to every aspect of human life) that are deepening the immiseration of women and young people through a rhetoric of dog-eats-dog; dangerous claims which have become normative and naturalized as the only reality possible. How unthinkable that we could be living in a world where the narrow, sectarian claims of a voraciously greedy class could assume such public hegemony and go so largely unchallenged even by those who know that it is a blatant lie.

We have to make the personal political by transforming the meaning of politics from its current definition as men contesting power by any means—including and especially through the making of war and the use of our resources at the expense of millions across this continent, while its citizens become refugees; non-persons in flight, without any rights or securities. We have to change it to a notion and practice of politics that guarantees the rights and securities of all citizens, all the time. We have seen over and over these past decades a worsening situation in numerous African countries, as the African petite bourgeoisie finds itself less and less able to accumulate competitively with the ruling classes of the North. Africa has remained 'economically marginal' in the capitalist global system, even as we know that for centuries our resources and knowledge have fueled the 'development' of Northern societies and continue to be crucial to the maintenance of their current notions of democracy.

However, for the African petite bourgeoisie, the crisis of reproduction has been intensified by the concentration of wealth globally in the hands of a smaller and smaller number of Trans-National Corporations that are poised to take over the state in the North as they have done to a large extent in Africa and in the rest of the South. The Multilateral Agreement on Investments agenda was precisely about that—making capitalist privilege the ultimate priority in every sense of the word and deed. We also know that in the history of human existence, war has always been a means of class accumulation by those elements that occupy the state—a patriarchal state that ensures the privilege and supremacist ideologies and systems of a small group over the rights and entitlements of the vast majority. Today we can see the coincidence of globalized class interests with those of an African ruling class in almost every African theater of war. The generals are consolidating their class statuses by looting national treasuries and extending the arenas of war and destruction across national and regional boundaries. A re-structuring of the relationships within and among the ruling factions that occupy and use the African patriarchal state is clearly visible when we look at the ongoing devastation of the Congo and the parties involved in that debacle. Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, Algeria, Sudan, Liberia, Nigeria, etc, etc—war has become the everyday tragedy of this the most beautiful and unquestionably most bountiful continent on earth.

That is why the normalization of war through the militarization of our societies and regions, under the guise of so-called pan-Africanist rhetoric, is totally unacceptable and must be exposed for what it really is—the plunder and accumulative rampaging of gangs of middle-class bandits who openly defy the demands of the people for accountability and democratic responsibility. At this point in time, we have to fight to retain the very language of anti-imperialist resistance and to keep the memory of enslavement and colonization alive because it belongs to us all—always—until our worlds are no longer determined by racism, classism, sexism, fundamentalisms and pernicious forms of sectarianism and communalism. Certain groups of Africans are deploying a collective memory in the justification of an openly militaristic class project that is costing the lives of millions of Africans and has laid waste to great swaths of this continent. This nationalist opportunism must be exposed and the rights and security of the African citizen must become the most important priority of all. We can no longer allow selfish class interests to dominate and destroy a continent that belongs to us all.

We have to find the courage to go beyond the hypocritical rhetoric of regional integration that in actual fact only facilitates for greater accumulation by both national and global capitalist forces, at the expense of the basic human and social rights that African working people have fought so courageously to attain. For me, the interface between class, gender and racist/communalist interests is the site where the most critical and most productive contestation has to take place. We need to understand the phenomenon of globalisation, in its multifarious forms, as a re-structuring of the old, hegemonic relationships of economic and political power, which are mobilizing technology, new notions of space and communication, and the political lapse in radical politics to make up for whatever was lost to them during de-colonization and liberation struggles across the world.

Women's Politics as the source of a sustainable alternative political vision

As a feminist, I draw my intellectual and political resources from the struggles of women on this continent—land and sea—and from the pursuit of rights by women globally. For centuries women have fought private and public battles to make the world safer for themselves and for those with whom they live, and it is this fundamentally inclusive epistemology that informs women's politics across the ideological and political divide within what we call the Women's Movement. This is where one of the most critical political resources to a different future lies, and I would like conclude my presentation by indicating some of these political gems that are so often unseen or even misunderstood by so many progressive men in the workers' and youth movement in particular.

Firstly and most fundamentally, women's struggles against patriarchy have made visible the intersectionality of all known forms of exclusion and oppression—racism, class exploitation, sexism and chauvinism, paternalism, ableism, and heterosexism. By rejecting all these expressions of injustice, women have brought together in a social movement for rights the totality of issues that underpin patriarchy as an ideology and a system of privilege for the few over the interests of the majority. Women's struggles have, for the first time in the human narrative, made visible the interconnectedness of all systems of injustice in ways which neither the struggles of workers or of poor people in general have done.

Secondly, by raising the essential issues of integrity and personhood, women's politics has challenged the bifurcated nature of notions of justice and equality at every level of their societies, rupturing the public/private divide which still keeps millions of women the world over outside those civic resources and spaces where rights are embedded and secured. As we know, the notion of rights is intimately linked with the demand for the social, economic, political and legal recognition of human value by those whose labour and reproductive capacities were appropriated and exploited by the ruling class. Men who laboured without pay came together to collectively demand the right to paid work and the recognition of their labour as valuable. It is in the valorization of human labour that the right to a dignified life becomes possible, and through a publicly recognized engagement with the market and the demand that profit making not be allowed to keep the worker enslaved to the owners of capital, workers have been able to win the rights that define them as a class in all our societies.

Through the demand that women's rights must become human rights, women have drawn from the struggles by workers and colonized people and are insisting that the notion of human rights itself is partial and unsustainable unless and until it encompasses fully (without a single cultural compromise) the total rights of women to physical, emotional, sexual and social integrity as complete persons in all their societies. The demand for integrity and personhood lies at the core of women's sexual and reproductive rights and this campaign has been most instrumental in taking women's unmet sexual and reproductive needs out of the private where they were considered 'domestic matters' and locating them in the public, making them a political and policy issue and requiring that the state and the major institutions of the society not only recognize these rights as legitimate and inalienable, but also provide the material and infrastructural resources to sustain them. The extension of these rights to all women in all our societies remains a major challenge which globalisation as a retrogressive process is making even more difficult. In response to the specific impacts of globalisation in this regard, women have formed global coalitions around the issues of sexual and reproductive rights and health, meeting in various international conferences (Beijing,

Nairobi, Mexico, and at the level of the UN and the Economic Commission for Africa) to insist that states not only ratify the conventions and international instruments that women have formulated, without reservation clauses, but also that states, as the assumed custodians of citizens rights and entitlements, must undertake to implement such policies in order to safeguard the sexual and reproductive rights of women in totality.

;This has met with a tremendous backlash, the use of so-called cultural appropriateness and slogans of authentication that seek to fragment women's rights through the claim that sexual and reproductive rights are 'western' and 'un-African'. Of course we know that when women demand their rights they become inauthentic and un-African and that is exactly what we aim to do. We will subvert the archaic notions of what is African as we insist on becoming modern and free; and we will re-define and re-structure relationships of power and control, surveillance and exclusion as we claim our democratic rights to be citizens in the fullest ways. Therefore, African men can moan as much as they want—while they remain locked in backward notions of what is African and practice western modernity in every other way but towards Africa women. We will not be stopped by patriarchal claims and threats.

In reality, however, these claims and threats often become translated into life-taking expressions of the backlash, and the vilification of women's rights activists and women who claim their rights is real and requires the urgent response of all progressive men in our societies. This is not a matter only for women to resolve, because fundamentally it is about old systems of male privilege which all men benefit from in one way or another. Therefore no man is exempt from the political responsibility of fighting for the sexual and reproductive freedoms of women; for women's integrity and personhood and for our right to be total citizens in both the public and private spheres. But, in addition to recognizing and defending all women's rights, men have to begin the process of moving themselves to a new gendered and male identity by interrogating their location within patriarchal society as men. How could it be that male comrades spend their lives critiquing and resisting capitalism and fundamentalisms of every kind, except those that construct them as males in deeply essential ways. At the core of masculinity lies heterosexism and male systems of privilege that underpin impunity and supremacy—even if not used by individual males in their relationships with women.

As a radical feminist I know and understand patriarchy in its most intimate and most pernicious forms, and almost never allow anyone to oppress me in any way. (Sometimes I am not sufficiently vigilant and do find myself in situations where I have been excluded and victimized in some way. However, I deal with that immediately—it is a promise I made to myself long ago and to which I am committed.) But feminist and women activists never assume that because we are able to defend ourselves we do not need to restructure the societies we live in so that all women can access their freedom and the rights that we have begun to exercise. Progressive men have to do the political work of transforming maleness and masculinity. It is not enough to be a good man—you have to be a revolutionary man so that women do not have to do this work for men, which we cannot do anyway. Everyone has to free her/himself as we all know.

Finally, the Women's Movement is without doubt one of the most vibrant and most sustainable movements globally, and through the creation of national, regional and global coalitions and networks, women have begun to change the world in very significant ways. In Africa, women's demands for justice, peace and equality have

shaken the foundations of old patriarchal assumptions about what is normal and acceptable. Women have begun to change the character of the public through educational and professional achievement and contestation. We are changing the meaning of science and knowledge by challenging the old dogmas and paradigms that excluded our experiences and opinions. At the level of the law the changes have been astounding and absolutely marvelous—in most African societies impunity no longer rages as an absolute force, although it remains a key challenge in the transformation of those areas where women's lives are most undemocratically and most dangerously affected. Politically, women are challenging the state and its hegemony over the meaning of citizenship; women are questioning the assumption that the state is the best protector of common property, and in countries like Zimbabwe, where a neo-colonial state simply took over from the colonial state in terms of being the 'middle-man' in relation to the land as a common resource, women are demanding that the state step aside and let the citizens relate directly to the land as a critical economic and socio-legal resource. The same is happening here in Mauritius and in many countries on the continent.

By changing their relationships with the state and with males in both the intimate and public spheres, women are becoming post-colonial in new and exciting ways. In my opinion, the challenge and disruption of old patriarchal relationships that constructed women as private or communal property and men as the natural heirs of all power in our societies speaks to the emergence of a 'post-colonial' consciousness among women (and among poor men who are challenging the neo-colonial state from where they are located as workers and peasants and homeless/landless persons) which will form the core of a sustainable anti-globalisation strategy in the future. In addition to understanding how capitalism and neo-imperialism work at the levels of macro-economic strategies, cultural and technological hegemony, the military-industrial complex and the use of guns, human trafficking and drugs, we also need to focus on our own political traditions and the resources being generated by our social movements at the national, regional and global levels. While we have to understand how the World Trade Organization and General Agreement on Tariffs & Trade work to extend and intensify capitalist exploitation and human misery, and remain vigilant about the resurrection and pernicious implementation of the Multilateral Agreement on Investments agenda, we also have to put more energy into the re-formulation of our capacities to think, mobilize and transform ourselves and our societies in ways which will finally rid us of the scourge of human-invented systems of greed and inequality. After all, globalisation is just a fancy term to describe patriarchy at its most nefarious form.

Radically Speaking: The Significance of the Women's Movement for Southern Africa

Patricia McFadden

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In trying to craft this presentation, I was faced with numerous possibilities. For a moment I stepped into that space where I find myself each time I am invited to engage with other

human beings on an issue of particular relevance to an activist moment and the building of a feminist platform of action; or as part of the nurturing of a personal tie that was created by a coincidental meeting somewhere, maybe a few years ago, and usually as part of the work that I have gladly done as an activist feminist thinker, from the 'dark' continent, for the past three decades. It is always a moment of tension and pleasure. The rebel in me is fascinated by the possibility of being totally irreverent in the way that I interpret an invitation, and the short but often critical journey to the place where I decide how my intellectual gift will look and sound is filled with all kinds of emotions and mind titillating sensations.

However, time, the exigencies of the moment, and the expectations of my hosts always bring me back to earth—not a bad place to be in, really, as a radical feminist, because the challenges facing us are so numerous and so exciting that I can, temporarily, forsake my passionate intellectual meanderings for the real task of 'putting my shoulder to the wheel of change' wherever I find myself.

And so, I took a deep breath and considered the less 'riotous' possibilities, one of which was that I could dwell upon the welcome resurgence in what might be considered 'traditional' feminist epistemology; a resurgence that is most obvious in the collection that makes up the SIGNS Millennium issue and the latest volume of a new journal called *Feminist Theory*. I must admit that I was tempted by this possibility, because after several years of struggling with the sense of frustration that accompanies most of us as we do battle with the obfuscating bla bla of post-modernist/post-structuralist jargon, I was joyous at the return to familiar expressions, stimulating and pleasuring traditions of anti-patriarchal language and thought, and a conceptual tradition that is embedded in speech which we as women/feminists have created over at least a century of writing.

I resent the implied expectation that I, in this modern world, should refer my thoughts and arguments, my musings, to a lexicon that has been crafted and marked by old, predominantly white, male philosophical renderings of human experience and envisioning. Why would I return to a body of thought and words that is male, masculinist, classist in almost every sense, and often racially exclusionary, when I have the beautiful, liberated and energizing feminist writing traditions of Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Virginia Wolfe, May Sarton, Toni Morrison, Yvonne Vera, Tsitsi Dangarengba, Rosa Luxemburg, Alexandria Kollontai, Simone de Beauvoir, bell hooks, Ama Ata Aidoo, and a gallery of the most incredibly empowering women thinkers and writers human society has ever experienced? Why, for goddesses sakes, would I refer to the thoughts of men who have no idea what it has meant to be a woman in the political, spatial, intellectual, ideological and cultural sense, at all, let alone in the physicality of being female. I simply do not need a philosophical tradition that does not include me, especially as a Black woman living and working on the African continent. And so I agree whole-heartedly with Catherine Stimpson that one reason feminism has proved so powerful is that it too provides a vision. The most influential feminists have had imagination enough to see below the crust of custom and beyond the horizon of convention. To be sure, individual feminists have been swept along by historical forces that galvanize changes in gender roles and relations—shifting patterns of women's work; the lessening reliance on physical strength in war and work, which is altering traditional rules of masculinity; the new reproductive technologies, which are altering traditional rules of femininity; and a more universal belief in human rights and democracy. Nevertheless, we have also had our visionaries.

Therefore, I am neither post-modernist nor post-structuralist in the location of my thoughts and activism.

But, the task required more than that. I needed not only to be feministically radical, but also to respond to the challenges posed by the appropriation of a key feminist construct: a thinking tool which has come out of our struggles as women for rights, visibility, integrity, equality and inclusion in the academy as well as at policy levels. Here I am referring to gender, that notion which so many rejected and resisted initially as unscientific, emotional, inadequate, inappropriate and well, maybe applicable only if it were denuded of its radical, political features by being disrupted from the feminist epistemological groundings where it was 'born'.

These days, we have to battle to use gender as a feminist thinking tool, it has been so 'mainstreamed' that in fact those who do not know of its early origins in the work of feminist scholars like Ann Oakley and Linda Nicholson could imagine that the notion of gender is a technical invention of the femocrats and Gender and Development types who currently homogenise its definition, meaning and use in many arenas around us.

However, I want to acknowledge the work of those scholar feminists, in whose footsteps I feel honored to tread, because of their creativity as wordsmiths, women who harvested the energies and thoughts, the passions and anger, the brilliance and experiences of women (albeit initially within their respective societies, and one cannot expect any more in reality) to present us with a century-transforming conceptual tool. This is a tool which we have continued to refine, reflect upon, bend and shape in various ways according to our needs and uses, but always, as feminists, maintaining the connection between the intellectual and political sources of gender—which are our daily struggles against exploitation and domination in whatever form—and the critical need to think and transform as women in our special life situations. In a nutshell, gender as a construct came out of the insistence by women that conceptually women's knowledge could be best understood and re-positioned within the knowledge production systems of our societies only if we constructed a specific vehicle that signified who we are in terms of our relationships with men, with power, with ideologies and structures and among ourselves.

Therefore, I want to reclaim gender as a feminist construct; a tool that is available to me, as an African feminist, thinking through the ways in which African patriarchal ideologies and systems, practices and conventions, have shaped and determined the spaces within which we live as African women, given our specific class, social, cultural, political, religious and ideological identities and locations.

I also want to insist that feminism is an identity that comes out of our global struggles against patriarchy wherever we live, and as a woman whose primary preoccupation is to resist patriarchal exclusion, I deliberately position myself within this feminist identity as a political statement of who I am. It is a truism that I want to repeat, simply for the effectiveness of its commonsense. Forms of resistance are always marked by their location, whether in local or global terms. This is 'natural' and expected. Consequently, we have what are called 'Western' feminisms; 'Asian' feminisms; African' feminisms; 'Caribbean' feminisms, etc. These feminisms are the markers of anti-patriarchal struggles that often go back thousands of years; some of which were not known because we have lived in such androcentric worlds, and many of which were deliberately

erased or denied, even in the present day discourses of globalisation and world openness.

Contestations over the occupancy of knowledge spaces are not only gendered in terms of patriarchal exclusionary practices. They are also linked to colonial traditions of intellectual privileging which are still reflected in appropriational tendencies that seek to speak for 'the Other'; to define the space within which Black women, for example, can think and express who they are and where they want to go; and which enable certain groups—white women and men, Black men—to patrol the borders of the academy often under the guise that the Other is herself a participant in this continuing exclusion from the centers of intellectual power and knowing.

Therefore, while some of my African sisters may prefer to name themselves 'womanist'—and, yes, as women, self-naming is central to where we position ourselves politically and ideologically in relation to men, to patriarchal power and in terms of identity politics—I do not. I would be the last one to insist that African women can only be named through one political identity, which is why I strenuously resist the homogenizing tendencies which exist within certain streams of essentializing, esoteric 'Western' feminism that attempt to lock African women into narrow and 'exotic' identities, more recently through collaborative discourses between such Western feminists and African 'womanists' based mainly in the North.

While the beauty of the academy is most dramatically displayed through cross-cultural discursive engagement and interplay, I am wary of debates and texts which, to me, reproduce the old colonial inspired representations of Africa as romantically different in its constructed primitivity—through the claim, for example, that something called 'the African family' is fundamentally different from the supposedly monolithic nuclear family of the white North. This is not only blatantly erroneous in historical and empirical terms, let alone stupendously flawed in methodological terms (there are many families even though the heterosexual, male created/male owned, legally acknowledged patriarchal family is hegemonic in most societies). It is also politically suspect and mischievous in that it re-invents old, conservative, ethnographic claims about African societies through homogenizing, blanket notions which flatten the cultural and socio-political, ideological landscapes of African family life, while providing sophisticated sounding tropes for radical nationalists who occupy the African state and its patriarchal institutions. Such claims, which might be the products of genuine attempts by certain African female scholars (who I do not name as feminist and who themselves do not wear this identity, and rightly so) are easily deployed by right-wing state-based elements, mainly men, to insist that African women remain as the authentic, 14th century markers of African authenticity and difference.

It is in the logic of this authenticating, nationalist rhetoric that I, a radical feminist who is critical of the state; who is unsatisfied with the meager gestures of male/state tolerance as reflected by the short-lived creation of so-called 'women's ministries/wings/units' etc, become, an outsider, un-African and most certainly inauthentic in my embrace of the political identity of a radical feminism. The accusation of Westernism—which in itself is ridiculous, given the interaction between worlds over the past five centuries, and, more importantly, the long and vigorous traditions of resistance within which someone like myself positions herself—is easily hurled by those who assume to represent the real African identity, past/present/future.

These are dangerous, risk-filled conceptual terrains where increasingly there seems to be a meeting of common interests between the more conservative streams of white, female anthropologists, who may name themselves 'feminist', and a cadre of Black womanists of a similar ilk. But then, as I stated earlier, African women come in all shapes, colors and hues of Black; political and ideological persuasions and class, ethnic, and cultural variations. We are as varied as the women of the North, East and West, even as we sometimes wear similar cultural, racial, and physical markers.

For me, womanism in its most politically productive use is only a sense of my 'womanness', as in *The Color Purple*—sensual and aesthetic terms shaped and molded by the color of my body, its place of origin and sense of continuity, and the reality of being a Black woman in a white, male dominated world. However, as a political stance, womanism has moved from the initial sense in which Alice Walker so poetically expressed it in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, and has become a political stance which defines issues of African authenticity through heterosexism (and often implicit homophobia), right-wing defenses of ritualistic heterosexist practices like polygamy, and a conservative ideological re-construction of what Africa is, based on old, patriarchal notions of the African—in spatial and human/cultural terms. I reject this kind of narrow, intolerant conservatism, which presents itself through the guise of esoteric uniqueness and cultural relativism. Therefore, I am not troubled by those who refuse to name themselves feminist, because they are not feminist, and why should they wear a political identity that they neither embrace nor have crafted? After all, the right to name oneself political is one of the gifts that the feminist movement has bestowed on all women.

I would now like to speak to several issues relating to the ways in which the appropriation of gender as a feminist construct has thrown up an interesting conceptual/activist debate that reflects interesting features of the South African political landscape. I will focus my attention on the intersectionality between notions of gender equality as they are interpreted and deployed within civil society—in the context of the Women's Movement—and within the state, through structuralist, mainstreaming approaches that attempt to de-politicize such notions, framing them instead in economic and or welfarist terms.

It is in the interface between so-called 'entryism' and 'outsider-ness' that the struggles between women and the state are being played out, reflected in the uses of the notion of gender equality as a feminist construct and activist rallying point, and the attempts of men who occupy the state to re-define women's claims and demands for power and inclusion through the recruitment of a cadre of women—femocrats and Women in Development/Woman and Development/Gender and Development activists—whose politics is embedded in an old liberal notion of the relationship between the state and the citizen. In the context of Zimbabwe, these contestations have been intensifying as white and Black men battle over the control of land and other material and social forms of property, including the continued ownership of women's bodies, in particular the bodies of Black women, and women's relationship with the state and with property has become an exciting conceptual and activist space through which to reflect upon that society.

I shall not have time to speak as exhaustively as I would have liked to all these fascinating political unfoldings. Suffice it to skim over the surface of a seemingly troubled and crumbling region, which in effect is becoming post-colonial in new and exciting

ways. This is good for Zimbabwe, for Southern Africa and for African women in particular, because post-coloniality understood as a transitional process presents new and significant opportunities for women, the most important being that of becoming citizens in modern terms.

For me, as an activist whose intellectual stimulation is largely dependent upon my interactions with spaces of engagement and struggle in both the public/state arenas as well as in relation to private battles for equality and justice in gendered and more socially general senses, civil society as we understand it today is one of the real products of modernity in Africa. Civic spaces were for the many decades of the colonial and early neo-colonial times, masculine, white spaces, wherein a few privileged women moved cautiously as 'ladies' or as 'Christians' or both. In Southern Africa, the exclusion of Black women from urban sites, where cheap Black, predominantly male migrant labor was mobilized to build the domains of white existence as well as to service the everyday needs of white colonial comforts, was one of the very few conscious collaborative projects between Black and white males. Patriarchal borders, common to both pre-capitalist Africa and Victorian England, were erected and monitored through the licensing of both Black and white males to undertake continuous surveillance over the mobility and identities of Black women in the colonial territories. This was critical to the continued supply of cheap Black labor on the one hand and the preservation of 'authentic' spaces in the rural areas for Black men, where they were allowed to return periodically, to reproduce themselves sexually, culturally and ideologically as males.

In recent human memory, the relationship between modernity and consciousness of self as a being with integrity and the ability to lay claim to rights and property is linked in some way to mobility and re-location in space. Keeping Black women out of urban spaces was of particular interest to the colonial state as well as to Black men: a strange coincidence which many Africans still deny but which is clearly reflected in the often vicious and violent activities of both Black and white men against women who entered the city/urban space.

Rape was one of the responses by Black men to women's attempts to enter the city, often accompanied by accusations that such women were 'unAfrican', and had become 'polluted by notions of whiteness'; that they had become whores (we know that whore has meant many things for women besides that which is derived from its association with uncontrolled and rampant sexuality), and therefore needed to be re-culturalized through misogynist, sexual occupation. For decades, Black women could not bring the crime of rape by Black men, and least of all white men, into any colonial court, not only because they were deemed illegally in those public spaces where rape was a criminal offence in 'white' terms, but also because the onus of proof that they had not invited such sexual violation was almost impossible to argue in such circumstances. Sexual violation in the traditional, patriarchal context was interpreted as a crime against the woman's father or husband, but she had no sexual integrity that could be violated in relation to herself as a female being. This is common to old, archaic forms of patriarchy, which constructed women as the property of males within family structures or in religious sites (as is the case with religious shrines, for example, in many societies across the world).

But African women resisted such surveillance and exclusion, and in a controversial, and what is often interpreted as an un-nationalistic political gesture, Black women used the opportunity of colonialism to reject sites of African patriarchal oppression and

privatization, often fleeing into the newer sites of white patriarchy that were controlled by white colonial or religious males. Initially situated in the margins of this new colonial urbanity, Black women found ways of reproducing themselves in economic, social, cultural and sexual terms. This new existence was not interpreted as political, and is still resisted as such. Typically, most of the historiography on migration in Southern Africa represents Black women only as prostitutes who brewed beer and lived off the 'hard earned' meager wages of 'good men' whose 'decent wives' waited for them patiently in the rural spaces—women curiously constructed as 'grass widows', passive and without resistance, a myth as we have come to uncover through feminist her-storiography.

This juxtaposition of Black women who seek freedom from African and white patriarchy—the crux of feminist activism to this day—has become a key feature of both white, anthropological reminiscing about an essential Africa, whose labor capitalism can easily exploit; and a deeply misogynist, anti-feminist vitriol which is manufactured and deployed by Black males (and increasingly by Black female radical nationalists situated in the Northern academy). This is why I interpret academic attempts to mark African women with old, anachronistic, patriarchal notions of who an African woman is or was as expressions of re-invented right-wing politics, wearing the guise of anti-modernity.

African women have striven to be modern at every opportunity. At the first chance, we flee the backward constraints of patriarchal privatization and seclusion through the doors that are opened to us by education and what is euphemistically called 'book learning'. When this door has been shut to us, we work ourselves to the bone so that our daughters, and sons, can experience the beauty of flight into those vistas made possible by institutionally based knowledge. We have flourished, wearing the garb of new languages and the ability to speak for ourselves, articulating loudly and clearly the priority of being free, whatever our social and class locations. We continue to challenge and reject those racist, sexist stereotypes which seek to limit and denigrate our creative sexual expressions as exquisitely beautiful persons; thinkers; dancers; wordsmiths; creative artists; engineers; healers; crafters of a different reality wherever we have lived.

Of course, as with all groups of women who are caught in the ambiguities of patriarchal social and cultural construction, we push and pull against the tides of identity forming structures and conventions that beckon to us, through notions of belonging and promises of intimate inclusion—in ethnic and locality specific terms—even as they vigorously restrain our freer instincts with threats of exclusion and outsidersness. But this is not peculiar to Africans; it is the stuff of struggle in all societies that remain un-free, and it must be exposed for what it is, instead of allowing the commonsensical to become 'peculiarly African' via an essentializing, conservative rhetoric.

It was in this mobilization of flight as an expression of new freedom that African women began the process of constructing a specifically female space within what we call civil society today. Through their involvement and engagement in liberation struggles, more often than not fighting multiple expressions of exclusion (as the film *Flame* by Ingrid Sinclair so poignantly re-tells, in spite of the re-shoots of its most central feminist narrative due to chauvinistic nationalist outcries that it insulted and blemished the glory of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle!!!)*, African women put down the foundations of what has become the most critical site of struggle for them vis-à-vis the state and institutionalized cultural forms of patriarchy.

Through an occupancy of civic spaces, where women struggle to be acknowledged as whole beings, with rights which the state is obliged to recognize and guarantee, African women have begun to engage with issues of power and entitlement at several levels of the society. By setting up institutions/organizations/structures which we manage and control; by establishing relationships mainly with white Northern men who continuously attempt to direct and define our political agendas, often with the collusion of Black men in the African state; and by contesting such political and ideological manipulation even as we know that often we have to accede to their demands and follow a trend (of which gender mainstreaming is the most recent and most politically threatening to feminist interests), African women have been able to locate themselves within the civil society in new and empowering ways.

Firstly, women have engaged in a lively and often frustrating battle to construct the Women's Movement as an autonomous space. In doing so they have had to contend not only with continuous attempts by the state to appropriate this political vehicle, which is, in my opinion, the most powerful social movement of the late 20th century in almost every country of the African continent, but also from the control of moderate to right-wing conservative elements within the Women's Movement, which have access to this space by virtue of being 'women', that is, they wear a female body. articulate grievances against misogynist practices like rape and domestic violence, and through nationalistic ideology have shaped the politics of the Movement in certain distinctive directions.

For example, through their agency as women in the state, development activists, often with the collaboration of Northern liberal elements, have defined the issues of gender equality from a more moderate, accommodationist perspective. They argue for the integration of women's political interests into state structures (through mainstreaming gender) and for the formulation of women's rights within a welfarist ideological frame. The relationship between women and the state is therefore couched in terms of old relations of power which have defined women as nurturers and care-givers; wives and daughters, paternalistically protected by males in both the private and public spheres. The notion of rights, even when acknowledged as critical to development, is mediated by an ideological claim that the interests of everyone (that is, men) are more important than the individual rights of the subject (that is, women).

In the African context, this pre-capitalist rhetoric which feudal ruling classes deployed against the claims of male peasants attempting to enter into a direct relationship with property, especially in the form of land, is re-invented as peculiarly African and in need of preservation. Yet we know that in the age of capitalist relations, the status of citizen and access to most civic rights is directly related to one's position in relation to property. For those groups in the society which are furthest from property, rights, entitlements and claims remain largely a dream, dependent upon the good will of a social-democratic state/elite. For example, the investment in education is not only about breaking into new worlds of knowledge and opportunity; it is also about creating the possibility of acquiring intellectual property; something that one's progeny can sell to make a better life for herself/himself and hopefully for those who made the initial investment. Yet, in the liberal language of developmentalism, the link between rights, status and property remains muted at best, and openly frowned upon at worst.

It is this battle to re-define the real issues between women as aspiring citizens—as a category of people who often do not have a recognized personhood in legal and property

terms, fundamentally because they are seen as the cultural property of men—that characterizes the relationship between the state, women as political agents and the civil society as a contested space in Southern Africa today.

The struggle for an autonomous Women's Movement; autonomous from nationalist control and ideological manipulation; autonomous from the influences of elements who seek to homogenize this radical, political space that women have crafted in resistance to patriarchal confinement; a Movement which is guided by a feminist political agenda that does not consider the possibility of qualifying women's rights and entitlements in any manner possible, is the bone of contention in the political arena of the region.

Through the foregrounding of community or national issues before those of women, the state and moderate development elements hope to undercut the radical edge of feminist demands in the Women's Movement, an edge which aims at re-casting women's rights as equal to those of all citizens (rather than those of men) and which insists that the integrity and personhood of women as individuals is central to any discourse or practice of democracy and notions of justice in legal and socio-cultural terms.

In Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Botswana, and Mozambique, the struggles within the Women's Movement reflect this tension between on the one hand, class elements who argue for a more 'rational' accommodationist relationship with the state; states which are totally irresponsible to the needs and rights of their citizens, and on the other hand, activists who argue for an uncompromising stance against these dictatorial regimes. These are states which spend with impunity the national resources of their citizens on militaristic ventures that have resulted in the destruction of huge swaths of the region and the loss of millions of human lives; the destruction of innumerable species; the devastation of eco-systems and the installation and or maintenance of increasingly repressive, autocratic and dictatorial regimes.

How does one even begin to accommodate the rampant jingoism of Mugabe, Museveni, Kabila, Savimbi, and their ilk while the poor of the region die the most horrific deaths imaginable at the cusp of a new, technologically and developmentally meteoric century?

How does one 'negotiate' with buffoons who have no concept of what democracy might feel like as an intellectual notion, let alone the reality of accountability and justice for women as persons with rights which they are obliged to respect and preserve?

How does one negotiate the relationships of autocracy, embedded in old colonial legal and economic precepts of citizenship, which excluded, first, all Africans from relating to the state as custodian of the rights of the individual; and which, more lately, have become enshrined in the very character of the neo-colonial state through its hegemony and control over land 'on behalf of the people', the majority of whom are women; poor; without access to education—generation after generation—and whose lives remain locked in the privatized, patriarchal wastelands called 'communal areas'—relationships which the men in the state refuse to change because they are a critical source of their power and masculinity.

How does one disengage the notion of citizenship, which is historically and materially locked into the assumption that white men are the true citizens (because supposedly

they embody what is civilized, rational and stable), making their claim over the vast material resources of Southern Africa logical and economically 'efficient'?

The challenges we face as feminists/women/Africans/human beings living on the continent are vast in their complexity and commonness. They speak to the imperatives all societies face, directly or indirectly, as we enter a new time—a euphoric invention, which nonetheless, provides a moment of possibility as we emerge from the chaos that the first two millennia have bequeathed Africa.

These are certainly trying times. But they are also times of great hope and rejuvenation. Globalisation, understood as a context which offers new possibilities for the refinement and consolidation of the gems we mined through our uncompromising struggles for justice, rights and equality in the 20th century, means that we can come together once again, having learnt that the liberal palliatives of the bourgeois state did not resolve the critical tensions between women and the state, in the West; and that for the rest of the world, even the most basic liberal rights have not yet been secured.

The challenge of re-politicising gender as a transformational thinking tool and human relational space—by subverting its ordinariness and normativity, through a revitalisation of feminist envisioning and the creation of global platforms which once again appeal to the being in all of us—is not only possible but imperative. I look forward to this century when we will be able to engage with old issues in new ways, convinced that every effort is worth it, now and for a different, wholesome world in the future.

I would like to end with a quotation from Catherine Stimpson which I think in many ways summarizes my own feelings about being a feminist in this here and now: I once imagined a feminist future abstractly as a place where 'equity' and 'rights' would be as common as sunshine in equatorial climes. I now imagine a feminist future more metaphorically. It is first a place of sufficient bread where all of us have enough to eat and where all of us are physically secure. It is next a place of roses where all of us have a sense of self, the ability to participate in democratic communities, and the capacity to love fully and freely. Finally, it is a place of keyboards where all of us have access to literacy, education, and the technologies that will shape the twenty-first century. Bread, roses, keyboards: my rubric for a unifying vision of the future.

I struggle for all of the above—to be able to live in the most beautiful place on earth, where sunshine is as common as existence and death. But I, too, and billions of women, poor children and poor men, want bread, roses and the ability to fly along the technological and informational highways that mark this new time we live in. And it is possible if we don't give up the dream.

Issues of Gender and Development from an African Feminist Perspective
Patricia McFadden

Lecture presented in honor of Dame Nita Barrow, at the Center for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies, Bridgetown, Barbados, November 2000.

It is a singular honor to be here with you this evening, celebrating once more the undaunted spirit of feminism and Africanity through a re-memorying of the significance of Dame Nita Barrow—an African woman, citizen of Barbados and the Caribbean, and a truly fearless defender of the dignity and rights of all Africans, wherever we live. Through her courage and amazing ability to envision a different world, even as she and her contemporaries battled with the seemingly impossible challenges of half a century ago, we have been able to come to where we are today—to a place where the discourse on rights has become one of greater inclusion for women and where issues of entitlement, dignity and integrity are opening up new intellectual and political challenges for us all, whether we are located in the academy, in the public service or private sector and/or we work within the home, as most women still do at some point in their daily lives.

This is a place we have come to, through struggle, perseverance and a belief in ourselves; where the notion of gender is no longer an idea that can be dismissed as 'western' and/or 'other' by an older, formerly hegemonic nationalist discourse, particularly with regard to race and identity. Gender has instead begun to occupy an increasingly central status as a political thinking tool, particularly in terms of comprehensively re-defining our African realities within the numerous locations we call home. It is throwing up new discourses that sometimes speak more covertly to unfinished historical tasks relating to our search for freedom as Black women and Black men.

For example, there is a fear in most African communities, both Diasporic and on the African continent, that the existences of Black men, particularly young Black men, are fundamentally jeopardized by the achievements and freedoms of Black women. For those who espouse this discourse, however it is framed, the reality of gender equality has become the nemesis they always suspected it to be, no matter how limited and unsecured women's rights and benefits may be, given that the most critical institutions in all our societies are still largely controlled and directed by male interests. The question for me, as an African activist feminist scholar, who has spent more than half of her almost fifty years of life struggling to be free, is why the achievement of freedom, relative and incomplete as it still is, is perceived as a threat by the very men with whom I share, unconditionally, the oldest experience of racist violation and impunity.

Could it be that, despite our common bitter heritage of racist violation and humiliation, we are now ultimately faced with the imperative of coming to terms with the fact that Black men of all classes have always been privileged by the very same patriarchy that facilitated and institutionalized racist privilege for white men? That at the end of the day, it is the fear of a loss of male patriarchal claims; claims that are reproduced and naturalized through basically outdated notions and practices of masculinity and heterosexism, which constitutes the sub-text of this still barely theorized but passionately articulated discourse of male endangerment? I know I am treading on dangerous ground, and I can already hear the mental rifles being cocked, as I can hear too the echoes of a volley of questions and reprimands waiting impatiently to be fired from across various bows of this august audience. But I dare to tread on any and all hallowed ground, in the proud and fearless traditions of Nita Barrow, Audre Lorde, Andaiye, Winnie Madikizela, Nehanda, Ndzinga, and all those fore-mothers and sisters whose

courage has moved the great stone of oppression and exclusion, so that change would come for all of us.

For me, these are narratives that are embedded in century old wounds—memories of having been ruptured from known cultural and social locations; from old and well-loved traditions that marked us as ourselves; of having crafted new familiars in dangerous and hostile lands and become African women and men again, albeit in new ways, within the landscapes of what is now known as the Caribbean; or along the margins of settler colonies which had displaced us in brutal and soul destroying ways, instilling in us that demon called self-hate, thereby making us strangers in our own lands.

And now, just when some would like to think that everything is finally back to 'normal'; when we have our own flags waving merrily in the breeze; our children's voices ring out with the sound of our very own national anthems; and Black men occupy the dizzying heights of state structures both on the continent and in these Africanized isles, now when it all seems to have been settled, Black women begin demanding 'gender justice' and insisting that 'women's rights are human rights'. Nita Barrow's dreams have taken root and the seeds of her labor of love, her life's work, are blossoming everywhere. How then to reconcile this difficult yet sincerely loved familiar—the anger and beauty of Black women struggling to be free of an African Patriarchy—the oldest patriarchy known in the human story.

In my presentation this evening, I want to venture into a landscape called Africa that is culturally so dense its true depth is rarely fully imagined let alone experienced. It is a place so materially, artistically and spiritually rich that only those who have lived as Africans within the skin of this incredible identity, and experienced being African through a history of resistance, can begin to have a sense of the power that this treasure house is capable of endowing. I will attempt to set out some of the legacies that have made it possible for us to survive as a people, on and off the continent, to '*play in the dark*' and still be known, experienced and longed for, even as we continue to be reviled and feared by the dominant hegemonic cultures of the white north.

This I hope to do by making reference to my experiences as a feminist working mainly in Southern Africa, and by anchoring my ideas in the intellectual and activist traditions of Black feminist scholars in Africa, the Caribbean, North America and Europe. This reflexive process will, I hope, show how feminist ideology and practice has begun to impact and change notions of development through a more radical conceptualization and application of the concept of gender. My contention is that gender, in its most productive and creative meanings, conceptually and politically, is a social product that comes out of the struggles of women for freedom and inclusion.

Within radical feminist analysis, gender comes to signify much more than an intellectual notion that may be bandied about like an intellectual ping-pong. It assumes a critical and deeply transformative ability when it is used to raise new senses of identity and meaning in relation to the categories of femaleness and maleness; youth and elderliness; citizenship and sexual identity/orientation; urban and rural location and their intersections with notions of authenticity and modernity; race and privilege; the contestation over space and nationality; and even the definition of the present and future.

However, before I set out to speak to some of the numerous issues which lie at this juncture where race, class, gender, age and location on the one hand, intersect with power, privilege and troubled relationships with the state on the other within the context of Southern Africa, I want to acknowledge and affirm the long and rich traditions of resistance scholarship and creative writing within the Caribbean—a bouquet of islands best understood as a living, breathing, always changing space.

To quote Patricia Mohammed as she celebrates the uniqueness of the Caribbean, even as she acknowledges the similarities this region shares with other parts of the world that have been marked by the common experiences of colonization, plunder and resistance for several centuries:

The narratives of misuses and abuses of colonization are tired old ones which will not be retired. The secrets and disguises of the past will be constantly rendered up for public scrutiny by each generation of Caribbean peoples, descendants of the myriad group of migrants; enslaved, bonded, coerced and encouraged to work and settle in these islands... Both consciously and unconsciously, the interrogation of the past with the present is a process of creating continuity and tradition. This continuity and tradition—of families, buildings, institutions, art, music, song, dance, cuisine, of political systems and political struggles, of language, and of cultural beliefs—all of these are the markers of identity and difference. The different manifestations of these are the signature of the Caribbean on the world map—the way in which the circumstances of history, natural geography and resources of the region have evolved into something which is viewed by others and by ourselves as Caribbean, despite colonialism, and because of colonization. (1998)

I too want to 'insert' myself into this vibrant, dynamic ambiance, albeit temporarily as a guest: an African who is often asked, 'Are you Caribbean/from the Caribbean'?—at which I beam and instantaneously become Caribbean, and might not actually locate myself elsewhere unless I am asked more locally specific questions. In re-locating myself momentarily, I hope to add my thread to the millions of multi-colored strands that have spanned the breadth and depth of the oceans between us; and the multitude of lives taken/given/lost in the crossing to get to this place and in making it home, in spite and because of all that has come before. Therefore, as I prepare to step towards an offering of what I understand to be happening on the African continent at this particular time, I want to re-affirm, with Barbara Christian that

people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing ... is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? And women, at least the women I grew up around, continuously speculated about the nature of life through pithy language that unmasked the power relations of their worlds... My folk, in other words, have always been a race for theory. (2000)

It is out of these traditions of theory making, in order to explain our own realities, that I would like to locate my critique of the prevailing notion of development, and show how, through feminist theorizing and practice, African women have begun to transform their societies in new and futuristic ways.

Gender, Development and Feminist Transformation

The notion of development is seldom associated with an old liberal discourse that not only assumed that African preparedness for independent existence from colonial supervision would be determined by the colonials themselves, but which also excluded African women in particular from any part of that process, an assumption which remained largely unquestioned by Black men long into the independence era. It took almost two decades of insistence by African women that we too had rights to the benefits of independence for a more inclusive and more critical development discourse to emerge. The same can be said of the Caribbean (Peggy Antrobus; Rhoda Reddock; Eudien Barriteau; Byron and Thornburn).

Very central to this new and heavily contested discourse was the concept of gender, a dynamic concept which came out of the feminist struggles of women for inclusion into the political, social and economic domains of our respective societies. Up until gender became a critical analytical tool in the discourse about rights and entitlements to social and material resources, women's interests were acknowledged only in relation to the reproductive roles and socio-cultural obligations and responsibilities which had determined their statuses for centuries across the various cultures of the world.

Over the past three decades an entire genre of feminist development literature has emerged, reflecting lively discussions and contestations over the location of women in relation to the state and their access to the most critical material and social resources within such societies. This discourse has centered on the association of women as a social category with development as a process through which old colonial relationships of power between the north and Africa had begun to be restructured. An array of players positioned themselves strategically in this debate—Black men (within the state and on its margins); white men (usually as former settlers, shareholders in multinational corporations and as donors); white women (who usually formulated the theoretical expressions of what they thought African and Caribbean women should expect/where we could be positioned within this restructuring); and more recently, Black women, who have either accepted the approaches which came with the funding for 'development' activities (WID/WAD/GAD), or have challenged the assumptions and prescriptions of such approaches, exposing the underlying liberal paternalism and its function in maintaining the very colonial relationships it claims to be transforming. This latter group espouses Audre Lorde's wisdom that the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house.

From a radical African feminist perspective, it is quite obvious that WID/WAD and GAD are basically different versions of a fundamentally conservative discourse, which essentially de-politicizes women in terms of the public while it entrenches the private construction of women as peripheral to the real sites of power within our societies. The very latest version of this paradigm is reflected in the policy of gender mainstreaming which I will make further reference to later in this presentation.

Ayesha Imam, a Nigerian feminist, captures this transition from marginal intellectual and social status to feminist centrality in the discourse on development within Africa in the following passage:

The study of women in general and African women in particular contributed to the breadth and depth of knowledge and theorizing of African realities in a number of diverse ways... It has demonstrated the importance of women not simply as passive breeders but also as economic agents, as active in creating new developments, in resistance to and in collusion with oppression also. It has added fuel to the questioning of assumptions about the beneficial nature of the colonial experience and the development of capitalism and 'modernisation' in Africa, by demonstrating that for many women these processes have frequently meant a decrease in economic autonomy, access to resources, status and security. It has contributed to the demythologizing of both the 'golden age of pre-colonial Africa' and the 'backward, uncivilized primitive Africa' theses through investigations as to women's positions in pre-colonial Africa—which turn out to have been neither a happy complementarity with men's roles nor the dumb beast of burden remarked upon by the early (white) anthropologists. (1997)

Through an expansive range of social science research, spearheaded by the leading African research institutes across the continent—CODESRIA (the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa, based in Senegal); SARIPS (the Southern African Research Institute for Policy Studies, based in Harare, Zimbabwe—my project is part of this initiative); OSSREA (the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern Africa, based in Addis Ababa); AAPS (the Association of African Political Scientists, based in Zimbabwe) and numerous institutes and departments in Universities across the continent—African scholars have created new and exciting debates about the relationships between coloniality, development and power since the late 1950s when the first African states achieved their independence.

However, it was not until more recently, as a consequence of several interesting national, continental and international factors, that the discourse on African development began to reflect the impact and relevance of African women's struggles and demands on the independence project. The work of Amina Mama and Ayesha Imam (Nigeria); Fatou Sow (Senegal), Rudo Gaidzanwa (Zimbabwe); Filomen Steady (Sierra Leone); Ndri Therese Assie-Lumumba (Cote Ivoire); Techua Manu, Dzodzi Tsikata, Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana), Ruth Meena (Tanzania); Fatma Mernissi (Morocco); Desiree Lewis, Natasha Primo and Shereen Hassim (South Africa); Sara Longwe (Zambia); Micere Mugo (Kenya), and my own work within the region, speaks only partially to a fantastic new tradition of feminist theory making and activist politics across a continent which is over three and a half times the landmass of the USA. Several African male scholars have also begun to engage with development issues using gender and feminist analysis to raise new conceptual and political issues.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (Malawi), Mwenda Ntarangwi (Kenya), Brian Raftopoulos (Zimbabwe) and Eboe Hutchful (Nigeria) are among a growing number of Black men who recognize the intellectual and policy relevance of gender analysis for themselves as male social activists within societies that desperately need to change. Although all these

scholars still use gender in relation to women's struggles, as an expression of their political support for women's rights and the necessary changes which need to occur within the academy and at the level of policy making (in particular the work of Yusuf Bangura of Nigeria speaks most directly to the need to change the relationship between gender, structures and power and organizational policy and development), it is clearly time for these brothers and their counterparts to move on and begin the more radical work on masculinity and issues of power, control, violation and the consequences of patriarchal privilege for them as men. To continue drawing their male identity from practices and notions of culture which are essentially pre-capitalist and largely constructed through the prisms of white patriarchal notions of manhood is surely deeply problematical.

However, in order to make the conceptual and political leap from supporting women's struggles for freedom to initiating the process of freeing themselves from patriarchal backwardness, Black men will have to understand not only the necessity of interrogating male privilege as it relates to them as men, but they will also have to locate that understanding at the intersection of race, class, age and social status, as all these issues affect their identities and their relationships with power. They will need to understand and accept, for example, that while being against gender violence has now become the politically correct stance to adopt, because women have fought uncompromising battles to wrestle the issue of impunity from the domestic arena by making it a crime to violate a woman in any way and place in most societies in the world (although the issue of marital rape remains intractable and outstanding in this sense), it is not politically correct to continue to hold onto the ancient, undemocratic practice of violating children, whether this takes the form of sexual violence (which is still justified by certain cultural claims in some African societies), or physical and psychological violence, supposedly for purposes of discipline.

For centuries men violated women on the basis of this very claim, which was shored up by justifications of biblical license and cultural sanction. Just because patriarchal power and the institution of the heterosexual family have granted this privilege for thousands of years to adults who bear children does not make it any more acceptable than the violation and abuse of women was made out to be until recent legal and political challenges debunked such claims.

For feminists, it is even more critical that we make the political and conceptual linkages between all and any forms of violation and show how *impunity* (which I understand to be more than the legal definition of committing a crime without paying the price through punishment; and define more as the boundary crossing behaviour and practices of those who break those collectively created rules and defined expectations around our dignity and integrity as humans, rules and assumptions that govern the very essence of human existence beyond the differentiations we have constructed through race, class, gender, age hierarchies and notions of social superiority and status). Impunity is embedded in supremacist ideologies which feed patriarchal sexism and misogyny, racist violation and brutality and classist exclusionary privilege. It facilitated the buying and selling, brutalization and dehumanization of Africans for half a millennium, and we know that too well, each and every one of us wherever we are as Africans.

Most often within African societies cultural constructs of age, hierarchy and tradition are used to mask such violations, enabling them to continue through the collusion of groups

who should be in the forefront of the removal of all vestiges of undemocratic and autocratic behaviour. The same applies to issues of sexual orientation and the right to self-determination. For too long, Africans all over the world tended to assume that heterosexuality was synonymous to being authentically 'African' and most Black people still collude (less overtly these days maybe) with homophobic, heterosexist structures and political systems in excluding homosexual and bisexual persons from exercising their rights to choose how they experience and express their sexuality. It has taken almost a century of hard activist work to begin to break the myth that Africanity is synonymous with heterosexuality—a compulsory sexual form which lies at the heart of much of the violation (bodily and sexual) which affects millions of Black women and girls all over the world, but especially in those parts of the continent which perpetuate the misogynist practice of female genital mutilation and other humiliating and degrading practices against women.

The essential political lesson which must come out of our struggles as women for bodily and sexual integrity and personhood is that any form of violation and exploitation perpetrated against any group of persons and/or individual anywhere, but especially within our African societies, cannot and must not be tolerated, particularly when it allows us as women to engage in undemocratic patriarchal practices which ultimately undermine our own freedom as women and as mothers. Beating children is a violation of their integrity and their right to live secure and humane lives. It serves to further institutionalize impunity under the guise of cultural preservation, and in my opinion it is another example of how oppressed women collude with patriarchy in perpetuating systems of domination.

Of course, we need a new and courageous public discourse about the relationships we enter into with the human beings we bring into this world; it is essential that we take the discourse of socialization out of its patriarchal embeddedness within archaic institutions like the patriarchal heterosexual family, which is still legally, socially and culturally defined and determined by conservative males, and make the personal political also in relation to our interactions with young people. Yes, it is a difficult and challenging issue because not only does it subvert the essentialist claims of cultural authenticity which have sustained the rhetoric of the nationalist male scholars and 'gurus'—the guardians of African authenticity—but it also means that women will no longer be able to exercise power over 'children'—and child will have to mean those things that speak to the nurturing, loving, supportive and protective aspects of our encounters with human beings who come through us, but do not belong to us. The power between women and their children will have to become a power to make life safe, democratic and violence free, rather than being a power over another human being—which is a bad habit we have learnt as women from patriarchal male practices and their uses of power for destructive and misogynist purposes. The persistence of war across our continent speaks tragically but most realistically to the exercise of this kind of power, and we have to stop this confounded nonsense which is destroying us all.

It will also mean that we begin a new layer of the discourse on property, a discourse which for ages included the ownership of women as property through rituals and cultural practices. When women insisted on becoming adults at the same age as men did, they entered into a relationship with material forms of property which scuttled the claim that women could not be autonomous in relation to economic and financial issues; and initiated a rejection of the violence women had suffered as privatized objects in

patriarchal societies. This discourse will require that we interrogate the relationship between violation, property and the continuing hegemony of patriarchal power after centuries of struggle to change our worlds, an expression of impunity which the recent rape of Black women by Black nationalist males on white owned farms in Zimbabwe brought to the fore in horrific but urgent ways.

When the systematic occupation of white farms began early this year (2000), one of the first things Black men did was to rape and terrorize Black women and girls, with impunity, claiming that they were colluders with settler colonialism for working and living on those farms. To most Zimbabweans working in the civil society, Black farm workers are isolated and disenfranchised—in particular Black women, who live the lives of slaves (in the main, they do not vote, have no access to education, legal security of employment, are the most casualized and the most impoverished section of the entire Zimbabwean population, and are without claims of any kind to citizenship and/or land on the basis of an indigenous identity or social status). Most of these women are descendants of Malawian and Zambian immigrants who were brought in by the colonial state almost sixty years ago to work as even cheaper labour on the white farms as part of the then Nyasaland and Rhodesia Federation. They stayed when Zimbabwe became independent, many families having supported the liberation struggle and even joined the ranks of the liberation movement. However, the distinction between them and 'authentic' Zimbabweans—who are basically the Shona (even the national claims of the Ndebele have been questions by the ruling elite, which is predominantly Shona)—was maintained. Over the 20 years since independence, most farm workers have been refused the right to register as Zimbabwean citizens because such a right is still tied to the presentation of proof of an authentic Zimbabwean parentage; most do not vote because to vote one needs an identity card; they have no claims to land because they do not have an authentic African home within Zimbabwe (in spite of the fact that all these workers know no other country or home besides Zimbabwe), and most tragically, their children have been excluded from national educational and health services because they cannot be identified as Zimbabweans. This by a government that has signed numerous human rights declarations and some of whose ministers use these very workers as peons on their huge farms across the country.

Therefore, when the crisis of property contestation erupted—because that is what the issue is about in Zimbabwe, a re-structuring of the relationship between predominantly Black males, who deploy the trope of authenticity to lay claim to indigenous land that was alienated by a white colonial state over a hundred years ago, and the demand for private property—female farm workers became the easiest enemy to attack. They raped and assaulted and brutalized women and girls without the state arresting or trying a single one of them (except the gang of thugs who abducted Shona children from a school where they claimed the teachers supported the newly formed opposition movement). Rape and domestic violence is still treated as common assault within the Zimbabwean criminal justice system, and unlike in South Africa, where a newly passed Domestic Violence Act provides severe punishment for such crimes, Zimbabwe, like most African countries, still treats the rape and violation of women and girls as a common crime.

Often, the police watched as the homes and meager possessions of farm workers were burnt and looted, and little girls were gang raped as punishment for being part of the white man's property. It was tragic and bizarre, and the responses of both the

Zimbabwean Women's Movement (which I shall make reference to below) and the wider civil society were generally feeble, moralistic protestations about how disgusting such behaviour was. However, an explanation for the impunity with which such violations were carried out was sorely lacking, and although some women's organizations provided termination (within the constraints of the law which still criminalizes a woman's termination of an unwanted pregnancy) and counseling services to a few of the girls and women who had become pregnant after the rapes, it was generally a case of too little too late.

Earlier today Dr. Barriteau showed me a report by the *Post Express* newspaper of Nigeria, where the implementation of Sharia Law in several of that country's states is facilitating the violation and total disregard of the rights of mainly women, girls and Christian individuals. Once again, women, especially young women, are bearing the brunt of the reactionary, right-wing backlash against the advances that women may have made in that society. This is not uncommon across the continent—the reinvention of archaic notions of culture and religious dogma to curtail the advancement of women is a strategy that is often applied with impunity, regardless of whatever larger civic laws and protections might be in place.

The report details how what are described as 'free and single girls' in Minna, the Niger State capital, were given a week's ultimatum by the state's Sharia Implementation Board 'to get married or quit the state'. This has resulted in some of the women and girls fleeing into the military barracks where Sharia law does not apply, and 'squatting with unmarried soldiers and policemen'. In Bida, another town: 'Some of the girls now squat with unmarried soldiers in the barracks while others throng the beer parlours for men that need them. Those without alternative arrangements have begun to flee the state en masse'. When asked about the indiscriminate arrest of the women and girls, the Board Chairman denied that this was indiscriminate arrest, insisting that 'we must do our job the right way'.

Here again, we see the blatant use of impunity to deny the rights of citizens in a country which is represented in the UN and the OAU; and has signed most, if not all, the international conventions on the rights of women and children, the human rights charter, etc. Yet the state and the wider society is clearly unable to defend the rights of female citizens in the face of outright misogynist practices. Women are running from one arm of the repressive state into another, victimized by both in the interests of so-called religious sanctity and cultural preservation. In such contexts, the distinction between religious dogma and outright patriarchal repression disappears, and all one sees is the brutalisation and exclusion of women from the securities and entitlements which those who inhabit the state are supposed to guarantee and secure.

I have used these examples to show how critical it is that we move from the important but still fragmented analysis and activism we have thus far carried out with regard to violation, and begin to understand its perniciousness and connectivity to a multitude of other structures and ideological systems within our societies. These are ideological and political systems which are linked very intimately to power, property and a value system that shapes and determines how people are included or excluded from the resources of the law, the state as a custodian of citizens/peoples rights and entitlements, and the very notions of dignity and respect for each other as Africans.

Having probably shocked some of you with the retelling of these brutal expressions of misogyny and exclusion in societies that have been in the limelight these past months, let me hasten to assure you that while everything I have said above is entirely true, and reflects a deep crisis within Zimbabwe and Nigeria, Africa has given rise to a plethora of social movements, amongst which the African Women's Movement is a foremost actor in moving the societies of the continent to a new and qualitatively different, people-friendly place. The transition to such a new dispensation will require a different set of political and cultural values, values which we see emerging predominantly within the African women's movement. I will return to this claim in the conclusion of this presentation.

Comprising fifty-four countries and numerous islands and beautiful archipelagoes, Africa is bursting with new energies and visions for a different kind of world. These of course are seldom even noticed, let alone spoken of in the global medias, which prefer to focus on those events and practices that continue to reiterate the tired racist colonial claims that Africans cannot govern themselves.

But then we all know that Africa's crisis is not simplistically the invention of a few greedy, autocratic dictators who have maintained the very state structures put in place by the colonials (which were not considered undemocratic while they served the interests of the colonial state for over a century in most countries of the continent). While I cannot speak adequately to the specificities of each and every African society within the context of a 45-minute lecture, I would have loved to have had the time to speak to the tragic realities of Sierra Leona and Liberia; Somalia and Sudan; Ethiopia and Eritrea; Angola and Rwanda and a multitude of other crises which desperately require our utmost attention as Africans wherever we live. The fact of the matter is that whatever affects Africa, affects us all—to a greater or lesser degree—no matter where we are and who we are as Africans. How we respond will determine how long it takes for Africa to get back on the road to building sustainable, democratic, African-friendly societies.

In conclusion, I would like to map out some of the outstanding challenges facing us on the continent, with particular reference to the reality of women in the Southern African region and the role of the African Women's Movement in this process of change.

First of all, almost every African country has been faced with the imperative, at independence, of having to restructure the state and its apparatus in response to the needs of the people, especially in those societies that fought a liberation war. In countries like Zimbabwe, the state put in place a welfare program which, for the first ten years, made provision for primary education and health care and limited transport infrastructure to the mass of the people, especially the rural folk who had been totally excluded from such services by the Rhodesian state. This had a tremendous impact on the people's sense of dignity and nationhood. However, the sustainability of such development initiatives is intimately tied to the ability of the leadership to not only reform the social delivery systems or just reform some of the laws, but to ensure that the relationship between the people and the state changes in fundamental ways which ensure that the rights of each and every citizen are secured and protected. Central to this is the question of property and a restructuring of the rights of the individual from collectively assumed 'rights' to specific individual rights. This did not happen for several reasons and the current crisis in that country is a reflection of this political and ideological flaw.

I know that there are still Africans, even those who live in societies where individual rights have been enshrined as inalienable in the constitution and the laws of their countries, who would like to imagine that the true African context is one where collective rights supersede the rights of individuals. They even argue for a so-called Afrocentric paradigm, wherein all Africans become 'similar' at the rhetorical level via the re-institution of common property, customs and traditions which protect these authenticators of Africaness, even as they allow for the ownership of private property (which includes women and children) by Black men. This is the myth which they perpetuate as they enjoy the right to vote, to own private property, to be autonomous and to make decisions about their sexuality and their reproductive capacities. Such people do not have to live in these imaginary African societies, they prefer to live in countries like the USA and the UK, while they pontificate about a 'true' African culture and way of life.

Let me explain briefly, and I will not be able to do justice to this issue given the constraints of time and space, but it is really very vital that I at least use the example of Zimbabwe to debunk this myth about a 'true' Africa, which is basically an invention of those who are either privileged by patriarchal cultural and social practices, or who naively have not thought about the reality of a viable Africa in the 21st century and what that will entail. I do not intend to insult or annoy anyone in this gathering, but if I have, it is certainly unintentional.

At independence, the new Zimbabwe government signed a deal with the representatives of the white settlers (Britain) that guaranteed the security of white property in land and other forms of property for the first twenty years of independence. Zimbabweans entered the independence era without a real constitution in the sense that South Africa has—where the people debated and contested across gender, race, class and special interests until they had formulated a document which reflected some of the expectations of those who fought for the liberation of that county. (I am not saying that the South African situation is fundamentally different from that of Zimbabwe, even if they do have the most 'advanced' constitution in the world.)

For Zimbabweans, their constitution for the past twenty years has been basically the constituents of the Lancaster Agreement, which fundamentally excludes the majority of Africans from accessing the most critical resource in their country—land. Whatever land was purchased during these past two decades was bought on the basis of willing seller and willing buyer, and a small percentage was redistributed to about 77,000 families across the country. There was no restitution of the land which had been forcibly taken from the people over a period of one hundred years, and many of those who had joined the struggle for Zimbabwe, including large numbers of poor women, were left without the very thing for which they had fought so bitterly. After twenty years, the moratorium on the security of white property elapsed, and the opportunity for a new and real constitution was at hand. The people of that country formed themselves into a national constitutional assembly which sought the views of the ordinary people on a wide range of issues, central to which was the claim to land ownership and its relationship to the realization of other citizenship rights. The response, as shown by the referendum, was overwhelmingly that the people of Zimbabwe wanted a multiparty political system, with a fair re-distribution of the land and the right to own private property as an expression of their constitutional entitlements as citizens of that country.

The occupation of white owned farms should have been an expression of the people's demand for their birthright, had it been allowed to occur immediately after independence. But the discourse on land reclamation and the restitution of land rights to the people were truncated and repressed through a rhetoric of reconciliation and co-existence which suited the immediate class interests of the emergent Black petite bourgeoisie at that point in time. A deal was made not to touch white private property in land, thereby perpetuating the deeply entrenched social and economic disparities which had divided that society for almost a century and protecting the rights of white Zimbabweans, whose citizenship is measured via their ownership of property, but who otherwise generally do not give a damn about that country and use every opportunity to siphon the resources of the country back to their places of 'cultural and social authentication'—in this case, Britain. Having lost the moment to do the right thing and recompense the people for a terrible wrong that had been done to them, and for which many died trying to reverse that wrong, the new regime colluded with global capital and the ruling elites of the north to protect the interests of a small, highly privileged white minority at the expense of the general welfare of the majority of their people. In addition, the country experienced the Matebeleland massacres, when thousands of Ndebele people (Zimbabweans who felt aggrieved by the political alliance struck between the leadership of the two main liberation movements in 1982 to form the Patriotic Front) were butchered Pinochet style over a period of three to four years, and the wound of that violation has continued to fester. As with the issue of racial privilege, the murder of the Ndebele people by the national army of Zimbabwe became a festering wound, waiting to explode.

And now that the horse has bolted, they want to shut the stable door. We know what the consequences of that are.

Therefore, the most fundamental challenge facing Zimbabwe is that the society has to find a way of reconciling the gross disparities between a small, very spoilt, white minority that squeals and screams violation of citizens rights at the first sign of any policies which attempt to bridge the gap between their enormous, ill-gotten wealth and the every increasing numbers of impoverished Black people who still remember that their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, children died for that country, for the very land on which the white settler continues to sit, gun in hand.

On the other hand we have a regime which has squandered the commitment and dedication of the people to a just and equitable society, by using the past twenty years to accumulate wealth and facilitate the enrichment of a small middle class; allowing the IMF and the World Bank to use an inherited debt, which Smith had incurred in a war against the people of Zimbabwe, to be used as a leverage against the state. So has the regime succumbed to the macro economic restructuring of the Zimbabwean economy in ways which have left the people totally vulnerable and without access to even the most basic educational and health services. The quality and standard of life of the ordinary Zimbabwean has plummeted in tragically dramatic ways over the past five years, and the people are so poor it simply is too painful to detail their condition at the present time. To add insult to injury, the government is involved in a war in the DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo] which is basically about a small military clique, which is using Zimbabwe's presence in this distant, absolutely unnecessary conflict to accumulate wealth through mineral concessions and other shady deals. The incorporation of a company made up of army generals last year, which was made known to the public through the national newspapers, bears this claim out, although of course this argument

would be vehemently denied by the representatives of the government, and my entire analysis would be interpreted as anti-Zimbabwean and hostile to the interests of that country. Even as I present this paper, I hope that my permit to work in Zimbabwe will not be revoked and that I shall not find a deportation order awaiting me when I arrive home on Monday morning. It is a risk I have chosen to take because I believe that we have to be faithful to the principles that we hold as Africans who aspire for a better continent at this critical time in our story.

The same analysis can be made of South Africa, which has an even more entrenched white economic ruling class which is diligently rewriting the history of the anti-apartheid struggle, inserting claims that remove the blame from the white minority and distributing the glory for the liberation struggle to both Black and white, equally. The notion of the 'rainbow nation' has become the hegemonic icon of multiculturalism and non-racialism in a society where racial privilege remains deeply entrenched and blatantly obvious. Any discourse on race is violently opposed by a white liberal media which immediately accuses that Black person of 'reverse racism'.

All this is of course very opportune for the purposes of middle class accumulation at this point in time, when the poor of that country are expected to wait and be 'reasonable' in their demands for economic and social redistribution. However, I dread to think of what is going to happen when the Black government of the day attempts to make the necessary amends in that deeply unequal situation, for the day will come, sooner than later, and the people of South Africa will not have the patience or the tolerance of the Zimbabweans, that we must understand from the onset. The superficial reforms which the South African government is making in relation to the land question in particular will certainly not resolve the fundamental contradictions facing the peoples of that country.

Across the region of Southern Africa, the people want guaranteed access to private title over land, and for women in these societies, this represents a revolution in several ways. We know that in class societies, especially within capitalist societies, people experience their citizenship through their ability to own property and to have that property safeguarded by the state and the law. This is an essential element of all class societies, and the construction of African women as the private property of men is embedded in outmoded yet preserved systems of feudal relations which assure men of the ownership of women's reproductive and productive abilities through various rituals, most important of which is the ritual of marriage. Marriage is essentially a relation of property, and even under modern law, men can access impunity by appealing to so-called conjugal rights, for example, in their denial of the existence of marital rape, or in seeking mitigation in cases of femicide.

For Zimbabwean women, the demand for private property speaks to several very crucial consequences for them as women and as citizens. First of all, because the current government simply stepped into the shoes of a colonial policy which claimed custodianship of all non-commercial land, on behalf of the people, the majority of Black women in Zimbabwe (and in all the countries of the region) who live in the rural spaces only relate to land via the custodianship of the state. Therefore, whoever occupies the state can use that custodianship as a leverage to 'persuade' women in particular, and rural folk in general, to vote for the party in power. If they do not, they will not have access to the land. This is a powerful mechanism of social and political and cultural

control, and it explains why so many dictatorial regimes on the continent continue to rule through the vote of poor women, in the main.

These women have no choice, because without education, access to markets and production inputs; without skills that are marketable and without the ability to survive in the urban spaces, they have to conform to the demands of the chiefs, headmen and husbands and vote for the government of the day. This is how Hastings Banda ruled Malawi as a dictator for over thirty years; the women kept him in power, because they had no choice. They remained dirt poor, without the right to make the kinds of political choices which would have economic, cultural and legal implications for their lives, and Moluzi, the current dictator, is using the same tactic in spite of having come to power on a claim of being different from Banda.

In terms of Zimbabwean women, the Women's Movement has seized this opportunity of crisis, which to me is really a moment of transition to post-coloniality, when the people are restructuring their relationships with the state and the ruling classes by insisting that their rights and entitlements be guaranteed constitutionally and in the law. The Women's Movement has mobilized women to demand equal land rights with men and to shift the meaning of citizenship from its supposedly gender neutral claims (in the law and constitution, claims which are contradicted by the very letter of these two phenomena), and to demand equality in terms of property, autonomy and personhood.

Women are also demanding the removal of relativist cultural clauses in the Zimbabwean constitution which have made it possible for Black, male judges to prevent women from inheriting property by using clause 23 of the constitution, which states that all rights for women shall be superseded by the interests of custom whenever the case of competition between the two arises. This clause has been used effectively by a particularly right-wing Black male judge who has argued that under African custom (of which he has decided he is the custodian), women cannot inherit property when a male heir exists, even if he was not designated a rightful heir. These are truly astounding demands and they are creating the necessary sense of entitlement among women which will enable them to defend their rights more effectively in the future. When people have a consciousness about their entitlements as citizens, they are better able to defend their rights to integrity and personhood in the face of reactionary backlash movements like that mentioned in Nigeria, which seek to push women and socially weaker groups and constituencies back into spaces where they can be controlled and dominated.

Additionally, the Women's Movement across the countries of the region is calling for all women to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis by demanding legally guaranteed reproductive and sexual rights which must be linked to the provision of adequate and accessible health care services, information and the facilitation of choice in terms of sexual relationships, reproductive abilities and counseling. Young women and increasing numbers of young men across the region, but in particular within South Africa as well as in countries like Uganda and Zambia, are insisting on a discourse about masculinity and responsible behaviour among their peers. Countries like Botswana and South Africa, which have the dubious reputation of having the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection, are taking the lead, through the activism of young women and men, in reconstructing the meanings of masculinity and its intersection with notions of culture and tradition. It is early days yet, but I think it is important that people know that we are not simply victims of the virus, as Africa is so often represented in the global media. We are fighting back,

through true African traditions, which is why the linkages between AIDS, poverty and economic globalisation need to be made more often and with greater clarity.

The recent vilification of President Mbeki on the basis of a claim that he had denied the existence of the HIV virus is clearly a reflection of the kinds of financial interests that have become attached to the HIV/AIDS crisis within so-called sub-Saharan Africa. The pandemic is undoubtedly a leading cause of death within the region and across the continent, but in order to explain its proliferation and seeming invincibility, we need to make the political, social and economic linkages between poverty, racism, the behaviour of pharmaceutical companies which have used countries like South Africa for decades as illegal testing grounds for their drugs, with the collusion of the apartheid state, and the development and availability of retroviral drugs as well as the provision of services to HIV infected persons in the white north. It is not only ideologically naïve but politically dangerous to accept uncritically the racist claims that Africa is affected worst by HIV because Africans are 'naturally' promiscuous and the only solution to the HIV crisis is to change the sexual behaviour of Africans, especially the sexual behaviour of young Black men. While attitudinal behaviour is very important in the overall strategy towards containing HIV/AIDS, this must be combined with a more wholistic strategy which incorporates the fundamental rights to choice, access to services, information and the ability to make decisions; the right to sexual pleasure and security within intimate relations; and the ability to make a distinction between one's reproductive abilities and the opportunity to enjoy one's sexuality as an erotic experience.

Most Africans still shy away from an open discourse about sexuality and sexual choices, and through our generally conservative behavior we tend to allow the danger to slip in and destroy us because most of us do not have the courage to become modern. Too many Africans, on the continent and in the diaspora, still cling to the dichotomisation between the public and the private, because we have accepted the claim that making the personal political is 'western' and 'un-African'. This kind of ideological schizophrenia allows for the continuation of a whole series of dangerous and backward practices—among which are the inheritance of women; so-called 'widow cleansing' rituals; the isolation and stigmatization of widows and their banishment from their communities because they have become witches, as is happening in Ghana, South Africa and Tanzania to mention only a few countries (a woman without a man to legitimize her existence is either a whore or a witch); the use of girl children to compensate an avenging spirit (in which case she becomes a sexual object to be used by all the men in the aggrieved family); the persistence of *Trokosi* in Ghana, where girl children are given to traditional priests to be used as sexual slaves and breeders (in some cases such priests can have several hundred women and girls at his disposal). These are blatant violations of women's and girls' human rights and their sexual integrity, and they are made possible by the maintenance of so-called customary laws which are often claimed to be necessary for Africans to remain African. In reality what is called customary law is a set of social status laws which apply only to women and which are safeguarded to ensure the sexual and socio-cultural privileges of males, especially older males. These laws are totally backward and must go.

For me, as a feminist who loves being an African, the key to Africa's future lies in a re-envisioning of ourselves in relation to modernity. This new vision of Africa has already begun within the ideological and political activism of women in the Movement—this is where the fundamentally inclusive notions of democracy, human rights, dignity for all,

respect without humiliation; integrity and the celebration of the human body as a totality; and a recognition of the personhood of the individual as central to a new and more sustainable Africa have begun to take shape. We are struggling against the assumption by Black men in the state that they can use the state to wage war, make money, and destroy the present and future livelihoods of millions of Africans across that amazingly beautiful continent. We are demanding political and economic accountability and through national, regional and global networks are working towards making Africa a more women-friendly, African-friendly space. The task is greater than us all, but through the solidarity of Africans wherever we live, and the adoption of an uncompromising stance against dictatorship and corruption, we will become modern citizens of our countries.

Words From a Granary

Introduction

Words From a Granary is the long-awaited sequel to *A Woman's Voice*. As we brainstormed on the title to give our second anthology of short stories, we came up with the word, "granary." In traditional Africa, no homestead is ever without a granary, and no granary is ever empty. A granary is a symbol of hope where there would be despair; it is a symbol of promise in what would be a hopeless situation. Likewise, Ugandan women writers refuse to be discouraged by the appalling lack of a reading culture in the country. They keep wielding their pens, churning out more and more reading material in the hope that one day, our people will realize that reading is the backbone of intellectual empowerment and an integral part of development.

In our call for short stories to be published in an anthology, emphasis was put on originality, creativity and readability. No thematic restrictions were set, leaving the choice of topics to the authors. The results were not disappointing: more than thirty short stories were received, out of which fifteen were selected.

The anthology is the outcome of a three-year program of training workshops geared towards equipping creative women writers with writing skills. It was made possible through the financial support of our founders, HIVOS, who sponsored the training workshops as well as the publication of the book.

Many thanks go to the writers, too, for their commitment to the promotion of the reading culture in the country by contributing to the scanty reading material.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the great effort put in by members of the FEMRITE Editorial Board to bring the stories to the required standard. These are:

Mary Karooro Okurut
Hilda Twongyeirwe Rutagonya
Ayeta Anne Wangusa
Winnie Munyarugerero

Violet Barungi
Editor

I Watch You My Sister

Goretti Kyomuhendo

I watch you, my sister, sitting in the same spot you have always sat for the last ten years. Even as we went through the throes of a terrible war in this country, you never abandoned your place. Even as everything was razed to the ground, everything looted from the stores, everything except books; you never deserted your favourite spot.

Even when everyone ran in disarray; even as the bullets flew above your head, you still sat head held high, unmoving, in your abode. Even as the fair-skinned tall men dressed in camouflaged fatigues roamed the city at night, arresting anyone breaking the curfew, you still sat in the same spot.

I watch you, my sister, clutching your little treasures around you: an empty, dirty, rusty, 'Kimbo' tin—your safe; two wooden legs safely tucked away under your tattered blankets and your two little ones, their faces a mask of bewildered empty stares, their shoulders haggard. I watch you, my sister, stretching your thin arms to receive your hastily proffered gifts whilst murmuring a prayer to your deaf God. I listen to you as you sing your well-rehearsed anthem, with your little ones chorusing along. The only change I see is in your surroundings. Just near your throne, stands the newly refurbished, imposing Grand Imperial Hotel, the Speke Hotel and The Sheraton Hotel. I watch you as you let your misty eyes feast on the sparkling, multicoloured, dancing neon lights emanating from these grand structures. What a hefty meal for your eyes!

I watch you as you stare and salivate at the bigger neon lights that announce great and delicious world cuisine: Chinese Food, Indian Curry, Italian Ice Cream, and American Pizza. I wonder why they never announce the African delicacies?

I watch you as your next bait approaches. A policeman, eehh...a traffic policeman! He looks tired, my sister, and I wonder if he will hear your memorised song or see your outstretched hand.

"*Baba, Baba, mpayo akokulya* (give me something small to eat)", you still intone anyway.

Without turning to look at you, he dips his tired hand in his pocket and brings out crumpled, hastily folded notes. But he puts them back and comes out with a more suitable gift for you: a shining two hundred-shilling coin, which he carelessly throws in your open safe. Alas, it misses the safe and falls right in the latrine of the little ones.

I see them scurrying excitedly to retrieve the family's lost treasure. The little one does not see the taxidriver, who is driving insanely and hooting madly trying to attract his own baits. He runs straight into her.

How you scream, my sister, how you cry, how you weep! How you implore your deaf God! How I wish both your legs were not wooden stumps tucked away in your blankets!

I watch you, my sister, once again with your little treasures around you, only this time, there is only one little one.

Aaah, here comes another bait. What bait! What a mountain of a woman! She parks her mammoth of a car, which occupies two parking spaces and one tyre comes to sit on your wooden legs.

"Mama, Mama, mpayo akokulya..."

The huge lady is wiggling her fat behind out of the car, clutching her leather handbag more tightly. She is now walking towards you and I can see lots of smiles hidden behind your tears. She is swinging her buttocks carelessly, clicking her high heels on the tarmac pavement noisily. The strong January wind blows her slit-skirt this way and that way, revealing pink knickers. She stops to remove her shades, then dips a meticulously manicured hand, with fingers littered with gold rings, into her leather handbag and comes out with a blue handkerchief.

"Mama...Mama..."

"Oh these beggars!" She screws up her nose and quickly scurries past you. She is late for a meeting, my sister. She has to attend that important meeting the huge banner is announcing at the Sheraton Hotel: 'Laying Strategies For the Plan of Action and Celebrating the Achievements of the Fair Gender in the New Millennium'.

I watch you, my sister, as your final bait for the day approaches. Eeeh, a white man, this time. Once again, your eyes are full of those bottomless smiles, your song louder...

"Muzungu, Muzungu, mpayo akokulya..."

The *Muzungu* looks at you, that plastic crack-of-a-smile face. He tightens the hold on the papers under his arm and almost breaks into a run. But the little one is on his heels, tugging at his white trousers and this time, he actually runs, and keeps on running until he is in the safety of the Grand Imperial Hotel.

What a world, my sister! I wonder what keeps you going. What keeps you so alert, my sister? I need not ask, for the answer is in your eyes: the smells. The strange floating smells from the world's cuisine, mixed with the stench from the little one's latrine, mingling with the strong smells of the contents of the disposed rubbers strewn carelessly near your home by impatient night lovers...

Vengeance of the Gods

Beatrice Lamwaka

"Now that she is dead, I must deal with her spirit so that my children and I will not be affected by that butter-wouldn't-melt-in-thy-mouth witch," muttered Lalobo as she looked around to make sure nobody was watching. She had to slide the feather from the middle of her thighs in such a way that no one would guess what she was doing.

She slouched towards the newly cemented grave of her co-wife, *Min Okello* (mother of Okello). "She thought she deserved everything, and I, like a dog, was to just watch," she said loudly to herself, scratching her kinky hair. "I have children, too, but they have deserted me." She sniffed and added with a sneer, "Her children buried her like a princess, a lavish funeral. Let's see who wins, if not I, mother of them all."

She glanced at Otto, who was too drunk to even tell his hands from his legs, let alone realise that he had defecated on himself. Lalobo turned away in disgust and hissed, "I had to destroy him: he spoke too much. I am not sorry about it." She let out an ear-piercing demonic laugh and added, "He ate it in his food, that bull! I, Lalobo, waste no time on people who stand in my way."

Not bothered by a soul, Lalobo parted her legs to remove the Malibu stork feather. The medicine woman had instructed her to keep it in between her thighs till the afternoon of the eve of *Min Okello's* last funeral rites. She pulled it out easily, since she wore no knickers, and buried it in the mound of soil next to where the deceased's head was supposed to be facing. Just like the medicine woman, Acen, had instructed her.

Min Okello had died of the swelling of the stomach, coupled with a strange ailment called *two rec* believed to have come from Sudan. This disease normally left its victim with a scaly skin and a mouth producing rotten substance resembling dead maggots. Her children, who lived in the capital city, Kampala, took her to all the hospitals there but the doctors could not diagnose her disease. Even Doctor Smith Clarke, the white specialist in strange African diseases, shook his head in defeat and referred them to the local medicine men. They at last found a medicine man who seemed to know the disease and how to treat it. But Lalobo's intrusion and supervision made him leave an irritated man. Efforts to bring him back were futile.

Lalobo flattened the earth carefully to hide the feather, which was to put *Min Okello's* spirit at rest. This was to stop her from taking revenge from the other world. Contented that the last ritual was complete, Lalobo decided to visit Acen on her way to the spring. Lalobo had no friend in the village; Acen was the only person she could confide in. Most women hated her. It was rumoured in the village that she had got her husband, Latim, through witchcraft.

Acen was a frail looking woman in her thirties. Her ears were enormous like a rabbit's. She had given birth to four boys who had all died at barely the age of one. What perturbed people was that her husband did not chase her away, neither did he hurl insults or derogatory remarks at her. He instead resorted to getting more wives. Poor Acen could not complain, for she had no children of her own.

Acen was now seated under a tree. As Lalobo approached, she could see that Acen had just shaven the sides of her head, leaving just enough room for two rows that stood majestically in the middle of her small head. This was a new hairstyle for sure.

"What do you want now from me, you wretched woman? Haven't you killed enough people already?" Acen asked Lalobo jokingly, as she walked towards her.

"Enough is never enough," Lalobo said and laughed.

"Then you have come for more killer charms, eeeeeh?" Acen asked.

"Nooooooo," replied Lalobo. "I have come to share my happiness with you. Don't you know what our people say, that one hand does not open the vagina? Ha ha ha," they both laughed like young girls.

"You woman and your dirty mind," Acen said. "Is that the best saying you could have used?"

"I am not the composer of proverbs," Lalobo said.

"I see. So if you want me to share your happiness, where is the cock?"

"Next time," Lalobo answered, looking at the mat. Acen got the signal and like a good mannered child, she moved away a bit to allow Lalobo room to sit. A worried look appeared on Lalobo's face. "Are you sure that I am a free woman? Without vengeance to worry about?" she asked.

"Have I ever promised you air, tell me, have I?" retorted Acen.

"You know I killed *Min Okello* out of jealousy. She was a good woman. Even if she had sons and I, on the other hand, was cursed with girls whose bastards fill my house, that was no reason to kill her, you know," Lalobo said, worried. "My worry, my friend Acen, is that the gods may turn against me."

"You see, that is what I was worried about. Why? Why?"

"Why what?" Lalobo asked, opening her palms.

"You have reported yourself to the gods. When you commit a crime like you have, you never say it aloud because the gods are always listening. Now they know you are a killer."

"Oh god Lagooro of my forefathers, what am I going to do?"

"Don't worry, my dear friend, we can also deal with the gods. But this time you have to bleed money, because we need a virgin bull, a white goat, water from the middle of the lake, a root of the *kituba* tree, a..."

"Please do not continue," Lalobo interrupted. "Where in the world do you expect me to find a virgin bull and all that? You will soon tell me to bring a fresh head."

"You must finish what you began. Water does not flow backwards."

"You said the feather would be the last. Now where are all these virgin bulls, white goats, tree roots and whatever else going to come from?"

"Woman, you never finish with these things."

"But..."

"No buts; just do as I say."

"I cannot afford it."

"It is not about what you can afford. Just do as I say in two days. You never know what these scorned gods are capable of doing."

"I came here to celebrate, not..."

"Celebrate after killing an innocent woman! What do you expect after you and your big mouth couldn't keep quiet about your deeds."

"I am confused, are you against me?"

"It is not about taking sides. It is about what you have done. You killed an innocent woman and I helped... oh no! I didn't say it. Listen carefully, Lalobo, do as I have told you and within two days. Excreta is dealt with while it is still fresh."

"Fine. I thought you we were supposed to side with mortals, not spirits. But I was wrong, very wrong."

"Just do as told."

"Let me leave your sight before you add a yellow sheep, a blue hen or a wingless eagle to the list." She stalked away angrily and left wondering where on earth she would find all those things.

Lalobo was now faced with a dilemma and needed to be alone. She knew that back home, guests for *Min* Okello's last funeral rites must have begun arriving. She tried to hurry to the spring to get the water she should have got hours ago but her legs felt as if heavy logs were tied around them.

At home, the relatives had started arriving. *Min* Okello's children came in cars with loads of things as if it was a party, Lalobo thought resentfully. She glanced at her stepdaughter Adong, who was a replica of her mother *Min* Okello. Adongo ran towards her stepmother and hugged her passionately. She loved her very much, though Lalobo treated her coolly, making her feel like a child caught licking sugar. But that did not bother Adong in the least: Lalobo would always be her mother.

"Mother, I am happy to see you! How are you?" Adong greeted Lalobo.

"I am fine. You no longer come to see us," Lalobo complained.

"I have been busy, mother."

"Don't worry, my daughter, we will survive."

"I will come and see you again, I promise."

"My daughter, I have a big problem. I don't have any money. I tried to brew local beer but it was too dilute and nobody bought even a tot. I need money desperately."

"Don't worry, mother, we will arrange everything."

No, I need something for the pocket."

"Don't worry. Everything is under control."

Seeing that her daughter was determined not to give her money, Lalobo walked away. She had to get another prey, but wherever she went, everyone turned her down. This sent the villagers talking. Lalobo was the kind of person who would not even beg for salt from the neighbours. "Perhaps something is amiss," they conjectured. One woman even said, "Lalobo is not herself these days." Sometimes she made a mistake and asked the same person twice for money, giving a different reason each time.

That night, Lalobo was awakened by a terrible dream. She dreamt that she was being bitten by babies who said the gods had sent them as their agents and told her the worst was yet to come. Lalobo quickly got out of bed. She had to get money this time by all means.

"Morning, mother," Adong greeted her.

Bad omen, Lalobo said to herself silently. Then loudly, "Morning." Why does she have to look like her dead mother!

Lalobo walked towards the villagers who were flocking in. Most of them came for the food and the local brew, *arege*. The young girls were doing most of the work. Bored, Lalobo had nothing to do but greet the villagers and watch what was going on. The compound was extremely busy. People were fetching water, bringing firewood, others bringing all sorts of food.

The elders were seated outside on low stools. They drank beer from gourds and spoke in low voices as they waited for the medicine man, Chan, who would fetch the spirit of *Min Okello* from the unknown place to be questioned about her welfare.

Chan arrived late in the afternoon with a group of assistants, all dressed in brown cow skins and *bomo*, a creeping plant. He wore a hat made of feathers and adorned with beads, cowry shells, claws of birds and snakeskins. On reaching *Min Okello's* hut, he trembled like an aspen in the wind. This was an indication that her spirit was disturbed.

Lalobo was frightened but remembering what measures she had taken against such an eventuality, she felt calm again. In her mind, she even had hatched a plan to distract

Chan if anything went wrong. Inside the hut, a stool was given to Chan to sit on, while the assistants rattled the gourds to the family members and the elders who had joined them. Then Chan began a familiar song to which everybody chorused a response as they clapped their hands. Chan danced, throwing his legs here and there, rapping, cursing, appealing to the unknown. Suddenly, Chan began speaking in *Min Okello's* voice.

"I am chained, set my spirit free." *Min Okello's* voice spoke.

"By who?" the elders asked.

"She," the voice spoke again.

"Who?"

"Lalobo, my co-wife."

Chen trembled, sent a cataloguing gaze around while everyone stared at Lalobo. She sniffed, got up but was shoved down by the assistants. Chan got up, walking in the same springy way *Min Okello* used to, prancing from one corner to the other. Lalobo, scared that Chan, now possessed by *Min Okello*, was aiming at her, fled from the hut. People got out and scrambled after her, leaving Chan and his assistants.

"She killed *Min Okello*. Get her!" somebody screamed. Everybody ran after Lalobo, hitting her with stones, saucepans and potatoes as she ran. Complete anarchy had taken over.

Lalobo fell down heavily but people were still coming after her. They had cassava sticks in their hands that they had uprooted from a nearby garden. Some strong men carried big stones all of which came crashing down upon her body.

"Spare me! Spare me! Let me explain," Lalobo cried out.

But nobody could hear her now. They were all thirsty for blood and blood was what they would settle for. "Kill the sorceress, kill the sorceress," they chanted. Children, too, joined in the stoning and chanting as if it was a game of dodge the ball. Soon, the stoning and chanting died down. What was left of Lalobo was a horrifying sight of blood, weapons and flesh mixed in one messy heap. Everybody turned away. Nobody said a word. Their faces reflected the horror of what was left of Lalobo.

The Leopardess

Rose Rwakasisi

"Ted, Ted dear," Anna called from the children's bedroom.

"Yes, madam," Ted responded. As usual, he was not sure of what to expect from his sister-in-law. Sometimes she was welcoming and at other times hostile to him. Anna

suddenly appeared in the sitting room, vigorously wiping her delicate hands with a hand towel.

"Ted, you are a man now, even if not a better man than your brother George," Anna started with a funny smile.

"Eh, well," Ted responded, cautiously.

"What do you think about Jane—speaking as a man, if course? Is she really beautiful?" Anna inquired seriously.

"Well..." Ted said again, with a tentative smile. "Well-uh-uh-mmm, as it is often said, 'Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder'."

"Surely what does your brother see in her?" Anna asked. "Though she looks younger than her age, everybody knows the woman is beyond four decades! If he had fallen for a young girl, I would have been ready to face the competition. I would have understood; but this old woman, men can be so blind!"

"Madam, have you forgotten the old saying that what attracts a man to an ugly woman is always hidden from the beautiful one, like you," Ted said, his eyes critically studying her. Anna was embarrassed by the message in his eyes. She decided to go to her bedroom and later came back with a ruffled photograph of Jane in a swimsuit.

"Look at her photograph, perhaps you can judge better when looking at her," Anna said as she put Jane's ruffled photograph on the table and continued to iron it with the back of her left hand. "Look at her! See the wide chimneys called a nose, those wide flat lips and the short forehead! And tell me, where does the beauty reside?"

There was a long silence as they both studied the photograph, one critically and the other with amusement. Ted almost blurted out something but he stopped himself in time. When he stole a glance at Anna's face, he saw a huge tear about to drop. He remembered the many parcels and letters he had carried from George to Jane's executive flat and he was filled with remorse. But he was also very pleased to see Jane shedding tears. He could clearly remember how he used to cry of hunger when he was in primary seven. If his classes went beyond six, he would run to her flat only to find the house-girl cleaning the supper dishes. There would be no supper left for him. That was the trying time when George had left him to keep an eye on his young wife while he was doing *kyeyo* in Japan. Whoever knew that one day, I, Ted, would be a respectable man and Anna would get her punishment, he thought.

Suddenly, Ted looked up. Anna blinked her eyes. She looked scared, and very unhappy. She looked desperately at Ted for a solution. "I fear old George thinks heaven of her," Anna confided in Ted.

"But how can he?" Ted said with exaggerated concern in his voice. "Perhaps he is deceiving you to make you jealous. How about that?"

She smiled as she licked some tears from her upper lip. "I hope so," she said. "I really hope so."

"Don't you trust George anymore?" Ted asked.

"Sometimes I do, but sometimes he does things that make me feel foolish. For example, there is tomorrow's wedding at Namirembe Cathedral. He is the best man and also responsible for the invitations. Only wedded couples were invited, I was told."

"Fortunately, I am not married. And between you, sis and me, I am planning to remain a bachelor for the next one hundred years," Ted interrupted her.

"But you must come. George is the best man and he asked me to go with you. But remember to leave when the party is about to end. I must return with George. Though only wedded couples are invited, I will not be surprised to see that leopardess, Jane, march in. She never misses big parties! That woman!" Anna said, as she struck the table with her clenched delicate fist. When she looked around, the table was decorated with rivulets of soda from Ted's glass.

The church service was superb. The Archbishop himself officiated at the ceremony. All the big names in town were present. Ted almost did not mind the ordeal of standing beside the woman he abhorred at the cocktail. If she was the price he had to pay to rub shoulders with the cream of society, perhaps it was worthwhile, he thought.

They were all merry, laughing heartily till the 'leopardess' walked in. Her face lacked classic beauty, but her enchanting smile was worth millions of shillings. She had a terrific figure and wherever she passed, men gaped and women cursed. For this occasion, she was dressed in a short-sleeved, tailored cream-coloured dress. No necklace, no decorations; just a simple dress was all she needed to steal the show. Like a house snake, she glided silently to the side of her late brother's widow, who was standing near the entrance unaccompanied. "Enjoying yourself, sister?" Jane asked.

"Oh, yes thank you."

With a mischievous smile all over her face, Jane said to her, "I know I am not wanted here by everybody present, but, since I am here, I will try to make the best of the occasion."

"But I want you here. As a matter of fact, thanks for coming. I was feeling terribly out of place," Mary said warmly.

"No, not even you. I embarrass you among your moral friends."

"Stop that, Jane. You know I lost all my friends when I lost him. It's only you I can count on now," Mary said sincerely.

"Now, listen to me, old pussycat," Jane said to her, "I came here uninvited." When she got no response, she asked, "Are you listening to me?"

Like one awakened from a long dream, Mary jerked back. Then she confessed to Jane, "No. I was listening to the mother of the bride. I was imagining what it will be like when

my time for speeches comes. It is mainly during ceremonies like this that I miss your brother most." She looked up as tears gathered in her eyes.

"Stop that and remember always 'to cross the river when you reach it', as he used to say to us," Jane admonished her.

"Yes, yes," Mary agreed. A teardrop escaped. She wiped it with the back of her hand.

"Now listen to me, sis, and stop being a sissy," Jane went on. "I came uninvited, but I came because a woman rang me and provoked me. I have come to show her and hers how bitchy I can be when someone dares to cross me."

"Jane, don't use such language," Mary begged. "Somebody might hear you. Don't give people reason to say more bad things about you. You know how much it hurts me when I hear so much rubbish fabricated about you." Jane gave her a sweet smile and walked away to mix with the crowd. Mary mused about how sweet Jane could be to her and so spiteful to others.

Jane was like a magnet. All eyes turned to her. From somewhere, a short, lean, tough-looking little man accosted her with a glass of wine. She brushed the glass away with her hand as if by accident and it fell, splashing wine onto the nearby guests. As if to save the man from any further embarrassment, Jane took his half-full tumbler of beer and gulped it. Then she walked on. Very soon she was the centre of attraction. Even the eyes of the bridegroom were riveted on her. The wedding ceremony had turned sour.

Then she beckoned to the manager of the Fathers' Union Bank with her left middle finger. The fat bank manager with an extended stomach zig-zagged his way through the crowds to her side in record time.

"Take me out of this place. Take me out before I cause a scene," Jane commanded him. The two disappeared. All the women sighed with relief to see her back. The wife of the bank manager disappeared to the ladies' room to adjust her make-up. The lucky ladies shared her grief silently. All the men felt cheated and lost their mood for the party.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the bride and bridegroom are going to cut the cake. You are all requested to stand up and clap for them," the Master of Ceremonies announced.

Everybody stood up, clapped and laughed in relief. Another announcement soon followed, "The Best Man, Dr. George, is wanted outside in connection with a patient he operated on yesterday. He is requested to go outside for a few minutes of consultation." George went out but whom did he find waiting for him near his car!

"George, don't panic. I am the patient. I need a prescription," Jane said, looking very serious.

"You bitch," George hissed under his breath. "But Jane, I am the Best Man, how could you interrupt the party like this!"

"How could I have known you were busy? You did not invite me."

"But Jane..." he pleaded.

"Because I am not wedded, so I have to be locked out of society?"

"No, but be fair, at least this once."

"Make your choice today! What time do you pick me up?" she asked him as she eyed him like a leopard about to spring upon its prey.

"But, Jane, stop being unfair. You very well know that I am a married man. I have duties to perform in that respect. One of them is driving my wife home after the After Party," George said firmly.

"Tonight of all nights, she will go home alone like I always do," Jane retorted. Then she added, "At midnight, I will be waiting for you near the Post Office." Then she marched away, swinging her behind with exaggeration.

"Okay, see you then," George addressed her back. He walked away feeling as if a bucket of ice-cold water had been poured over him.

As soon as she reached her car, Jane rang another guest at the same wedding party. This one had no qualms about leaving his wife stranded. "Meet you at eleven p.m.," he agreed. They spent the rest of the weekend at the Collins Hotel.

Before the party ended, George explained to his wife that he had a patient in serious condition to attend to at the hospital. Feeling victorious, she kissed him goodnight and walked to a special-hire taxi which dropped her at their posh Kololo residence.

When George looked in the parking lot at midnight, Jane's car was not there. He instead found a note on the side mirror of his car telling him that she had changed her mind about meeting him.

"That bitch!" he cursed. He put the key into the lock and opened the door. He then lingered out for a while wondering where to go.

When he woke up twelve hours later, he was in a hospital bed. He was told that the force of the explosion had thrown him a safe distance away from his car. Who had planted the bomb under his car, the police wondered. George was scared when he was told how he had narrowly escaped death. He dared not speak his thoughts out loud.

She sent a bouquet of flowers and a card to him at the hospital. The card read, "The leopard skin you wanted is too expensive for you. Somebody else has bid higher. I believe the god she prays to answers her prayers. Lucky her. Bye and wishing you a quick recovery."

End of a Journey

Waltraud Ndagitjimana

Everything was still at rest when the faint morning light turned grey over the distant bare Ntungamo hills. Only here and there an early bird stirred and a hesitant chirping could be heard. It would not be long before the first rays of the sun pushed away the darkness that had lain over the land, covering all its misery and poverty like a heavy dark blanket. The land lay still, silent and enduring. It waited for the end of fear and torment, torture and death.

The woman pulled the threadbare blanket up to her thin shoulders for more warmth. She was shivering again. "I must get up," she said loudly. Her weakened body felt every mound of the mud floor through the thin mattress. Slowly, wearily, she turned herself, mindful not to disturb the little boy sleeping peacefully beside her. The boy moved just a little, turning his head on the flat pillow, his curly dark hair damp from sleep. Today he would not go to school—today they would leave home.

She looked around the small house. It was not much of a home, anyway, only a shaky table and two rough chairs. Her mattress was placed behind an old curtain in a corner next to the Blue Band carton where she kept her clothes. Yet these four walls had given her shelter and a little comfort for many years. Through the cracks in the shutter of the small window, she had watched the heavy army trucks of the different regimes roar past on the road below. Here, she had barricaded herself behind the door, when a gang of uniformed men had approached her house. Maybe they had been put off by her all too humble hut, only to kill her neighbour and his wife, leaving the children screaming in horror at the sight of the mutilated bodies of their parents. The woman's fingers tensed and the hollow feeling in her stomach returned whenever she remembered the scene of desolation. Insecurity was all round them, death had become a major part of their life.

At the final rooster call, she slowly turned the key in the door, picked up her bundle of clothes and took her son's hand. She breathed heavily. She had little strength left in her and every little movement seemed to cost her so much effort, so much will and energy. The boy hopped along the narrow path, his bare feet hardly touching the ground and paying little attention to his mother. The grass was still wet from the morning dew and it left small cool droplets on the boy's legs. He seemed to have no worry in the world as he rushed in excited anticipation towards the asphalt road. When he stopped suddenly, he heard his mother's laboured breath and saw her coming unsteadily down the hill. Her eyes looked bright and seemed to have lost the dullness of the previous months. Sometimes he could not understand her painful twists and little moans that seemed to have taken her over completely. She did not smile so often any more. He jumped down the last metres of the path and sat by the roadside, his foot drawing irregular circles in the sand.

"Where are we going? I am hungry," he said in a matter-of-fact-voice that was not going to betray the excitement he felt. He had never been anywhere far from home.

"I shall buy you some cakes on the way," the woman said, ignoring the first question. The boy seemed satisfied with the answer, the prospect of some succulent cakes making him hum a tune. Behind him, his mother sat down heavily on a mound of earth. She had tied a colourful scarf around her head. Her eyes seemed too large in her thin drawn face. She was looking at her hands, then rubbing the palms together as if to give them some comforting warmth.

From the distance, the boy heard the rumbling of the bus. As he jumped up excitedly, he saw it crawling up the hill like a huge caterpillar. First he only caught a glimpse of mattresses and other odd pieces of furniture tied onto its top, and swaying precariously as it rounded a bend. The noise increased as the old vehicle drew nearer. With screeching brakes and a loud puff, it stopped right next to its prospective passengers.

"Kabale - Kisoro" said the small wooden board behind the screen. The boy looked at his mother who hesitantly picked up her bundle, then halted a moment, drew in a sharp breath and gazed at the soft green hills around them. She seemed to be memorising this picture of early morning peace and tranquillity. Her eyes blinked as the top of her hand briskly rubbed over them as if to erase what she had seen. Then she straightened her back and followed her son who was already waving and calling animatedly inside. The conductor looked at her and asked where she was going. The woman mumbled her destination and slowly placed the fare in his outstretched hand and secured her ticket.

The bus started with a jerk and wound its way along the mountains, climbing each approaching hill with more and more effort. The windows were mud-splattered and the boy could hardly see anything outside. His eyes wandered around the bus, inspecting the passengers who seemed drowsy and exhausted. Some youths on the seat behind him were making crude jokes, repeatedly bursting into laughter. The boy strained his ears but he only caught the odd word in a language that was strange to him.

After what seemed only a short time, the bus stopped at the roadside. Fruit and cake sellers swarmed around noisily, advertising their goods. One of them came right up to the woman and she bought the cakes that the boy had been longing for. He closed his eyes when his teeth bit into the soft texture. This was a rare treat and he made small bites, letting them linger in his mouth, enjoying the sweetness. He counted the remaining cakes in the polythene bag, which he held tightly—only four! These he would eat later, the journey was still long, his mother had said.

As the bus pulled out of the little trading centre, the murram road became hard and bumpy. Innumerable potholes were filled with muddy water and every time the bus sank its tyres into one of them, it sent splutters up to the windows. Thousands of water drops formed small rivulets, which made their way to the ground again. The boy looked at their dancing and dazzling performance fascinated. But eventually, his eyes grew heavy and he fell asleep, his head lolling between the fringe of the cushioned chair and the window glass. The voices of the other passengers grew faint and distant, and their laughter to no more than a giggle. The woman dozed off, too, her head leaning towards her son.

Suddenly, the bus came to an abrupt stop. Lake Bunyonyi lay still and unruffled but from outside came the noise of agitated angry voices. Something hard hit the door and the passengers were suddenly roused from their sleep and looked up apprehensively. The boy's eyes searched for his mother's, who at that time was seized with a violent bout of coughing. Her eyes widened in terror as she fought to regain her breath. Her chest heaved, expanded, collapsed again only to be seized by a greater panic. In her agony, she pulled the scarf from her head and held it to her mouth, but not quickly enough. Her son gazed in terror at the bright red spot that coloured the scarf. As she slowly pulled in the life-giving air, tears of exhaustion streamed down her face. But she wiped them away fearfully, at the same time trying to give the boy next to her some confidence. She was only betrayed by the anguish in her eyes.

The other passengers had tried to divide their attention between the angry voice outside and the woman fighting for breath. Now they anxiously turned their heads towards the door again, which was roughly thrown open. The muzzle of a gun appeared first, slowly and menacingly. Then, as if he feared something from the passengers inside, a tall figure in a ragged uniform slowly came into view. The woman's heart stopped a bit as she gazed at the figure. Her son's hand instinctively found hers and she gripped it and held it tight.

"*Toka wote!*" the figure ordered. At the sound of the harsh tone, a small child started wailing. The brutal face turned in the direction of the small voice. Terrified by the hostile stare, the child's mother quickly pulled her breast from under her blouse and pushed the nipple into the eager mouth. As if waiting for appraisal, the mother looked at the man but he avoided her eyes, pulling his mouth into a small black line. He did not say another word but he lifted his heavy gun and gestured to the passengers to stand up and leave the bus. Slowly, the men and women stood up from their seats, hampered by the luggage heaped on their laps. The odour of sweaty bodies filled the stale air.

As the passengers left the bus, their bags and bundles were seized from them, some thrown violently back into the bus, narrowly missing bodies that were pushing forwards. The woman and her son slowly climbed down from the bus. She saw a group of not less than twenty uniformed men sitting under a cluster of trees. These were watching, with sadistic amusement, the passengers being herded from the bus warily take their position as far from them as possible.

"Separate the women, let us look at them," a cruel voice shouted. Seized by sheer terror, the women clung tightly together as they were separated from the men. A huge man, his uniform in tatters, looked at his kingdom of cruelty and fear. He lay his hand on the shoulder of a young girl and pulled her violently from the elderly woman she was clinging to. As the muzzle of the gun was pushed hard into her back, she lost her balance and let go. With an iron grip, the tall man dragged her behind in the shadow of a dilapidated unipot, grinning at his comrades as they cheered him.

The small group of women drew more closely together as two more uniformed men approached them. The woman felt a tight grip on her arm and knew that her fate was sealed, but she would not give in to this overpowering villain without a fight. Her son had also clutched her in total panic. "No!" she screamed. "I am not well and I am with my child, please...my son...here...you see." She stumbled in the muddy water and the brown liquid shot up and splashed her to her ankles as she pulled the bloody scarf from her pocket. "I shall make you sick..." As if she had waved a magic stick, the soldier pushed her roughly aside. She fell down, one hand still clutching her son's, the other holding the bloody scarf. The man looked at her in contempt and made his way back to the group of women.

"What did the man want with you?" her son asked fearfully, his voice trembling. As he watched, another woman, much younger in age, was hauled from the group and pushed roughly behind the hut. "We are lucky we didn't have to go behind the hut," he now said, quite pleased with himself.

From behind the hut, the woman could hear some subdued sobs of the young girl, then some angry voice and a slap. While the boy strained his ears to make out what was

going on in that secret place, his mother made an effort to involve him in some conversation. After some time, he grew tired and started looking around the place.

One of the women, not young any more, came from behind the dark shadows holding the young girl. She had put an arm around her, speaking softly. Two more women reappeared, one looking defiant, the other looking at the group of male passengers who seemed to be gazing in a void, their feet rooted to the ground. Others gave their shoestrings an aura of importance. Neither group spoke. A force that could not be argued with had taken possession of them. The only thing they could do now was wait.

Some of the uniformed rogues had entered the bus. From outside, one could hear boxes being broken, locks discarded. Whole bundles of clothes were flung through the windows. The woman saw her bundle thrown close to her feet. She was about to go for it when a strong hand of another woman held her back. "Don't push your luck. You have escaped once, let those things go."

Time seemed to stand still. Minutes dragged into hours and the people sat there like waste being washed ashore by a violent river. Anything could happen to them any time.

Finally, under a lot of cruel laughter, the loot was carried away and the air of oppression became lighter when, in a coarse voice, they were told to get back into the bus. Hastily, they scrambled up, pushing and shoving each other, trying to escape from the place of inhumanity and terror. None of them bothered about their property any more: everything of value had been taken, anyway. But the boy dived under his seat and triumphantly reappeared holding the polythene bag with his four cakes, some reduced to crumbs. His mother smiled and patted his head.

As the bus slowly and hesitantly drove off, a bullet passed above it, narrowly missing it. Derisive laughter followed as the driver accelerated. The ordeal was over but what lay ahead of them?

Outside, the evening came up slowly. The green hills receded in the mist, the clouds lay low and a cold wind came up from the lake. It was going to rain and they still had another two hours to go.

The woman felt exhausted and could hardly breathe. The anguish of the afternoon had taken its toll. Her chest was tight, her breathing very painful and her head thumped. The other passengers sat in silence, each trying to come to grips with what had happened, in their own way.

As the bus lumbered on, night took over the world. The rain fell slowly and the trees were now mere silhouettes in the deepening darkness. Gradually, the rough road descended towards the valley and somewhere near a mud track, the woman made out the Mutolere Hospital signpost.

"I have had enough problems for one day," the driver shouted through the bus. "Diesel is little and if we pass through the hospital, we might get stuck there before we reach Kisoro town. You must find your own way there now." The woman froze. She did not know anybody in the town.

"No," she said to herself, "he can't do this to me." But there was no pleading with the man. He stopped some good distance from the town near a beaten track. "Follow this path: it is just a few kilometres from your hospital," he said.

As the woman and her son stepped out into the night, they held on to each other. It was a very dark night and a sense of total loss overcame them. The rain had changed into a steady drizzle and a cold wind made them shiver. The woman pulled her son closer. Her teeth were chattering and an ice-cold grip held her throat. She tightened her grip on the boy, trying to give him the reassurance she herself needed so badly.

Slowly, they stumbled on in the darkness, hitting their feet on the sharp lava stones. There was no sign of life anywhere. They had no idea where they were and whether the direction they were taking was the right one.

There was not a soul near the roadside. All the little village bars that had in former days bristled with life and resounded with the happy laughter of men, had long closed now. These were times when one did not move about at night. Too much had happened lately.

Suddenly, the woman was shaken by another violent burst of coughing. She stopped walking and pressed her hands to her chest. As the bout shook her violently, she slowly slid onto a grassy patch. The hot sticky liquid filled her mouth again and she spat it out. She spat again and again until her breathing became shallow and she lay exhausted. The boy had started crying silently.

"Don't cry," she whispered. "Just give me a little time." He crouched near her and they sat holding each other. The rain had stopped but it was very cold. The woman knew she had to make an effort to stand up but she felt terribly weak. Her cheeks were burning and she felt an urge to just sit there and let things happen to her. The boy seemed to have fallen asleep next to her. So she sat and waited for a little while longer until she regained enough strength to continue. "Let's go," she shook him awake and he hastily stood up and felt for her hand. Together, they stumbled on in the darkness for what were just a few minutes but seemed like eternity to them.

They passed trees, their branches hitting their faces and thorns scratching their legs. The woman could hardly walk but she had to continue for her son's sake. Every part of her body was now aching, every breath a torment. She sat down again and again as the minutes of the dark night slowly ticked away. They had come nowhere near the hospital; they did not even know if they were moving in circles.

Suddenly, the boy saw a small flickering light in the distance. A ray of hope for them in this desolate night. The woman seemed to regain her energy but as they came nearer to the house, she again fell down heavily. "Go to the house and tell the people inside that we need help. Tell them that we need shelter and that we are looking for the way to the hospital..."

"Mother, I am scared. I don't know those people."

"Just go. You have to be a big boy now."

"Okay," the boy breathed, swallowing hard.

Slowly, he moved towards the house, repeatedly turning to glance back into the darkness. After only a few paces, he had lost sight of his mother lying there and he started to sob as he moved forwards. He felt his way forwards, guided by the flickering light until he was standing before the door. As soon as his hesitant knock was heard inside, all voices fell silent and the little gleam of light was extinguished. After a lot of whispering, somebody cleared his voice and asked, "Who is that?"

"It's me. I have come for help."

"Go away. We cannot help you." This time the voice was very loud, drumming in the boy's ears.

"Please help me. My mother is sick outside. We need someone to help us," he pleaded.

"You need to go to the hospital. Isn't that the story you told our neighbours two nights ago, and when they opened the door the soldiers came from behind the bushes and rushed in the house? You go and see what is left of that house and the people there."

The boy did not understand what the man was talking about. But from the sound of his voice, he knew he would not get any help from here. He tried just one more time, pleading and crying but there was only stony silence inside.

Slowly, he turned away, stumbling back into darkness, crying out softly for his mother. He heard her voice that was now barely audible. When he finally came close to her, he just sat by her side. She did not even ask what had happened at the house. She slowly pulled him towards her, pulled her sweater over him and the two lay motionless side by side. It was not until next morning that two early risers from the village found a young boy sleeping peacefully next to his dead mother.