

The CODESRIA Gender Symposium 2007
Gender in the Dynamics of Slavery and Enslavement

Orientation Note

In line with its mandate of developing, promoting, consolidating, and disseminating the highest quality of research on and about Africa, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) will hold a **Gender Symposium** from **November 12-14th in Cairo, Egypt**. CODESRIA is closely attentive to the social relevance of research, and seeks to contribute to the shaping of a developmental process for Africa that is anchored on rigorous scientific research. Recognizing that any endeavour that seeks to promote democratic development must as a matter of necessity adopt a gender equality approach to its work, the Council holds gender enquiry and analysis that leads to the understanding of the gendered realities of Africa as central to the advancement not only of Africa's development agenda; but of knowledge about Africa and the place of the continent in global terms. In particular, the Council believes that engendering African development requires close attention not only to the analytical tools of the researcher but also to the production of a gendered critique of development that questions the very foundations on which socio-economic and political processes in Africa rest. The Gender Symposium is thus designed to offer a platform for focused deliberations on the many facets of Africa's development agenda and of its Gender spectrum. The Symposium is an annual event that CODESRIA hosts within the ambit of its Gender Programme.

THE CODESRIA GENDER PROGRAMME

CODESRIA's Gender Programme was launched in 1983 as a special program that aimed at strengthening gender research and analysis in Africa. In 1996, it was transformed into a core programme following the recommendations of a Gender Task Force that was set up in 1995. The main objectives of CODESRIA's Gender Program are to:

1. Consolidate progress made in generating gender-transformative social science through systematic identification of new methodological concerns and instruments, the formation of new paradigms of social research on gender and the implementation of new training regimens and processes.
2. Provide concrete opportunities to a new generation of scholars –both male and female- to take creative approaches to gender-related research, pose new questions and better avail themselves of the experiences of senior scholars.
3. Systematically consider the implications of gender research and analysis to culture, social agency and social change in Africa.
4. Enhance understanding of the interactions of gendered realities at different social levels - households, community, social networks, state and trans-national institutions.

PROGRAMME VEHICLES

CODESRIA's approach to realizing the afore-mentioned objectives is multi-faceted but inter-related; spanning research, training, policy dialogue, publications and knowledge dissemination.

- National and Multinational Working Groups: These Working Groups foster comparative studies on gender transformation in Africa and are constituted on the basis of an annual open call for proposals.
- Gender Institutes, Fellowships and Grants: The Gender Institutes are held annually and are organized around specific themes to promote gender awareness on the subject area and strengthen gender analysis in African social science research. First launched in 1994, these institutes bring together twelve (12) to fifteen (15) researchers together for a period of four (4) weeks with a view to expanding and consolidating gender and gender-sensitive research networks. The institutes are constituted on the basis of an annual call for proposals.
- **Gender Symposia** and Conference Sessions: The Gender Symposium is an annual event that provides a platform for gender-focused debates. The debates are characterized by dialogue across disciplinary, generational and geographic divides. The Gender Conference Sessions on their part are sessions on gender that are infused into the various conferences organized by CODESRIA. Both the symposia and conference sessions provide a space for reflection and allow for debates that are geared towards the identification and development of cutting edge, Africa-relevant, globally situated gender research.
- Gender Series: The Gender Series is a publication of papers emanating from CODESRIA's Gender Symposia and Institutes. While work on gender is characteristically documented across the various CODESRIA publications; the Gender Series is solely dedicated to the dissemination of research on Gender in Africa.

THE 2007 Symposium

THEME: Gender in the Dynamics of Slavery and Enslavement

Different authors have identified different entry points for the developmental project they have in mind for Africa but these differences need not detain us here for now. What is really important to note is that it is inconceivable that the project of democratic development, however defined, can ever be successfully built without a full integration of gender into the equation. And it is precisely here that the silences have been loudest in spite of all official declarations committing governments to the promotion of the rights of women and the equality of men and women. Nowhere has this been more in evidence in recent times than in the new forms of slavery and enslavement that have, thus far, been a prominent feature of the new millennium and which have particularly affected women and girls. Going way beyond the various existing forms of exploitation of women and girls as domestic labour, farm hands, and factory employees, the new trade in human beings involves the sale of women and girls into new lives of bondage from which only the "lucky" ones succeed, eventually, to escape. Catalysed by a variety of socio-economic developments that have been associated locally and internationally with contemporary globalisation, the new forms of slavery and enslavement have translated into new local and international commercial transactions in women and girls organised by international networks with local anchorages and carried out under different guises. The transactions feed numerous demands that span various socio-economic sectors ranging from agriculture and industry to tourism and the domestic economy. They are built on their own supply chains that run from the local to the international – complete with the usual North-

South asymmetries in the distribution of value – and involve the negotiation of various national and international boundaries through which the women and girls are circulated until their final destination. The motivations of the different actors and actresses in the supply chain may differ in material detail but the sum total of their calculations is the recruitment of women and girls as commodities to be traded through various intermediaries.

That the international community is having to grapple with a contemporary problem of slavery and enslavement in the 21st century is probably one of the most tragic ironies of our times. For, only 200 years ago, in 1884, the old slave trade was formally abolished through a court ruling in the UK in what was celebrated as the opening of a new chapter in human history. To be sure, the abolition proclamation that followed the 1884 ruling was not without its opponents who organised a fairly prolonged resistance to preserve the trade and there were clearly class interests and structural changes in the economies of Europe and America that underpinned the shift from the slave trade to the so-called “legitimate” trade, a new form of exchange that presaged the colonial imposition. Still, the abolition proclamation was full of symbolism and the subsequent struggles it yielded that culminated in the birth of pan-Africanism, the nationalist struggles for African independence, the civil rights movement and the feminist movement could have been sufficient reason to assume that slavery and enslavement as practices and the exploitation of women within those practices had no place anymore in human history. However, evidence from across the world amassed over the last two decades indicates clearly that slavery and enslavement has not only persisted in some countries but has also been revived as a global business targeting girls and women in particular. But young boys too have not been spared this new form of enslavement as paedophilia, linked with the dynamics of sexual exploitation of children within the tourist industry, has been on the rise. As with the old slave trade, Africa has been especially hit by the new trade in human beings, a fact which should not be lost on the peoples of the continent even as they celebrate 50 years of the independence that was ushered in by the liberation of Ghana from direct British colonial domination in 1957.

The old slave trade was replete with its own gendered relations of oppression which historians have not particularly studied as a distinct field of interest but which all available accounts suggest was traumatic for the women who were captured and transported to the so-called New World. Evidence available on the contemporary forms of slavery and enslavement as local and international business suggests that the exercise within the household and the community of patriarchal powers in a context of deep social inequalities and extreme poverty is a key factor feeding the new trade in women and girls. Participants in the CODESRIA 2007 Gender symposium will seek to remedy the gender lacuna in the literature on the old slave trade which focused one-sidedly on the male slave, and in the critiques that have been produced on the new trade by undertaking a comparative analysis of different gender aspects of the old trade with the contemporary one that is particularly targeted at women and young girls. This will require a critical, gendered re-reading of the old slave trade alongside the new forms of the enslavement of women and girls that are being experienced. Comparative studies examining the contemporary experiences of female slaves and boys who are subjected to sexual exploitation will also be discussed. Participants in the symposium will also pay attention to, and explore the possible paths of liberation that a “free” world has to offer.

STRUCTURE

The symposium will be organised around the following plenary panel discussions:

1. Gender in the History of Slavery and Enslavement: (i) Theory and Method
2. Gender in the History of Slavery and Enslavement (ii) Perspectives
3. The Origins and Nature of the Contemporary Enslavement of Women
4. The Nature and Dimensions of the Contemporary Enslavement of Women:
Local/Global Push Factors (i)
5. The Nature and Dimensions of the Contemporary Enslavement of Women:
Local/Global Push Factors (ii)
6. Gender, Slavery, and Enslavement: The Adequacy of Legal Regimes
7. The Gendered Cultural and Literary Articulation of Slavery and Enslavement

The 2007 symposium will also feature a roundtable on Visual Representations of Slavery and Enslavement with panellists drawn from Gender Studies, Film, History, and Literary Studies.