CREATING AND SUSTAINING FEMINIST SPACE IN AFRICA: LOCAL-GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika (AmwA)

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THE DAME NITA BARROW DISTINGUISHED VISITORSHIP

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University Of Toronto

The Dame Nita Barrow Distinguished Visitorship in Women in Development and Community Transformation was launched by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) in 1997. The Visitorship recognizes the remarkable contributions of Dame Nita Barrow, former Governor-General of Barbados and graduate of the University of Toronto.

The Distinguished Visitorship creates an opportunity for a woman from the “majority world” to be in residence at the University for six months each year working in the Centre for Women’s Studies in Education and the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology. Each visitor offers a course that calls on her particular area of interest and experience, dealing with the current issues of women in development, and community transformation in a global context and from a Southern perspective.

This is the text of the Dame Nita Barrow lecture presented by the Distinguished Dame Nita Barrow Visitor
DAME NITA BARROW  
(1916-1995)  

“Lost is a true daughter of the soil”  
- Erskine Sandiford, Former Prime Minister of Barbados

The late Dame Nita Barrow, former Governor-General of Barbados, studied nursing at the University of Toronto from 1944 to 1948.

She served at various times as the world wide President of the Young Women’s Christian Association, the World President of the International Council for Adult Education, President of the World Council of Churches, and Barbados Ambassador to the United Nations. A member of the Global Fund for Women’s Board of Directors, Dame Nita was also a member of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Mission to South Africa in 1986 and the Convenor of the NGO Forum for Women at the United Nations World Congress on Women in Nairobi in 1985. In all these capacities Dame Nita championed the causes of justice, equality, peace, and the empowerment of women. With high government office, diplomacy, and statescraft, she linked grass roots initiatives and loyalties and was a tower of strength to local and world-wide movements inspired by her spirit of activism, compassion, brilliance, common sense and joy.

Dame Nita’s life was an outstanding example of dedication, commitment and selfless service to women, men and children, especially the poor, dispossessed and disadvantaged.
Do you remember,
When we all walked tall and proud
When we were the salt of the earth
When we sang with voices loud and clear
And put the most vain of birds to shame
Long before the lies, the deception, the myths
Before the gradual destruction of our bodies, our spirits and our minds
Do you remember
When God was a woman?

I feel extremely honoured standing before you this evening to deliver the 4th Dame Nita Barrow Lecture. I also feel deeply gratified to be here as part of a process of paying tribute to the memory of a great woman who was a formidable activist, a committed fighter on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed, and a role model for my generation.

The objective of my lecture is to bring to you reflections on local and global issues of concern to women in Africa, and the implications of these issues for community transformation. I will begin by looking at some contemporary issues facing Africa, and how these issues impact on African women. I will discuss some features of African feminist theory and practice and how these have impacted on African women’s thinking and activism. I will briefly describe some of the strategies that have been used to engage in various levels of discourse, contestation and organising. Finally, I will look at future directions for the transformation of structures which still impede the empowerment of women in Africa and in many other parts of the world.

The year 2000 review of the impact of the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995)\(^1\), revealed that whilst there have been some significant gains for women in various parts of the world, there are still considerable obstacles in the way of achieving world-wide equality for women. Over the past twenty-five years, consciousness has been raised on issues affecting women all over the world, on a macro and micro level. In spite of this, the material conditions of women have not necessarily improved. Lifestyles in most of the ‘developing’ world have continued to deteriorate for both men and women. Global phenomena such as the debt crises, structural adjustment policies, increased militarisation and communal violence, have continued to widen the gap between most Western nations and developing regions. The Africa region has fared particularly badly over the past two decades. If there is a crisis, women are affected in different ways from men, and in most cases, they suffer most. This affects all spheres of development—economic, political, technological and social. Therefore women in Africa have
borne the brunt of the continent’s misfortunes.

My definition of Africa for the purposes of this lecture, is a pan-Africanist, geographical one, i.e. from Cape Town-Cairo. Africa, being a massive continent with 54 countries of varying degrees of economic development and industrialisation, historical differences and connectivities, deep race and ethnicity divides, religious differences and specificities, is very difficult to tackle analytically, especially if one is trying to avoid dangerous generalisations. Having said that, it is even more tricky to go down the slippery roads of ‘black Africa’, ‘sub-Saharan’ Africa, etc., because these terms have deep political meanings and significance, and their uses can only be justified within carefully prescribed contexts.

Africa as a continent has been weakened by the adverse consequences of globalisation. Whilst globalisation presents many opportunities, it has always been a bane on poorer, vulnerable societies and economies. Globalisation favours the deregulation of markets, free trade and privatisation. It involves movement of finance and capital at the speed of light, and the formation of quasi-governments in the form of multinational, financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF. The heavy indebtedness of many countries in the global South, the fracturing of societies due to violent conflicts, and rising inequities in access to resources keeps plunging the majority of the world’s countries into new depths of poverty and disintegration. The use of information technology as humanity’s lynch pin further isolates the majority of the countries in the world—computers cost a lot more than food, shelter and clothing for one year. As parts of the world grow fantastically rich and most parts grow desperately poorer, we need to ask questions about the true meaning of globalisation. Does it mean we all exist in a global village where a few get to have all the comforts and riches on the basis of their geographical location and race, and the rest of us literally clean their toilets? Or does it mean seizing opportunities to ensure equal access to terms of trade, fairness, equity and justice? President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria said at the recent UN Millennium conference:

*the new millennium is shaped by forces of globalisation that are turning our world into a village. Thus, the new millennium will demand of us, more than ever before, to live and work together as members of one human family. But up to now globalisation has meant prosperity only for the chosen few of the industrialised countries. For us in the developing world, globalisation will continue to ring hollow... in short, globalisation has to be seen to mean the eradication of poverty.*

According to the recent Beijing Plus 5 review process, progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in the African region, has been slow. A combination of factors, such as economic decline, political instability, conflict, lack of adequate communication systems, inadequate institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming gender, and the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, have marred the process. Based on the available documentation which emerged from the governmental, non-governmental and United Nations agencies during the Beijing Plus Five review, as well as my own experience of participating in the process, I will attempt to give a summary of the current status of women in Africa.

Approximately 44% of Africa’s population, the majority of whom are women, are currently living below the poverty line of US$39 (per capita) per month. Women continue to lack access to resources such as land, capital, technology, water and adequate food. Macro and micro-economic policies, programmes, and development strategies have hardly been designed to take into account their impact on women and girl-children, especially those living in poverty. The majority of women, most of whom are rural based, and most urban women, continue to live in conditions of economic underdevelopment and social marginalisation. According to African women’s organisations:
the level of poverty has increased in the last five years and has impacted more negatively on women. Poverty levels have increased as a result of mounting and constant misuse and misappropriation of resources. Governments have undertaken people-blind economic reforms without proper cushioning measures in place to protect vulnerable groups in their countries. This has contributed to the increased impoverishment and disempowerment of women.

The implementation of economic policies such as Structural Adjustment Programs in most of sub-Saharan Africa has also compounded the feminisation of poverty. This has manifested itself in the loss of livelihoods, unemployment, increases in the number of commercial sex workers, trafficking in women, street children and a total rupturing of the social fabric which binds communities together. This has also made more women and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation and at risk of contracting HIV & AIDS.

Over the past six years at least 2 million Africans have lost their lives in wars and genocide. Many more have become refugees. These conflicts have placed tremendous burdens on women who suffer displacement, loss of families and livelihoods, various forms of intense gender-based violence, and the responsibility of sustaining entire communities. Twenty-one out of fifty-four African countries are affected by conflict. Women and children from countries such as Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Somalia have spent the last decade living under unbelievably difficult circumstances.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action raised concerns about the continued under-representation of women in most levels of government in spite of the movement towards democracy everywhere. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) set a target of 30% for the inclusion of women in positions of power and decision-making. This target has not been met worldwide. African governments made specific commitments on this issue. Several countries and political parties created quota systems and affirmative action programs through which between 25-50% of elective seats at national and local levels (as well as other appointive positions) are reserved for women. As a result some countries such as South Africa (29.3%), Mozambique (25.2%), Seychelles (23.5%) Uganda (21%) and Namibia (22.2%) have significantly higher levels of women’s representation in national assemblies and other positions of power and decision-making.

On the whole, the political empowerment of women in the Africa region has been very slow: Africa’s regional average representation of women in national legislative assemblies stands at 11% reflecting little progress in achieving the 30% target of women in decision-making positions set by the UN Economic and Social Council.

Access to mainstream decision-making and political power for African women is a long-haul process. Millions of women are illiterate. For those who are literate, they have to contend with the difficult process of seeking the support of husbands, family and friends, and acceptance from party colleagues. They have to mobilise the necessary campaign finances, and they have to endure the harsh realities of political campaigns in Africa which can break the toughest of women. The few who do survive the difficulties of running for public office find it extremely difficult to work within structures which are still hostile to the empowerment and equality of women. The implications of women being excluded from decision-making are serious. It means if women do not have a voice where key decisions which affect their lives are made, then their capacity for full development and equality is severely limited. Women’s involvement in decision-making contributes to redefining political priorities, placing new issues on the political agenda.
which reflect and address women’s gender-specific concerns, values and experiences, and provides new perspectives on mainstream political issues. Without the active participation of women and the inclusion of their perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the lofty goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.  

Africa has the lowest literacy rate in the world at only 50%. The majority of the illiterate are women, and they live in rural areas with limited access to clean water, good transportation, adequate food, land, credit facilities and accessible healthcare. Women’s health in most parts of the continent have been affected by bias in gender policies and programmes and socio-cultural practices. The continent has one of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world. Decreased health spending and privatisation of health care systems in many countries without guaranteeing universal access to health care has affected the health of women and girls.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has exacerbated the already vulnerable status of women’s health. Five of the six countries in the world with the highest number of HIV/AIDS infected people are in Africa. Botswana has 18%, Zimbabwe 17.4%, Zambia 17.1%, Malawi 13.6% and South Africa 11.4%. Last year, AIDS experts in Nigeria confirmed that well over 500,000 Nigerians are HIV positive, and if serious steps are not taken, up to 10% of the population might be affected over the next 5-10 years. Women are more vulnerable to infection, due to biological, social and economic reasons and have less negotiating power with partners. They also spend a great deal of their time and resources caring for other family members who are sick.

Many African countries (at least 45), have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). There are several regional and international agreements guaranteeing the human rights, equality and integrity of women and girls throughout the life cycle. However African women still face discrimination in all spheres of life, in public and private. Violence against women is still a major problem, religious and cultural fundamentalisms are on the increase, discriminatory laws still serve to control women’s lives and bodies, and harmful traditional practices still persist. Negative stereotypes and attitudes prevent many women from realising their full potential and making the contributions towards their communities that they would really wish to. Women in many parts of the continent are suffering from a backlash and a rollback of gains already made.

I do not want to give you the impression that Africa is a continent of gloom and doom. I do not want to fuel already persistent attitudes and beliefs about how quick Africa is at making a mess of things and waiting for others to clean up after them. These challenges which I have highlighted are the realities facing the majority of women living in Africa. Africa is a vibrant continent of hopes, dreams and visions of a better tomorrow. Most of the continent’s rich history has been bastardised, rewritten and devalued. Its immense wealth of human, material and natural resources have been plundered and laundered by outsiders and their local collaborators. Yet the hopes and dreams still remain, and slowly but surely, African States are beginning the long and hard journey towards restoring their systems and institutions. It has been made quite clear that this journey can not happen without the full involvement of civil society institutions and the constituencies they represent. And it certainly can not happen without the full and equal participation of women.

Against this backdrop, let me now look at what we call the African Women’s Movement today, and its responses to the current situation of African women. Trying to define what a women’s movement is in Africa is still a work in progress. African women have contributed immensely towards the development of the continent in all spheres. They have done this through organisations, coalitions, associations, unions, faith-based networks, local, national and regional networks, rural and urban based organisations, and
through mixed/mainstream institutions; through activities ranging from income generation, forming co-operatives, consciousness raising, advocacy and campaigns, to research and analysis, they have contributed to what is referred to in this lecture as a Movement—a movement for social justice, equality and empowerment for the society in general, and for women in particular. This movement is politically and ideologically diverse, often to the point of very hot contestations. There are serious divisions which reflect Africa’s complexities—ethnicity, language, ideology, colonial legacies, race, age, marital status, class, religion, literacy levels, geo-political and geographical differences and along various other lines. Considering the sheer size of the African continent, and the deep complexities of the issues that the continent faces region by region, how easy is it to speak of an African women’s movement? How reasonable is it to assume that there can be common interests and agendas forged across these major divides, not to mention being able to work out a platform broad enough to accommodate these shared interests and agendas for mutual action?

It is not easy, but it has been possible. While the divisive issues still remain unresolved, there is an African women’s movement. There is a movement in so far as there has been a collective, if somewhat pocketed, response to the needs of women in the region. There is usually consensus on issues which are considered to be priorities, which affect the lives of African women such as poverty, illiteracy, health and reproductive rights, political participation and peace. However there are differences of opinion and strategy as to how this can be achieved. We can therefore talk about different strands within the movement. A large number of actors and organisations which constitute the African women’s movement are mainly concerned with reforming the status quo, and pushing for reforms which will ameliorate the conditions under which the majority of African women live. For these individuals and organisations, they accept that these systems are skewed against women. They however fall short of coming up with effective strategies which will challenge these systems conclusively. This is because many of them do not want to ‘rock the boat.’ Most of these individuals and organisations tend to bring a welfarist perspective to the movement, and rather than engage the State to face up to its responsibilities such as provision of basic needs, they opt to take over these responsibilities themselves.

There is also another strand within the movement, those who believe women can achieve their goals by being an integral part of State programs, ostensibly set up for the benefit of women, but which in reality are just vehicles to use women to mobilise to sustain the interests of the State.13

Within the women’s movement, are also feminist leaders, thinkers and activists who challenge the legitimacy and the fundamental basis of patriarchal institutions, norms and values. As far as they are concerned, any movement to free African women from oppression has to be feminist, has to be anti-imperialist and anti-racist, it has to have a holistic agenda, and has to have the tools to transform African communities and the lives of women within those communities.14 I will now look briefly into how this strand of the movement manages to create and sustain space for itself within the broader context of the women’s movement.

**Feminism in Africa & the African women’s movement**

When talking about feminism in an African context, I use the terms ‘African Feminism’ and ‘African feminist’ with caution. This is for a number of theoretical and political reasons. Being an African woman who is a feminist, might not be the same as calling oneself an ‘African Feminist.’ I believe in a definition of feminism which is dynamic enough to articulate the interconnectedness and specificities of women’s experiences, identities and struggles all over the world, and which does not have to be qualified. I sense a danger in such qualifications, because they tend to obfuscate the real issues around difference and
diversity, and substitute these understandings with false notions of hierarchy and importance. For example, it moves the discourse away from ‘my analysis might be different from yours because of my experiences and realities’, to ‘my feminism is better than yours’, or ‘yours is not relevant to mine’. Also, within the context of Africa in particular, where the word feminist can be quite problematic, using the term ‘African Feminist’ as a qualifier could mean buying into a watered down agenda, as opposed to identifying with real issues of linking feminist identities to African realities. Therefore, in this paper, I use the term African Feminists to refer to those who happen to be both African and feminist.

**Establishing the space and acquiring the faith**

The feminist movement, for all feminists, is a political and ideological home. This space is made up of the many organisations, associations and entities that constitute the feminist movement. It is a space for feminists to claim for themselves and to use. This space is made up of our friendships, networks, our bonds, organisations and our individual and collective feminist energies. This is the space we use to mobilise around our feminist principles, where we hone our analytical skills and where we seek (and sometimes find) answers to our many questions. What makes the space work is faith. The belief that this space is needed to make our lives better and easier. This is manifested in our processes of self-discovery, our hopes, our dreams, our aspirations, our yearning for more knowledge and revelations. The two, space and faith, are inter-dependent and cannot survive in and of themselves. We need our space as feminists to walk the road together, and we need the faith that will keep us together in good and in bad times.

So what does having feminist space mean in Africa? There are key features of feminist theory and practice in Africa, which are vital to our understanding of how this shapes the analysis and activism of African women.

First, feminism in Africa is located in the continent’s historical realities of marginalisation, oppression and domination brought about by slavery, colonialism, racism, neo-colonialism and globalisation. It also places the inter-connectedness of gender, women’s oppression, race, ethnicity, poverty, and class at the centre of the discourse. It is therefore impractical to talk about a feminist theory in Africa without an understanding of how these issues have shaped African women’s lives and world-view in historical terms. African feminist thought, by implication, is anti-imperialist, socialist-oriented, and keenly aware of the implications of social injustices on society as a whole. It is also anti-racist because it challenges the institutionalised racism of global and regional structures which exploit the continent and undermine its progress. This also enables African feminists to add their voices to the work of other feminists from the global south, who critique the eurocentrism of white western feminists.

Second, feminism did not ‘arrive’ in Africa via western feminism. As a matter of fact many serious African feminist thinkers consider this to be an insult. Africa has one of the oldest civilisations and therefore one of the oldest patriarchies. Women living in those communities did have some access to power and leadership, though this access varied from one part of the region to another. Based on all the available literature, African women have always lived in deeply patriarchal societies, and have therefore always found ways and means of resisting patriarchy. This was done through various strategies such as using the institution of motherhood, access to political power, religious authority, autonomous institutions, etc. Colonialism and settler-colonialism merely emphasised existing inequitable structures.

Our female ancestors might not have called it feminism but there definitely was some form of patriarchal resistance. I usually make reference to the institution of witchcraft, where I come from. I am Yoruba, from Southwest Nigeria. We have a strong tradition of women as political, religious and cultural leaders.
Yoruba women have been trading long distance for many centuries. We also have a strong tradition of witchcraft and the notion of all women as potential witches. What was the profile of a witch? I was interested to know. I found out that witches, where I come from, are usually older women, they are wealthy, they are knowledgeable, opinionated and very assertive (this in androcentric terms translates as aggressive). Quite a number of them are widowed or divorced, without male protection. This profile is very significant, because Yoruba women at a certain age, feel they have paid their dues to their patriarchal communities. They no longer feel bound by conventions of obedience or deference to male authority, neither are they afraid of sanctions because again, at their age, they have earned respite from certain obligations. For the first time in their lives, these women are free in the real sense of the word and they are enjoying it. That is when they are called ‘witches’.¹⁹

So, from my point of view, witchcraft could be an example of an institution through which women resisted patriarchy. It therefore undermines the argument that feminism was imported into Africa. By saying this, we are actually saying that for centuries African women have crossed their arms and accepted to be battered and depersonalized by patriarchy.

Third, we are all familiar with the terms ‘African culture’ and ‘African identity’. What is African culture and what constitutes an African identity? Who defines it? These two terms are used by African scholars, practitioners and politicians in discussions aimed at reviving or sustaining vital elements of our humanity which were lost in the many years of brutalisation and dislocation. However these concepts mean different things in the day to day lives of African women. They mean that within the context of an African culture as defined by men and not herself, she is a second-class citizen, her labour is unremunerated, available and disposable, her rights are subject to validation, and her daughters will share her fate. She is socialised into sustaining the very structures which will oppress her throughout her lifecycle. There will be some rewards which come with compliance, and punishment for rebellion. This, in essence, is her identity. African feminists hereby point out that definitions of Africaness can not be constructed outside of the personhood of African women.

Following on from this, African feminists question the validity of African institutions which are of no value to the society. Motherhood, as an example, has always been seen as a vital power base for women in almost all African communities. It guarantees women companionship and protection, which they definitely do not expect from their husbands, unlike their western sisters.²⁰ Yoruba women often say ‘omo mi loko mi’ - ‘my child is my husband’. A feminist analysis of motherhood rejects the devaluing of women who are non-biological mothers, and the higher premiums placed on boy children over girls. There are several other cultural and social institutions which no longer add value to the lives of women, but rather, they devalue them, and are therefore no longer acceptable. African women are trying to create new identities for themselves. Identities based on nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and a primordial understanding of African cultures do not serve us well as African women. This is because these identities were crafted outside of our own realities and experiences as women, and serve to locate us in spaces which make us invisible, vulnerable, dispensable, transferable and disposable.

Fourth, another site of contestation for African feminists, is the whole notion of narratives and history. We question the writing and compilation of histories which do not include the lives of women. Where we have heard of some women, it has been mainly through their affiliations with powerful men as fathers, husbands and sons, i.e. the legendary Queen Mothers and Queens. Where were ordinary women in the history of our communities?
Fifth, a significant feature in the lives of African women, is the need for self-reliance and economic independence. African women in almost all communities that we know of, have always worked. They have worked within and outside the home. They have always made significant contributions to the economies of their communities through provision of free and cheap labour, and endless reproduction. We are by now, all familiar with the famous statistic, ‘African women produce 80% of the continent’s food’. We are always featured in photographs and works of art carrying babies on our backs, water on our heads and firewood in our arms. These images are sold all over the world as that of the typical, unspoilt, natural African woman who knows the true essence of womanhood. The self-reliance and economic independence of African women is vital to their well-being and integrity, but this is not the same thing as condoning the exploitation and overburdening of women. A feminist perspective allows us to question the unfair use of women’s unremunerated labour in the private and public sphere.

Sixth, another arena in which an African Feminist theory has emerged, is in relation to the experiences of African women with the State. Women’s experiences in liberation struggles provided an entry point for them into political and social activism in several African countries. This has given critical lessons in terms of women’s relationship with the State, women’s citizenship, and their democratic rights. For many years now women have become part of building States through active participation in liberation movements, in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Uganda, Guinea-Bissau, and many other countries around the continent. And after the liberation struggle what happened to the women? The constitutions that emerged out of the struggles they fought, effectively wrote the women out of existence as citizens. A lot of African constitutions are now being questioned and re-negotiated where possible, as a result of feminist activism. A lot of African constitutions actually do not recognize women as citizens, because in many of our constitutions, we as women do not have the right to transfer our citizenship to another national\textsuperscript{21}. If you are a \textit{bona fide} citizen of a country, you have to have the power and the capacity legally to transfer citizenship. If the constitution says that you can not, then your status as a full citizen is questionable. Millions of African women therefore are not citizens of the very countries that they fought for, and risked their lives to build.

Seventh, African feminism is inter-connected with a global feminism which has worked hard for gains for women at a global level, borne out of the experience of women at grassroots level. All the gains that women worldwide have made through instruments such as CEDAW-- the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights 1993, which says the human rights of women are an integral and indivisible part of human rights, the Beijing Platform for Action and several others, were agreements and obligations that came out of many hard years of feminist struggles all over the world. And the voices of African women, have been a part of that movement.

How then do these theoretical frameworks inform the activism of African women scholars, thinkers and practitioners, and what challenges do they face? It is very difficult to create and sustain feminist space in many African countries, for several reasons. Feminism is still very unpopular and threatening. The word still conjures up bogeys of wild, naked white women burning their bras, imperialism, domination, an undermining of African culture, etc. Feminists are subjected to ridicule and insults, and in some cases, receive threats to their lives. They are called ‘frustrated’, ‘miserable spinsters’, ‘castrators’, ‘home wreckers’ and many other undignifying epithets.

The public/private divide is a real challenge. A feminist ideology tries to expose the artificial distinctions and points out the consequences for women. For African women, the public/private divide means that women’s lives in the public have to be lived out as a reflection of their designated roles in private, i.e. as
nurturers, carers, second-class citizens. Women in the public sphere advocating for rights and challenging the status quo do so at great risk. In private, many articulate women’s rights advocates have to deal with the challenges of indifferent or unsupportive partners, and when they chose to do what is best for them and leave abusive relationships, there is a public backlash against them. Hence, society uses the public/private to serve its own interests.

For women living in rural areas, the private means being confined to poverty, lack of electricity, clean water, safe health facilities, etc. A very popular strategy used to silence feminists, is to continually use rural women as a weapon over articulate, middle-class women, who are mainly urban based. Anytime middle-class women open their mouths to raise an issue of concern, the question is, ‘what about the women in the village?’ This is a code for saying, ‘the women in the village have nothing and they are not complaining, so why are you turning them against us?’ This strategy serves to erode the self-esteem of feminists, it dissipates their energies, and makes them continuously apologetic for their education and whatever privileges they might have.

Most States are hostile to women’s rights issues. While the laws and the constitutions of the countries say one thing, the politicians and opinion leaders are saying other things to discredit ‘those lost, polluted women, who want to cause trouble with our women who are happy where they are’. The very important and serious work of trying to lobby for legal reforms and constitutional amendments which could raise the status of women, is usually undermined with frivolous statements from government officials. Most of them do not work in enabling environments. The media, political parties, trade unions, etc, do not genuinely understand why there has to be a feminist movement. Male colleagues in civil society organisations, who we assume ought to know better, do not always provide the support and solidarity that feminists need. There are also some women who are in leadership positions in government structures and other strategic institutions, but lack either the consciousness or clout to push a progressive agenda for women. They sometimes become a liability to the feminist movement because of their conservative, reactionary positions.

Many women’s organisations lack the institutional capacity to sustain long-term activities to improve the lives of women. They run on a shoestring budget, are heavily donor-dependent and donor-driven, and do not have the necessary mechanisms for sustained institutional growth and development. Whilst some might argue that so-called professionalism ruins social movements because it adds a dollar price to people’s commitment, we need to also be realistic and accept that for movements to survive they need to grow and evolve. Some national and regional women’s organisations in Africa, having been around for up to 25 years, have now reached the stage where they either grow stronger and survive or wither and die. An organisation needs adequate financial, human and material resources to make its work relevant and sustainable in the long term. Commitment, good will and volunteerism are vital, but they are no longer enough to sustain organisations.

Also, due to various factors, which include ideological differences, donor involvement and poor employment opportunities, civil society organisations tend to proliferate. Therefore, many organisations aim to carry out work, which is not necessarily adding value, or can be said to be a part of an overall developmental strategy. This brings a lack of respect, cynicism and suspicion from communities, potential beneficiaries, donors, and gives governments an opportunity to discredit civil society institutions.

Non-governmental organisations, with the appropriate capacity, have the ability to provide the necessary conceptual, analytical and practical tools for emerging leaders. Women’s organisations in particular have the potential to produce well-grounded leaders through their many awareness raising, self-esteem, inter-
generational and capacity building programs. If these organisations are weak, the opportunities are wasted. One of the lessons we have learnt as a women’s movement in Africa, is that if the organisations and institutions, which constitute the movement, are weak, this will ultimately have a negative impact on our strategic agenda.\textsuperscript{22}

Another key challenge facing African feminists is a lack of conceptual clarity within the movement itself. Granted, not all women in the progressive strand of the movement call themselves feminists, even though they do work on a day to day basis which is clearly feminist. A concern I have developed recently, is the depoliticisation of feminism as a result of gender and development language. At a conference in 1998, a woman stood up proudly to announce, ‘I have moved beyond feminism to gender’. In her Dame Nita Barrow Lecture in 1999, Nighat Khan said,

\begin{quote}
\textit{a large number of feminists and women activists have begun to use the word ‘gender’ in place of ‘women’ when discussing the issues of equality and rights........the problem with the notion of ‘gender’ is that it can mean both men and women or either man or woman. The specificity of women’s oppression disappears.}\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

I couldn’t agree with her more. As a matter of fact, it is precisely because gender means both men and women, that many African women activists describe themselves as ‘gender activists’ and not ‘feminist activists’. Gender is safe. Feminism is threatening. Gender can be accommodated and tolerated by the status quo. Feminism challenges the status quo. As a result, the feminist spaces we have tried to create for ourselves are in danger of being ‘genderised’. The sentiments around now after years of gender mainstreaming, is that men have been ‘left behind’ and need to be ‘carried along’.

Working with men, building personal and professional partnerships with them and seeking them out as allies is something we all have to do as feminist activists. However, does ‘carrying men along’ also include employing them to run women’s organisations, editing women’s magazines, speaking on behalf of women, counselling women suffering from abuse and tolerating the company of men who philander, batter their partners physically and emotionally in private and seek to be our allies in public? Are these men we are ‘carrying along’ prepared to give up the powers and privileges which patriarchy confers on them?

Many women in the movement say, ‘what does it matter what we call ourselves? As long as we are all fighting for women’s rights, isn’t that what matters?’ That is not good enough. The work of fighting for women’s rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is a political one too. Choosing to name oneself a feminist places one in a clear ideological position. If we do not have an adequate theory of the oppression of women we will lack the analytical tools which might enable us come up with the appropriate strategies. As a result we end up working on symptoms and not root causes. By naming ourselves as feminists we politicise the struggle for women’s rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we can develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. By ‘genderising’ the debate, we cop out, lose out and collude with the process of accommodating ourselves within oppressive structures.

In spite of its many curses, globalisation does bring with it some key opportunities which the global South can take advantage of. An example is the increased demand for democratisation processes, and a broadening of the spectrum of rights for women and men. This can strengthen civil society movements, and women’s movements in particular in the following ways. It opens up the possibilities of universal guarantees that go much further than those given by individual nation states. For example it raises the
possibility of two parallel citizenships, a national citizenship and a global one. A global citizenship is
guaranteed through the adherence to universally agreed and accepted principles of social justice and
human rights. A national citizenship can be enriched through the co-existence of a global one, through the
provisions of recourse to regional and international mechanisms and legal instruments.

Organisations such as the Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya, The Federation of Women Lawyers
in Uganda, and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers have actively promoted issues affecting women’s human
rights in those countries and have gained a lot of respect for being outspoken and undeterred voices for
women. In Nigeria, BAOBAB is an example of a women’s organisation committed to challenging the use
of religion, culture and tradition to undermine women’s rights. In the Gambia, GAMCOTRAP has similar
objectives, and in Senegal, Mali, Cameroon and other French-speaking parts of Africa, there are national
networks and grassroots organisations committed to the same issues. All these organisations work on
mobilisation and awareness raising around women’s rights such as violence against women and harmful
traditional practices. They work with women in very poor communities, in rural and urban areas, and they
work on changing structures, beliefs and attitudes. This is the process of recreating identities and
redefining a personhood for African women. Their work is clearly transformatory and feminist. Other
examples are Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), Uganda, Gender and Development Action
(Nigeria).

The South African and Ugandan constitutions make explicit provisions for the protection and promotion
of the rights of women. These provisions include quotas and affirmative action for women. These are
gains won by the women’s movements in those countries through advocacy, analysis, research and
institution building. Many African women now believe that most of their work will be of little effect if
they continue to remain on the margins of power sharing and leadership. There is now a deliberate shift
towards not only dealing with the issue of access to decision making, but also to strengthening women’s
leadership within hostile, patriarchal structures. A good example in this regard is the Women’s Budget
Initiative, which was spearheaded by women in the South African parliament.

There are opportunities for participation in shaping policies and development agendas for reconstruction
of war-torn societies and countries in democratic transition. This is characterised by a shift in power
relations, and a refocus on how, where, and by whom power is defined—the creation of a new human
agency with new actors such as women’s organisations, trade unions, human rights organisations, and
new political power bases. Over the past ten years at least, civil society organisations have kept countries
running when they had virtually collapsed, i.e. in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Somalia. Women in particular
formed broad-based peace movements in these countries. With this comes a call for new values for
defining communal relationships, and state/civil society relations. Such values include calls for
accountability, transparency, anti-corruption and inclusiveness as crucial frameworks for good
governance. Central to the call for these values is the role and participation of women. No society can
rejuvenate or reclaim itself without the active involvement and participation of women.

There are the possibilities of engagements with the State as new demands for accountability and
representation emerge, for example through decentralisation programs, affirmative action, and calls for
legal and constitutional reform. These are sites where African women have been very active through
advocacy, fighting for political space, legal reforms, representation, affirmative action, and gender
mainstreaming policies. Examples are Women’s Lobby Group (Zambia), Forum for Women In
Democracy (FOWODE), Uganda, Gender and Development Action (Nigeria).

There are the possibilities too, of increased alliances and networking across regions and continents, to
sustain gains made at the major UN conferences in the 90s. Whilst the significance of UN ‘jamborees’ on the lives of the majority of African people at the grassroots can be debated heatedly, the facts still remain, that these meetings provide healthy opportunities for South-South/North-South sharing of information and expertise, and formulation of new strategies. At a regional level, there are many women’s organisations working towards building a strategic, pan-African agenda for the empowerment of African women. A regular feature of the work of these national and regional organisations has been linking global and local concerns through their participation in regional and international events.25

Connected to all these possibilities is the global consensus on the centrality of women’s empowerment for the attainment of sustainable development. Even the most reactionary of States would admit this, even if they do little to put it into practice.26

**Strategic directions for the African Women’s Movement:**

The key areas of importance, which are important to building and sustaining the women’s movement globally have been the following:27

**Confronting public structures and institutions:** The feminist movement worldwide is now concentrating on confronting State structures to change the systems. This has been with mixed results, but it is a necessary strategy if we are to see lasting changes in the lives of women, especially the majority of women who live in the world’s poorer countries. In order to do this, we need women as public advocates, who can work at a policy level in governmental or quasi-governmental institutions, as legal advocates, politicians, and lawmakers. As stated above, African women are actively involved in critical debates with African States and institutions.

**Increasing the capacity to develop new knowledge:** Feminism has thrived in the academies in the North, because feminists in those countries have been able to acquire the spaces and resources. Unfortunately this has led to intellectual hegemonies – the sisters in the North are the ones with the money, technology and access to international publishing, all crucial sites for the production of knowledge. They hereby appropriate the knowledge bases of women in the South, and within the global women’s movement we have a dichotomy whereby the women from the North are regarded as the thinkers and scholars and the women from the South are the practitioners, with more value and respect added to the former. How many feminist writers on Africa refer to the works of African women? How many books on ‘international feminism’ include contributions from African feminist scholars and activists? There has been a very effective silencing of African women’s voices and experiences. Within the African women’s movement, we are now challenging ourselves to devote time and energies to writing our own stories, narratives and to theorising. We have to scale up our contributions to the rich debates on feminist theory and practice worldwide. Only when all voices have been heard, will we be able to talk of a truly global feminism.28

**Building and sustaining feminist institutions** is what has kept the feminist movement alive. Feminist organisations today are somewhat different from what they where when they started years ago. We need feminist spaces that can consciously move from one phase of development to another. Feminist organisational development is another area calling for more research and attention, and it might take a while for us to be able to assess the implications. I believe that the nature and structure of feminist organising will have to change. Feminist organisations have usually been premised on principles of non-
hierarchy, collective work and collective responsibility. The work has also been characterised by its dependence on volunteers.

For feminist spaces to survive, we need a reconceptualisation of power and leadership within organisations. As organisations grow more complex and try to cope with the demands of various projects, funding, servicing various stakeholders, and retaining relevance, we need effective feminist leaders to engage in this process. Feminist organisations also need to start thinking of acquiring their own resources in order to consolidate and sustain their legacies. We cannot afford to have a political movement which is at the mercy of donor funding.29

There is also the issue of racism within the global women’s movement. It is still there, it hasn’t gone away. As African women we are learning to re-define ways in which we engage with the global women’s movement, in order to sustain our ‘local’ spaces. In many instances, it can be painful and frustrating.30 Patricia McFadden says of this:

we must re-define the ways in which we enter as participants in the global women’s movement and challenge the exoticisation and objectification of African women… we have to challenge racial privilege in the Global Women’s Movement, just because we are women fighting for the same goal does not make racial privilege go away.31

In order to achieve the task of sustaining feminist spaces through these strategic directions, I would like to suggest that we focus our energies and interventions on three crosscutting issues.

**Investing in the personal growth of women**: For us in the African women’s movement, this is a priority. The growing backlash against the women’s movement which manifests itself through hostile State responses, media harassment, cultural and religious fundamentalisms makes the task of sustaining individual women’s energies difficult. We need to go back to old-fashioned feminist strategies of awareness and consciousness raising, and developing self-esteem. This has been one of the major successes of AMwA’s African Women’s Leadership Institute.32

**Replenishing our ranks**: We need more young women in the movement, and we need to develop institutional cultures of inter-generational organising. This is usually a sticky area in the African women’s movement. Younger women note the conservatism, matronising, often selfish behaviour of older women. Older women on the other hand point out to the lack of commitment of younger women, who are less willing to challenge gender relations because of where they are in their life cycle.33 It has also been noted that in the North, the feminist movement has become a victim of its own successes. Young, middle-class women, now armed with their college degrees, the right to control their bodies, their credit cards and a marked improvement in the quality of their lives compared with that of their mothers, are saying that we are now in a ‘post-feminist era’. There is no such thing as post-feminism until there is a post-patriarchy. In her contribution to a book about conversations between feminist mothers and daughters, Barbara Ehrenreich said:

*I worry that young, middle-class feminists are not as involved in collective action as we were, but instead see feminism as an individual program for self-improvement. That’s fine if you are fortunate and privileged, but what about the women who aren’t? How do we make up for that? We need a collective movement. Patriarchy is an old*
I would like to end by calling for more discussions and dialogue on the various aspects of globalisation and their impact on the world’s communities, especially women. We need the continued solidarity and support of our sisters in the North. I especially would like to salute the feminist community here at OISE who have created this beautiful space for the sharing and nurturing of feminist praxis. As a global women’s movement, we need to be cautious, brave and vigilant so that gains we have made are not lost. We need to keep sustaining our feminist spaces in whatever way we can. Our feminist spaces are not the same, and they don’t have to be. Some are academic, some are activist oriented, some are policy inclined, some are local, national/international in focus. They are all differentiated by our varied realities, locations and identities. To sustain these spaces we need commitment, solidarity, critical dialogues, effective leadership, power and money. Like Angela Miles in her work on *Integrative Feminisms*, I believe in a diverse, inter-related, inter-connected, multi and inter-disciplinary feminism, which is local, global and collective, and links theory with practice. We will not survive without it. It is about choices, hopes, dreams and justice. But much more than all that, the lives of millions of women all over the world depend on it. So, let us keep these spaces. And the faith. Thank you.

Let me end by paying tribute to the memory of Dame Nita Barrow.

*One fine day I shall walk with my head held high*  
My back ever so straight  
My strides long and purposeful  
As I take my walk  
My hips will swing from left to right  
With absolutely no thought about cellulite  
My breasts will have a dose of sanity  
And disobey the laws of gravity  
I will carry a large bag  
Full of everything I need  
For work, for play and for looking good  
Everything, that is,  
Except money  
But who cares?

*For on this fine day*  
I will not be alone  
I will be walking with those who do not care  
About being a size four, fourteen or forty  
About being eighteen, eighty or eight-nine,  
With those who are not bothered  
About the difference between Somalia and Somaliland  
Nor the distance between Cape Verde and Cape Town

Yet they know about dreams and visions  
They know about hopes and aspirations  
They know that if you work hard enough  
Thin big enough
Dream large enough
And live long enough
Dreams do come true
And visions do come to life
And that we don’t have to die
Before we go to heaven

On this fine day I will walk,
Bag full of this and that
My body responding to the warm caress of the sun
And even if it is cold
I will walk free of all the symbols and signifiers that tell me
I am less than who I am

Those I am walking with will know how I feel
We are walking a road we have all paved together
And it is finally taking us to the places we want to go
together

Oh, how I will enjoy my walk
On this fine day
With all my sisters.
And the brothers who would like to join us
1 The review of progress made since the 4th World Conference of Women held in Beijing 1995, was held at a United Nations General Assembly Special Session in June 2000, New York. This meeting was popularly referred to as ‘Beijing Plus 5’.

2 Speech by President Olusegun Obasanjo, Head of State, Nigeria at the UN Millennium Summit, September 6-8, 2000.


4 My organisation AMwA, was one of the eight regional African women’s NGOs who had been invited to be a part of the UN/ECA Regional Preparatory Task Force to prepare for the Sixth African Regional Conference, the preparatory meeting (PREPCOM), for the Beijing Plus 5 conference.


9 Ibid. Getting women into decision-making is one thing. Ensuring that they make an impact is another. There are four key issues involved here. The first is the issue of access for women to political spaces. This they can get through quotas, voter education, public support and awareness, affirmative action, party support, etc. The second level is the issue of participation – representation of women in decision-making structures of say, parliament, their level of political engagement, etc. Third is the issue of transformation on an internal basis - what are the meeting times at parliament? What are the childcare arrangements, if any? What about a women friendly environment and women friendly language? The fourth level is external transformation: how are gender considerations integrated into legislation? See ‘Women in Politics and Decision-Making in SADC: Beyond 30% in 2005’ Report of the proceedings of a conference held in Gaborone, Botswana, 28th March – 1st April 1999, organised by Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Unit.
10. A recent study in Uganda (I am afraid I can’t recall the exact source, but I read about it in *The New Vision Newspaper*, Uganda) confirmed that Ugandan sex workers have a lower risk factor than Ugandan wives.


12. When we think of a Movement, we would usually like to believe that we are talking about entities which emerge out of political and social crisis and which foster cohesiveness, work towards a common objective, work in solidarity, have continuity, have the capacity to engage in mass mobilisation and clarity of purpose. When we apply these conventional criteria to the African women’s movement, we are usually tempted to conclude that there is no Movement. However, on closer analysis, observers find that the work of mobilisation, engagement, and contestation, which is vital to any movement’s success is present within this Movement, even though it tends to be fragmented and uncoordinated. See Wilhemina Oduol & Wanjiku Kabira, ‘The Mother of Warriors and Her Daughters: The Women’s Movement in Kenya’, in Amrita Basu (ed.) 1995, *The Challenge of Local Feminisms, Women’s Movements in Global Perspective*, Westview Press. Also, Florence Butegwa (1997) *The Women’s Movement in Africa*, Background Paper for the 1st African Women’s Leadership Institute, February 1997 (AMwA publication).

13. In several African countries, programs for women have been co-ordinated by 1st Ladies. These programs are usually heavily funded by the State and have been used to stifle autonomous organising in those countries. In Nigeria for example, during the regimes of Generals Babangida and Abacha (1984-1998 between them) their wives fronted mass-mobilisation programs which gulped millions of dollars. They used the powers of their office to minimise and marginalise the efforts of autonomously organised women. See Ifi Amadiume, 2000, *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women, Culture, Power and Democracy*, Zed Press, and Husseina Abdullah, ‘Wifeism and Activism: The Nigerian Women’s Movement’, in Amrita Basu (ed.) 1995, *The Challenge of Local Feminisms, Women’s Movements in Global Perspective*, Westview Press.

14. Some key African feminist thinkers and activists include Awa Thiam, Nawal el Sadawi, Patricia McFadden, Amina Mama, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Ayesha Imam, Marie-Angeliqe Savane, Sara Longwe, Filomena Chioma Steady, Fatima Mernissi, Abena Busia and Ifi Amadiume.


17. Some argue that we had matriarchies e.g. in Ifi Amadiume’s work. Some (Awa Thiam, Patricia McFadden and myself) do not necessarily agree with the notion of an African matriarchy as Ifi describes it, but we accept the historical facts that some African women in certain communities had a revered status.
Feminists all over the world are often intimidated with the expression ‘bra burners’. To begin with, African women never wore bras, they used various means to cover their chests, but not bras, and in quite a number of communities, unmarried women went bare chested. More importantly, we do have versions of bra burning, which I consider to be even stronger forms of protest. When women want to protest against an unfair law or convention, they strip and march bare chested, and in some more serious instances, naked. It is an abomination to see the nakedness of a mother or grandmother, so the mere threat of such an action is enough to make the male rulers sweat!


If you are a Nigerian man and you marry a foreigner you can transfer your citizenship to whomever you marry. If you are a Nigerian woman, you cannot do the same thing.


Zambian Women’s Lobby has carried our research on women’s political participation and attempted to raise funding in support of female candidates.

Examples include: 1) *Women in Law and Development in Africa*: This is a leading network of individuals and organisations in over forty African countries, dedicated to using the law as a tool for African women’s empowerment. Using capacity building, information sharing and research, the network has provided a voice for African women at a regional and international level. WILDAF, for example, led most of the contributions of the African women’s movement to the UN World Conference on Women’s Human Rights in June 1993. They have also spearheaded the additional protocol on women’s rights to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights. 2) *African Women’s Communication and Development Network (FEMNET)*: FEMNET is one of the oldest regional networks in Africa. Its main contribution has been in the areas of networking, policy and communications. 3) *Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA)*: AMwA is an international NGO for African women with a head office in the UK and an Africa regional office in Kampala, Uganda. In 1996, AMwA established an African Women’s Leadership Institute. This project has helped train over 500 African women in regional, sub-regional and national leadership development programs. AMwA’s focus is on building transformatory leadership in Africa, and ensuring that women are at the forefront of the process. A particular value added, has been the emphasis on bringing in younger women into the movement. 4) *Abantu for Development*: This is another regional organisation, which works in the areas of capacity building and influencing policies from a gender perspective. Through their Gender, Advocacy and Poverty network, they make the case for understanding how micro and macro development policies impact on women and can lead to their impoverishment. 5) *Association for African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD)*: AAWORD was established in 1976. It grew out of a commitment of African women scholars and practitioners at the time, who wanted to respond to how African women’s experiences were being appropriated at the level of the academy and in development practice.
In 1997, at a conference on leadership in Africa which was held in Mozambique, a senior government official from Botswana said, in response to a flippant statement that had been made by another male colleague of his about “this gender business”: *I can not sit here hundreds of miles away from my constituency and say that women do not count. They are the ones who vote for us. Not only that, we African governments promised to do so many things at Beijing, I ask you, what have we done for the women? I was so pleased to hear this!*


Some of us have recently set up an African Feminist Initiative, which will be a collective for analysis, writing and feminist education. Our first publication, **Africa Feminist Perspectives** is currently in production.

It is for these reasons that the **African Women’s Development Fund** has recently been established. The founders of the Fund are African women who have been active in the women’s movement for many years: Ms Joanna Foster (former Regional Coordinator, WILDAF); Dr Hilda Tadria (Gender Specialist, currently a Senior Gender Adviser at the UN/ECA); Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi (Director of AMwA). The AWDF will raise money and provide grants for African women’s organisations.

As an African woman who has lived and worked in Europe for many years, and been a part of many feminist initiatives in the North, I never cease to wonder at this blind spot within the international women’s movement. We have spoken about the issues many times, black women writers have raised the issues over and over again, but sometimes we still don’t seem to have moved forward. For example, it would never occur to an African woman to tell an American or British woman ‘your accent is cute’, or ‘you look so smart’, or ‘your costume is lovely’. References to people’s accents are about race, ethnicity, class and ultimately power. Why would I want to comment on the accent of an American, when I know she is an American. How else would I expect her to speak? How do we expect an African woman professional to dress? And since when did African boubous and babus become ‘costumes?’ Costumes are worn by stage performers or at the circus. We do not refer to ball gowns or tuxedos as ‘costumes’. This is not the same as innocent curiosity of admiring difference, it is usually a subtle process of ‘othering’.


See **Taking the African Women’s Movement into the 21st Century**, Report of the 1st African Women’s Leadership Institute (AWLI), 1997, **Moving from Accommodation to Transformation**, Report of the second AWLI, 1998, **Feminist Leadership in Africa**, report of the 3rd AWLI, 1999, and **Keeping Feminist Space and Faith**, report of the AWLI reunion conference, February 2000, all AMwA publications. One of the most important things for African women feminists and activists, is space for personal growth and self-discovery. This area is equally as important (and in some instances even more important) as all the capacity building, strategic planning, management, gender training that we and other organisations provide in Africa. Therefore the fact that the AWLI provides a feminist leadership framework at an analytical level, and translates this into practice is something we are proud to declare as a
significant contribution to the African women’s movement. Over the past three years, the AWLI has provided leadership development opportunities for women’s rights activists through regional, sub-regional and national programs. These women are in turn passing their skills on to others in their communities.

33 This is a complex relationship. It is usually older women, free from the challenges of looking after young children, who have the time and space to concentrate on their activism. Younger activists, especially those who are planning to marry or are new in the institution are still testing the waters of their relationships, and might be more reticent in their commitment to the feminist movement. On the other hand we have seen many young activists challenge the conservative, accommodating politics of older women, calling for newer, more radical approaches. Through the work AMwA has done at the AWLI, we try to provide platforms for these discussions to take place and develop strategies which take on board the positive contributions and insights of all generations.