

space of political and moral sanctuary, and to find a language and a new discourse perhaps or even an old one for that matter, that will not only enable us to understand the present but will assist us in our quest for a better tomorrow.

I will begin by talking about two historical events in order to make a few points that I wanted to make about this evolution of feminist consciousness in South Africa. When I looked at the literature and the various emails sent by the team for the colloquium, I chuckled because it is often taken for granted that in pre-colonial Africa there existed a homogenous identity, a cultural practice, forms of worship and belief systems amongst Africans. At the bottom of the hierarchy, it is believed, were women like myself or like my forebears. On the other side of the argument of course there are those who have a vested interest in power and in perpetuating the stereotypes and the myths, who in defence of Africa and its Africanness, deny any heterogeneity and internal contradictions amongst Africans themselves. On many sides of this discourse, including those in the dominant feminist literature deriving from Anglo-Saxon Europe which I think this seminar is also partly about exploring, is a deep silence on African women's multiple and complex locations, in the pre-colonial period as well as in the periods that came afterwards and in the present. On the other side, there also are those with vested interest, particularly men and patriarchal women, as we call them at home, who in defence of Africa, will then eschew anything that is so-called Western and talk of Western feminism as a foreign concept. Many of us of course do not know what Western feminism is, we do not know what kind of animal that is, because we believe that even Western societies themselves have never been homogenous, they continue to be completely complex and heterogeneous themselves. So we believe that often these complexities mirror each other. That is not to deny the fact that people from my part of the world, from my continent, have had particular experiences, especially in the colonial countries in the African continent.

I think that it is important to just perhaps touch therefore on something that appears to be a major shock to many people in South Africa: the fact that as early as in 1894, African women refused to carry passes, passports, documents of identity; as early as in 1894, before the state of South Africa was formed. And when the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, and black people were excluded and formed the

South African Native National Congress – which is the precursor to the present day African National Congress (ANC) – they too left the women out, the men left the women out, the black men left the women out. I think it is important to say, in order to see the complexity of identity and the ways in which African women have pushed for political space, that in 1913, merely a year after the ANC was formed, women took to the streets in Bloemfontein, even before Gandhi's Satyagraha movement, and took to the streets in ways that were much more militant, in ways that had never been seen before.

Historians reading this particular event have tended of course to look at what appears to be rather than what actually did happen. Interestingly, Julia Wells, who is seen as an authority on South African women's history, writes that the women who were in Bloemfontein, who resisted the pass laws, bore little resemblance to the majority of Black women in South Africa. They were urbanized, devotedly Christian and well educated. This is the literature that I have read, this is what I have been told and I look at it and wonder, "Where the hell did she get this from?" Because of course the actual reality is very different. For the women who were in Bloemfontein, the trigger point of the protest was a shiny new public bathhouse that was built for white women. Black women were doing laundry and the only way they could do laundry for white people was to use the bathhouses that were considered sanitized and hygienic enough. But in order for them to do that, they had to purchase passes. The images of that particular march are very important not only because it was the first march of its kind in South Africa, but because it talks of the intersectional, intersectoral, interracial, intergenerational and, most importantly for us in South Africa, multiethnic composition of that march itself.

As said, when the ANC was founded in 1912, women were left behind. They were not allowed to join but women were in fact voting in ANC long before they were members. Their influence was in fact not through their husbands or through pillow politics, they were simply going to the conferences and influencing and lobbying the political spaces as they wanted to.

This notion of breaking away from the movement that you are part of has always been part of the South African women's movement consciousness. In 1954, the Federation of South African Women was formed and it was the first multiracial, non-racial platform ever

formed, even before the trade unions in South Africa. Women who were from different groups, from different ethnic groups, from different sectors in terms of industry of the unions came together and formed the Federation of South African Women. You had communists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims and one of the lasting legacies of this union is the green and black church-like jacket that the African National Congress Women's League continues to wear.

And again, when these women marched in 1956, still refusing, long after the men had accepted the passes, 20,000 of them gathered in Pretoria. The urban legend says that the then Prime Minister jumped out of the window running away from the women. The beauty, of course, of the African oral tradition and story-making is that you can juice it and spice it up as you want, but it is often very close to the truth because the truth is that he did fly out of Pretoria on that day. He did not exactly jump out of the window but he did take a plane out of the city.

As we look at 1956, we again have to look beyond the appearances. For me, one of the most powerful images, one that is reported less and that very few people comment on, is the one of Lilian Ngoyi with her daughter talking to her as she was about to ascend the steps to the empire, if you like. Their foreheads are almost touching and you do not need the words to understand what the mother says to the daughter. But you understand that this is a moment that is pregnant with what is unexpected and perhaps what we do not know could have happened.

Interestingly, as people read and give various narratives of both the 1913 and the 1956 marches, the silences are much more eloquent than what is said. The continued invisibilisation of African women's experiences or women's experiences in general is something that we still live with. Nelson Mandela writes, in his own biography, that the Satyagraha movement helped him or helped his generation when they went to jail after the passive resistance because they took the stigma out of jail. And we're all like "Really? But sorry men, how about the sixty women who had been in jail, forty of whom had been without boots or shoes to court in the middle of the winter in Bloemfontein?" I do not think he intends not to acknowledge women, I think this is about what is said generally and has been repeated without thinking about whose voices are we silencing and whose history are we heroising.

The other part important to me in 1956 again is about images. It is an image of four young boys on the shoulders of black domestic workers. One of the interesting images is that of two boys astride the shoulders of these black domestic workers, and holding hands and playing with the other. There are various ways of reading this. You can say that they are so used to black women's bodies for an easy ride that they take it for granted. That is probably one aspect of it but it would be a very crude one. Perhaps you can also argue that these boys have become so comfortable that they can go into the space of a march that was banned by the government – it is said that all buses and trains were stopped – that perhaps the women themselves had a much more complex relationship with the parents of these boys than we would care to ever even understand.

Coming as I do myself from a family of domestic workers, with a grandmother who worked as a domestic worker for forty years, I find that the black/white relationship between women who live in the same domestic sphere is very complex. I think at some point one becomes the boss and the other becomes the support crash and I don't think it is necessarily always the same and linear relationship. I know that when my grandmother's boss, the madam of the house, was beaten up black and blue by her drunken husband during a drunken brawl, I know that it was my grandmother who applied the poultice and it was her who comforted her, not so much as the boss at that particular point in time but as one woman to another. So I think that even in that contradictory space that is deeply unequal, there may be some symbiotic sort of embryonic seeds of solidarity. But perhaps I am reading too much from it.

Looking now at those images of 1956, looking at Ruth First for example at the frontline, looking at how deliberate it was to have black and white women and Indians and coloureds together there to the point that it almost feels imposed and unnatural, at a time in South Africa when we are caught again in essentialist and sometimes ethnically chauvinistic politics, we are caught by these images so that we can understand that non racialism is not something you arrive at but something you actually bore towards.

So when you look at these images now, you see this complex history of otherness, of those who are inside and those who are outside and their ever shifting sense that is very much part of our history in

South Africa. South African women in general have defied compartmentalisation. There is no reason why Ruth First for example had any presence in the potato boycott. She was a Jewish middle class journalist who came from a very rich family. Everything else that we know tells us she should not have been there. There is no way that we can explain why an Indian woman would sell half of her dowry in order to make it to Pretoria to a protest march about a pass she was not asked to carry in the first place. I can imagine how the white supremacist mentality would say "This is not about you, this is about the dark ones". I think a part of it is about building a very solid ground of refusal even as we acknowledge difference and differentiations and inequalities amongst ourselves.

In many ways the 1956 march remains a very rich field to be harvested if we are interested in understanding how the history influences the present. And yet much of feminist reading and interpretation has been blind to its richness, we have been looking instead at questions such as whether they called themselves feminists, why they came out and said "We the mothers", as if to call yourself a mother in the face of a regime that calls you a girl when you are sixty is not revolutionary enough in and of itself. So, as we get caught in motherism versus feminism, what we do lose, even us as feminists, is the actual voicing and forms of self-expression that the women who were part of that movement in the 50s were using to define themselves. I think that harvest is a bitter sweet one, I think that if we allow ourselves to be imprisoned by academic canons, the feminist movements globally are actually not going to grow, because we are forever looking for that which we know. If it did not work in 1970, do you think it is going to work in 2008? And I think in many ways we are denying ourselves the potential for a very rich language and a very rich way of self-expression. So yes I agree that we do have to talk about women's insurgencies, but I would like to talk particularly in the context of African feminisms about feminist insurgencies because I think in my country right now, despite the fact that we have the most non sexist, non racial Constitution applauded by the whole world, that even legalises homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenerness, and any other form of identity that you might have, the truth of the matter is that I come from a country that commits hate crimes against lesbians right now as we speak.

We need to therefore understand where the hatred comes from, we need to name it for what it is and say it does not belong in a constitutional democracy, that this hatred is particularly taken in small white towns against black lesbians, black bisexual men and women, and black transgender people. There is an overlaying of race, gender, class and sexuality and right now with the bible thumping right wing that is emerging in South Africa, which is a very new phenomenon, every time they want to leap on any bandwagon, sexuality becomes the issue. So we are seeing in South Africa, in ways that we have never seen before, women's bodies being battlefields in ways that are very shocking. When you talk about crime breaking in your house, it is no longer sufficient to take the television, they have got to rape the wife and the children too. That is the world that I come from.

Presently South Africa like any other country in the region is affected by migratory patterns. There is no way that we can be insulated from the crisis that is happening in Zimbabwe, it is only normal that people would move from Zimbabwe to South Africa, after all they did build the wealth of South Africa. The shame of the country of course is that, suddenly, that which we wanted to push under the cover for all those years, that is the hatred of Africans, especially dark skinned Africans coming from other countries, has exploded in May in xenophobic acts and everybody from the president to others claim it is not xenophobia. Ok fine, what is it? So we have come up with all these terms like "negrophobia" to accept this deep-seated fear of imagination, of Africans living and coexisting with one another. In the letter that we received, we were told, "If you come from countries where you do not need to obtain a visa, please bring the letter of invitation because Western European governments are intolerant". I laughed because my own government is just as intolerant, so I could have sent that letter to you, except that perhaps being Swiss you would have made it through the passport controls. But I think that as migrants move in and out of our societies, we simply have to accept the fact that the boundaries were artificial in the first place and will continue to be so. But beneath that story of xenophobia, what remains untold are horrifying numbers of girl children, who are left alone, who have been caught up in the net of transactional sex in order for them to survive and not to leave South Africa, to go back to their countries of origin. We have no idea how many they are, we are

even afraid to ask, in case the picture is actually much more horrifying than we think.

What is interesting though is that even in migrancy, women still refuse to be put in neat boxes. So we study migrancy and human trafficking, people who are fleeing from economic distress, from war, and then we meet quite a substantial number of Africans who are just in South Africa because they just want to have an experience of travelling. And that defies any kind of logic and when you say, "Wouldn't you just rather be in your country?", they reply, "No, I will just go to the next country". So we have to be humbled by the fact that unless we do have a conversation with people and ask them what shapes them, what informs them, we are simply going to have policies that are way off the mark

I have told you a lot about the problems in South Africa, there is no need for me to tell you what is good in South Africa. You know that, you know about our political representation, about our Constitution, so I would much rather talk about these grey and dark areas. Not to deny the successes that have been made in the past fourteen years, but what preoccupies us right now is the fact that even the political movement from which I come is a threat to the feminist movement. So the question that I would like to pose is how to reclaim the spaces that we have created in the first place, so that the agenda and the freedom are not completely hijacked. It is a contested space, it always was, but how do we reclaim it? How do we ensure the longevity of the Commission on Gender Equality that I chair and that is a Chapter Nine institution enshrined in the Constitution? How do we ensure that whoever comes into power is not going to have a majority giving him – the him could even be a woman there as most of them have become so patriarchal in their outlook – the possibility to use the simple tactic of numbers and scrap these institutions that he thinks are problematic? So I think that it goes back to where we started, that we have to go back to history, that we have to go back to that very uncomfortable thing which is called mobilization. And if we have to do it again, I think we have to do it smarter, we have to do it in ways that give people an acknowledgement of the power that they have, that feminist epistemologies are more powerful when they are in fact informed and when knowledge is derived, produced and consumed by those to whom it is directed to liberate.

Féminismes en Afrique occidentale? Prise de conscience et luttes politiques et sociales

Fatou Sarr

Le thème de ce colloque nous permet de partager les fruits des recherches que nous menons depuis quelques années sur la situation des femmes africaines, leurs rapports avec les hommes et les luttes sociales et politiques dans lesquelles elles se sont impliquées. Cette communication revient sur une vision véhiculée par les travaux des Occidentales et même des Africaines, tendant à considérer les femmes du continent comme des objets manipulables entre les mains des hommes. Elle essaie d'abord de restituer la place des femmes dans les sociétés africaines traditionnelles et de montrer comment le modèle colonial a consacré le recul de leur statut et a renforcé la domination masculine. Elle revient ensuite sur les luttes politiques et sociales menées par les femmes dans leurs espaces sociaux avant l'avènement de la colonisation, ainsi que sur la manière dont elles ont tenté de faire face au modèle de domination masculine et coloniale de l'envahisseur. Enfin, elle montre que même si la période post coloniale a accentué l'écart entre les hommes et les femmes, ces dernières n'ont pas pour autant baissé les bras. Des actions ont été menées même si elles ont parfois été méconnues, que ce soit au niveau local, national, ou à l'échelle continentale; y compris dans le domaine de la production de la pensée.

La place de la femme africaine avant la période précoloniale

Comprendre la place des femmes africaines dans la société précoloniale permet de saisir le sens du combat qu'elles ont mené contre le modèle occidental qui remettait en cause des acquis que leur conféraient leurs sociétés. Leurs positions sociales étaient justifiées par leur rôle au niveau économique, social et spirituel, mais elles pouvaient être aussi le fruit de luttes âprement menées.

Les données sur de grandes figures féminines à travers toute l'Afrique, fournies par les témoignages d'anciens voyageurs et les découvertes d'historiens modernes (Hadiza Djibo 2001) illustrent le rôle de premier plan joué par des femmes remarquables qui ont assumé dans certaines circonstances la direction de leur peuple, notamment dans des luttes entre États africains ou contre les invasions arabes et les conquêtes coloniales.

Chez les Songhay, on cite la Reine Weyza, qui selon Boubou Hama (1972) a été mentionnée expressément par Tarikh-el-Fettah, ainsi que deux autres illustres reines: Adama et Koddio, qui se succédèrent au trône de Kokoro (Djibo 2001).

Au Mali, Bikoun Kabi, Reine de Sanhaja Nono, aurait régné au milieu du XV^e siècle.

Au Nigeria, c'est à la Reine Haussa, Amina de Zaria, arrivée au pouvoir en 1476 que l'on doit l'introduction de la noix de cola. À la tête d'une armée de 20 000 hommes, elle a mené trente-quatre années de campagne militaire quasi ininterrompues, a annexé plusieurs cités et dominé Kano et Katsina.

Cette présence des femmes dans l'espace politique précolonial n'est pas un mythe. Elle est confirmée par le rôle joué par quelques unes, jusqu'au début de la conquête coloniale.

En Sierra Leone, en 1787, ce fut la reine Yamacouba qui céda le premier lopin de la presqu'île à une société anglaise. Deux autres femmes signèrent un siècle plus tard, en 1889, des traités analogues.

Au Ghana – actuel – la dernière personne à jouer un rôle de chef de résistance contre la conquête britannique, à la fin du XIX^e siècle, fut une femme du nom de Yaa Asantewa. Elle prit la place de la reine mère des Ashanti, quand cette dernière, Nan Afrane Kuma, fut déportée avec son fils, Prempeh Ier, en 1896 aux Seychelles. Elle organisa devant la