

## **Situating Fireside Knowledge in Development Feminist Academy**

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### **Introduction**

As a feminist development geographer scholar for the last 26 years, I have interacted with the feminist development academy. I have experienced two scenarios. The first one being a marginal scholar in the global knowledge production ladder because I am a female working in an African university. The second one is that I am both a subject recipient of development and a researcher of development. These experiences have placed me as a marginal scholar in the development feminist academy writing about marginal communities in patriarchal capitalist global development. I have envisioned and positioned my scholarship work as situating fireside knowledge in development feminist development academy. I coin the term ‘fireside knowledge’ from my Agikuyu tradition that separated knowledge that was passed on in the woman’s fireside in the kitchen from that of men in the men’s hut. The difference in the two forms of knowledge was expressed in the saying *cia riiko ti cio cia thingira* (knowledge or information passed at the kitchen fireside is different from that conveyed in a man’s hut).

Positioning fireside knowledge in feminist development academy has been an uphill task. This is because the feminist development academy is laced with patriarchal capitalist norms and values which aim at transforming women from the margins into patriarchal capitalists by positioning them into global financial, labour and commodity value chains. This positioning demands that women shed off their fireside knowledge and adopt masculine knowledge systems as pathways to empowerment and liberation. This paper attempts to define fireside knowledge, compare it with mainstream feminist development academy and show my efforts to situate fireside knowledge in the feminist development academy.

### **Fireside knowledge concept**

Fireside knowledge represents an African feminist form of knowledge. It consists of women’s perspectives of knowing, norms, values, methods and strategies of doing and engaging the world that are transmitted from one generation to the next at the fireside. Knowledge systems that have evolved from the works of Socrates, Plato, Marx, Hegel, Weber, Darwin, Alfred Marshal, and Adam Smith, to mention a few, have convinced us that knowledge is constructed and organized through a masculine frame. Any other form of knowledge originating from different paradigms and sources especially those of African women is marginal and peripheral. Thus, the stories, norms and values passed on by African women are disregarded as irrational and non-scientific. Most

development feminists are inspired by the works of economists like Alfred Marshal, Adam Smith, Schumpeter and neoliberal institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund or vanguards of global capitalism. These works, when embraced, force women to change their household economy to become firms or corporations and reinforce patriarchal global commodity production, labour and financial circuits albeit at the margins.

Fireside knowledge espouses survival, self-reliance, resilience, solidarity, self-determination, justice, sharing and reciprocity. It is the type of knowledge that the Swahili say: *asiyefunzwa na mamaye hufunzwa na ulimwengu* (loosely translated whoever is not taught by the mother is bound to be taught by the world). Patriarchal knowledge systems suppress feminine forms of knowledge so that they can prepare individuals to live in perpetual servitude to the global capitalist production and exchange.

The fireside knowledge is also gained from lived experiences and participation in the daily household and community activities. The knowledge is experiential, affective, practical and is tested in the lived environment. It prepares one for survival and equips one to live with others in the household and community. It teaches individuals to be human, self-reliant, productive and just. It can be compared to indigenous forms of knowledge which have survived colonial and neoliberal modernist projects. Fireside knowledge is free. It is not commercialized in the knowledge market system of textbooks, journals, schools or college. It is passed on from one generation to the next in households and African market places. It is the knowledge that sustains activities of women peasants, artisans and traders in Kenya.

Women peasants, artisans and traders are marginalized and depicted as individuals who do not know anything. Their logic norms, values and institutions are regarded as primitive backward and not belonging to the developed patriarchal capitalist world. It is perceived that they have to be rescued from their own situation. Their knowledge is regarded as unscientific and irrational. Women peasants, artisans and traders are considered to be ignorant and overwhelmed. Consequently, most studies on women peasants, artisans, and traders harp on the challenges and difficulties they face in fitting in the patriarchal capitalist development rather than their resilience and creativity in coping with everyday life. This condescending attitude and rendition of women's fireside knowledge has to be countered with one that presents the women traders, artisans and peasants as normal, with agency, rational and scientific.

Presenting fireside knowledge involves talking back to the development feminist academy. The development feminist academy has unequivocally sought to help women catch up with global patriarchal capitalism. It assumes that women are a *tabula rasa* upon which capitalism can be scripted. The development feminist academy portrays women, peasants, artisans and traders as deficient. A woman in development feminism either lacks a body, or if she has one, it is constrained. She lacks finance, credit facilities, education, health services, power, skills, technology, leadership qualities, choices, rationality, scientific knowledge, land and resources. This portrayal is done without posing the question: Who works on farms to produce the coffee and the tea we drink every day? Why does the high global consumption of coffee mean better prices for farmers? Who feeds the city? Why doesn't the high urban food consumption in cities translate to better earnings for farmers? How do women artisans, peasants and traders perform their

activities? What logic, norms, values and institutions do women uphold in production and exchange in peasant artisan and trade activities?

Introducing fireside knowledge in the development feminist academy is an anti-colonial strategy that documents the resistance and self-preservation of women in the face of invasive global patriarchal capitalist system. It presents scenarios where women peasants, artisans and traders in the past and present have resisted developments bent on stifling their activities hence continuing to articulate their production and exchange in global patriarchal capitalist development. Fireside knowledge shows how women have maintained and articulated their identity, gender, logic, norms, values and institutions in production and exchange. For example, the *chama* (self-help group) in East Africa is a woman's attempt to use solidarity and create commons in global development (Kinyanjui, 2012, 2014; Federici, 2012; Podlashuc, 2009; Caretta and Cheptuma, 2019).

Introducing fireside knowledge in feminist development academy brings to the fore; women who have been consigned to oblivion. Although such women work and produce coffee, nowhere do they appear on our coffee or tea packages in local or foreign supermarkets. These women do not appear on television adverts or glamorous women magazines. While milk adverts in Kenya will show a middle-class woman serving her family with *Fresha* milk to keep it healthy, the adverts will not show the many peasant women who keep *Fresha* milk production alive by milking and feeding cows every day in Githunguri, Kiambu County.

Introducing fireside knowledge in the development feminist academy involves creating knowledge that is not anti-women. Fireside knowledge preserves and transfers women's logic, norms and values of nurturing, care, creating solidarities and commons, intergenerational connectedness and transfer of knowledge and resources to communities and across generations. It counters the exploitative global patriarchal capitalism knowledge.

### **Development Feminist Academy**

Development feminism was spurred by the works of Esther Boserup (1965), a Danish Economist. She wrote a book entitled *Woman's Role in Economic Development*. The book documented the distribution of duties between men and women in agricultural production. She set the ball rolling for interrogation of gender relations in development. She showed that women performed the heaviest tasks in agricultural production but received minimal rewards for it. Boserup's work inspired many female scholars to engage in research on women in development. These female researchers have addressed several issues affecting women participation in the patriarchal capitalist development economy.

Some studies on women operating in the informal economy view their participation as a limitation and the reason why they are not part of the patriarchal global capitalist development. Chant and Pedwell (2008) argue that the failure of governments to create jobs explains why women are in the informal economy. They also argue that men push women to low value activities of the informal economy and that the 'feminization of informal labour has served to exacerbate gendered, sexualized, racialized and classed inequalities' (Chant and Pedwell, 2008: 13). In their view, informal jobs are not decent.

Had they looked at the informal economy in the eyes of women, they would have learned that the informal economy concept was a masculine creation by Keith Hart, who viewed non-western traders and craftspeople as informal. They would have appreciated that African women in particular have been traders and artisans since time immemorial. Their persistence into the 20th century could be viewed as a form of resistance to incorporation and conscription into global capitalist production chains. Chant and Pedwell (2008) would have interrogated the meaning of decent jobs. It is not clear in whose eye decency is constructed. What is indecent in sitting in a marketplace trading in groundnuts? How is decency measured or observed? What is the difference between a market trader and a clinical assistant doing double shifts in the American health system? Knowledge from a fireside perspective would have illuminated why women are in the informal economy, the methods they use to survive, and the alliances, commons and solidarities they form to advance humanity rather than endorse a patriarchal capitalist system.

In her writings and activism on the informal economy dating from 2000, Martha Chen has documented the marginalized and peripheral position of the informal economy. Of notable significance is the lack of inclusion of the informal economy in national economic systems. Through her WIEGO organization, she has tried to form informal economy networks and associations to address the problems affecting the informal economy. Chen et al (2016) bemoans the lack of national and local government policy for informal enterprises. Her works have greatly documented the problems that informal workers experience while going about their duties as well as the neglect and exclusion they experience from mainstream policy. Her work is different from fireside knowledge because the latter demonstrates how informal workers negotiate their everyday activities in the context of exclusion and discrimination. The latter provides information on the norms and methods that informal workers use to navigate exclusion and marginalization. Fireside knowledge proposes that these norms and methods should be enhanced to counteract the exclusion and marginalization.

Other works on the informal economy in mainstream feminist development academy include the works of Mitullah (2003). Mitullah demonstrates the constraints that street vendors in African countries face while carrying out their business. She observes that street traders operate in unregulated and unprotected environments that are not conducive for business development. This kind of knowledge assumes that there is a specific frame and business environment in which businesses should operate. The frame is most often western economic models and thoughts stipulated in the works of Alfred Marshal, Adam Smith and Schumpeter. Street traders in Africa will always be found deficient and laden with multiple constraints when analyzed through western models and thoughts. Fireside knowledge would have highlighted how street traders navigate the streets despite the numerous constraints.

The development feminist academy has addressed the issue of allocation of resources in households (Guyer, 1988; Kabeer, 1994; Quisumbing, 2003; Kevan, 2012; Johnson, 2017). Its studies demonstrate how women from developing countries are constrained in the allocation of resources in the household and communities. While the studies propose the need for interventions in allocation of resources between men and women in the household and community, they do not interrogate why women do the things that they do. They do not decipher how women navigate the

unequal resource allocation in the household and community. The studies ignore the dislocation and uprooting of men from households and communities to go and work in plantations and mines or in urban centers. Fireside knowledge is crucial in helping come up with solutions that address resource allocation.

Development feminists have raised important issues on women participation in patriarchal global capitalist development, some of which have been or are being addressed through government policies. These contributions can be enhanced by situating women's fireside knowledge into the academy. The fireside knowledge will bring in norms, methods and strategies of transforming the mainstream patriarchal capitalist development. It will ensure that women are not 'add ons' to global financial, labour and commodity chains. Telling the world that women are key in the production of coffee and cocoa in Africa and they need to be rewarded and recognized is a different ball game from telling the world that allocation of resources is unequal. We need to shift from documenting constraints of women in the informal economy to highlighting the question of extraction and exploitation inherent in the patriarchal global capitalism. Fireside knowledge has the tools of survival, resilience, solidarity and self-reliance for addressing the extractive global patriarchal capitalism.

### **Navigating the process of situating fireside knowledge in mainstream academy**

In the development process, I have played the twin roles of an academic studying development and a subject of development living and practicing it. Playing and balancing these two roles has not left me unscathed. As an academic, I have had the privilege of studying in major universities in the World. I obtained a PhD in Geography from Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom; A Master's degree in Geography from Kenyatta University and Bachelor's degree in education from the University of Nairobi. The knowledge presented in the academy conflicted with my fireside knowledge. Critical studies in my undergraduate and Master's studies made me question some of the truths that I had held about life. Studies on the role of missionaries in education made me begin to question my Catholic education tradition. Missionaries were presented as harbingers of colonial extraction and exploitation. My lived experience in a peasant community of Gatundu North was labelled as backward and primitive. Peasant farming was accused of environmental degradation. In a class on Women and Education, my mother and other women whom I had always viewed as strong and courageous were presented as docile, victims and helpless. I felt alienated and frustrated as I tried to reconcile my fireside knowledge with my studies in the university.

During my study at the University of Cambridge, Geography department, I came face to face with leading geographers whose works I had read during my college days. I had assumed that because they had written books about Africa and the third world, they would be welcoming and receptive to an African student. I was wrong. Except one lecturer, most of the others were distant and did not care whether there was an African female student in the building.

Another source of frustration was my experience in supermarkets. Products like coffee were labelled as coffee from Nestle, or Decaffeinated coffee from Germany. Coffee was no longer a product of peasants like my farming community in Gatundu North. I would look at the scars on

my left foot occasioned by stabs and pricks while picking tea and coffee and feel the pain of being a nameless body in the coffee production and trade. At the department, the numerous journeys that people made to the coffee machine made me feel short-changed. This was because these people were being kept awake by the coffee produced by bodies like me who were not recognized and to make matters worse, were called backward and primitive peasants. My fireside knowledge about gender, production, survival was put in disarray by what I read, listened to in seminars and small chats during breaks. My only consolation was a few lines from a Gikuyu Christian song we used to sing at my mother's fireside before we went to bed: *Magithii kuhanda mbegu mathiire makiririraga, na riria magicokaga ciondo ciao ciaiure ki* (Sowers went to plant to seeds while crying but upon return, they came with full bags).

As a subject of development, I have been actively involved in the development process by working in peasant farming activities in my rural Ngethu village in Gatundu North, Kiambu County. I also participated in urbanization by building my own home in Nairobi. As a subject of development, I am affected by the development processes. I have full experience of the devastating effects of neoliberal policies in Kenya. As a subject recipient of development, I had a personal experience of the effects of structural adjustment on my life. My savings were wiped out and I could not raise a mortgage for my housing. My salary was kept low compared to fellow graduates from other parts of the world because in neoliberal definitions, I hailed from a labour surplus economy. I have lived and shared my participation in the global development process with others. The knowledge I generate is not only about them, but it is also about me. In my research endeavor, I have tried to build a body of knowledge that is based on both my lived feminist experience as an academic and a subject of development who is marginalized and privileged at the same time. This has entailed processing my research experience in the eyes of my neighbors who include women workers in the informal economy and peasant activities. To process feminist knowledge from information and data generated from my research process has involved battling with dominant knowledge paradigms, dealing with sexism and racialized knowledge hegemonies. One of the problems has been how to read the broad development literature without getting annoyed with the terminologies and concepts used in the analysis because of my lived feminist experiences or countering sexism in the academy.

My writing is also inspired by the feminine *utu* (humanness) fireside philosophy of *gutuga* (being generous and multiplying or enhancing good practices) rather than cataloguing problems of development. Feminine *utu* is a concept that I use to describe the feminine side of humanity. The norms, logic, solidarities, resilience, self-reliance, nurturing and care attributes that female human beings use to engage and navigate the world. In fireside knowledge, dwelling on problems is self-defeating. Whenever I encounter challenges and problems, I turn to the philosophy of *gukiriria*, *kuiganira* and *kwihe hinya* (persevering and accepting that what happens has to happen) and summon the strength to move on. One should make use of the only good that is available. Self-reliance involves improvising and making do with what one has rather than remaining in the same position, redefining and narrating the problem over and over again. It means using the language of resilience which is expressed in sayings and proverbs. These sayings and proverbs encourage me to continue with the everyday struggle. One Gikuyu proverb *ūtamerithitie ndatigaga kūhanda* states that instead of one complaining that her seeds have not sprouted, she should continue

planting. The individual whose seeds have not sprouted should not stop planting. The language of resilience gives hope and upholds that no situation is permanent. *Gūtirī ĩrurumaga merĩ* (There is no situation of a powerful being roaring twice). This is because its energy dissipates or diminishes with time. *Ireragĩra rĩkũĩnĩ ĩ kaya kũigana* (a being sets base on dead wood and is able to live and grow into maturity). This stresses the importance of acknowledging life possibilities even during the worst of situations. *Mũheria ngĩa ndagiragia gũkĩe* (A powerful being who oppresses others does not stop daybreak) or *haria ikagigio ti ho iguaga* (Something thrown in a certain direction may not always land in that direction) inspire my everyday struggles as a marginal scholar in the development feminist academy and in my livelihood negotiation and survival with resilience.

In my writings, I view feminism as advancing a feminine *utu* frame to navigate the neoliberal patriarchal frame in the world. It is the strategy of using feminine tools, norms and values to change the world rather than using masculine tools to engage the world. To engage the patriarchal world, in most instances, women are forced to shed their feminine *utu* and be ‘just like the men’ to fit in boardrooms in the academy, corporation and development.

### **My writings**

My first three written pieces on women in global development: *Gender Mainstreaming in Development Policy* (1999); *A Gender Analysis of Small-Scale Garment Producers’ Response to Market Liberalization*, (2003) and book coauthored with Kaendi Munguti on *Gender Equity in Micro and Small Enterprises in Kenya*, (2002) were illuminated by development Feminism. I predicate my work on the argument that men and women are different and unequal. In one of the chapters in the book *Gender Mainstreaming in Development Policy*, I review the articulation of gender in Kenya’ five-year development plans between 1964 and 1998. I demonstrate that most of the five-year plans were gender-blind and did not have specific policies for women. In the 2003 paper, I demonstrate gender differences in responses between men and women enterprises to market liberalization. Differences in responses to liberalization are manifested in terms of level of education, professional background, previous occupation, product lines, sources of startup capital, and sales distribution patterns. I also observe that the male entrepreneurs were exporting products to Uganda and Tanzania. I conclude by prescribing interventions that could help the women to catch up with men. I recommend extension of business services and configuration of government policies in a manner that encourages women to participate in exports. The book *Gender Equity in Micro and Small Enterprises in Kenya* shows gender differences between men and women. Men tend to operate larger enterprises than women. They invest more capital than women, and serve larger markets. Women enterprises are smaller, dwell on traditional female activities of food and garment making and tend to serve local markets. I also recommend government interventions to support women’s production to catch up with the men in production and exchange by availing credit and training skills.

My development feminism approach to the study of the informal economy changed after 2004. In the night of 16th December, 2004, I was attacked by thieves in my house. They stole all my household goods and raped me. When the painful news about my experience spread, a group of ordinary women known as Nyahururu Taveta paid me a visit. They brought me food, money and consoled me. As part of healing, I decided to write a proposal entitled *The Political Economy of*

Rape. I approached many of the development research financiers to fund the project but unfortunately, none of them acknowledged receipt of my proposal. This incident and what followed forced me to rethink who I am and why I do the things I do. I began questioning the feminist idea of equality with men or using the male ideological and institutional frame as the reference of viewing, structuring and coordinating life and economy in society. I also began to question global capitalism and the anger and inequalities it was generating. After a lot of soul-searching and consideration, instead of blaming the rapist, I decided to lay blame on the system that produced him. I also began to question the role of western funding in gender research. Western funders only funded politically correct projects that advanced their interests. For example, it was politically correct and fashionable then, to fund research on micro and small enterprises and women rights, but not violence as they are doing today.

The support received from the ordinary women opened my eyes to a side of knowledge that development feminism had closed, that is, using the feminine ideology and institutions as the frame of organizing life and society. I learnt that life is not about ‘catching up’ with men in global development. It is about advancing the feminine *utu* (humanness) which involves self-reliance, nurturing, solidarity and affection in society. The knowledge and perspective by ordinary women are peripherized and marginalized in development feminism in its attempts to help women ‘catch up’ with men in global patriarchal capitalism. It involves situating fireside knowledge in development feminist academy.

My efforts to situate fireside knowledge in the development feminist academy include the following works: *Vyama Institutions of Hope: Ordinary People’s Market Coordination and Society Organisation*; *Women and the Informal Economy in Urban Africa: From the Margins to the Centre*; *Coffee Time*; *The Sweet Sobs of Women in Response to Anthropolain*; *Feminine Utu: Rethinking African Feminism with a special focus on the Agikuyu*; *Mama Jua Kali: Female Resistance and Resilience in the Informal Economy*; and *Wanjiku in Global Development: Logic and Solidarities in Ordinary Women Livelihood Survival in Kenya*. In these works, I have made efforts to present knowledge, philosophies, norms and values of subaltern women. I have also made efforts to come up with different vocabulary to describe the activities they are involved in.

**Vyama Institutions of Hope: Ordinary People’s Market Coordination and Society Organisation (2012)**

This was my first attempt to situate fireside knowledge in the development feminist academy. In this book, I demonstrate how two indigenous feminist institutions, *ngwatio* (labour pools) and **matega** (gift pools) were articulated into global capitalist development to help ordinary people coordinate markets and organise society. The women and later men, attempt to create a form of commons that helps them pool financial resources which are distributed on rotational basis to members. These institutions were known as *chama* (singular) or *vyama* in plural. The *chama* served many purposes which included buying food in bulk and redistributing it to members or buying household utensils. Other welfare groups pooled money while others addressed emergencies such as member illness or offsetting funeral expenses. Others were used to celebrate life such as in the case of graduations, weddings or childbirth. Through the *vyama*, members exchanged knowledge and ideas on everyday issues including parenting, schools, marital



relationships and religion. They were based on a local philosophy of solidarity that espouses: 'I am because you are and because you are, therefore I am.' The *vyama* were founded on the on kinship, geographical, business, profession or religious ties. They have evolved from serving basic household needs to become investment clubs that buy shares in stock exchanges or purchase parcels of land. Some high street banks have also created products for them such as the Chama Account. The *chama* collects small sums of money and builds lumpsums which are then banked. Some have loan facilities for members. They have constitutions which govern their everyday operations. They have rules on attendance, contributions, rewards and penalties as well as the manner in which elections are held. Most of them are recognized by the government which serves them through the social development officers. The government is keen on incorporating them into neoliberal development so that it can extract surplus from them.

### **Women and the Urban Informal Economy: From the Margins to the Centre (2014)**

The conceptualization of this book was triggered by a YU mobile television commercial. The commercial was demonstrating the importance of using a YU line for *Mama Mboga* (vegetable vendors) and her Asian female customers. The vegetable vendor would call her customer on the top floor of a high-rise building. The customer would answer the phone, place an order, pay and then drop a bag. The vendor would service the order and convey the product to the customer, sealing the trade deal.

The YU mobile phone advert forced me to interrogate the positioning and representation of women informal workers in the city. My interrogation was further spurred by the fact that women traders had started occupying trading stalls in the central business district. I began with archival research on the impact of the heavily masculine planning on the positioning and representation of women in the city. I also interviewed women in the informal economy as active agents of the city transformation. The archival research revealed that although women were marginalized and discriminated against by the planning ideologies, they have been initiating a silent revolution in the city through their feminine genius of solidarity which I call 'solidarity entrepreneurialism.' This form of entrepreneurship involves shared transactions in hiring space, transport and business utilities; forming welfare groups that further extend transactions and creating own commons in the centre of the city. I also observed that women investments were prompted by the logic of nurturing and care. Most of their earnings were used to educate their children, service health issues, and support parents. Some women used their proceeds to pay church tithe, invest in purchasing parcels of land, and buying shares. The women had come from peripheral positions, crossed boundaries and become visible. They were found their way out of the boxes in which the masculine planning ideology had confined them. The women were able to achieve this through resilience and resistance. They built on the efforts of those women who had been before them. They drew on indigenous institutions at the same time struggling to maintain their gender difference in a neoliberal city through the logic of nurturing and care and creating commons.

### **Coffee Time (2015)**

My book *Coffee Time* was published by Laanga Press from Cameroun. I tried to publish the book in Kenya but could not. One publisher whom I approached told me that it was a good manuscript

but they were not keen to run such titles. Another told me that writing about tea time would be more appealing to the youth rather than coffee time. These publishers were not willing to adopt fireside knowledge into the mainstream.

In *Coffee Time*, I document fireside knowledge in the phenomenon of labour extraction and exploitation at the household level through coffee production. The book majorly centres on my family experience. I document feminist struggles that my aunt, my parents, young girls in my village and myself go through. I also highlight my own as an uncircumcised girl in my family and community.

Coffee production was introduced to small scale farmers in central Kenya in the 1950s as part of the Swynerton Plan (Kinyanjui, 2002). The plan was supposed to appease the Africans who were agitating against colonial rule by adjudicating and consolidating land parcels and giving titles. The Swynerton Plan also allowed royal Africans to grow coffee. Although coffee production and export is hailed as a source of foreign exchange, it is a form of labour extraction and exploitation from households. Farmers are paid peanuts while global coffee marketers make a killing in coffee trade. Instead of extracting male labour in coffee plantations, the labour extraction was extended to women and children in the household. I demonstrate how the extended family household labour is articulated in coffee production. By so doing, everyone in the family except my grandmother who refused to work on the coffee farm was integrated into global capitalism. I also demonstrate the differences in coffee times in Europe and North America. In Europe and North America, coffee time is a relaxing and celebration moment. In the family in my rural area, coffee time is a period of hard back-breaking work. The forms of solidarities created during coffee times in Europe and North Africa are also different. In Europe and North America, coffee time creates consumption commons while in my family, coffee time created solidarities for further extraction and hard work. The book also shows the delicate settings in which girls, I included, navigated adolescence. In the book, I also tell the story of my aunt's struggle in navigating life as a single parent, and as a Catholic faithful in a situation where single parents are frowned at. She tries to overcome her marginal status through hard work and Christianity. Finally, I document, deaths in the family that were associated with working on the coffee farm.

### **The Sweet Sobs of Women in Response to Anthropain (2019)**

Today there is a lot of violence. Human beings are causing a lot of pain to each other. There have been bomb blasts in shopping malls, in hotels, in train stations and shootings in schools and churches. I refer to the pain caused by human beings on other human beings as anthropain. I argue that this form of pain could be reduced through more humanistic methods that involve dialogue and forgiveness as opposed to revenge and vengeance. In *The Sweet Sobs of Women in Response to Anthropain*, I draw from my grandmother's teachings. She used to tell me "*aciara arĩra athata arĩra*" (both the barren woman and the woman who bears children cry). This saying indicates that pain and sobbing is a factor in women's life. I explore the issue of pain and its management through the stories of eight women drawn from my village in Gatundu North, Kiambu County. I interrogate the issues of leadership, sexuality, economy and society organization in the eyes of women who were sobbing due to the adversities they had experienced. They engage their feminine *utu* (humanness) to negotiate and dialogue with others in society so that they can transfer life to the

next generation. The women contribute to the idea of centering life and intergenerational transfer of humanity in the family and community. As human beings, the women feel pain and are emotional. They weep but turn their tears into creative energy that generates resilience, hope, productivity, inspiration, positive change, and sustainable development.

**Feminine *Utu*: Rethinking African Feminism with a special focus on the Agikuyu (2018)**

This paper interrogates motherhood rights inspired by the feminine *utu* (humanness). The right to be a mother is a basic right that ordinary women strive for. They strive to mother and see their children grow into responsible adults. This motherhood was best expressed by the mothers of people who were detained by President's Moi government in Kenya. The mothers in collaboration with the environmental and political activist Prof. Wangari Maathai went on a hunger strike to demand for the release of their sons. This protest energized the clamor for more democratic space in Kenya in the 1990s. The leaders of the democratic movement supported the mothers' resistance to the illegal detention of their sons.

Key to motherhood rights is the desire for their offspring to live and thrive in safe and secure spaces. It also includes the women's right to have spaces for self-reliance and self-determination in work, production, and exchange to nurture and care for their offspring. To achieve these rights, women work with resilience to provide for their offspring and also resist any form of injustice to their children. The women's resistance is embodied in defying orders or resisting the desires of their own bodies, desires such as food and sex. among the Agikuyu of central Kenya, a signature tune *Ni ithui atumia* (we are the women) narrates the resilience, solidarity, unity, resistance and silence of women while negotiating their lived life experiences. Their desires can be expressed in the rubric of motherhood rights. Their kind of feminism is closely tied to their lived experience. *Mama Mboga*, and *Mama Jua Kali*, for example, stand out in the city resisting coloniality and modernity by preserving the peasant, artisan and trader's mode of production. *Mama Jua Kali* juggles and negotiates with sexism, sexual exploitation and oppression as she goes about her livelihood negotiation in *jua kali* (businesses carried out under the hot sun), local name for the informal sector. She builds alliances and solidarity so that she can provide for her offspring, realize flourishing and thriving community and connecting communities. She actualizes her self-determination and desire to work for herself.

I have discerned nine tenets of the feminine *utu*. The tenets are perpetuated in indigenous feminism propagated by ordinary African women peasants, artisans and traders. They are influenced by the logic, norms, and values that aim at reducing human suffering and ensure continuity of life in homes and communities. The tenets are:

1. Continuity of life to the next generation
2. Peace and harmony in homes and community
3. Body and psychological pain management and control
4. Food self-sufficiency
5. Making everyday work easier and tolerable

6. Socialization and education for the next generation
7. Connecting human beings in the family, community and nation.
8. Thriving and flourishing communities
9. Creating solidarity and community

### **Mama Jua Kali: Female Resistance and Resilience in the Informal Economy**

Many women drive the cogs of urbanization in Nairobi from their marginal positions. These women are referred to as *Mama Mboga* (vegetable vendor), *Mama Fua* (laundry women), *Mama Samaki* (fish trader) or *Mama Jua Kali* (women in informal economy), *Mama Maziwa* (milk distributor) or *Mama Mayai* (egg distributor). They play important roles in food distribution and rendering services. I explore the story of female resistance and resilience through the eyes of *Mama Jua Kali*. *Mama Jua Kali* differs with the existing narratives in literature that characterize women in the informal economy as helpless, marginalized, voiceless, vulnerable, invisible, survivalist and poor. The term *Mama Jua Kali* confers agency, authority and command to the bearer. *Mama Jua Kali's* simplicity of dressing and the way she carries her goods represents her resistance to conspicuous modernity. Today, women in the *jua kali* enclave are identifiable by their pink and blue checked aprons. They make a feminist statement of resistance, self-reliance, self-determination and collective action. They are real and practical, courageous and determined to venture into livelihood negotiation without relying on government or corporations to provide them with jobs or depending on the male spouse to cater for their needs. The story of people like *Mama Jua Kali* are not always told. They do not appear in everyday women magazines, yet they overcome hardship and sweat in *jua kali* as they provide goods and services.

### **Wanjiku in Global Development: Logic and Solidarities in Ordinary Women Livelihood Survival in Kenya**

The name *Wanjiku* in Kenya is used figuratively to represent ordinary low-income women who derive livelihood in trade, peasant and artisan work. I push the debate of exiting majority of ordinary African women from poverty by interrogating how *Wanjiku* articulates herself in the global economy by monetizing transactions in the household as well as creating institutions that regulate self and group in peasant, trade and artisan activities. She juggles with money between gifting, reciprocity, sharing, accumulation and investing as she fulfills her roles and mission in the world involving nurturing and care. She makes and configures households as sites of monetized production and reproduction transactions in her everyday livelihood negotiations on the farm, market or at the artisan site. She makes money, accumulates, invests it or uses it in realizing the wellbeing of self, offspring or parents to reproduce and connect communities in time and space. Through intense processes of socialization and orature, she crafts a model of economy that ensures survival, transfer to the next generation and connectedness to the divine, local family and community and personal realm.

Maintaining command at the household is key and many women strive to maintain this at all costs. This influences the way they monetize transactions in the household, family and community as well as make peasant, artisan and trade activities centers of self and group market regulation.

Understanding this process, the logic and desires of wellbeing and wealth will go a long way in explaining the survival of peasants, artisans and traders into the 21st Century.

In my writings, I have attempted to situate fireside knowledge in the development feminist academy. My kind of feminism is one of advancing feminine *utu* norms, tools and strategies with the aim of transforming the patriarchal global capitalist development. It is an anti-patriarchal frame which does not position women as ‘add-ons’ to a masculine framework in boardrooms in corporations, government, development and academy. It is a revolutionary mechanism which aims at transforming the foundations of the masculine operations in the household and community using nurturing, solidarity, sharing, reciprocity, self-reliance, individual and group agency norms and ethos.

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