



## At Issue ezine

### At Issue ezine

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## Vol. 16 (January - June 2015) GENDER AND GENDER EQUALITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

### No. 1 - January 2015

#### Editorial: What do gender equality scores really tell us?

**By the Ezine Editors** To introduce the volume on women's empowerment, this editorial examines the rise in popularity of international gender rankings over the past twenty years. However, it remains important to recognize that there are vast differences in gender equality and how individuals experience gender across Africa. One's gender identity and associated gender roles differently influence one's opportunities and lived experiences. Ultimately, the aim of the volume is to examine the complexities of gender as experienced, constructed, and enforced.

### No. 2 - February 2015

#### Shifting roles: Girls and women in Boko Haram's strategic terrorism

**By Leslie Ngwa** This paper analyzes Boko Haram's modus operandi in Nigeria and Cameroon. The author examines the growing trend in Boko Haram's asymmetrical warmongering that increasingly involves women as a key element in their strategy. Both countries, and the international community must go beyond speechifying and barren activism, and sustain a proactive community-based strategy in dealing with gender-based violence in this war of attrition. Gender-based community action can pave the way for a stronger, women-led resistance in the fight against Boko Haram.

### No. 3 - March 2015

#### Mau Mau women and the struggle for justice in historical and contemporary perspective

**By Katherine Bruce-Lockhart** The Mau Mau Emergency, which lasted between 1952 and 1960, was one of the most violent flashpoints of Britain's exit from empire. Historians have long been fascinated with this dramatic episode in Kenya's history, but the existing scholarship has had been biased towards males in the Mau Mau movement. This paper will have two components. First, it will examine women's contribution to the Mau Mau movement and the gendered expectations that shaped their detention, as discussed above. Second, it will examine the role of women in shaping the collective memory of Mau Mau, and their efforts in the recent reparative justice cases that have called for financial compensation by the British for abuses against the Mau Mau.

### No. 4 - April 2015

#### Debating Gender in the Classroom: Black Consciousness and the Politics of Knowledge in South Africa

**By Shannon Morreira** Nearly 40 years after his death at the hands of apartheid police in 1977, Biko's message is still deeply relevant in post-apartheid South Africa. The black man: his dignity, his life, his pride. But what of the black woman? Is the absence of women in Biko's writing merely a product of the times in which he wrote that we can safely ignore from a more enlightened present, or is it something that needs addressing?

### No. 5 - May 2015

#### Struggles Over Space in a World Class City: Women Informal Traders in Nairobi, Kenya

**By Glennys Egan** Contemporary urban development strategies in Kenya can be characterized as promoting the city as a marketable product rather than tending to the needs of the urban population. Recent efforts to implement urban renewal in Nairobi's city centre have not only contributed to the erasure of informal activity, but have once again precipitated violence and corruption in a manner that is especially threatening to women traders. A "city of opportunity" will only be realized if access to urban space and the benefits of city life are offered to everyone.

### No. 6 - June 2015

#### Obstetric fistula harms women's dignity in Burundi



Murder at Sharpeville, 21 March 1960  
by Godfrey Rubens / CC Wikimedia

**By Jerome Bigirimana** Every year thousands of women may develop obstetric fistulas in Burundi. This disease imposes a form of social banishment on the women who suffer from it, unless they can access treatment. Treatment options are largely held up by a patchwork of dedicated individuals and organizations, as the government in Burundi does not address this public health issue effectively.

## What do gender equality scores really tell us?

by the Ezine Editors

According to the 2014 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), sub-Saharan Africa has the world's worst gender discrimination related to women and girls' access to resources and physical integrity. The OECD Development Centre's index, which ranks countries based on their social institutions, found that women in sub-Saharan Africa face barriers to access and control of land, property, and financial services. Furthermore, **40 percent of women** in the region have been victims of gender-based violence, and legislation on rape and domestic violence is lacking. After reading the results of the SIGI — and many other global gender rankings — one could contend that sub-Saharan Africa is one of the worst places in the world to be a woman. The reality, however, is more complicated.



Slogan on a wall in Kibera, a slum in Nairobi.  
Courtesy of Africa Renewal/ Zohra Bensemra 2011.

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### The rise of gender equality rankings



As the popularity of international gender rankings has grown over the past two decades (see Table 1 below for the complete listing of indexes discussed here), the headline-making lists have brought gender issues into the spotlight. Yet unreliable data and debate over how gender equality is defined and measured leaves global rankings limited in their ability to capture the complex impacts of gender on the lives of sub-Saharan Africans.

According to **The Economist**, global performance indicators that rank countries by combining related measures into a single

score are “enjoying a boom”. The magazine cites Judith Kelley of Duke University and Beth Simmons of Harvard University, researchers who study the impact of global indicators on policy, as attributing the growth of these global rankings to their use by governments, NGOs, and activists to promote and shape policy change.

Global gender equality indices have similarly grown in number since the first ones were introduced two decades ago. In 1995, tens of thousands of government representatives and activists met in Beijing to discuss gender equality and women's empowerment. Two weeks of debate led to the introduction of the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**, which listed 12 critical areas of concern related to education, the girl-child, and violence against women. That year, the UNDP set out to add a gender dimension to its Human Development Report. The result was the Gender Empower Measure (GEM) and the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI), which used data collected by the UNDP to rank countries in annual reports. The GEM used the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, the percentage of women in economic decision-making positions, and power over economic resources based on earned income to measure “whether women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decision-making” (United Nations Development Programme, 1995). The GDI on the other hand, is designed to measure gender gaps in life expectancy, education, and incomes.

Though the indices were pioneering at the time, the **1995 Human Development Report** acknowledged that the indices lacked other gender equality and empowerment

indicators. The report attributed the indices' shortcomings to the lack of internationally comparable data. Still, the indices have been criticized for measuring inequalities only among the elite and ignoring qualitative aspects of gender issues.

Since then, many other gender equality indices have emerged, each taking related but unique approaches to how gender equality, empowerment, and discrimination is measured. As gender rankings became more elaborate and introduced more indicators into the measurements, fewer countries could be included — African countries in particular were often left out. In 2004, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa introduced the first continent-specific international gender ranking: the **African Gender Development Index (AGDI)**. The index aimed to “better reflect the realities of women and men on the African continent, so as to assess the gender gap in each African country and to help governments improve their performance on gender equality and equity” (Economic Commission for Africa, 2011). To do this, the AGDI measured women’s rights and gender equality based on the level of implementation of key international documents. Though the 2004 pilot index only assessed 12 African countries, the 2011 AGDI expanded to include an additional 18 African countries.

In 2010, after 15 years of criticism, the UNDP introduced yet another global gender ranking, with the aim of remedying the shortcomings of the GEM and GDI.

The **Gender Inequality Index**, published annually, combines and expands upon the categories used in the GEM and GDI: reproductive health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment, measured by the proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and the proportion of adult females and males aged 25 and old with some secondary education; and labour market participation, measured by the labour force participation rate of females versus males 15 and over.

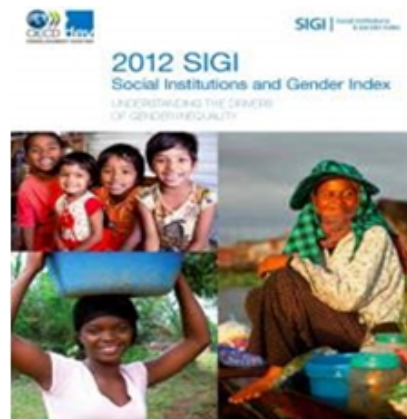
The UNDP’s new index intends to “measure the human development costs of gender inequality” in more than 150 countries (UNDP, n.d.).



Rebecca is training to become the first female mason in her community, in S. Sudan. Courtesy of Oxfam/ Laura Pannack 2012

In 2013, Europe followed Africa’s lead by introducing its first region-specific gender ranking. The European Institute for Gender Equality’s **Gender Equality Index**, targeted to EU member states, purports to take into consideration the criticisms of older gender indices by including indicators related to, for example, leisure time and unpaid work. The index, which will be updated every two years, measures indicators in six domains: work, money, knowledge, time power, and health. Notably, the index includes what is called “satellite domains” that are separate from a country’s overall score. These are intended to allow for the measurement of specific phenomena. The two in its first report were intersecting inequalities and violence.

### Accounting for differences between rankings



Front cover of the 2012 SIGI report, Understanding the drivers of gender inequality. Available at [genderindex.org](http://genderindex.org)

Yet even the subtle differences in what indicators are included and what are left out can lead to vast differences in the overall rankings. Take, for example, the central African country Rwanda. The 2014 SIGI gives **Rwanda** a medium score for discrimination in social institutions, one of 13 sub-Saharan countries to receive the score. As the 2014 SIGI included 39 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, this score put Rwanda above average in the region, but not among the top performers: South Africa, Lesotho, Madagascar, and Namibia. Compare this to the **2014 Global Gender Gap Report**, published by the World Economic Forum, in which Rwanda debuted at a remarkable **seventh place**, beating out countries like New Zealand, Germany, and Canada. South Africa, by contrast, came in at 18. Why was there such a big difference between the rankings?

The contrast mostly comes down to which data were used as indicators of gender equality and how they were weighted. In the SIGI, Rwanda did worst in the category of access to resources and assets. The SIGI found that despite legal rights to land and

property, negative attitudes towards women's land rights meant that women still face difficulties accessing land. Similarly, though there are no legal restrictions to Rwandan women accessing credit, in reality that access is limited. Rwanda's success, on the other hand, in the Global Gender Gap Report is primarily due to the political empowerment indicators. Rwanda ranks first in the world for the percentage of women in parliament and also does well for the percentage of ministerial positions that women currently hold. Access to land, property and resources, however, is not counted in the Global Gender Gap Report. In the SIGI, the percentage of women in parliament is included under the Restricted Civil Liberties category, one of five equally weighted categories, and thus carries far less influence than it does in the Global Gender Gap Report, which has only four equally weighted categories.

It's important to note that the intentions of the two indices differ, which affects what they count. Though both indices include a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures, the Global Gender Gap Report intends to highlight the gender-related gaps — rather than overall levels — in access to resources and opportunities with regards to outcomes. The SIGI, on the other hand, focuses on that gap as it relates to policies, attitudes, and practices.

What is included in and excluded from gender equality indices comes down to subjective judgements, which can substantially sway the results. Once a methodology is established, any changes related to new data, additional countries, or an evolved understanding of gender issues are difficult to incorporate as doing so inevitably affects the ability to make comparisons over time.

### The value of global rankings

Rankings are useful. What is measured is made visible and affects what is prioritized and funded. The data collected can be used to stimulate discussion, hold political leaders and institutions accountable to their commitments, and raise awareness around key issues, thereby helping advocacy efforts.

But rankings also have their flaws. BRIDGE, a UK-based gender and development research organization, points out that, "...while measuring change is often considered to be a technical exercise, it is also a political process." (Demetriades, n.d.). The Economist adds, "...choosing what to include means pinning down slippery concepts and making subjective judgments". Multi-faceted and complex concepts such as gender equality and empowerment are inherently simplified in the process of deciding how they will be measured.

The process is complicated by the fact that the data often simply don't exist, making more complex understandings of gender impossible to measure. The data, which often come from local governments and institutions, may not reflect the experiences of marginalized women and gender minorities who are often simply not counted. The data that do exist differ greatly in quality and are inconsistent, which can make comparisons difficult.

The need for better data was emphasized by United Nations Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for **Sustainable Development's report** released in November 2014. The report, which aims to inform the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals that will replace the Millennium Development Goals, noted that "[g]ender inequality and the undervaluing of women's activities and priorities in every sphere has been replicated in the statistical record". The absence of gender-based violence, for example, is a common criticism of many existing gender indices, and yet only about half of all countries report data on intimate partner violence. Further, data is rarely collected from women over 49, and there are little data available on the distribution of money or the division of labour within households, as well as the economic roles of women (IEAG, 2014).



Advocacy poster for Girl Child Network Worldwide.

"There is an urgent need to improve statistical systems to ensure the full mainstreaming of gender into data production, analysis and dissemination and increase the availability of gender statistics for national and international monitoring," said Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the **UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs's Statistics Division**, at a Gender Statistics Workshop in August 2014. This means avoiding gender bias in the collection of data and collecting data that specifically address issues that may affect some gendered parts of the population more than others.

In an article published by the **International Women's Development Agency**, Eleanor Boydell criticized the UN report and its proposals for not going far enough. A World that Counts, she writes, does not specifically call for data to be collected on individuals rather than households. "While the report speaks broadly about the importance of forms of data that provide information about all demographic groups and allow for disaggregation, its consideration of the gendered implications of areas and methods of data collection is limited," Boydell wrote. John Hendra and Eduardo Sojo argue in a **November 4, 2014 post on Devex** that non-monetary forms of deprivation must also be measured.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' statistical division is one of the organizations trying to improve the data. Recently, gender statistics experts identified 52 quantitative indicators, based on the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and 11 qualitative indicators of gender equality to guide the production and compilation of gender statistics in the future. As well, the UN's **A World that Counts report** named disaggregated data as a key principle for a data revolution in sustainable development. Data disaggregated by sex, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc., could be broken down and analyzed in complex ways, providing a far more comprehensive picture of gender equality and empowerment around the world.

International gender equality rankings, then, represent the evolution of the international development community's understanding of gender and gender equality. They are both an attempt to reflect the different realities experienced by people around the world and a statement of a shared ideal of what gender equality should look like. As data become more nuanced, so will the rankings — and vice versa. Yet, while rankings serve the purpose of mainstreaming gender as it is understood by international organizations, they will never provide more than a fragment of the reality in any given country or region.

### The aim of this volume

This is where the AfricaFiles' Ezine volume on Gender and Gender Equality in Sub-Saharan Africa comes in. The aim of this volume is to draw attention to some of the region's gender issues not visible in global rankings. As we have just five articles to do this, we have selected articles that examine issues from new angles, generate discussion, and explore lesser known case studies.

We will begin with an analysis of how Boko Haram, a Nigerian-based terrorist group, uses women and girls as a key element of its terror strategy. Next, we will share an exploration into women's contributions to the 1950s Mau Mau anti-colonial movement in Kenya and their role in shaping collective memory of the movement. Our fourth article will look at the insecurities faced by female street vendors in Kenya. We will complete the volume with a story from an anthropologist in South Africa about her students' reflections on gender bias in anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko's writings.

We recognize that there are vast differences in gender equality and how individuals experience gender across Africa. One's gender identity and associated gender roles differently influence one's opportunities and lived experiences. Ultimately, the aim of the volume is to examine the complexities of gender as experienced, constructed, and enforced. We hope you enjoy AfricaFiles' first — and long-overdue — volume dedicated to gender.

**Table 1 - Discussed indexes**

Name of Index - By - Year launched	Categories measured
Social Institutions Gender Index (SIGI) OECD 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discriminatory family code</li> <li>• Restricted physical integrity</li> <li>• Restricted civil liberties</li> <li>• Son bias</li> <li>• Restricted resources and assets</li> </ul>
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) UNDP 1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seats in parliament held by women</li> <li>• Female legislators, senior officials and managers</li> <li>• Female professional and technical workers</li> <li>• Ratio of estimated female to male earned income</li> </ul>
Gender-Related Development Index (GDI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life expectancy at birth</li> <li>• Adult literacy rate</li> <li>• Combined gross enrollment ration for primary,</li> </ul>

UNDP 1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>secondary and tertiary education</li> <li>Estimated earned income</li> </ul>
African Gender Development Index (AGDI) UNECA 2004	<p>Gender status index:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social power 'Capabilities'</li> <li>Economic Power 'Opportunities'</li> <li>Political power 'Agency'</li> </ul> <p>African Women's Progress Scoreboard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women's rights</li> <li>Social</li> <li>Economic</li> <li>Political</li> </ul>
Gender Inequality Index UNDP 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reproductive health</li> <li>Empowerment</li> <li>Labour market participation</li> </ul>
Gender Equality Index European Institute for Gender Equality 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work</li> <li>Money</li> <li>Knowledge</li> <li>Time</li> <li>Power</li> <li>Health</li> <li>Intersecting inequalities</li> </ul>

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## terrorism

by Leslie Ngwa

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### Introduction

“These terrorists slaughter our boys and abduct our girls to force them into slavery ... people should be made aware of the importance of being in a state of preparedness and make sure they acquire what they need to protect themselves...”

Mohammad Sanusi, Emir of Kano (who until earlier last year was also Governor of Nigeria’s Central Bank) In the wee hours of 15 November, 2014 Boko Haram fighters took advantage of a fall in water levels on the river separating Cameroon from Nigeria in the Makary district in northern Cameroon and seized two teenage girls leaving their parents in tears. Local tabloid L’Oeil du



Parents of Chibok kidnapping victims. Courtesy of Wiki Commons/ VoA, 2014.

Sahel recently stated that these girls have not been seen since. On 4 April, 2014 Canadian missionary Sister Gilberte Bussiere was taken hostage in Tchere in the Far North region of Cameroon. She was maltreated and later freed after a ransom had allegedly been paid (Cameroon Tribune, 2 June 2014). During a prayer meeting on Friday 14 November, 2014, the Emir of Kano, Mohammad Sanusi urged populations affected by Boko Haram’s activities to “acquire what they need” to protect themselves. Even though this was generally understood to refer to a call to arms, we could extend the call for reasons of analysis to involve a socio-political reawakening that would better prepare communities to deal with the terrorist activities of Boko Haram. These incidents, including the kidnapping of over 200 Chibok girls and numerous other unreported attacks on women, clearly show that women are unique and strategic victims in Boko Haram’s transnational terrorist activities.



Terrorist attack in Jos. Courtesy of Wiki Commons/ Diaricritico de Venezuela, 2014.

The situation has become even more dicey with the unleashing of what BBC reports described in August 2014 as the a new weapon of war – the female suicide bomber; fuelling concerns that Boko Haram’s insurgency has entered a more ruthless phase. Four of these female suicide bombers – all teenage girls, carried out attacks in Nigeria’s biggest northern city, Kano, last year and prompted many to speculate that Boko Haram had turned some of the over 200 abducted school girls abducted in Chibok in April 2014 into human bombs. Early last month, Boko Haram carried out a major attack in Nigeria’s Borno

State. This attack has been described by Amnesty International as the deadliest attack in the history of Boko Haram. Nigerian authorities claimed just 150 people lost their lives, but other sources put the figures at 2000 deaths. According to Jeune Afrique (No. 2819) UNHCR recorded 11,300 refugees arriving Chad from affected areas. Last month, a suspected female suicide bomber, Rokayatou Moussa was arrested in Dimako, a locality in Cameroon’s Eastern Region (Sama, 2015). If we add these realities to last year’s arrests in Katsina State of two girls aged 10 and 18 with explosive belts, France 24’s 12 December 2014 reports of the arrest of a 13-year-old girl with a suicide belt in the same region, the 10 January, 2015 attack in Maiduguri where a ten year-old girl detonated an explosive device tied to her body possibly by leading Boko Haram operatives (BBC/CNN/France 24 TV Reports), and the recent attack in Nigeria’s north-eastern city of Gombe by a middle-aged suicide bomber who detonated explosives killing herself and one soldier at a security checkpoint (Ola, 2014), it becomes very clear that female bodies have become not only battlefields but weapons in Boko Haram’s terror strategy. The presence of female suicide bombers is therefore a potent and deadly grand strategy that has led to the death of at hundreds of Nigerians and Cameroonians (going by Associated Press reports). There is therefore a pressing need for counter action at community, national, and international levels given that the impact of Boko Haram’s activities is multi-dimensional and has the potential of not only ensuring long-term destabilization of the region, but also geographically expanding the theatre of their terrorist activities.

### Critical Issues

Boko Haram's use of women as victims and perpetrators of terror has rocked the foundations of regional geopolitical decency. Allegations of weakness and irresoluteness have been levied against the Nigerian government. According to Foreign Policy (December - 2014), Nigeria's actions aimed at fighting Boko Haram over the last couple of years have been characterized by a gaping lack of the three Cs - continuity, consistency and commitment. The result of these weaknesses has been Boko Haram's success in creating a semi-permanent reality of their own in the Lake Chad region and its environs. It is therefore, safe to say that Nigerian authorities have botched the war against Boko Haram. Cameroon on the other hand has been arguably more effective in pounding Boko Haram and reducing its capacity to create havoc in its territory. This probably explains why Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau recently declared his intention in a YouTube video to create more havoc in Cameroon, a clear that the counterinsurgency activities of the Cameroon military have actually hurt Boko Haram. But with women as a new weapon in Boko Haram's arsenal, anxiety may be the new mood in this region, which is yet to become accustomed to the fact that women have become victimized perpetrators in the spread of terror.



The activities of Boko Haram and especially regional counterinsurgency efforts against Boko Haram have not been sufficiently reported and "securitized". According to subscribers to the Copenhagen School of securitization theory like Buzan et al (1998), 'security' is a both a speech act and a distinct social construct. It has consequences in the context of the anarchic international system in which we live. By securitizing a threat, stakeholders seek to move it beyond politics into an area of security concerns. The goal generally tends to use the legitimization of resources needed for dealing with the threat – in this case Boko Haram, or more specifically, the use of women in Boko Haram's terror activities. Boko Haram has arguably not been sufficiently securitized as a transnational threat. When securitization of Boko Haram has been high (through media reports and high-profile speeches/conferences) it has generally been late securitization. Early securitization, that is, setting the agenda on the war against Boko Haram much earlier would have been ideal. Instead, we now find ourselves with what I call "staccato" securitization, which could be understood as intermittent securitization as opposed to sustained securitization. That said, we must recognize that securitization of a threat like Boko Haram is not a solution in itself. It should be seen as a first step that leads to socio-political dialogue, because this threat, like many others, has its roots in the disenfranchisement of young affected young people, and the unwillingness of governments to communicate strategically with local populations.

Unfortunately, there has been little or no counter-narrative against Boko Haram's ideological positions. There is a critical need for the framework of public debate to be reshaped in order to accommodate a growing need for ideological warfare against Boko Haram's incoherent ideological positions. The organization claims it fights against western education, yet it uses the products of western education and western innovation such as western weapons and uniforms in its terrorist activities. It claims to be against western education, but uses computer technology – the fruit of western education and research, to carry out their propaganda activities. Boko Haram has turned the World Wide Web into a world wild web of inhuman propaganda and reduced the internet into a platform for denigrating women and girls. These inconsistencies are glaring. It is difficult to understand why its ideological positions are not being hit consistently in order to expose their terror-breeding mechanisms.

### **The Way Forward**





Cameroonian military operation against Boko Haram in Mayo-Sava Division. Courtesy of Leslie Ngwa, 2015.

When fighter jets from the UAE took part in airstrikes against the Islamic State in September 2014, they were led by female pilot Major Mariam Al Mansouri (Zraick, 2014). When the Taliban upped their game against girls attending school in Pakistan, they found a powerful response in Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani girl who has become an icon in the fight for access to education for every girl. Nigeria and Cameroon need a local Malala in the ideological battle against Boko Haram, and a local Mansouri in the counterinsurgency efforts against this terrorist organization.

Part of the problem with fighting the victimization of women in regional transnational terror activities in the region has been the absence of female icons and symbols that convey a counter-narrative through their life stories and courage.

According to figures published by Foreign Policy (December 2014), thirty five percent of Kurdish combatants fighting in Syria are women (approximately 15000 women). When Islamic State fighters swept through Syria and Iraq, Kurdish forces met them on the frontline. Among these forces resisting the advance of the Islamic State fighters were thousands of female combatants including those from the Peshmerga, the armed forces from Iraqi Kurdistan, and Syrian Kurdistan's People's Protection Units. Colonel Nahida Ahmed Rashid, a Peshmerga told PBS recently that the armed engagement of women in the fight against the Islamic State is not just to protect Kurdistan, but also to say that there is no difference between men and women. There is an urgent need for women to join the armed struggle against Boko Haram. This will not only be a sign of collective responsibility, but a major victory against those who have used distorted norms of patriarchy to promote gender inequality and demean women. In Cameroon and Nigeria, women need to step up to join the armed struggle in order to show not just that the battle for equality is a battle for the resources generated by society, but also that equality can be evidenced in the sacrifices each gender makes.

The Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau have more in common than just similar first names. They are driven by a desire to spread their chaotic vision and distorted values. Successes and failures in the fight against the Islamic State have seminal value in the fight against Boko Haram. Of course, this does not mean we can cut and paste strategies, but it means that lessons can be learned and implemented. The engagement of women in counterinsurgency efforts is one of those lessons that can be learned from the fight against the Islamic State and implemented in the fight against Boko Haram.

The increasing agency of non-state actors in warfare and terrorism in Nigeria and Cameroon cannot be addressed without the engagement of local non-state actors like local communities and civil society organizations, especially in rural areas. The Economic Community of Central African States recently trained its first batch of civilian experts at Cameroon's international war college in Yaoundé. These experts are trained in peace-building and the geopolitics of the sub-region. The recently trained experts are yet to be actively involved in the fight against Boko Haram. Of significant importance is also the fact that less than 10 percent of these experts are female. So while women disproportionately suffer the nefarious consequences of Boko Haram's terrorism and play a significant role in the perpetration of deadly terrorist activities, the response to gender-based and female-intensive acts of terrorism has not actively involved women in Cameroon and Nigeria.



A woman marches during a demonstration by civil society groups in Lagos, seven weeks after the kidnapping of 200 Chibok girls. Via FT/ Getty Images (fair use), 2014.



Courtesy of OSun Defender.org/ Demotix, 2014.

We must understand that Western geopolitical interests and local geopolitical interests are not necessarily similar. There are those who argue that sustained egregious action by Boko Haram has met with growing minimalism and retrenchment in U.S. policy; but even the French who have significant military presence in the region have not seen their presence act as a clear deterrence. Therefore, it can be argued that the U.S. and German approach of supporting counterinsurgency efforts through alternative means is potentially more effective. We, as Africans need to take

control of our destiny and stop complaining at every single opportunity about what the West is doing or not doing. Western military might and assistance alone will not help counterinsurgency efforts. Endogenous and community-led approaches like the engagement of hunters and vigilante groups in Nigeria has been seen to help (Carayol, 2005 p.30), and should be encouraged and supported. However, these key actors will need better training to fill the gap left by inefficiencies in police and military action within affected communities.

### Conclusion

Understanding the sources of radicalism and extremism is more important than ever before (Esposito, 2002). What we are witnessing with Boko Haram is nothing new and is certainly not an exclusively Muslim-world-inspired affair. The West must adopt a right versus wrong approach in a counter-narrative against Boko Haram, instead of an us-versus-them approach which appears to be the case right now. The reality may be different, but there is a growing perception particularly among Muslim populations that Western media have made the war against terrorism look like a war against Islam and its values. This is why the "jesuisCharlie" protests sparked anger and counter-protests in a number of African countries. This us-versus-them approach to dealing with terrorism is counterproductive. The approach needs to shift into an approach that focuses on condemning terrorism without appearing to create a culture clash. There is a gaping credibility deficit in the eyes of local populations as far as the capacity of stakeholders to ensure security of local populations is concerned, but local women too must step up and play a more active role by undertaking important courageous acts like informing officials about radicalization of their children as soon as possible.

Regional leaders need to tap into their common heritage in order to find endogenous soft-power-based approaches for dealing with this collective enemy. Boko Haram has succeeded to institutionalize uncertainty not only in Nigeria, but also in Cameroon and parts of Chad. The organization's deification of utopian ideologies continues to gain some traction in fragile communities where women have traditionally held roles as second-class citizens. You do not have to be a prophet of doom to fear massive disaster. But the worst can be avoided by actively engaging the female demographic, which makes up the most affected group in this new emerging era of sustained terrorism. As well as first-state counterinsurgency efforts such as taking up arms, women must become actively engaged in waging peace and articulating a counter-narrative. Boko Haram has clearly demonstrated that women's bodies and minds are not only battlefields on which their terrorist activities can be carried out, but also that they can become strategic arms of choice in the battle against local communities. A proportional response to this strategy must involve an equal measure of female engagement.



Damage at Chibok after a Boko Haram attack. Courtesy of A World at School.org/ ynalja.com, 2014.

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## Mau Mau women and the struggle for justice in historical and contemporary perspective

by Katherine Bruce-Lockhart

### Introduction

The Mau Mau Rebellion, which lasted from 1952 to 1960, was one of the most violent flashpoints of Britain's exit from empire. Composed of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru peoples in Kenya, the Mau Mau was an extreme element of the anti-colonial movement that used violent methods after other tactics had failed to create a change in their socioeconomic and political circumstances. In 1952, the Mau Mau launched a guerrilla insurgency against the British, which ended with a British victory in 1956. However, the Emergency Period, as it came to be known, continued until 1960, as the British dealt with Mau Mau suspects held in detention camps.



A night raid organised by the British army and the Kenyan police to find members of the Mau Mau.  
Via Militaryphotos.net (fair use)

Historians have long been fascinated with this dramatic episode in Kenya's history, but the existing scholarship has had been biased towards males in the Mau Mau. Women, although smaller in number than their male Mau Mau counterparts, made up an important part of the movement in both leadership and supporting roles. Women were also prisoners and detainees, with approximately 8,000 of them locked behind bars for the duration of the Emergency Period. The nature of women's incarceration was shaped by British preconceptions about gender, as the rehabilitation programmes designed for women in the camps sought to make them into better wives and mothers. Feminine tropes were also applied to those women considered the most deviant women who resisted British rehabilitation tactics were labeled as mentally unstable, a stereotype commonly applied to women who challenged colonial authority. The British constructed and enforced their own gendered ideas in the camps, punishing women who did not conform to their stereotypes.

This article will have two components. First, it will examine women's contribution to the Mau Mau movement and the gendered expectations that influenced their detention, as discussed above. Second, it will examine the role of women in shaping the collective memory of Mau Mau, and their efforts to achieve recognition and justice for Mau Mau veterans in post-colonial Kenya. Women have played an important part in the fight to

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Wearing a helmet topped with ostrich plumes, His Excellency Sir Evelyn Baring, governor of the Kenya colony from 1952 to 1959, inspects African troops. Via Militaryphotos.net (fair use).

In response to political and economic marginalization, in particular land alienation, the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru peoples of Kenya took up arms against the colonial British government, launching a guerrilla style insurgency from the forests of Central Kenya. Fighting between the Mau Mau and the British, supported by a loyalist Kenyan "Home Guard" lasted until 1956, ending with the defeat of the Mau Mau.<sup>i</sup>

However, the Rebellion was not only a military affair, but also had a profound impact on the lives of civilians. Determined to eliminate support for the rebels, the colonial government launched a system of detention and forced resettlement in 1954.

Although there is still debate about the exact numbers, it is estimated that 80,000 to 120,000 Kenyans suspected of involvement with the Mau Mau were put into detention camps across the country, where they were subject to physical and psychological abuse by the British.<sup>ii</sup> Another 1 million Kenyans were subject to the villagisation programme, in which they were forcibly transferred to newly created villages in order to cut off civilian support for the Mau Mau.<sup>iii</sup>

In reality, these villages were akin to detention camps. As historian Caroline Elkins writes of the villages, "Surrounded by barbed wire and spiked trenches, heavily guarded by armed Home Guards and watchtowers, and routinized by sirens and daily forced labour, these villages were also detention camps in all but name."<sup>iv</sup> Thus, many Kenyans – rebels – civilians, or those who joined forces with the British – were deeply affected by the Mau Mau Rebellion.

The Mau Mau Rebellion has benefited from a wealth of historical scholarship, allowing us to understand many elements of this period in history, from the military strategies employed to the cultures of confinement created in the detention camps. A recent wave of scholarship has provided comprehensive accounts of the detention camp system, most notably in works by Elkins, Professor David Anderson Professor Daniel Branch and Dr. Huw Bennett.<sup>v</sup> Despite the wealth of scholarly material on the Mau Mau Rebellion, women's role in the conflict has remained relatively understudied. Furthermore, memoirs by former Mau Mau rebels are overwhelmingly male, providing us with intimate accounts of the period from masculine perspectives while largely obscuring female voices.

Despite this asymmetry in the historiography of Mau Mau, women played a significant role in the rebellion, taking on military, civilian and activist roles. One woman, Muthoni wa Kirima, even rose to the position of field-marshal.<sup>vi</sup> Women played an even more important role on the civilian front. They were crucial members of the "passive wing," which provided supplies and intelligence information to Mau Mau fighters.<sup>vii</sup> Women were also members of the Mau Mau Councils, which helped to make important decisions about the rebellion, as well as the High Courts, which punished rebels for transgressing Mau Mau rules.<sup>viii</sup>

Several government reports in 1953 indicated the importance of women's contribution. In one report, it was revealed that the "part played by women to aid the terrorists is considerable."<sup>ix</sup> The British were alarmed at women's involvement in the Mau Mau, as they had assumed women would stay away from the rebellion. However,

achieve justice for former Mau Mau members, many of whom have dealt with poverty, stigma and physical and emotional trauma since the end of the Emergency Period.

### Kenyan Women in the Mau Mau Rebellion



A map used by a British newspaper to show the Mau Mau area of conflict. Courtesy of MauMauHistory.com



The 'protected village' of Kamiritho, which served as a concentration camp for Mau Mau prisoners of the British. Via militaryphotos.net (fair use).



A woman is arrested by the Kenyan police during the Mau Mau uprisings. Via militaryphotos.net (fair use).

when the scope and significance of women's involvement became clear, the colonial government decided to act. In addition to villagisation, the government decided to detain those women deemed most threatening. In 1954, Kamiti Detention Camp was opened on the outskirts of Nairobi.x Added on to the existing Kamiti Prison, which remains notorious today, it was the first detention camp created specifically for women. Over the course of the Emergency Period, approximately 8,000 women were detained, most of them at Kamiti.xi

The British were determined not only to change the views and behaviour of female Mau Mau detainees in order to make them loyal to the colonial government, but also to make them conform to its gendered stereotypes. A rehabilitation scheme was launched at Kamiti, designed to make women more docile and domestic. While various rehabilitation activities took place in all the camps, the program at Kamiti was gender specific. Women took part in activities such as embroidery, hygiene training, cooking, child welfare, literacy, civics and gardening.xii

Initially, the British were optimistic that the women would be easily rehabilitated. As Thomas Askwith, the director of the department in charge of rehabilitation, commented, "The women have, of course, far less knowledge than the men and have been easily swayed by the Mau Mau leaders."xiii It was felt that women would be more impressionable when separated from their menfolk, and would thus quickly relinquish their Mau Mau allegiance.

Such assumptions were quickly proved wrong. While some women were "rehabilitated" and released, many refused to engage with the program. In 1955, Eileen Fletcher, the woman in charge of running the scheme at Kamiti, revealed that the Mau Mau "had gone very deep" with the Kamiti detainees.xiv "The task of rehabilitating these women is an extremely hard one," she continued. "It cannot be dealt with (as some people have told me they intend to) through friendly cups of tea, recreation, and a feeling that all past sins are forgotten."xv

The major challenge for the Kamiti administration was a group of 162 women who were considered "hardcore," that is, most extreme in their loyalty to the Mau Mau movement.xvi These women – described as "thugs" and "witches" by the administration – were viewed as highly dangerous, as they had been involved in the Mau Mau



Poster used by the British during the rebellion. Courtesy of New York Public Library.

leadership and engaged in violent activities.xvii Determined to recondition them, the British set up a new program in 1958, situated at a small camp near Kamiti. Gitamayu, as this satellite camp was called, became the home of small groups of hardcore detainees.

At Gitamayu, the women were subjected to hard labour and one-on-one interview sessions with Kenyan women who were loyal to the government. Detainees who were cooperative were allowed to take part in activities such as sewing and basket-making, thus encouraging good behavior and engagement with domestic tasks. xviii

Despite this new intensive program, certain detainees were still not responding to discipline. One medical officer described them as "surlly and uncooperative" and remarked that they were worse than male hardcore detainees.xix These women became the subject of significant attention at the highest levels of the colonial administration. Although information about Gitamayu remained hidden at the time, recently disclosed archival records have made it clear that its detainees (as well as

those at Kamiti) suffered from physical abuse. The use of force against detainees had become a nation-wide policy in 1957, known as the “dilution technique.”<sup>xx</sup> Practices at Gitamayu were shaped by this change in policy. Colonial reports characterize these techniques as being “unorthodox” and “revolutionary,” remarking that “normal rehabilitation methods,” would not work on these extreme cases.<sup>xxi</sup> This suggests that staff were encouraged to push the legal limits of rehabilitation policies and use force if necessary.

Evidence of these abuses stems from several sources. In a letter written by a group of women from Gitamayu in 1958, the detainees described the beatings they suffered and asked a simple question: “We want to know who [has] given [these] men permission to do that? So why are we [beaten] like that?”<sup>xxii</sup> They went on to recount how they were “withered” and “lame” because they were “beat much,” commenting, “we cannot walk because we are hurt.”<sup>xxiii</sup> This letter caused a firestorm in the Colonial Office, resulting in investigations into the treatment of female detainees. However, rather than addressing the issue of detainee treatment, it appears that the Colonial Office attempted to cover it up. Medical officials working with the women often ascribed such physical ailments to resistance (suggesting that the women were faking injuries) or to insanity. Women in the camps who were struggling to walk (most likely due to injuries) were instead said to be suffering from “a psychological inhibition” which made it difficult for them to walk.<sup>xxiv</sup> The label of mental instability was often applied to African women considered deviant by the colonial administration. This was especially true for women who had engaged in violence, as this was seen as abnormal female behaviour, thus rendering them insane in the eyes of the British.<sup>xx</sup>

Ultimately, there was no public inquiry into the treatment of female detainees, and so it remained largely hidden from the British metropolitan populace. Women at Gitamayu and Kamiti continued to be subjected to various forms of physical, sexual and psychological abuse until the end of the Emergency Period. Eventually, they were removed from these detention camps and sent off to work in other camps, from which they were later released. Despite being free, they returned to lives that were irrevocably changed, carrying the weight of family and friends lost, as well as the physical and mental imprints of their experiences in the Emergency Period.

### The Contemporary Struggle: Seeking Recognition and Compensation

The Emergency Period drew to a close in 1960, with Kenya receiving its independence three years later. Although independence was meant to be a victory for

the Mau Mau, in reality they continued to struggle for justice. Rather than recognizing the contribution of the Mau Mau to the independence cause, Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta, banned the organization, suppressing memories of the movement and stifling claims by former Mau Mau for recognition and reward.<sup>xxv</sup> During the course of fighting and detention, many Mau Mau had lost their lands and sources of livelihood, and Kenyatta refused to rectify this. As historian David Anderson writes:



A Mau-Mau gang, with home-made weaponry  
Via Militaryphotos.net (fair use)

“Kenyatta had little time for the former “freedom fighters.” He often spoke of the need to “forgive and forget,” and to “bury the past,” but never conceded rights, rewards or genuine compensation to Mau Mau. When asked about the future role of Mau Mau in 1963, his answer was unequivocal: “We shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

For many years after independence, the cause of the Mau Mau remained outside of the spotlight. Kenyatta and his successor Daniel Arap Moi maintained the ban on the Mau Mau, insisting that this chapter in Kenya’s past should be forgotten.<sup>xxviii</sup> Thus, many Mau Mau veterans found themselves impoverished and ignored by their government. Determined to change this reality, many veterans have been involved in a long struggle to gain recognition and compensation for their contribution to the cause of Kenyan independence. Women have been important figures in this struggle, determined to disseminate the memory of Mau Mau and seek out justice.

In the decades following independence, literature provided an important vehicle for women to express their memories of the Mau Mau. Although still fewer in number than male Mau Mau memoirs, women in post-colonial Kenya have written about their experiences of the Emergency Period. In 1969, the first memoir dealing with women in



Muthoni Likimani in 2013. Courtesy of mwakilishi.com

the Mau Mau, Charity Waciuma's Daughter of Mumbi, was published. Waciuma recounted her experiences as a child during the Emergency Period, including her time in one of the villages created through the villagisation policy. Although she did not participate in the rebellion directly, her account offers insight into the experiences of civilian women during this period.

In 1985, Muthoni Likimani, a former member of the Mau Mau, published 'Passbook Number F.47927'. In her introduction, Likimani notes the absence of women in accounts of the movement: "Many books have been written about the Mau Mau movement in Kenya ... but I note, with special interest, that the role played by women in the bitter and costly struggle for Kenya's independence has not been highlighted."<sup>xxix</sup> Her collection of fictional short stories details women's varied experiences during the Mau Mau Rebellion. She describes women's civilian and military roles, using her female protagonists to show the courage and leadership of Mau Mau woman. Finally, in 1998, Wambui Waiyaki Otieno published her memoir *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History*. This was an in-depth personal account of Otieno's experiences during the Mau Mau Rebellion. She recounts her role in the passive wing, her rape while in detention, and women's roles in the rebellion more generally. The book also serves as a platform to discuss the place of women in Kenya. She is highly critical of Moi's treatment of women, and urges Kenyan women to "throw off their sense of inferiority" and demand greater power.<sup>xxx</sup> The efforts of these female authors, played an important part in challenging the androcentric presentation of Mau Mau history.

During the last two decades, women have made more significant gains in the struggle for justice. In August 2003, President Mwai Kibaki lifted the ban on the Mau Mau.<sup>xxxi</sup> As a result, Mau Mau groups were allowed to register as societies and "Mau Mau" could once again be uttered in public spaces.<sup>xxxii</sup> This was a monumental act that helped to erode the stigma attached to the movement. As Security Minister Chris Munranguru commented at the time, Mau Mau veterans would henceforth be recognized as "freedom fighters" rather than "terrorists".<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Since this historic change in policy, women have played a pivotal role in reclaiming a public space for memories of the Mau Mau, as well as in actively pursuing justice for veterans. Otieno has remained a prominent figure, both in terms of spreading memories of the Mau Mau and women's rights more generally. She embodied her causes in her own life, as she became one of the first women to run for political office, travelled abroad promoting women's rights, and played a prominent role in Kiama Kia Muingi, Mau Mau's successor organization.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Women have also played an important part in the Mau Mau Veterans' Association, which has been vocal in pushing for compensation.

In the past few years, women's visibility in the Mau Mau cause has become even more prominent. Much attention has been paid to Muthoni wa Kirima, the only woman to achieve the rank of field marshal in the Mau Mau army. Kirima has appeared in many international news outlets. She remains steadfast in her commitment to Mau Mau veterans, symbolized by her long dreadlocks that she refuses to cut until compensation has been given. Kirima is adamant that the Mau Mau veterans have been unfairly treated, remarking, "The fruits of independence have not been enjoyed by the people who sacrificed most."<sup>xxxv</sup> She is very critical of Kenya's post-colonial leaders:



Muthoni wa Kirima, aged 83. Courtesy of Kaganof.com, 2013.

"Most of us were hoping for compensation from the government, but we are still waiting. After all this effort – what have we got? We were like dogs that are forced to lick up what they had just thrown up. There is no justice in Kenya."<sup>xxxvi</sup> This pattern of neglect is something that she hopes to change, as she continues to campaign for justice.

Recently, concrete strides have been made to attain this goal. In June 2013, a landmark case was settled between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom and Kenyans involved in the Mau Mau.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In this case, the British



Spokespeople for the Mau War Veterans Association outside a British court in 2013. Courtesy of MauMauhistory.net.

government admitted that “Kenyan women were subject to torture and other forms of ill-treatment at the hands of the colonial administration,” and provided 19.9 million pounds in payouts to the 5,228 claimants, many of them women.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

One woman, Jane Muthoni Mara, went to the courts in London, relaying her experiences of the Emergency to the court and a global audience.<sup>xxxix</sup> The case attracted international attention, and became the subject of many articles and even a documentary, all of which enhanced knowledge and recognition of women’s role in the Mau Mau. This is

symbolized by the recent installation of the Mau Mau memorial in Kenya in 2014, which portrays a male and a female member of the movement.<sup>x/</sup> The inclusion of a female figure in the monument symbolizes the advances made in terms of acknowledging the importance of women in the Mau Mau.

The monument, court victory, literary achievements and activist efforts are representative of the significant gains made towards remembering and redressing the abuses experienced by women during the Emergency Period. It is now widely acknowledged that women played an important role in the Mau Mau, and that their efforts should be memorialized and their sufferings compensated. Ultimately, in both the past and the present, women have played a pivotal part in advocating for recognition, remembrance and justice for the Mau Mau.



A memorial unveiled in 2014 to remember the Mau Mau freedom fighters. The sculpture shows the woman bringing food to the man in the forest. Courtesy of Kenya Human Rights Commission

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## Debating Gender in the Classroom: Black Consciousness and the Politics of Knowledge in South Africa

by Shannon Morreira

### Introduction

Stephen Bantu Biko is a household name in South Africa, where he is celebrated for his intellectual and material contributions to the anti-apartheid struggle. Steve Biko was an anti-apartheid activist, a founding member of the South African Students Organisation (SASO), and later the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Biko's message to Black South Africans in the 1970s was timely and hugely influential: don't get taken in by apartheid ideology that tells you that you are inferior; Black is beautiful, and Black is powerful. Along with this message came a more overtly political one: to be Black (as opposed to non-white) is to identify as a unit and "fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that seeks to mark you out as a subservient being" (Biko, 1978:52).



Steve Biko addressing the second general students' council of the South African Students' Organisation - SASO at University of Natal, July 1971. Courtesy of sahistory.org/ Mayibuye Centre.

Nearly 40 years after his death at the hands of apartheid police in 1977, Biko's message is still deeply relevant in post-apartheid South Africa. Although Black Consciousness has largely fallen away at the level of party politics, the symbolic message of the movement is resurging in popular culture as a result of the fact that social inequality has grown rather than diminished in democratic South Africa and has remained racialized (Reddy, 2013). Archbishop Desmond Tutu argued in 2006 that "Black Consciousness did not finish the work it set out to do" – in other words, in South Africa today, identity politics still really matters. But whose identity? "The first step," wrote Biko, "is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell, to infuse him with pride and dignity; to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused" (Biko, 1978:31). The black man: his dignity, his life, his pride. But what of the black woman? Is the absence of women in Biko's writing merely a product of the times in which he wrote that we can safely ignore from a more enlightened present, or is it something that needs addressing?

I am an academic who works in an Education Development Unit at the University of Cape Town, where I have designed a foundation course for students in an extended degree program. The students are predominantly black, predominantly South African, and predominantly younger than 20, meaning they were born in democratic South Africa long after Biko wrote, lived and died. In the class, we read Biko's *I Write What I Like* in order to explore some of the key concepts and debates in the social sciences using an African theorist – abstract ideas such as identity, race, social class, inequality, and power can easily be grounded in the world that Biko presents to his readers. But the preponderance of "he's" and the absence of "she's" in Biko's writing means that we are also able to use his text to explore issues of gender inequality in South Africa.

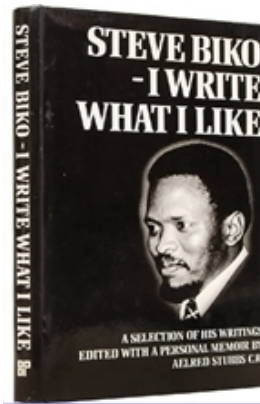
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University of Cape Town, Jameson Hall. Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons/ Szymanowski

In what ways does it matter for us as Southern Africans today that Biko largely silenced women in his writing, and that the Black Consciousness Movement, which relied on women in its ranks, presented its ideology in largely



I Write What I Like, 1978.

patriarchal terms? How, as young Africans, do we deal with the gendered legacies of the past, and the gendered realities of the present?

It can be hard to critique a national icon. Students in the class often revere Biko, and are so used to the everyday gendered bias of public discourse in the country that they don't, at first, notice the absence of women in Biko's work. Once perceived, however, it cannot be unseen, and the absence of women in Biko's writing leads to debates in class about gender dynamics and what it means to be a feminist in South Africa. Conversations in classes have centred on three positions that provide interesting insights into the ways in which young men and women in South Africa imagine their place in the world. In what follows, I present the debate as it unfolded. While I hope to have captured the essence of students' words, and while I took notes during and after as the course was part of a research project on attempts to decolonize the university curriculum, the class was not recorded verbatim and so I have presented the conversation as I remember it.

### Debating Gender in the Classroom

"The struggle isn't really over for us as black South Africans," said one female student. "If you look around Cape Town, who is living in the townships? Black people, that's who." The student gestured to the text open in front of her and read aloud:

**"The struggle isn't really over for us as black South Africans," said one female student. "If you look around Cape Town, who is living in the townships? Black people, that's who."**

"Townships are placed long distances away from areas where black people work, and the transport conditions are appalling, trains are overcrowded the whole time, taxis that they use are overcrowded, the whole travelling situation is dangerous, and by the time he gets to work he has already been through a mill." (Biko, 1978:112)

"Listen to this, written in the '70s. That is Cape Town today. And all these other things that Biko writes about needing to respect our identities and recognize our culture, that's all still true today. So to me, it doesn't matter so much whether he's talking to a man or to a woman. What matters is

that he's talking to black people."

The class was silent for a while. I thought about the validity of what she was saying, the deeply racialized class divide that exists in post-apartheid South Africa. I probed a little further: "So can we say that Biko is a product of his time, and that makes his gendered gaze okay?" The class was still silent. I point them to an excerpt from another academic we were reading, Daniel Magaziner, a historian who has described the defence of Biko provided by supporters:

"Rather than judge with history's glare, they protest, we ought instead to read a silent 'and woman' (or the inclusive 'people') appended to Biko's repeated invocation of 'black man.'" (Magaziner, 2011: 46)



The township of Khayelitsha just outside of Cape Town.  
Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons/ No Lands Too Foreign.

**"Rather than judge with history's glare, they protest, we ought instead to read a silent 'and woman' (or the inclusive 'people') appended to Biko's repeated invocation of 'black man.'"**

"Is that enough?" I ask. I remain silent, knowing that from my own position as a female academic in South Africa, I strongly feel that it is not enough, not in a country where the Commission for Gender Equality recently reprimanded the President for the ways in which he publicly speaks about women, and not in a country with such a high incidence of violence against women. But I am curious to hear my students' views.

"Yes, it is enough," says one. She is wearing a Biko T-shirt. "Biko asks that we celebrate our culture. And we need to acknowledge that in the 70s, men came first in black African culture."

A miniature outcry results.

Another student responds, "But if we agree with this now, in 2014, if we say it's okay for us now to think in this way, then we're saying men still come first."

"Well, they do."

Silence in the room, followed by laughter. But the second student stands her ground:

"It's not an excuse to say that he was writing in the 1970s, not if we still say he is important today. Where are the women here? We know that Mamphela Ramphele was working closely with the BCM. Why isn't she in the text? For me, this makes Biko just another man. He is useful for us to think about race, but we can't let it slide that he didn't care about women." She, too, gestures to the Daniel Magaziner article and reads aloud:

**"It's not an excuse to say that he was writing in the 1970s, not if we still say he is important today. Where are the women here? He is useful for us to think about race, but we can't let it slide that he didn't care about women."**

"As the 1970s unfolded, Black Consciousness's conflict with the state intensified and gender roles reasserted themselves. Men emerged as the spokespeople of the entire community – the imagined vanguard who invoked the future existence of the black nation by struggling and sacrificing on its behalf, while women were supposed to witness male suffering and deny their own." (Magaziner, 2011:57)

"The spokespeople for the entire community!" she continued. "That still happens today, and it comes from this place in our history. We have to stand against it and say that Biko was not the spokesperson for black women, that this attitude is dangerous for us as black women. He writes against black subservience; we must write and talk against female subservience."

Some sounds of agreement from the class, including from some male members. But then a third female student raises her hand, somewhat hesitantly, and begins to speak, faltering at times as she puts into words the thoughts in her head (and it is interesting to note that the whole conversation on that day was held by the women in the class, not the men).

"What if we can say that Biko is presenting women in his work, but that he's

presenting them in a way that we can't recognize as valid because it is an African way? Or rather, a way that Magaziner doesn't recognize as valid. He is very critical of Biko; we have been critical of Biko's use of gender. But Magaziner shows us that in the Black Consciousness Movement, women were celebrated as mothers." She turns to the text:

"In the early 1970s SASO and other organisations opened a space for women to be adults, defiant in their hot-pants and socially and politically as male as men. By the end of the 1970s, as in other nationalist movements, female Black Consciousness activists were commonly assigned the role of socially conserving mothers and sisters." (Magaziner, 2011:57)

**"What if we can say that Biko is presenting women in his work, but that he's presenting them in a way that we can't recognize as valid because it is an African way? In the Black Consciousness Movement, women were celebrated as mothers. "**

"What if I'm happy to celebrate my womanhood as motherhood, what if mothers are important to black Africans? What if I don't want to be defiant in my hot-pants?" she asked.

Laughter from the class, and some nodding. I am silent, surprised, because this is an element of the Black Consciousness debate that I did not expect to emerge during this conversation between 18-year-olds in their first year of university. Do conventional feminist critiques of Biko fail because they are too Eurocentric? By endorsing women as mothers, did the BCM give women high cultural prestige? Did the women within the BCM drive this, or were they, as Magaziner asserts, assigned this role? Are we seeing a misogynist nationalism, or a Eurocentric reading of a non-misogynist nationalism? The class is silent once again as we talk through the implications. I am aware that we are running out of time, and that one of my tasks as educator is to 'wrap up' the session, to somehow resolve these debates. But I am unsure of how to do this. I am saved by another student:

"But that is Magaziner's reading of the BC Movement as a whole, not of Biko's writing. We can't deny that in Biko's writing, women aren't mothers, or hotpant wearers, or anything. They're not even there. Black man, you're on your own. But as for black woman? You're not even there, sister. "

The class laughs again, and we continue to debate the positions: race before gender; gender before race; 'culture' before both; kinds of feminisms and kinds of women, kinds of men.

**"The class laughs again, and we continue to debate the positions: race before gender; gender before race; 'culture' before both; kinds of feminisms and kinds of women, kinds of men."**

We speak briefly of bell hooks' "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy", which provides us with a shorthand for the entanglements of race, class and gender. We cannot resolve these debates in class, but as I leave the room I am very aware that members of the new generation of black South African women that I have the honour of teaching are thinking very critically about their place in the world.

How, as young Africans, do we deal with the gendered legacies of the past, and the gendered realities of the present? What does it mean to be a young feminist in South Africa? While many of the students in the class would not describe themselves as feminist, I have no doubt that on a daily level, real-life feminisms and refusals of feminisms of this sort are happening all the time — whether as mothers, as fathers, as students, as businesspeople, as political activists, as whatever. It's not all doom and gloom from South Africa on the gender front. No, there are many spaces where patriarchy is being contested, even while there are many where it is reaffirmed.

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## Struggles Over Space in a World Class City: Women Informal Traders in Nairobi, Kenya

by Glennys Egan

Nairobi, Kenya, was recently listed as one of Africa's top ten "Cities of Opportunity" (Page, 2015). Analysts have lauded Kenya's trajectory of economic growth over the past several years, citing its potential to become a world-class business environment for foreign investors. For the thousands of hawkers who make their living selling wares on the streets of Nairobi's downtown core, however, the creation of a world-class business environment may lead to exclusion from their own business sites and the loss of their livelihoods.



The entrance to Muthurwa Market.  
Courtesy of Glennys Egan, 2013.

Contemporary urban development strategies in Kenya can be characterized as "entrepreneurial" (Harvey 1989), meaning that they focus on promoting the city as a marketable product rather than tending to the needs of the urban population. Urban renewal projects often involve the removal of traders from certain parts of the city in an effort to present a clean and safe image to international investors. As a result, hawkers and others who depend on access to urban space for their livelihoods have found themselves being pushed out of the city centre, often in violent ways. While both men and women in Nairobi have long engaged in street trade, the exclusion of traders from the city centre is a highly gendered process. Urban renewal has affected women traders in Nairobi in specific and often severe ways. Women tend to benefit least from policies that aim to relocate traders to other parts of the city, while also bearing the brunt of the violence that occurs as a result of enforcing such policies. A closer examination of women traders' struggles over access to space in Nairobi reveals the need for more inclusive urban development strategies in order to foster a "city of opportunity" for everyone.

### World-Class Nairobi

Like most countries in the Global South, Kenya is rapidly urbanizing. Government projections suggest that Nairobi will be home to over eight million people by the year 2030, more than double the 3.1 million it registered in 2013 (UNDP, 2013). Urban planning therefore plays a pivotal role in the country's long-term development. Plans outlined under the auspice of Kenya's national development initiative, Vision 2030, present the Nairobi region as a future global and regional hub for "world-class" tourist attractions, financial services, technological innovation, international conference hosting, and more. Digital renderings show parts of the city elaborately rebuilt to reflect a bright, clean and spacious aesthetic for the growing middle class, investors, and tourists (Bradley, 2012). Following the lead of international consultants who work closely with the Government of Kenya to devise strategies for achieving these goals, the plan stresses the importance of place-based urban renewal projects, where certain parts of the city are heavily invested in to create dynamic spaces of economic competitiveness.

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The Vision 2030 report, 2008. Courtesy of vision2030.go.ke.



Aerial photo of hawkers at a market in Nairobi. Courtesy of Easawa.com, 2013.

As ambitious as this vision may seem, it is divorced from the lived reality of most Nairobians. Despite Kenya's economic success over the past decade, urban poverty remains rampant and inequality is becoming more pronounced (Miriri, 2012). World-class shopping malls and resorts neighbour sprawling urban slums. Opportunities for employment are scarce, with unemployment rates for young people reaching an alarming sixty per cent (UNDP, 2013, 22). While CNN lauds the city's potential to create a world-class business environment for international investors, the majority of Nairobi's urban residents continue to survive through informal activities, meaning they generally operate outside of the regulatory business framework of the state. Street trade, or "hawking" as it is colloquially known in Nairobi, is one of the most common livelihood strategies for the urban poor. Some hawkers procure licenses granting them permission to trade in particular spaces, while others forgo licensing and operate wherever they see the most potential for profit. Regardless of its legality, access to urban space is pivotal to hawkers' ability to conduct their business meaningfully.

Entrepreneurial urban development may signal increasing opportunities for investors, tourists, and the wealthier Kenyan classes, but can be devastating for the majority of urban residents who cannot afford to access malls, resorts, and other "world-class" establishments. Inequality has been a significant feature of the Nairobi cityscape for many years, and current urban renewal strategies risk compounding socio-spatial inequality by channelling investment towards specific and exclusive areas (Graham and Marvin 2001). Parts of the city are energized by commerce, while others remain underdeveloped and underserved by the state. Furthermore, the need for the city to present an image in line with the perceived expectations of foreign investors - a clean, safe, and spacious aesthetic for competitive working spaces - has led to the exclusion of certain populations. Those who do not conform to the desired "world-class" aesthetic find their access to important urban spaces limited, and they are pushed to the margins of the city.



Nairobi's Central Business District (CBD). Via Ledna.org (fair use), 2012.

In Nairobi's Central Business District (CBD), which has long been a centre of diverse commercial enterprises, informal traders have become targets of exclusion (Linehan, 2007). Proposed urban plans aim to encourage investment in the downtown core through urban rejuvenation and beautification projects (JICA, 2014, 3-52). Hawkers, however, are not envisioned in these regenerated sites. Globe Cinema Roundabout, for example, has seen the forced removal of hawkers since the construction of the nearby Thika Road bypass, a flagship project of Vision 2030. Despite the importance of informal trade as

a key source of income for many Nairobians, Vision 2030 states that informality in Kenya's retail sector should be eradicated due to the negative impact it may have on the country's global competitiveness (Government of Kenya, 2011, 64). Informal traders are considered an aesthetic blemish on the modern cityscape and therefore a barrier to achieving world-class status. As a result, attempting to access the spaces they depend on for their livelihoods has become a difficult and dangerous endeavour for Nairobi hawkers.

### Gender and the history of informal trade in Nairobi

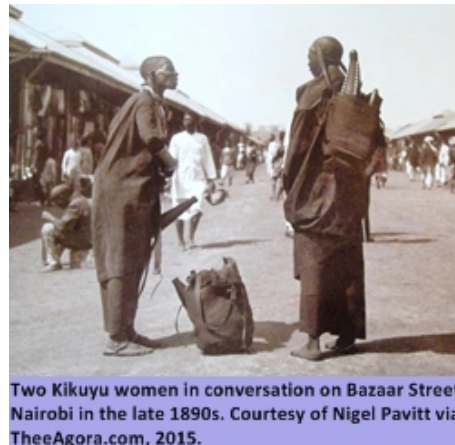
Described by critics as "gender blind" (Kinyanjui 2014), urban planning in Kenya has generally failed to address the particular needs of women. The way that cities are

designed directly impacts - and in many cases, limits - the choices that women have in accessing urban space, services, and security. For the nearly 1.5 million women residing in Nairobi who live in conditions of informality, the struggle for women's rights is rooted in these material aspects of city life (Kinyanjui 2014). As a result, the exclusion of traders from Nairobi's CBD is a gendered process.

**"Described by critics as "gender blind", urban planning in Kenya has generally failed to address the particular needs of women. For the nearly 1.5 million women residing in Nairobi who live in conditions of informality, the struggle for women's rights is rooted in the material aspects of city life."**

Informality itself is highly gendered in nature. Faced with significant barriers to already-scarce opportunities for formal employment, women are overrepresented in the informal economy. In a 2009 study, women in Kenya were found to be five times more likely to be unemployed than men, despite an increased number of female-headed households (Oxfam 2009). Traditional care-giving obligations are a major barrier to formal employment, as family responsibilities tend to keep women out of the workforce. Meanwhile, women's important contributions to the reproduction of labour are largely ignored. Men also have greater access to education, which is closely linked to income levels; in Nairobi, men outnumber women by 10 to 15 per cent at nearly all levels of education (Kinyanjui, 2014, 44). As a result, men tend to have higher rates of financial literacy and therefore not only enjoy better access to formal employment, but also dominate more lucrative forms of informal work (such as taxi driving) by having easier access to credit, business licenses, and other livelihood-related resources.

Women's prevalence in informal trade in Kenya is not, however, a new phenomenon; in fact, it was women who first began hawking foodstuffs in Nairobi during the early days of colonization. Even at that time, women traders were at the forefront of struggles to access urban space. Under British rule, Africans were only allowed to enter Nairobi with special permission passes. The passes indicated their intention to perform waged work, and they were granted almost exclusively to men. Women from surrounding areas saw opportunity in the administrative centre, and began commuting to Nairobi daily to sell produce from their rural homesteads to African workers (Robertson 1997). While the practice was tolerated at first, the colonial administration soon intervened and began returning traders back to their home districts. The lucrative nature of hawking was attracting an increasing number of Africans to the city, threatening its status as a haven for British settlers. Though the expulsion of hawkers was chiefly motivated by the desire to restrict spatial access along racial lines, expulsion campaigns were publicly justified in gendered terms, under the guise of ridding the city of prostitution (White 1990).



Two Kikuyu women in conversation on Bazaar Street Nairobi in the late 1890s. Courtesy of Nigel Pavitt via TheeAgora.com, 2015.



Attempts to evict hawkers from a Kenyan market turns chaotic. Courtesy of Signalfire.org, 2010.

The hawkers' relationship with urban authorities remained tumultuous even after Kenya achieved independence. Post-independence leadership saw traders as a pliable political constituency, and access to space was frequently used as a tool of political patronage. Access to the most lucrative spaces in the busy city centre was granted to those who remained loyal to powerful elites, while violent acts of retribution were enacted on others, such as harassment from police or the bulldozing of open-air markets. As political tensions in Nairobi increased with the advent of multi-party politics in the early

1990s, traders organized themselves to develop stronger associational ties in order to advocate for their right to urban space. Women traders, however, were denied most of the benefits of these male-dominated associational structures (Robertson 1997). Ironically, women's rights were also gaining significant traction in Kenya at that time, yet



violence against the many women who relied on informal trade was not an exigent issue for local women's rights groups (Kinyanjui, 2014, 61). Given the great power that mediating access to space afforded Kenyan elites, it is regrettable that the women's movement focused primarily on issues of formal political representation rather than the material struggles of women in the informal economy.

### Relocation and the reproduction of (gendered) violence

Recent efforts to implement urban renewal in Nairobi's city centre have not only contributed to the erasure of informal activity, but have once again precipitated violence and corruption in a manner that is especially threatening to women traders.

Given the imperative to appeal to a "world-class" aesthetic, police now enforce anti-hawking bylaws more aggressively (Linehan 2007). Hawking is not only treated as a nuisance, but as a criminal activity deserving of criminal punishment. Police routinely arrest, tear-gas and even use live ammunition against hawkers caught operating in unsanctioned spaces. Women traders are especially vulnerable to police violence as they are often subject to sexual violence and extortion. Corrupt officers who may demand money from male traders force women to perform sexual favours in exchange for permission to conduct their business.

**"Hawking is not only treated as a nuisance, but as a criminal activity deserving of criminal punishment. Police routinely arrest, tear-gas and even use live ammunition against hawkers caught operating in unsanctioned spaces."**

Esther, a twenty-three year old woman who hawks second-hand shoes, explains how she has experienced sexual violence at the hands of police who threaten to uproot her. In an effort to avoid being targeted again by police, Esther now walks a winding route to and from the city center bus stop where she arrives from her home in a low-income estate. She estimates that the detour cuts into her work by at least twenty minutes each day, and has a tangible impact on her ability to earn money. Despite this lost income, Esther says it is worth it to be able to return to work in the aftermath of her trauma. "You find a way," she says. "You have to. You try not to think about it. You carry less of your wares with you", she explains, "so you can run faster if [the police] come. You take the long way into town."

Efforts by Nairobi City Council to improve condition for hawkers have been of no clear benefit to women like Esther. In 2008, Nairobi City Council encouraged traders to relocate from the CBD to Muthurwa Market, located on the southeast edge of downtown. Out of twelve new market spaces proposed under Vision 2030, Muthurwa is the only one that has so far been constructed. City Council charges traders a small daily fee to operate in Muthurwa. Though Muthurwa was initially promoted as one of Nairobi's "boldest moves to control hawking," the relocation strategy has been an overwhelming failure (Kiarie and Kiberenge, 2009). Constructed to accommodate only 8000 traders, Muthurwa now hosts over 15 000 (David et al., 2012, 31), compounding the pre-existing challenges of sanitation and security in the market. Corruption in the City Council has led to the most lucrative retail spaces being allocated to politically connected traders, disadvantaging the displaced hawkers for whom the spaces were originally intended (Government of Kenya 2008).



Corruption in the market has had a particularly damaging impact on women traders. The male-dominated nature of patronage networks have relegated women to Muthurwa's least favourable spaces, limiting their accessibility to customers and posing challenges to their personal safety. With a high density of people and poor lighting in its labyrinthine corridors, Muthurwa is perceived by traders and potential customers as unsafe. Many traders report a significant drop in their earnings since their relocation. Women, in particular, stress that their business has suffered because of a lack of security in Muthurwa; many close down their shops early for lack of customers or fear of operating in the insecure market after dark. As a result, some women traders consider operating in Muthurwa to be unfeasible for them.

Consequently many traders have chosen to operate in CBD in spite of measures to criminalize and remove them. Purity, a young woman who chose to give up her stall at Muthurwa and return to the Globe Cinema Roundabout, explains how her resistance to relocation has been partly predicated on fears about her own vulnerability to crime in the market: "In Muthurwa, there were less customers and I worked shorter hours, so my profits were doubly lost. By six o'clock I would be packing up for the day so I could leave by dark. In town I can work later than that and get people on their way home from work. Muthurwa is not safe after dark. I hope you know it is not safe for us women to stay there after dark. In town the streets are busy until late. The police might harass us, but I prefer to run from them rather than risk what might happen in Muthurwa after dark. These are the choices we must make as women: which violence is worse? We risk a lot."

**"I hope you know it is not safe for us women to stay there after dark. In town the streets are busy until late. The police might harass us, but I prefer to run from them rather than risk what might happen in Muthurwa after dark. These are the choices we must make as women: which violence is worse? We risk a lot."**

For many women traders, the threat of violence – whether from police or from other opportunists – carries a special weight in the consideration of when, where, and how they conduct their work. In response to increased crackdowns on their activity, many hawkers now look towards informal protection rackets to secure themselves and their business. For a daily fee, security teams - always comprised of young men - offer "protection" by surveilling police, keeping hawkers abreast of their whereabouts and warning hawkers of impending police raids. When hawkers are engaged in running battles with police, security teams join in the fight against them, defending the hawkers' space by throwing stones and glass bottles.



Hawkers engage in running battles with Nairobi County askaris at Globe Cinema roundabout. Via in2eastAfrica.net (fair use), 2014.

However, the intensification of anti-hawking policing in the CBD has made protection an extremely lucrative business, leading to competition between informal security teams. Once considered by traders to be their allies, security teams are now often referred to as "cartels" who engage in predatory and extortionate acts of their own. In the Globe Cinema Roundabout area, traders suggest that "turf wars" between protection cartels have actually led to an increase in violence, hurting their business and putting them at personal risk. Hawkets, especially women, must now negotiate access to the city centre with both the state and these cartels. They face violence from

both police and gangs to whom they are equally vulnerable.

### **Ways forward for women and the informal economy**

Entrepreneurial urban development initiatives that exclude traders from the city centre offer few alternative livelihood options. Some traders have therefore forged new methods of accessing space in which to conduct their business. Women traders, especially, have exhibited dynamism in order to gain entry into the CBD. On Taveta Road, for example, women traders have pooled their resources to rent regular shopfronts that they have turned into spaces for informal trade (Kinyanjui 2014). By subdividing businesses once owned by Indo-Kenyan men that have left the city centre to set up shop in malls and other suburban establishments, women on Taveta Road have subverted planners' efforts to remove informality from the CBD.

Given that anti-hawking policies have, paradoxically, reproduced urban violence that is at odds with the city's aim to create the image of a safe and secure downtown, urban planners should learn from the solidarity and collective organization that these women traders have exhibited. Access to space for hawkers in Nairobi is not only about ensuring livelihoods, but also about marginalized women's inclusion in larger political processes that shape the city. Rather than building a "world-class" city that appeals to the aesthetic imagination of foreign investors, tourists, and a small Kenyan elite, urban development initiatives should accommodate hawkers by investing in and granting access to viable urban spaces to conduct trade. Failing to include certain populations in

the benefits of Kenya's projected economic growth will only deepen socio-economic inequality and compound many of the urban social problems that are arguably the greatest deterrents of foreign investment in Nairobi. A "city of opportunity" will only be realized if access to urban space and the benefits of city life are offered to everyone.

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Market space in Nairobi. Courtesy of khym54/Wikimedia Commons, 2005.

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## Obstetric fistula harms women's dignity in Burundi

by Jerome Bigirimana

Poverty is a hard fact throughout Africa. In Burundi, women who suffer from vesicovaginal fistula (VVF) experience some of the cruellest consequences of that poverty. At the moment certain individuals and organizations- such as international NGOs like Doctors Without Borders (DWB), are dealing with it, but ultimately the Government of Burundi will have to find the resources and the will to address the problem.

Called "Ingwara yo mu kigo" in my mother tongue (Kirundi), VVF condemns several thousand women each year to live in the backyard. Its socially and physically harmful effects are numerous. And despite outreach initiatives by international NGOs and free health care provided by the Burundian government, the challenges to alleviate the situation are huge.



Vesicovaginal fistula, which is an abnormal entrance between the bladder and vagina, has many causes. In developed countries, fistula is almost unknown. It occurs in some circumstances such as surgeon clumsiness that can hurt the bladder during an abdomino-pelvic operation, pelvic cancer, or radiotherapy for pelvic cancer. However, in less developed countries, VVF has become a public health problem. Each year, between 50,000 and 100,000 women develop obstetric fistula. The United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) estimates that the total number of women living with fistula in the world is two million.<sup>1</sup>

According to Dr. Deo Ntukamazina, Coordinator of the Fistula Reference Centre in Burundi, VVF occurs after birth and is mainly due to complications from a long and difficult birth. It occurs mostly in the developing world, especially in rural areas. Rural women are often poor, live far from health facilities, and lack transportation. When labour begins, they find it hard to reach a care unit. At first they try to stay at home for the birth, with the help of a midwife from the neighbourhood. Even if there is a nearby health centre, it can do nothing in cases requiring a Caesarean section. Patients have to be transferred to the hospital, which is usually located far away. As a result, these women can be in labour for 3 to 4 days.

**"VVF occurs after birth and is mainly due to complications from a long and difficult birth. It occurs mostly in the developing world, especially in rural areas. "**

"The woman then gives birth to a child who is often stillborn. After delivery, [one discovers] the bladder was so compressed by the fetal head, which could not pass through the maternal pelvis, that the bladder or rectal area has darkened and become necrotic, leaving a hole or pathological way or abnormal passage between the bladder and the vagina and/or between the rectum and vagina. Urine or stool will then move there constantly. That is why these women always have a continuous flow of uncontrolled urine. And for the rectal fistula, the stool will pass through the vaginal cavity and spread a foul smell that will follow these women wherever they go", explains Dr. Ntukamazina.<sup>2</sup>

### Consequences

There are many harmful consequences from obstetric fistula. A woman with VVF will always have a constant flow of uncontrolled urine or a foul smell from stool in the vaginal cavity. In addition, because the genital tract is contaminated, the woman will be unable to have sex. In 90 percent of cases, a woman affected by fistula is abandoned by her husband.<sup>3</sup> Apart from divorce, women with fistula also face discrimination from their neighbours and their family. Thinking that they are cursed, they also exile themselves.

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They often no longer appear in public places and are forced to live in backyards for the rest on their lives or for many years until the fistula problem is treated. In Burundi, for example, some women have lived with fistula for 40 years, far from any contact with other people.

### Assistance

Help is mainly brought by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Until 2006, the fistula problem in Burundi was largely hidden due to lack of information, difficult health care access, discrimination and traditional beliefs. Unlike DR Congo, fistula in Burundi is obstetric at 90.2%.<sup>4</sup> It was then that Dr Ntukamazina, after completing his PhD in surgery, got in touch with foreign gynaecologists to tackle this issue. That same year, an agreement was reached between the NGO Gynaecology Without Borders (GWB) and the Government of Burundi, which owns the Roi Khaled Hospital where Dr Ntukamazina works.



Two doctors from Gynécologie Sans Frontières work with patients. Courtesy of Jerome Bigirimana, 2015.

The fistula project came as a great relief to many thousands of rural women. Most of the GWB specialists came from France and Belgium. Their key contributions were to help recognize fistula as a public health problem in Burundi, to involve the country's highest authorities in support of fistula treatment, to raise government awareness and prompt international NGOs to create other fistula centres in the country, and lastly to train local doctors who will take over the task when GWB leaves.

Mission well done! The fistula concern has gained more and more attention and another big fistula centre, "Urumuri," was set up in 2010, run by the Belgian NGO Doctors Without Borders (DWB – "Médecins Sans Frontières" in French), at Gitega in the centre of Burundi.<sup>5</sup> Apart from health care, DWB is also providing information sessions and awareness campaigns in villages. Up to 2013, DWB worked together with another NGO, Handicap International, whose main tasks were to identify cases, make referrals and provide transport for patients.

Maggy Mudende, a former health technician at Handicap International in Ruyigi (in eastern Burundi), says that despite the bad odour these women emit, it was her pleasure to help them. "Every morning I had to make one or two tours in different villages to look after these excluded women in order to identify and to carry them to the Gitega Urumuri Centre. You cannot imagine to what extent these women are discriminated against and forgotten. They no longer remember what social life is because they are afraid to be discriminated against when they go to church, to market, to weddings and to other social events due to their bad smell."<sup>6</sup>

When women arrive at Urumuri Centre, DWB provides full support: health care, clothes, meals, entertainment, counselling, a return ticket and other needs. According to Datus Gihugugu, Health Promotion Officer at Urumuri Centre, "because of the sensitization campaign and free full support, we notice a big rush to our centre which

has already repaired more than 2,000 fistulas."<sup>7</sup>

Mathilde Manirambona, aged 42, is one of the women who has been assisted by DWB at Urumuri Centre. She expressed her great joy after the fistula repair. "[Smile] ... Yeah! It is my deliverance! I can smile like other women because now is the end of my trial. I spent over 15 years in the backyard. My husband chased me out and even my close family could not visit me except my lovely mother. I could not appear in public because of my smell and dirty condition. Fistula caused me more harm than I have ever had. But now, my dignity is restored thanks to God and the Urumuri Centre."<sup>8</sup>



Road between Gitega and Bujumbura. Courtesy of Dave Proffer/ Wikimedia Commons, 2007.

Because they provide full support to the sick, Urumuri Centre receives many more

women with fistula than the Bujumbura centre run by the government through the university hospital of Kamenge (north Bujumbura), which gets few visits. "The reason is that this hospital offers only medical care, no logistic or financial assistance. The cost of fistula repair may be estimated at US\$300. This includes feeding the patient and her helper and their transportation home. US\$300 is a huge expense that these women cannot afford. Currently, the Burundi government has given free health care, but the patient has to bear the other expenses," notes Dr. Ntukamazina.<sup>9</sup>

### The inertia of local authorities and organisations



Patients in the Urumuri centre in the Gitega regional hospital. Via Martina Bacigalupo/VU, 2010 (fair use).

Apart from international NGO initiatives, and minor government support, there is no action from local authorities to deal with fistula. In fact, despite DWB sensitization, there is still community discrimination, low public awareness and involvement and low mainstream media coverage. There are no large or regular campaigns to end stigma even though there are so many local women's organizations which could advocate for these women.

Instead, there is a common belief that these women are being punished by God for their sexual misbehaviour. Or that it is a result of witchcraft. This affects the women's hope and leads some of them to blame themselves for their condition.<sup>10</sup> According to Gihugugu, "In the woman's mind, this means that there is nothing else to do. She is condemned to live in the backyard. That is why we find these women are hopeless when we go to take them to the hospital. We make great efforts to free them from the discouraging thoughts which they have suffered with over many years in the backyard."<sup>11</sup>

Women interviewed at the Bujumbura fistula centre, however, do not blame themselves but rather criticize the inertia of civil society, especially local women's organizations. Marthe Barahinduka, aged 40, reveals her sorrow while waiting for fistula repair: "We are seen as cursed people. I have lived in the backyard for 20 years. I have not done anything wrong; fistula was just an accident. I wanted to give birth like all other women, but when misfortune happens, we are excluded from public spaces. And where are those women's associations to advocate for us? I have not seen any. Are they there only for appearance?"<sup>12</sup>

Anatolie Ndayishimiye, head of the Collective Associations and Burundian Women's NGOs (CAFOB), understands Barahinduka's sorrow, and agrees that CAFOB has done nothing great for these women. But Ndayishimiye assures us that her organisation is setting up a new programme to inform and guide them: "Rural women face many problems in Burundi. Their problems are complicated to solve, but we are thinking about how to help, especially in providing information and guiding them in their rights. Unfortunately, the Burundi political crisis is hindering all our initiatives. And worst of all, we do not know when it will end."<sup>13</sup>

### Concern

There is great concern about the future of fistula repair in Burundi. In fact, Burundi, as with many less developed countries, suffers from an insufficient number of qualified gynaecologists trained in this specific surgery. For around 10 million inhabitants, Burundi has only 20 local gynaecologists and all of them are working in Bujumbura city.<sup>14</sup> Among these, only Dr. Ntukamazina is able to conduct a complicated obstetric fistula operation. And other complicated cases are often transferred to Urumuri Centre where there are two full time expatriate gynaecologists paid by DWB.

The situation is not going to change soon because neither at Urumuri Centre nor at the Bujumbura hospital do local doctors want to be trained in fistula repair. They are not interested in fistula surgery. On the one hand, fistula repair does not pay well. It is paid at a government or NGO level. In Burundi, since 2006, the government has stated that all procedures related to childbirth and infant care are free of charge. On the other hand, unlike many doctors and nurses in the Democratic Republic of Congo who have been trained in fistula repair surgery and fistula counselling,<sup>15</sup> "doctors in Burundi say they don't have time; they prefer to work in the private sector which pays more. Besides, there are few specialists who agree to stop their work in Bujumbura and go to be trained for six months at the Gitega centre," says Dr Ntukamazina.

"The sustainability question is a problem because one trained gynaecologist is nothing when international NGOs support comes to an end. The Burundi government has to start getting involved in fistula surgery and set up a serious plan to address fistula issues," advises Dr Claude Rosenthal, one of the Gynaecologists Without Borders from France, who is often in Burundi for fistula operations.<sup>16</sup>



The time has come for Burundians to take over this fistula project because GWB has already ended its activity. Moreover, the fistula unit of Handicap International has moved to the Congo where thousands of women also face the problem of obstetric fistula, in addition to fistula caused by sexual violence at the hands of different rebel groups. And the main actor in this field, DWB, will also end its activities in August of this year. DWB has a big budget and receives patients from the whole country, but it said it has to leave in 2015 because its mandate is to deal with emergencies. So the NGO has asked the Burundian government to take over the Urumuri centre. The government has agreed but the problem for the government is to find the means to provide regular obstetric fistula services. Maybe Burundian women could go to Rwanda (a neighbouring country) where the Fistula Foundation is working like DWB in providing transportation and food costs during treatment and recovery, for the Rwandan project also aims to address the major barriers that women face in getting treatment.<sup>17</sup> But there remains the financial problem: Most of fistulous Burundian women are rural and poor. They can not afford transportation means to Rwanda or arrange their stay in Rwanda. Unless, a person or another NGO facilitate the contact for them with the Fistula Foundation.

**"The sustainability question is a problem because one trained gynaecologist is nothing when international NGOs support comes to an end. "**

Thanks to the initiatives of international organisations, the lives of thousands of women have improved and their dignity has been restored. But if the Burundian government or other organisations do not find the means, the Burundian women with untreated fistula will face the same situation as before 2006. This would be a big step backwards.

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