



Editorial

(Re)making Bodies: The Structures and Dynamics of Aesthetics and Aspirations in an Evolving Africa

This special issue of *Africa Development* assembles contributions from the CODESRIA Humanities Programme conference held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2016. The articles included in this edition explore the (re)making of bodies and the structure and dynamics of aesthetics and aspirations in an evolving Africa. Recognizing that (re)making bodies in Africa is not a new phenomenon, these reflections try to escape the temptation of mainly dwelling on the present by inserting these bodily practices within the variegated histories of an expansive continent that has been and continues to be in constant contact with the rest of the world. Bodies constitute central pillars for examining and interrogating disparate aspects of personhood and subjectivity in Africa, especially given the manner in which the human body operates as a medium to navigate, understand or journey into the everyday African life.

The (re)making of bodies, often portrayed more grotesquely today in the practices of skin bleaching and the enhancement and reduction of various body parts are pervasive practices in Africa that continue to generate much debate and controversy, including a recent ban on skin lightening products by the Rwandan government. The health implications of these practices and the markets that underpin them have received attention both among scholars and in the popular press. Further, discussion has focused on the implications and effects of these practices on identities and hierarchies of being at a global as well as local level.

In what ways are bodies deployed as problematic for theorising and researching subjectivities in Africa? Contributions interrogate 'the body' as a material locus of contested meanings and practices, as well as an object

for fashioning multiplicities of everyday life in Africa. They examine how bodies are inscribed in the material world of Africans; how these are represented and experienced; and also, how the world in turn inscribes itself upon bodies. The key themes addressed include: the evolving meanings and contested vistas of sensuality, beauty, wellness and wellbeing and the (re)making of African bodies; the intersection of the (re)making of bodies and the (re)making of aesthetics and aspirations in Africa; hierarchies of being and the (re)making of the being that is seen; nativist and cosmopolitan flirtations and alibis in the location of the (re)making of bodies in the structures and dynamics of aesthetics and aspirations; (re)making bodies as a set of gendered practices; the social embeddedness of the (re)making of bodies; the economics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of an economy of (re)making bodies; and virtual aesthetic communities.