

AFRICAN WOMEN IN THE DIASPORA CONFERENCE 2 Minnesota .

June 20-21, 2008

Addressing Cultural Rites & Practices that Harm African women & girls

Venue: University of Minnesota Law School, 229 19th Ave. S., Minneapolis, Minnesota

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() **Full Registration:** \$160 - Full registration includes breakfast and lunch on Friday, Breakfast on Saturday, and Friday evening mixer with a performance by MzBel, our Ghanaian star who will thrill you with music from her amazing repertoire.

() **Conference Registration (Presentations Only)** - \$150

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Website: www.mawanet.org

Selected Sessions Summaries

Here are some of the sessions scheduled for this year's conference.

1. Achu Frida Njiei (Cameroon)

Title: The Abusive Nature of Early marriage.

The presenter posits that women perpetuate the practice of early marriage and are equally among the perpetrators as well as the men. Since most of the women are not educated they do not see the ills of early marriage. In addition, men in Magba being the custodians of culture believe that when a girl is past 20 years without being married they are considered barren and men dread them. This stereotype has encouraged most young girls to be interested in early marriages for fear of stigmatisation by their communities. This paper looks at some of the physical and psychological damage caused by early marriage.

2. Balogun, Oladele Abiodun, PhD (Nigeria)

Title: Proverbial Oppression of women in Yoruba African Culture: A Philosophical Overview.

The presenter highlights elements of oppression of women evident in some proverbs. He looks at the negative effects these have had on gender balance, women empowerment and marriage amongst the Yoruba people.

3. Mrs Temitope Abiodun Balogun (Nigeria)

Title: Panacea to the Problems of Gender Inequality and the Building of a Gender friendly society in Nigeria.

This presenter attempts to trace the abusive cultural rites, values and practices in Nigeria. She is of the opinion that a lot has been done in an attempt to change these practices but the progress is slow. She presents reasons for this and possible solutions to this problem.

4. Erica Borgstrom (England)

Title: Rites vs. Rights - An Anthropological Consideration.

This presentation explains the difference between cultural relativism and universal relativism to practices such as female genital mutilation. The discussion highlights the need for a culturally sensitive approach in addressing the theoretical and practical problem of potentially harmful rites and practices.

5. Anne Githinji (New Mexico, USA)

Title: What is the value of the African Woman.

Format: Panel discussion

Presenter wants to demonstrate how: the identity of the African woman is shaped by sexism and racism;

how sexism and racism are upheld by political, economic and socio-cultural institutions. Finally, she discusses ways to reconstruct a wholesome identity and its bearing on all people of African descent.

6. Fayemi A. Kazeem (Nigeria)

Title: Curbing the Problems of Prostitution and Women Trafficking in 21st Century Africa. An African –ethico feminist Perspective.

The paper will champion African feminism by explaining how the strength, resilience and resounding liberation of African women can be positively harnessed and enhanced in order to reduce prostitution and trafficking of women in the continent. It also highlights the role of men and youths in combating this problem.

7. Kongolo M (South Africa)

Title: Abusive Practices in Society: Possibility for Negative Engagements.

Paper discusses various ways in which abusive cultural rites and practices negatively impact the lives of women and girls. Among other things, the presenter will show how cultural rites can increase the risk of domestic violence and disease.

8. Nyenke Chionma (Nigeria)

Title: Eliminating Abusive Cultural Rites, Values and Practices. A Socio-Psychological Analysis of Female Circumcision Amongst the Ijaw Ethnic Group of Niger-Delta.

Presenter discusses harmful traditional practices embedded in the African culture. She focuses on Female Genital Mutilation and tries to show: the prevalence amongst the Ijaw ethnic group of Nigeria; establishes the causative relationship between this practice and health hazards; pinpoints factors that have encouraged and maintained the practice; ways to change the peoples' attitude towards this practice and finally examines the psychological consequences of this practice on the Ijaw woman.

9. Ohiro Oni-Eseleh (New York, USA)

Title: Psychological and Economic cost of Widowhood.

Presenter reviews various studies on the subject of widowhood, focusing mainly on its economic and psychological impact, as well as the need for organized social service systems in Africa. He will discuss whose role it is to make possible the establishment of relevant social service systems that will include significant consideration for the plight of widows.

10. *Nkiruka Ahiauzu (United Kingdom)***Title: De-sexing the African Family: Gender Roles, Equality and the Law.**

Paper presents ways through which the law can help eradicate oppressive cultural practices that debase women such as Female Genital Mutilation and widowhood rites. Presenter looks at other practices and institutions that even though not obviously sexist, are still harmful to women.

11. *Oredein Afolakemi (Nigeria)***Title: Eliminating Abusive Cultural Rites, Values and Practices: Education a Panacea for Women Empowerment.**

Presenter will show how education can be a way to achieve women's empowerment by contributing in the elimination of abusive cultural rites, values and practices in society.

12. *Christine Gwalawala Sibande (Malawi)***Title: The Human Rights Law and the Refugee Woman in Malawi: Unmasking Cultural Problems and Solutions under the Law.**

Presenter examines some cultural practices in Malawi and their effect on women refugees in Malawi. Presenter goes on to examine the clash of cultures and how they infringe on human rights of women refugees. The presenter discusses inadequacy of the law in addressing these problems.

13. *Ukwungwu, J. O (Nigeria)***Title: Gender Discrimination against Women Participation in Yam Production in Nigeria: A Shift in Gender Role Stereotyping in the Family.**

A historical perspective of yam cultivation in Nigeria: a symbol of masculinity. There have been a variety of beliefs and taboos against women participating in the lucrative business of yam cultivation. The presenter discusses how this was a victory for women's rights in Igbo land.

14. *Atojoko Ojochido Okunnu (Nigeria)***Title: Widowhood in Nigeria.**

Presenter will focus on the travails of the African woman, the diverse cultural trends and beliefs associated with widowhood. Presenter takes a look the lives of a few widows to see how they have survived the horrible fate imposed on them by tradition.

15. *Tunde OGUNJOBI, Nigeria***Title: Gender Differences in Household Resource Allocation in Southwestern Nigeria : A Comparative Analysis.**

Most of the contemporary works on gender have revealed the startling fact that men have advantage

over women when it comes to defining gender roles particularly at the level of household. The issue therefore is that the birth of a boy-child is often greeted with pop and pageantry while that of a girl-child is mostly seen as a "bad investment". The tragedy however is that the girl-child is born into a socio-cultural trauma and biases that consciously subordinate her in the process of resource allocation and socio-economic relations. In effect, where the pattern of resource allocation is largely determined by the father, the girl-child becomes inconsequential but, where the mother is in control, the girl-child gets adequate attention. The study therefore examines the extent to which gender differences come to fore at the level of household resource allocation in the Southwestern Nigeria and their implications for both the boy-child and the girl-child. For the study, both primary and secondary sources of data shall be adopted. Primary data and information shall be collected from interviews and questionnaire through random sampling technique. It is expected that the study will open more vistas for further understanding of gender discourse in Africa particularly Nigeria. It is also hoped that the study will create a platform to interrogate the ideology of patriarchy in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, as a necessary condition for shifting the theoretical boundary of gender discourse.

16. *Caroline Tine, USA***Title: The Role of the Custodians of the culture Statutory Laws and Religious beliefs.**

A lot of documentation exists about Harmful Traditional Practices that affect the African Woman, but little information exist on the role which the traditional rulers, who are the custodians of culture, the law makers and the religious leaders play to either foster these practices or help to eradicate them. The objective of this paper is to examine their roles in the society and how they can use it to combat these harmful practices, using Cameroon Nigeria and Kenya as case study.

The struggle to elevate the socio-legal status of the African woman has remained an uphill task and one of the main reasons is the application of customary practices (laws) to the legal status of the Woman. Custom are usages that identify a particular group of persons but when this customs contravene statutory laws to the extent where it denies a particular group of persons in the given society, then these custom must be stopped. This is where the role of the custodians becomes very useful.

The first phase is to examine the role the custodians of customs play in the society and how their roles affect the woman.

The second phase is to examine the role the custodians of statutory laws (parliamentarian's judges and police officers) play in the society and how it affects the woman. The third phase will look at the role of the religious leaders.

The fourth phase will examine how the roles of each of the above can be used positively to eradicate these harmful practices and to help elevate the socio-legal status of the woman.

The fifth phase will be advocating for the effective participation of the International bodies and the implementation of international laws where national laws are lacking.

17. Dr. Ngozi Chukwukere, Nigeria

Title: Themes of Wife Battering in African Literature and Language: Lessons from Igbo Poetry.

Wife battering is an important theme in any advocacy for women's emancipation. It is a reality that many women avoid talking about, especially when the patriarchal society legitimizes it and even blames the battered. My paper explores the ways that African writers present the acts of the aggressor and the victim in their works. Finally, it is postulated that using poetry and songs in indigenous African languages would enhance public enlightenment campaigns on obnoxious practices including wife battering.

18. Martha Teshome, Western Australia

Title: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is Violation of Human Rights specifically The Rights of Women and Children is affected by this procedure.

Background: FGM is sheltered under the guise of culture. Several reasons are given to sustain the practice in the affected communities including, culture, religion, for hygiene and aesthetics matters. Repression of female sexuality cuts across cultures in different forms and shapes in the FGM affected communities. FGM pre-dates all the major religions including Christianity, Judaism and Islam. However, because religion is central to the lives of many women in the FGM affected communities, and this, too, can be manipulated to control women's sexuality.

Rationale: to explain the contribution of the patriarchal system in controlling women's sexuality in various cultures with the emphasis on FGM.

Methodology: Knowledge acquired through ten years work experience with FGM affected communities in Western Australia will be shared.

Knowledge gained about the procedure from different literatures will be stated.

FGM is a critical component to control female sexual desires. It deprives children their right on their body as decision is made by adults without the children's consent.

Conclusion: Although women largely perform excision and are direct perpetrators of FGM; they end up performing FGM as a result of their powerlessness in traditional male dominated societies. Women practices FGM to please men.

19. Damaris M'Mworia

Title: Why do some Kenyan women participate in cultural practices that are oppressive to them or to other women?

Scholars who have conducted research studies in African societies where female circumcision is practiced as part of the rites of passage, have given horrifying description of the torture that young women are subjected to by older women as a way of preparing them for adulthood. In all these activities women play active roles preparing for the function and ensuring that it is done according to agreed specifications. Women have also been at the forefront in their defense on such practices and at times defied government attempts to stop such practices. Cases of girls running away from their homes and getting circumcised without the knowledge of their parents are common in most of the Kenyan communities where circumcision of girls is practiced. In most of these cases these girls' grandmothers and aunties are the ones who secretly encourage them to run away. This paper addresses the following questions:

- 1) Why do some girls demand to go through such torture?
- 2) Why do some mothers, aunties and grandmothers, put their little girls through such a painful surgery?
- 3) What are the historical, social, political and economic conditions that often force a majority of Kenyan women to choose between survival and personal safety?
- 4) How can African Cultural practices be respectfully assessed to determine if they nurture a vision of justice that enhances women's freedom?