

Report of the International Summer School Perspectives of Feminism and Politics of Identity in Africa: Finding a Common Ground, August 27-September 7, 2007, Usmanu Danfodiyo University in Sokoto, Nigeria.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, gender relations have become highly contested in many African societies. On the one hand, religious movements are gaining influence; on the other hand, African traditions are being reconstructed. These two processes have put African gender orders under pressure, subjecting them to contested negotiations on what a proper woman is and the reconfiguration of lines between female and male spheres of moral practice and public action.

In many African societies the negotiation of gender relations is done by deconstructing Western concepts of gender and gender order. African feminists and women activists are looking for new images and new identities that do not reflect Western concepts but instead their own local and/or regional, ethnic, and religious experiences and aspirations, thereby questioning Western feminism as an adequate theory and point of reference.

The increasing localisation of African women's issues demonstrated by identity politics of 'difference' is a double-edged sword. On the one hand such an approach offers legitimacy to and acceptance of African women's struggle; on the other hand, it may prevent building a consensus and finding a common ground among women at the international, national, regional and local level. The central question during the summer school was therefore: does a common ground for feminist theory and practice exist?

The 12-day summer school was a joined effort between the Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto and the Free University in Berlin and was funded by the German Volkswagen Foundation. About 50 people from different African countries participated, among which Nigeria, Ghana, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Cameroon, Kenya and Madagascar. Furthermore, one Indian woman, 8 Germans and one Dutch participated. The German participants included Dr. Ulrike Schultz from the FU, Prof. Gudrun Lachenmann from the University of Bielefeld, two PhD students and 4 MA students. Dr. Marloes Janson represented both the Netherlands and The Gambia. The participants, whom were selected by a scholarly committee, formed a heterogeneous group, not only because of their geographical and ethnic background, but also because they included both junior and senior academics, NGO activists and representatives of women's movements (Islamic, Christian as well as secular).

The summer school was structured around 6 modules, different working groups and a seminar. During the modules lectures were given by invited lecturers. The lectures discussed literature included in a reader which the participants were requested to read before attending the module. After the lectures papers were presented on topics that fit in with the themes discussed during the introductory lectures. After the paper presentations, the participants were divided in

interdisciplinary working groups moderated by the lecturers. In these working groups specific questions raised by the lecturers were discussed. There was also room for the participants in the working groups to elaborate on their own research projects, to develop questions for future research and to create academic networks in the field of gender studies. In a plenary session the working groups presented the discussions they had had in their respective groups. This alternation between theory and practice worked very well.

After a welcome speech by the vice chancellor of the Usmanu Danfodiyo University and the organizers of the summer school, Fatima Adamu and Ulrike Schultz, we started with the first module on national gender politics, taught by Irene Pogoson of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and Gudrun Lachenmann of the University of Bielefeld. The emphasis in this module was on the different national legacies and contexts in which national gender politics are embedded. Attention was paid to the transformation of African states, the involvement of women in national politics, the importance of bringing a gender perspective into development, and women movements' negotiation of the global discourse on gender politics within the nation-state. The working groups focused on the interrelation between gender, nationhood, civil society, Islam, policy, micropolitics and resistance.

Module 2, taught by Ulrike Schultz and Akua Britwun of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, dealt with the localisation of national gender discourses and politics at the level of the community, household and market. It described how women make use of resources such as income and social networks to negotiate room for manoeuvre outside established gender norms. A central concept in this module was 'bargaining': women's bargaining of household economics and their bargaining within patriarchy. Instead of the popular depiction of the household as a corporate entity, intra-household relations were not described in terms of consensus but in terms of bargaining and negotiation. By means of a case study of the fishing industry in Akan society in Ghana presented by Akua Britwun, insight was provided into women's economic roles. A second case study, presented by Sanaa El Batal of the Sudan Academy of Science, focused on how gender in Sudan is interwoven with other categories of difference, such as age and ethnicity. Her paper also paid attention to the meaning of Islamization for Sudanese women. In the working groups different forms of negotiating gender politics and power relations at the local level were discussed. At the end of module 2 the film 'Justice at Agadez' was shown in order to illustrate how in West Africa Islamic law, customary law and traditional practices interact.

Module 3 had as its main theme African feminism. Lectures were given by Joy Ezeilo, a renowned Nigerian gender activist, and Fatima Adamu from the Usmanu Danfodiyo University. They introduced the participants into the different feminist debates and approaches that have been

developed by African feminist scholars and activists, by looking at such perspectives as African feminism, Islamic feminism, Third world feminism, Black feminism, negofeminism (derived from 'negotiation' as opposed to Western so-called 'radical' feminism), Womanism and Stiwanism (an acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa). The module looked at the definition, construction and deconstruction of feminism as both a scholarly and political endeavour. Attention was paid to how African feminists relate themselves to Western feminist thinking. Two female Hausa writers, Asabe Kabir Usman and Saliha Abubakar Abdullahi, spoke about writing on feminism from an African woman's perspective. They elaborated on constructions of womanhood, motherhood, wifhood, and women's struggle in contemporary Hausa literature (the Hausa form the main ethnic group in northern Nigeria). The questions that were central in the working groups focused on whether feminism is the right label for African women's struggle and on whether despite the differences among African women, there is a common ground for solidarity between the women in Nigeria, Africa and around the globe. At the end of the module a Nigerian film on a barren woman was shown, since motherhood is such an important theme in African feminism.

Module 4 dealt with women's movements. After the participants had compared the various women's movements in their own countries, which turned out to have as commonalities the struggle against HIV/AIDS, FGM and other forms of violence against women, women's rights, and education, Chairmain Pareira, who is working for a Nigerian women's organization, gave a lecture on the differences between women's movements, organizations and NGOs. In her lecture she tried to unpack the notions of 'nation', 'woman' and 'movement'. Halima Ben Umar of Women in the Media, a women's organization in Sokoto, presented a paper on Nigerian women's movements, the problems they encounter and their achievements. Later in the week some women's organizations were visited.

After a free Sunday, which was reserved for church visit, shopping at the market, and study, we continued with module 5 on religion, identity and gender. In this module, taught by Oyeronke Olademo from the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, and Marloes Janson, the relation between current trends toward religious renewal - both Muslim and Christian - in West Africa and the transformation of gender relations was explored. By means of case studies from southern Nigeria and The Gambia, attention was paid to the redrawing of conventional lines between public and private spheres of action and realms of religious practice. Muhammad Tukur-Baba from the Usmanu Danfodiyo University presented a paper on the first lady syndrome in Nigeria. The working groups focused on local concepts used for the tradition defined as 'fundamentalism', the effect of fundamentalisms on women's identity constructions, women's use of religious symbols (such as the veil) to identify themselves and to create public space for themselves and the

differences and similarities between Christian and fundamentalists' constructions of gender roles.

The aim of the seminar, taught by Mohammad Kuna of the Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Daniela Hrzán of the HU, and Hanna Meissner of the FU, was to introduce young academics and activists in current discourses in post-structuralism, post-colonial theory and critical whiteness studies. The theoretical concepts discussed during the seminar were later evaluated with regard to their relevance for African feminist research and the teaching of gender studies at African universities.

Parallel to the seminar, module 6 on practical gender issues, moderated by Fatima Adamu, Ulrike Schultz, Irene Pogoson and Gudrun Lachenmann took place. In this module working groups were formed around practical gender issues, among which health, education, political leadership, law, economy, research and knowledge generation, and networking.

During the last day of the summer school the German students gave a presentation on gender politics in Germany, followed by a round table discussion with the media, an evaluation of the summer school and the graduation party.

In addition to the scholarly programme, there was time reserved for a visit to the Sultan's wife, some sightseeing, a visit to the Sokoto museum and a reception organized by the women's commissioner.