



# CODES

**A Bi-annual Newsletter for Black Women in  
Switzerland**

**SPECIAL EDITION 2**

**10 years**

**Meeting Place &  
Resource Center for Black Women**

**2003 - 2004**



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## Meeting Place and Resource Center

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open to women of Black Heritage

every Friday

Time / Zeit: 10.00 – 1500

Open to the public every last Friday of the month

- **Meet and Eat – African Buffet –**

Time: 12.15

### Management Committee:

Dinah Obay	Chair
Fatima Rubi	Vice Chair
Ruth Fux	Acting Treasurer
Grace Benjamin	
Claudine Guinand	

### Team

Zeedah Meierhofer-Mangeli	Director
Udoka Küpfer	Team member

### Resource Persons including :

Jeanne Brönnimann  
Sabah Sidler  
Nellie Mollin

### Youth Forum

Sharon Nehrenheim  
Sophia Meierhofer  
Alexandra Meierhofer

### Intern:

Penda Diallo

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## CODES

“Walking the same road of shared history and common struggles;  
United in purpose despite individual differences and aspirations;  
We draw courage from our collective strength;  
And from the bonds we form through our special codes;  
Codes of mutual support, safe spaces, and collective voice  
our codes of Sisterhood.”

### CODES:

The importance of being able to understand each other, through a  
language of commonalities, unspoken understanding, shared history,  
Identity, rich in diversity  
But visible and united in purpose

### CODES

Even when our voices are drowned, our vision remains.  
We continue to draw strength from our special code. Our code of  
sisterhood.

# CONTENTS

2	Mission Statement
3	Project description (German)
4	Letter from Chair
5	Your average 10 year old
6 - 8	Summary report: Strategising for common Agenda
9 - 12	Women of substance : key note speech Conference
13	Reflecting on Space Voice and Sisterhood
14 - 16	Key note speech Anniversary Gala
17	Poem: I Arise
18 - 21	Laudation
22	An observation of the Youth Forum
23	Challenges and Opportunities
24 - 25	The Center and Human rights
26 - 27	The AWLI, A life changing experience
28 - 29	Reflections to white sisters
30 - 31	Migration and health
33 - 34	Calendar 2004



## **Mission Statement**

The Meeting Place and Resource Center for Black women is a National organisation based in Zurich, Switzerland. The Center serves as a platform for carrying issues concerning Black Women, their families, their integration process, and their interaction with society.

### **This is achieved by:**

- Offering a safe space
- Mobilising and empowering Black Women
- Challenging sexist and racist stereotypes by emphasising positive images of Black women
- Networking and linking up with other institutions locally, nationally and internationally
- Educating, consulting and sensitising society

## **PROJEKTBESCHRIEB**

Der Treffpunkt für Schwarze Frauen wurde 1993 gegründet. Vorausgegangen war eine elfjährige Vor- und Abklärungsphase. Seit sieben Jahren beinhaltet der Treffpunkt ein zusätzliche Ressourcen Zentrum, welches Materialien wie Videos, eine Bibliothek und Info-Pakete für Interessierte anbietet.

Wir sind das einzige solche Stelle für Schwarze Frauen in der Schweiz.

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### **Team**

Der Treffpunkt wird von ein Team und Management Komitee von 6 Frauen geleitet, die ehrenamtlich arbeiten. Neben professioneller Beratung, bietet das Team und Ressourcenpersonen gemeinsam etwa 27 Sprachen an und kann die meisten Schwarze Frauen in Ihrer Muttersprache beraten. Die Teamfrauen werden weiter durch Ressourcen-Frauen unterstützt.

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### **Spezifikum**

Der Treffpunkt antwortet auf Bedürfnisse Schwarzer und anderer Frauen, die durch die vorhandenen Angebote nicht oder nur ungenügend befriedigt werden. Die spezielle Stärke des Treffpunktes liegt:

- in der Vertrautheit mit den Problemen, die Schwarze Frauen als Migrantinnen erleben.
  - in der Auseinandersetzung mit den spezifischen Bedürfnissen dieser Frauen.
  - in einer von Schwarzen Frauen erstellten Analyse, die die notwendige Wahrnehmung von Unterschieden wie Macht, Möglichkeiten, Privilegien und Status beinhaltet. Die Selbstdefinition und Kompetenz der Migrantinnen hat darin Platz.
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### **Die Benützerinnen**

Schwarze Frauen sind keine homogene Gruppe, sie sind Frauen aus fünf

Kontinenten; jedoch haben sie Gemeinsamkeiten, die sie verbinden:

- Die Auseinandersetzungen mit ihrem Umfeld wegen ihres Aussehens und die damit verbundenen Vorurteile

- Schwierigkeiten, eine soziale und ökonomische Nische in ihrer neuen Heimat zu finden
- politische und gesellschaftliche Systeme, die Migrantinnen diskriminieren
- es fehlt an einer gerechten Erziehung und Ausbildung für ihre Kinder
- sie werden von ihrer Umgebung fremdbestimmt
- sie werden durch die geschilderten Schwierigkeiten im fremden Land, ebenso aufgrund ihres Geschlechts benachteiligt. Die öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit für diese weitere Belastung ist erst im Entstehen begriffen, wie sich in der nur zögernden Revision von speziell Migrantinnen diskriminierenden Passagen im Ehe- und Ausländerrecht zeigt.

## **Ten Years: Meeting Place and Resource Center for Black Women**

Ten years! Ten years of Being and Becoming, ten years of maturation and metamorphosis, ten years of learning and growth. Yes, we've come a long way! In these past years, we've rendered invaluable services to the community and many Black women of Zurich and beyond. Despite the odds, we're still here and continue to prosper. I regard it as an incredible feat accomplished. All the same, this would not have been possible without your belief in our integrity and without our collective capabilities as Black women.

As we come to the closing of our Ten-Year celebrations, I'd like to say a big THANK YOU to all well-wishers, friends, sponsors and supporters of the „Meeting Place and Resource Center for Black Women - Treffpunkt und Ressourcen Zentrum für Schwarze Frauen“!

We are here today because YOU have been here with us and have stood by us. The challenge is ours, SISTERS! Lets take the plunge for the next ten years.

I'm ready and looking forward to more amazing , life-fulfilling and enriching encounters. I know you all are too! Go for it.

Thank you.

Dinahlee Obey Siering

Chair

## An average 10 Year old

It has been a pleasure for me to be part of this Project for the last 10 years. A pleasure for me to be able to celebrate this achievement with friends, families, supporters and donors of the Meeting Place and Resource Center for Black Women.

Our Center for Black Women is 10 years old.

*During the last few hectic months, when we were planning this event, I was thinking about what this meant. What are 10 years for a project ?*

What is the significance, and what are the characteristics of a 10 year and what would make a 10 year old worth celebrating?

No longer small babies and not yet adolescents. They have already developed an individuality and a distinct personality. Any skills or personal talents they possess become apparent at this age. 10 year olds can be fun, because they are visible, have their own opinions and are still willing and able to take on new ideas.

Another amazing thing about 10 year olds is that it is an age most prone to tumbles and falls. Many survive horrendous falls, just to get up and continue on their merry way.

It is therefore no surprise or coincidence to learn that French studies revealed a 10 year old to be four times as quick to wound-healing than a 50 year old

10 is the age of intense friendships, it's the year that our role models play very significant parts in our lives, because no matter how grown up 10 year olds may feel, they still need constant support, mentoring and nurturing.

Just like any 10 year old, we have had our share of tumbles and bruised knees. However, A vision which has held for 10 years deserves a celebration, as the knees heal and we focus again on the next challenge.

Our work has metamorphosed into a visible and specific project, serving our community with professional skills, cultivating dialogue, and offering Black Women in Switzerland a safe space. Our core values and our vision are being widely understood and shared by the Center users and the society at large. We continue to rise, celebrate our diversity and look forward to this 10 year old processing to the next height.

As we celebrate ourselves, we also thank our mentors, our donors our supporters, families and friends, without whom, we would not continue to grow.

Zeedah Meierhofer-Mangeli

Center Director

# 10<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary Conference

## Strategising for a common Agenda

### Summary Report

To mark the beginning of its 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary, the Black Women's Centre (BWC) organised a conference for Black Women in Europe. In attendance were representatives of Black women's organisations from several European and countries, including, England, the Netherlands, France, Scotland and Switzerland.

#### **The aim of the conference were:**

- to examine lessons from dealing with the collective experiences of black women in Europe
- to develop forward looking strategies.

The keynote speech, delivered by **Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi**, Executive Director of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) based in Ghana and previously the Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika based in the UK, set the scene for the presentations and discussions that were to follow. Among other things, Ms. Adeleye-Fayemi underscored **5** important factors in our collective effort to pursue a common agenda.

**First:** is the strength we draw from our diversity - "our rich and complex heritage"- we deal with our common challenges "the need to survive isolation, loneliness, racism, be it personal or institutional, exclusion, poverty, abuse and discrimination."

**Second:** we have learnt to cope; found ways to harness our individual and collective strengths and sought refuge in the safe spaces that we have created - of which the Resource Centre for Black Women is one.

**Third:**

**The prejudice we face as Black women in Europe is no respecter of age or acculturation. When one generation learns to thrive against all odds, the problems simply comes masked in other forms and lurks around the corner, awaiting a new group, a new age and generation.**

Ms. Adeleye-Fayemi reminded us that while life has become better for some of us, "for the majority of women in Europe, today, not much has changed"... Rather "life has become much worse with sex trafficking, violence, poverty, the plight of refugee and asylum seeking women, inadequate access to healthcare, voicelessness, racial attacks, most of our sisters living in Europe are living the worse years of their lives".

**Fourth:** in these situations, spaces such as the Black Women's Center become all the more important. "It is within these spaces that we re-discover ourselves and the power we have within us. In places like this, we find strong, positive role models. Not the image of the black woman as helpless victims, hopeless, on welfare, drug addicted, alcohol dependent, sexually exploited, ignorant, unemployed and illiterate. In spaces like this, we find brilliant noble women with integrity and strength of character.... It is in spaces like this that we develop strategies that enable us understand the new worlds that we find ourselves in".

**Fifth:** *It takes a lot to keep these spaces safe and to keep them going: " It is not easy for these spaces to be created and for them to survive".*

These statements were reinforced by **Ms. Alem Desta's** presentation. Ms. Desta is based in the Netherlands and works with the Ministry of Migration (VON). She is also a pioneer in for many Black Migrant women's organisations in Holland. Her presentation highlighted the potential threat that a reversal of the gains achieved for migrant women in the Netherlands - as a result of a change in political tides - posed for continued existence in that country. And yet this only highlights a growing tide across Europe, where migrants increasingly face unfavourable policies.

*The net implication of Ms. Desta's message is that we cannot afford to work in isolation, our greatest strength lies in our collective strength, the harnessing of our energies in our safe places. But it also requires constant vigilance, and greater harnessing of our knowledge and the pursuit of strategies that are relevant for our times and effective to address the current challenges we face.*

The next input was from **Ms. Mukami McCrum** from Scotland. Ms. McCrum is a member of the Mukuyu women's group in Scotland. Ms. McCrum presentations reminded us of the issues that stay with us, no matter how long ago we left our homes and countries to start a new life in our host countries. Our cultures, our ways of life in which we were raised, which made sense and which formed the backbone of our world, and served as our natural instincts and trusted choice can sometimes present a challenge in our new world. We need to find a space for that which we know, to add in ways that will add value to our lives and will give us balance.

*We need to balance the old and the new so that they can be strengthened and not weakened.*

The inter-generational dialogue, among other things, served to highlighted the communication gaps between the older and the younger women and how meanings are lost in translation between generations. Our children can be caught between our old and new worlds and unless we pay attention to the way they deal with their own challenges in a new era where the same old problems are cloaked in new images, we risk losing a new bright generation and a wealth of norms, values and rich heritage.

The conference concluded in the same way that it began - While our lives might have changed and present times in Europe keep changing for better or for worse, depending on the issues, we must hold on to that which we know in order to address the ever growing challenges facing black women.

The older and younger generations must come together as one - in solidarity and pursue their common causes.

*<sup>1</sup>Concept: strategising for a common Agenda*

*The tools will be our safe spaces,*

*the wealth we find from our diversity*

*the bond that ties us, which cannot be broken*

*the knowledge we acquire that will allow us to dare, to move into a new phase.*

*We are all working the same road*

*we must strategise for the journey ahead*

*in our collective*

*find our strength*

*together*

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<sup>1</sup> Concept. Prose written for the Resource Center by Minuf, TL, London, September 2003

# Women of Substance:

## Key Note Address at the 10th Anniversary Conference

September 26<sup>th</sup>. 2003

**Speech presented by Bisi Adeleye Fayemi, Executive Director, African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)**

It gives me great pleasure to be here today to celebrate with the wonderful sisters at the Black Women's Center here in Zurich. It is unbelievable that 10 years have gone by since this organization first began. In October 1992, when I was working in London as the Director of AMwA<sup>2</sup>, I organized a conference for African women in Europe. Two days before the conference I received a call from a woman in Zurich. She said she had heard about the conference and wanted to know if she could attend. I told her that she was most welcome to attend but we had exhausted our entire travel budget for participants, so we would not be able to cover her costs. She said never mind, I will take care of myself, I just want to be able to attend and be with other black women. This woman arrived in London, full of smiles, energy and passion. The smiles, energy and passion are all still there eleven years later. I see the woman I have come to know and love dearly as a colleague, friend and sister, Zeedah Meierhofer-Mang'eli.

*The theme of the conference was "Creating our own Space, Strength, our lives & speaking for ourselves"*

As black women who find themselves living in Europe, we have many identities. We are from different parts of the African Diaspora and from the African continent itself. We are of various ages, nationalities, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, classes etc. Some of us were born here and have dual nationalities. Some of us have come as migrants, refugees, professionals, asylum seekers, students and wives. Whatever the circumstances that bring us here, we find that we all have one thing in common. The need to survive. The need to survive isolation, loneliness, racism, be it personal or institutional, exclusion, poverty, abuse and discrimination. The need to survive is so strong in all of us people of African descent because that is the only way we can bear testimony to our rich and complex heritage and affirm our own humanity.

Over the years we have all found ways to cope with living in these environments. We do this through doing the work that no one else wants to do, by seeking educational opportunities, by challenging stereotypes and assumptions, by breaking barriers, by raising our voices and by speaking for ourselves. In order to ensure that our individual and collective energies are harnessed and channeled strategically, we have also created spaces. It was the need to create space for African women in the UK in 1985 that led a group of less than eight women to set up AMwA. It was the need to reach out to other African women in Europe in 1992 that led to the African Women in Europe Conference. When women like Zeedah attended the conference, she became convinced that she was not crazy to have thought of having a Center for Black Women in Zurich after all. Her experience at the 1992 conference inspired her to continue to pursue the vision with other sisters and the Black Women's Center WC was officially launched a year later in 1993.

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<sup>2</sup> *Akina Mama wa Afrika, an African Womens NGO with Offices in the Europe and Africa*

For some of us, over the years, as we have learnt to survive these harsh surroundings, we have thrived. Our lives have changed. We have more skills, more choices and better opportunities. We are engaged with better jobs, have professional recognition, more financial and material resources and generally have a better quality of life. However, for majority of black women who live in Europe today, not much has changes, in fact, life has become much worse. Sex trafficking, violence, poverty, the plight of refugee and asylum seeking women, inadequate access to healthcare, voicelessness, racial attacks, most of our sisters living in Europe are living the worse years of their lives.

This is why it is so important for us as black women to have spaces such as the Black Women's Center. What do we gain from these spaces?

- **These organizations provide us with a safe space to cry together, laugh together and share experiences**
- **It is these spaces that give us the strength we need to go on and the courage we need when we think all hope is lost.**
- **It is within these spaces that we find the lost threads of our humanity and carefully weave them into ties that bind us regardless of all our diversities and differences.**
- **It is within these spaces that we re-discover ourselves and the power we have within us. In places like this, we find strong, positive role models. Not the image of the black woman as helpless victims, hopeless, on welfare, drug addicted, alcohol dependent, sexually exploited, ignorant, unemployed and illiterate. In spaces like this, we find brilliant noble women with integrity and strength of character. We find lawyers, teachers, accountants, social workers, students and responsible loving mothers.**
- **It is in spaces like this that we develop strategies that enable us understand the new worlds that we find ourselves in. And it is here that we make very specific links between our local conditions and global phenomena such as conflict, globalisation, unequal trade terms and the closing of borders. Here, we find the means to nurture another generation – our daughters and sons, who, because of us and what we believe in, have opportunities we never had.**
- **It is in these spaces that we learn that our identities are not always fixed. This is a lesson for the next generation.**

Some of you might be wondering, where do men fit into all this? Why don't organizations like this include men, after all black men in Europe have issues too? Of course they do. The reason why we have women-only spaces like this is to first and foremost affirm black women's personhood. This is something that patriarchy and racism do not allow.

Sometimes we underestimate the power of the sheer activity and talent that can be unleashed when women come together and have a shared sense of empowerment. We cannot begin to

quantify the value of the precious partnerships and relationships that are made possible at a personal and organizational level. Over the years AMwA and BWC<sup>3</sup> have drawn strength and inspiration from each other, and have shared financial, human and technical resources to strengthen each other.

AMwA in the UK started out as a support group for African women in UK, predominantly London. Today, AMwA is an international development organization with offices in the UK and a regional office in Kampala, Uganda. In addition to the excellent work AMwA continues to do in the UK with African women living there, the AWLI, which AMwA established in 1996 to provide leadership development opportunities for African women, has trained over 1,000 all over Africa. AMwA also served as the nurturing space for the first ever African Women's Development Fund, which today funds over 135 women's organizations in 31 African countries and has awarded over US\$1M in grants. This is the power we create when we have organizations like AMwA & BWC, spaces where empowered women can use their expertise, opportunities and talents to maximum advantage within Europe and elsewhere. Core values are: solidarity, respect, compassion, good will, listening.

As we celebrate with the BWC on this occasion, let us all try to imagine what it must have taken them to witness this day. It is not easy for these spaces to be created and for them to survive. Let us think about the hard work, passion, time, sacrifice and commitment that have gone into building this organization. Let us salute their courage. Let us thank them. ***Let us honor them. Most of all, let us tell them that we love them, because it is only those who love women who can create lasting spaces and legacies for other women.*** Congratulations to all of you sisters at the BWC, may you celebrate another 100 years.

I salute you Zeedah, for your vision, your leadership and your passion. Last year, you worked with us at AWDF on the WOS film and photo exhibition project, which took us to eight African countries. I remember you saying then that women are going to rebuild Africa with their bare hands. You, Zeedah, are one of those women. You are building Africa with your bare hands and climbing mountains with bare feet. I salute YOU, Woman of Substance. I salute all you sisters of the BWC who have walked this road and kept the faith. May this space continue to thrive.

Thank you!

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<sup>3</sup> Black Women's Center

## Reflecting on Voice Space and Sisterhood<sup>4</sup>

Some of the challenges that we have met in the past 10 years have left us a lot of food for thought.

As women, we are part of an international and national movement. For many years, this movement has been a life line and we our sapped strength from the solidarity and support it offered. We are fortunate that the Center has been supported and mentored by many sisters from this movement.

The multi-faceted identities we carry, being Black, being Swiss, being females, and foreigners (to name just a few), confront us at the same time, with both opportunities and challenges. Identity is dynamic and the process of harmonising the different facet's can at times can be lonely and confusing.

The Meeting Place and Resource Center for Black women has served as a basis for Black women to come and draw strength to better manage their integration process, in what is sometimes a hostile environment.

The services we provide, give Black women and their families a support system which they can fall back on for information, legal support and nurturing.

Although our services have, over the years, become more professional, we have not lost the specifics that bring the women to us. We continue to be sensitive to the needs of Black women and their families, speaking in a common language, with codes which are not foreign to our Afro cultures.

We keep bureaucracy to a minimum, and offer extended support to other social institutions which work with Black women.

Our work and commitment to the global women's movement has also led us to more networking with Sisters from the Diaspora. We have hosted and attended Conferences and Seminars, training and learning from each other, and this way strengthening our links.

Our anniversary Theme, VOICE, SPACE AND SISTERHOOD has been cultivated and lived. Black women a huge potential for the economic and cultural growth, and for the advancement of the Swiss Society. We look forward to marking more presence, keeping our spaces and raising our voices.

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<sup>4</sup> *Zeedah Meierhofer-Mangeli, Resource Center for Black Women, ZH*

# **Key Note Address at the 10th Anniversary Dinner Gala**

**September 27th 2003**

**Presented by Her Excellency, Mrs Nozipho January-Bardill, Ambassador, Republic of South Africa, Bern.**

Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening,

I would like to begin my presentation by congratulating the courageous women of the Meeting Place and Resource Center in Zurich, for the achievements of their organization as they look forward to another decade of serving their communities in their adopted cities; communities that they have embraced openly, that they feel an emotional attachment and a social responsibility towards; where their difference, their racial identity, has required them to respond to the particular needs of their target users.

I would also like to thank Ms Meierhofer-Mangeli and her colleagues for inviting me to this special occasion, for it has also put me in touch with serious black women who, despite enormous constraints relentlessly give of their free time to add value to the lives of those black people who fall through the cracks of the safety nets of the social system and cry for help. This is work that is done from the heart and rightfully deserves recognition, value and applause.

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## **These women are playing a role as Community Leaders**

These women may not consider themselves to be leaders but they are. They saw a need and they responded to it, and ten years later they are still carrying out the social goals and objectives that they set themselves. They got involved because they cared. It was essential and not just desirable to serve their communities. That the City and Canton of Zurich recognised their efforts through offering them an award is encouraging, and those in the establishment who saw the value of this contribution to social up-liftment also need to be applauded for giving the meeting place the accolades that it deserves. I trust that the City and Canton of Zurich will continue to provide political and material support to this project to enable it to reach its full potential. The needs of the user groups are likely to grow given the state of the economy in Switzerland and the rest of the world. A partnership between the local state and this project has the potential to be mutually beneficial and most of all to the users of the centre.

Moreover groups that feel marginalized often lack the inclination to engage in doing things their way because we learn early that our work may not be recognised or valued. We are often told by the gatekeepers in the establishment that we should think in a more conventional way, a way that is better understood by the dominant culture even though it does not fully understand the real circumstances under which minority groups function in European societies.

Cultural differences dictate, for example how people relate to one another. When I first came to Switzerland as Ambassador two and a half years ago nearly, I had to understand, in my own way what the fundamental differences were between me and my Swiss colleagues at the Embassy so that we could work together as colleagues and friends pursuing a common objective: South Africa's foreign policy. One simple difference was that in our society in SA we become friends before we deal with business. As soon as you enter my house, at any time without an appointment, I welcome you openly and treat you as a member of my family. We work with first names and not last names.

*The challenge was, how do I remain South African without negating the Swiss way of doing things which in many cases was the exact opposite: Business first, then friendship? How do I express who I am without offending anyone? Also how best can I accept the Swiss way without judging their way of relating? My way is effective for me and their way is effective for them. Mutual acceptance of our differences became the only way of working well together.*

The need therefore for people working in local authorities to understand the cultures of minority communities is therefore crucial. To work on the basis of stereotypes only could cost the authorities much money and credibility. And the need for them to use the expertise of people who understand minority cultures better is vital.

I do not know any country in Europe that does not have an organisation set up by black women, first to address issues related to their experience of living away from their countries of origin, and secondly, to help others like them deal better with the enormous challenges of being a perpetual "foreigner" or "Ausländer" as is said here in Switzerland.

I too have experienced living away from home in Europe. For 10 years from 1983-1993 I lived in the UK as a South African in exile. Like the women at the Resource Center, I too was a founder member of an African Women's organisation called Akina Mama wa Afrika – an organisation which is still serving the needs of African women in Britain. It was a safe meeting place – one where we could meet socially and be ourselves; one where we were able to discuss the politics, economics and cultural challenges of our continent; one where we shared the joys and the pain of living in exile in a society which on the one hand offered us sanctuary, safety and security and on the other regarded us as foreigners who simply came to Britain to live off the welfare state.

We worked with women who were able to thrive in this foreign environment through sheer determination and inner strength. We also worked with others who fell through the cracks. We struggled to raise funds; to convince the establishment of the value of our intervention. The men in our communities did not like the fact that we were a women's group. It threatened them. White women also sometimes felt we were being separatists. So we had to deal with many labels. However, through constant dialogue, determination and a belief that what we did was right and needed, the political and administrative authorities in the public sector learned to understand the value of our minority organisations and often approached us for help in designing and delivering essential services to our kith and kin from the continent.

This work was both joyful and painful and through it we developed our own sense of self worth in a society where that self worth was constantly being eroded.

And so when the women from the Resource Center came to the Embassy to invite me to speak tonight, I could relate to all their experiences because they reminded me of my own days. What is more, they informed me that the main speaker at yesterday's conference was the woman who I recruited as Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika in London in 1992/3, Mrs Bisi Adeleye Fayemi! I couldn't believe my ears.

Ultimately we are all ambassadors of our continent. We fight against the stereotypes that identify us always as a collective rather than as individuals. On the other hand we feel bad when our compatriots let the continent down through behaviour that is not complimentary to our cultures at home because it is that behaviour that confirms the endless stereotypes. However we as black women also feel a deep sense of responsibility to do something when people are in need and urge the politicians to take seriously the contributions that self help groups make to address the social needs of their communities.

There is no need to make the case that women must by definition and of necessity participate in political processes as equals, who know what they want and what is needed to accomplish real social and political objectives.

To participate also suggests therefore that they must be leaders not because it's desirable, but rather because it is essential. They must participate in political processes because politics is where real power is exercised and where real resources are prioritised, allocated and utilized. It is not, after all the political process, through its institutions that determines where we are born, where we go to school, what we learn at school as we grow up, what buses, trains and roads we travel on, how much we earn at work, and finally issues death certificates at the end of our material lives? This process is too important for women to be left out of it.

In SA we work on the premise that women should and have the right to equal opportunities in employment at all levels of government and business. They must, as leaders, shape the quality and quantity of public services, influence economic development, act as custodians and develop our culture while nurturing and engaging in other labours of love.

I therefore conclude by encouraging the women at the meeting place to continue their invaluable work; encourage the communities they serve, to treat them with care by supporting them and their efforts at the Centre; urge the cantonal and city authorities to continue to recognize the value added and the need for continued material and moral support and thank all of you here tonight for having made the time to share this important occasion with these phenomenal women.

*I'd like to read Maya Angelou's famous poem "Still I Rise" to end my speech.*

## **STILL I RISE**

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

**<sup>5</sup>Laudatio Förderpreis für die Gleichstellung von Frau und Mann der  
Stadt Zürich  
Stadthaus, 21. Oktober 2003  
Zürich**

Verehrte Anwesende, liebe Frauen von Lilli und Nottelphon

Als ich gefragt wurde, ob ich am heutigen Tag diese Rede halten würde, war ich natürlich sehr geehrt, danke schön. Ich freute mich besonders, weil ich finde, es ist auch höchste Zeit, dass junge Frauen in die Entwicklung unserer Gesellschaft miteinbezogen werden. Wir leben in einer modernen und fortgeschrittenen Welt. Den jungen Frauen stehen so viele Türen wie noch nie offen. Wir sind es, die mitverantwortlich sind, was in Zukunft sein wird, wir sind es, für deren Kinder man neue Kinderkrippen machen will. Wir sind es, die die Bundesräte eines Tages ablösen können. Und wir sind es, die am häufigsten von sexueller Gewalt betroffen sind. Junge Frauen von heute, so viele Möglichkeiten, so viele Türen, jedoch begegnen wir auch gleichzeitig so vielen Herausforderungen und Barrieren.

Ich erlaube mir hier Platz einzunehmen, um etwas los zu werden.

Ist es denn möglich, dass so viele junge Frauen sich von aktuellen Problemen nicht betroffen fühlen, nur weil sie sich bisher noch nicht persönlich damit auseinandersetzen mussten? Zum Beispiel Armut, Krieg, Rassismus und Sexismus.

Mir passt das nicht. Es passt mir nicht, meine Altergenossinnen anzuhören, wenn sie über HIV und AIDS reden, als wäre es ein Problem der Dummen in der Dritten Welt. Mir passt es nicht, dass diese jungen Frauen sich heute im 21sten Jahrhundert noch immer zu ungeschütztem Geschlechtsverkehr überreden lassen, um einem Mann zu gefallen. Mir passt es nicht, dass diese jungen Frauen versuchen, emanzipiert zu sein, behaupten, sich von einem Mann nicht einfach so alles gefallen lassen zu wollen, aber trotzdem immer noch Gefahr laufen von ihrem gewalttätigen Ex-Freund mit Erpressung und Bedrohung in eine derart unterwürfige Lage gebracht zu werden, dass er sie im schlimmsten Fall sogar vergewaltigen kann.

Mir gefällt es nicht zuzusehen, wie sich junge Kolleginnen so extrem um ihr äusseres Erscheinungsbild kümmern, immer, als ob sie nur das wären und dahinter gar nichts stünde.

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<sup>5</sup> Key note speech presented by Sophia Meierhofer at the Award giving ceremony of the office for Gender and Equality, ZH. Sophia was elected by a jury to give this very prestigious talk. She is currently a medical student and the coordinator of the Youth Forum of the Resource Center .

Es gefällt mir nicht, dass uns jungen Frauen unser Erbe so selbstverständlich ist. Was nötig war, dass wir heute von einer Gleichberechtigung sprechen können: Frauen, die auf die Strasse gingen, um endlich abstimmen und mitbestimmen zu können; Frauen, die uns einen steinigten Pfad geebnet haben und uns den richtigen Weg gezeigt haben. Mir gefällt es nicht, dass es zu wenige sind, die wissen, dass wir das alles wieder verlieren könnten und somit gezwungen wären, das Rad nochmals neu zu erfinden. Anstatt diesen gegebenen Kiespfad zu einer gut befahrbaren Strasse zu machen und nicht zu einem Zustand zurückzukehren, in welchem uns weder der verdiente noch der nötige Respekt entgegen kommt. Mir gefällt das nicht.

Liebe Frauen, liebe Männer,

Aber mir gefallen auch sehr viele Dinge an uns jungen Frauen, oh ja. Mir gefällt unser Mut, das zu sein, was wir sind. Mir gefällt es, dass wir Konfrontationen herausfordern. Mir gefällt unser Stolz, mir gefällt unsere Selbstverständlichkeit, uns das zu holen, was wir wollen. Mir gefällt unsere rebellische Ader, die unsere Mütter nicht haben durften. Mir gefallen all unsere Chancen, Möglichkeiten und Perspektiven, die uns geboten werden. Und es gefällt mir - mit einer gewissen Arroganz - unsere Jugendlichkeit, unsere Schönheit und all die Zeit, die wir noch vor uns haben. Ich bin 20 Jahre alt und ich kenne viele junge Frauen. Was ich bestimmt sagen kann, ist, dass kaum eine gleich ist wie die andere. Es gibt Ausnahmen unter uns, das ist klar, denn Ausnahmen gibt es immer. Es freut mich, wenn ich eine junge Frau kennen lerne, die nicht nur behauptet, sich und ihre Erscheinung und Sexualität unter eigener Kontrolle zu haben, sondern dies auch wirklich tut und auch immer wieder gerne auf den Punkt bringt. Ich zähle mich mit Stolz zu diesen jungen Frauen.

Traurigerweise gibt es auch die anderen Ausnahmen. Ich spreche hier über jene jungen Frauen, die sich in einer Lage befinden, in welcher sie nicht die Freiheit besitzen, ihr Frausein und somit ihre Meinungsfreiheit, ihre Privatsphäre, ihren Körper und vor allem nicht ihre Sexualität selbst zu bestimmen und zu verwalten. Sei dies durch ihr Alter, ihr familiäres Umfeld, in welches sie geboren wurden, sei es aufgrund einer Erziehung oder sei es, weil sie auf Männer treffen, die sich schamlos jeglicher erdenklichen Gewaltform bedienen, um sich die jungen Frauen anzueignen und sie in ihren körperlichen oder geistigen Besitz zu bringen. Unter den von mir aufgezählten jungen Frauen sind diese klar die Bedürftigsten.

***Wie viele Frauen es wirklich sind, die einmal oder zweimal oder ständig Opfer von sexuellen Übergriffen werden, liegt im Dunkeln, im ganz düsteren Dunkel, weil wir alle***

***wissen, wo diese sexuellen Übergriffe meist statt finden: hinter verschlossenen Türen, bei verschlossenen Augen und verschlossenen Mündern. Schweigen, Leugnen, Unterdrückung. Immer und immer wieder das Schweigen.***

Es sind unter den Opfern alle Altersgruppen vertreten, und ich bin mir sicher, dass es kein bestimmtes Opferprofil dieser Frauen gibt. Jede von uns kann zum Opfer werden, egal welcher Herkunft sie ist, egal wie hoch ihr Monatslohn ist. Doch eines haben die Frauen, die zu Opfern sexueller Gewalt werden, häufig gemeinsam: Sie sind oft von genau denjenigen, die sie doch beschützen sollten, verraten worden. Das ist doch paradox. Sie sind traumatisiert und leben in Angst. Sie haben Alpträume und Komplexe, Schuldgefühle, sie wurden auf schlimmste Art und Weise ausgenutzt und missbraucht. Kaum eine will oder kann sich jemandem anvertrauen, geschweige denn Hilfe anfordern. Sie werden eingeschüchtert und es wird ihnen mit Schlimmstem gedroht, falls sie es wagen sollten, das Geschehene jemandem zu erzählen. Und wenn sie dann vielleicht doch die Möglichkeit und den Mut dazu fassen können, wird ihnen unter Umständen am Ende gar nicht geglaubt.

***Viele junge Frauen, die Opfer von Sexualverbrechen wurden, wissen auch nicht, an wen sie sich wenden können, wenn sie Hilfe und Beistand brauchen.***

Ich weiss, dass es sehr, sehr viele junge Frauen gibt, die Opfer von sexuellen Übergriffen sind, die an Hilfe nicht herankommen, die nicht aus dem Haus dürfen, oder deren Telefonate abgehört werden. Es kann manchmal äusserst schwierig sein, einen Hilfeschrei hörbar zu machen. Was ist denn mit der mutigen, stolzen, selbstbewussten jungen Frau, wenn sie nach innen schreit und sie keiner hört? Die Gefahr besteht, dass man nur ihr Aussehen bemerkt und die Angst in ihr nicht wahrnimmt. Sie wird reduziert auf Kleider, Jugendlichkeit, Sorglosigkeit und Verantwortungslosigkeit, und wird in ihrer Not nicht ernst genommen. Darum gefällt es mir nicht, wie ich am Anfang sagte, wenn junge Frauen nur gefallen wollen, ihr Potential nicht wahr nehmen und unsere Möglichkeiten nicht ausschöpfen. Darum gefällt es mir, dass die Stadt Zürich die Bedürfnisse junger Frauen anerkennt und uns im Prozess integriert.

Als junge Zürcherin bin ich stolz, dass das Projekt LILLI geehrt wird. Es ist ein ***safe space***, das heisst, ein Ort, wo eine junge Frau in geschütztem Raum und ohne Scham direkte Unterstützung bekommt. Ein Ort, wo die Fragen und Antworten der Frauen auch für alle anderen, die die selbe Erfahrung gemacht haben und Hilfe und Beistand brauchen, zugänglich

sind. Meine Mutter sagte immer „Schmerz teilen ist halb heilen“. Die Erfahrungen bei LILLI werden auf diese Weise unter einander ausgetauscht, ohne dass irgendjemand erfährt, wer das Opfer ist, und betroffene Frau erfährt, dass sie mit ihrem Schmerz nicht allein ist. Diese Möglichkeit, anonym Antworten auf persönliche Fragen zu bekommen, senkt die Hemmschwelle, und ein Heilungsprozess kann beginnen. Ich habe selber während der Zeit, als ich mich über das Projekt erkundigte, viele dieser Fragen und Antworten gelesen und ich lege dies auch Ihnen allen ans Herz. Es ist schockierend, von innen zu sehen, was man von aussen nicht mitbekommt! Aber es ist auch umso besser, dass es endlich öffentlich wird auf eine Art und Weise, wie bis anhin noch niemand auf die Idee gekommen ist.

*„Ich wünsche mir, dass die jungen Frauen von heute, die Opfer waren oder sind, von dieser Website erfahren, dass diejenigen jungen Frauen, die glauben, in einer Gesellschaft zu leben, in der wir Frauen den Männern gleichgestellt sind und die glauben, Gewalt geschehe nur in anderen Teilen der Welt und anderen Frauen, sich diese Website ansehen, um sich zu vergegenwärtigen, dass sie noch weit davon entfernt sind, in einer Welt voller Gleichstellung und Fairness zu leben, und dass jene jungen Frauen, die auf dem richtigen Weg sind, versuchen, die andern hinter sich herzu ziehen und ihnen die Augen zu öffnen“.*

Ich danke den Frauen der Beratungsstelle Notteléfono für Frauen, dass sie diese Möglichkeit realisiert haben und ich danke der Jury des Förderpreises für die Gleichstellung von Frau und Mann, der Stadt Zürich für meine Möglichkeit hier zu sein und diese Rede halten zu dürfen. Dadurch wurde nicht nur ich auf das Problem sensibilisiert, sondern auch mein enger Familien- und Bekanntenkreis. Ich wünsche der Stadt Zürich weiterhin viel Mut und Geld, um solche Projekte unterstützen zu können, und ich wünsche den Frauen von LILLI weiterhin viel Courage, vor allem aber viel Courage den betroffenen Frauen selbst, die es zu erreichen gilt.

Ich wünsche vor allem uns jungen Frauen den Mut und den Ehrgeiz nach vorne zu kommen, vorbereitet zu sein um rechtzeitig die jetzige Spitze abzulösen, sei das, der Filialleiter im Lebensmittelladen oder die Bundesrätin in Bern.

Herzliche Gratulation und danke schön !

# **THE ROLE OF THE BLACK WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER IN SUPPORTING ITS YOUTH FORUM**

AN OBSERVATION BY EMMA SHANNON WALSER

I was privileged to participate in two of these workshops/seminars and found them educational even for adults. The first one, an inter-generational dialogue workshop, was held during the Ten-Year Gala Celebration of the Black Women's Center at The Swiss Hotel, Zurich Oerlikon on 26th September 2003. The age range of the participants of this workshop was quite wide - 17- 73 years – which made it a stimulating and highly yielding discussion.

Some of the problems that came up were universal ones faced by young people, namely, a strong need to feel independent and of course, the phase of rebellion all teenagers undergo. During the ages 15 – 16 some children feel they and only they have the right to decide when they should go out to parties and discos – for example, and also what hour they should come home. It was pointed out that the parents' concern for their safety was the most important reason for requiring them to be home at a certain time. Although no time of day or night is absolutely safe, the danger of being accosted during certain hours of the night is greater. Another bone of contention was the invasion of the privacy of bedrooms by mothers. The young people strongly felt that whether their rooms were messy or neat was their prerogative, since they occupied them. Amid laughter, I think we convinced them that it is a mother's obligation to oversee the condition of the home and also in still in the them the need for order. They conceded that there are times when they privately agree with their parents but feel the urge to argue.

The second forum I attended was held at the Black Women's Centre (BWC) on 13th. December 2003. This was a youth workshop including young black men as well as those of mixed parentage. The meeting was well attended, including some guest from other countries such as Mr. Ishmael from Germany , who is involved with a youth group there was present and Ms. Funmi Olonisakin from London, who co-facilitated the meeting, among others. The meeting was coordinated by Sophia Meierhofer, a member of the Youth Forum, and she really did an excellent job.

Interestingly, there was a repetition of problems discussed at the Inter-generational dialogue workshop at Swissotel. The unique issue faced by offsprings of mixed race parentage is that oftentimes they feel that people think they are “too white to be black“ or “too black to be white“ – the real issue here being acceptance. Two other groups fall under the umbrella of acceptance or non-acceptance. African youths with an African upbringing who later came to Switzerland and those who were brought here as little children. The former are less likely to challenge parental authority. Strangely, even among the three groups, there is still the problem of accepting or not accepting each other. A young black man told us of his meeting with a young black woman who was in the company of three Swiss youths. When he greeted her, she promptly told him that she did not speak with black men! He was assured that he did not have a problem- she did!!! The interaction of these groups was discussed at length and regrettably, I was left with the impression that when a relationship between a Swiss woman and a Black man soured, many times the off springs were encouraged to dissociate themselves from Blacks. What a pity!

Another important issue put forward was how black youths perceived the Negro Race or themselves. Responses were:

- a. They were admired for their ability to dance,
- b. music,
- c. sports.

Not a single youngster mentioned the achievements of **Black People** in Science, Medicine, Literature, Law or Civil Rights. Are they to be blamed or are parents too lax in not educating them of the outstanding contributions Blacks have made and continue to make in these fields? The youths were also reassured that competing with Whites is an understandable trait but we strongly advised them to engage in personal competition, that is, they should always try to improve on their last achievement, thus setting high standards for themselves.

What is seen as contradictions in cultures, African and European, was also discussed at length. It was reiterated that all Africans do not share the same culture; even in one country there are cultural differences along ethnic groupings let alone between continents. The outcome was to accept all cultures that respected people and their rights, and reject those that humiliate, debase or mutilate people. Having a goal in life and being prepared to sacrifice for it was stressed by Funmi Olonisakin. She related the conditions under which she left her country and the sacrifices she had made to get to where she is in life today. This was a very moving and inspiring testimony.

The Youth Forum of the BWC is very important and must be continued even if attendance is slow to find numbers. This will increase by word of mouth. Helping a few is better than helping none. Congratulations to Sophia Meierhofer and Funmi Olonisakin for ably chairing these forums, and also all the other supporters, and may I presume to suggest that some consideration be given to the “in-between group” – those between the ages of 25 – 35. They do not have the problems of the youths but neither are they as established as we are.

**<sup>6</sup>In youth we learn, in age we understand**

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<sup>6</sup> *By anonymous, who was probably a Black woman*

## Challenges and Opportunities<sup>7</sup>

As Black women living in Europe, we all know that we're continually confronted with challenges in all aspects of our lives, some of them peculiar to our situation, others not. I would like to reflect on a couple of my personal challenges of the past year.

For the past 10 odd years I've been teaching English to students of other languages here in Switzerland. It is a profession I've grown into out of necessity, because I actually trained to be a secondary school biology teacher. My students include teenagers (public and private schools) and adults learning English for work or leisure. So far, things have gone on smoothly until I started teaching at a state grammar school here in eastern Switzerland.

The last two academic years have been my toughest. Not all my classes have been difficult, but two of them specifically. I did not teach well at all and just didn't succeed in reaching out to these students nor in imparting the required knowledge I had been employed to impart. I tried quite a variety of methods but none of them seemed to work.

This resulted in disciplinary problems in class; I became an object of ridicule and a constant source of „entertainment“ for them. Just imagine what a bunch of 15- to 17-year-olds are capable of when they decide to make someone the butt of their jokes. It seemed like the harder I tried, the worse things became. Administration had to eventually step in because of complaints from parents and I had to give up one of the classes in the middle of the semester. The whole experience shocked and overwhelmed me and eroded my professional confidence to a great extent.

My saving grace was that my adult evening classes were going exceptionally well during this period of time. I was conducting a brush-up course for Swiss primary and secondary school teachers. They wrote brilliant feedbacks to the city's Department of Education.

On a more personal note, whilst all of this was going on at school, I happened to find myself caught in the middle of two on-going, emotionally draining disputes that took a toll on me mentally. All four parties expected me side with them. I felt constantly tugged in four different directions. Of course I was seen as the passive one in the end. For me, although exhausting, it was an interesting case-study in diverse facets of human characteristics and traits, in retrospect.

As human beings we go through a lot experiences as we age and live . It is what we learn from our past experiences, (good or bad ) and how well we draw upon this intrinsic wealth of knowledge we acquire through „living“ everyday that matters.

As regards school, I'm learning to „protect and distance“ myself when caught in the middle of disputes.

At the Resource Center, we too have had differences, but considering the sheer diversity of cultures and backgrounds of the women at the BWRC, we do well to even still be in existence, and **10** at that. Things can only get better. These CHALLENGES should be seen as **OPPORTUNITIES** to grow individually and collectively.

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<sup>7</sup> By Dinah Obey Resource Center for Black Women ZH

Jean-Jacques Rousseau once said: „La jeunesse est le temps d'étudier la sagesse; la vieillesse est le temps de la pratiquer.“ Roughly translated, it means: during one's youth, wisdom should be studied or learned; as we age, we should put it to practice.

## The Centre for Black Women and Women's Human Rights<sup>8</sup>

The Meeting Place and Resource Centre for Black women in Switzerland has been championing Women's rights as human rights since its inception. The situation of migrant women in Switzerland can be precarious. Switzerland is "male-shaped". The number of women at top levels in politics, business and academia is very small. Most women stay home once they have children, and those who wish to continue working do so at great financial cost (in German speaking Switzerland there are very few state-supplemented day-care centres, and children go to kindergarten at the ripe old age of five). Swiss men on the other hand have been socialised from birth for life outside the home (professional/academic success), and there is always a woman to take care of the home (first the mother, girlfriend and later the wife).

All this is a long-winded way of providing the at first, bewildering background, into which the foreign wives of Swiss men (especially those from developing countries) find themselves. Additionally, a married woman's residence permit depends directly on her husband. One must live and be married in Switzerland to a Swiss man for five years before getting a permit that grants one an independent stay. This erasure of one's individuality renders one incapable of controlling one's environment. There have been cases where the authorities have sent a wife back to her country of origin following the death of her husband ostensibly because her *raison d'être* no longer exists. There are also cases of women under immense psychological and physical torture who simply endure it for the mandatory five years, and dare not ask for divorce or separation so as not to jeopardise their chances of staying on in the country.

This is one of the backdrops against which the Meeting Place and Resource Centre intervenes. The director of the centre, Zeedah Meierhofer-Mangeli, together with one of the members, Sefa Dänzer participated actively in the campaign launched by the Commission for Gender Equality, whose aim was to raise awareness about this law that turned marriage into bondage for some women and men. It has been proven that more women than men are victims of domestic violence and this campaign mainly spoke for the women. The Centre organised information evenings, first for Black women and later for the general public, and signed the petition seeking to amend this law.

We at the Centre understand that:

*Gender refers to structural inequalities marked by unequal access for women and men to material and non-material resources. It is not just a question of 'roles' and behaviours or income but it permeates social institutions and political structures and processes. It is an organising principle of social life* (Gender and Global Governance 2000).

According to Dr. Ilona Kickbusch (Yale University 2003), "this approach – gender as an organising principle of social life – is crucial because it goes to the very core of how societies are structured. It finds its expression in deep social inequalities where, despite progress in many areas, no country on the globe treats its women as well as its men – as the annual UNDP

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<sup>8</sup> By Ruth Fux-Limo Resource Center for Black Women ZH

Reports on development document regularly". I have quoted Dr. Kickbusch verbatim because she expresses so eloquently the principle behind the work that we at the centre do in the field of Women's Human rights. If human rights are women's rights (or vice-versa), then, by obliging one to stay in an abusive relationship for fear of losing one's residence permit, the state is infringing on basic human rights. The work of the Centre was recognised by an award from the state of Zurich, which commended the Centre on contributing positively to multicultural understanding and has resulted in collaboration with the Commission for Gender Equality in other projects.

Our strategy entailed raising awareness by organising discussion evenings, and joining the public campaign to have the law amended. The law has not been changed and might never be changed. However, by being proactive and demanding to be treated as equals with all the choices and opportunities that that entails, with or without a husband, we migrant women have felt empowered and spoken for ourselves publicly. We have claimed our space and voice.

*If one woman is able to express herself and have her integrity and dignity preserved, then the Centre is fulfilling its mission.*

## THE AWLI<sup>9</sup>, A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE<sup>10</sup>

As I put my things together in preparation for departure from this most memorable Hotel, my thoughts went back to the events of the past 7 days. It has indeed being a wonderful, life changing experience. I will most definitely remember my new colleagues, the ALUMNI as we will all be known from now on. To think that not long ago, I didn't know anyone of them and had never heard of them; yet these people have become important part of my life. My newly adopted *Sistas in the Diaspora*. The bonding was great! To put a group of twenty-two vibrant women in a space for 8 days, without a single form of personality clash or unnecessary misunderstanding, was indeed an achievement for the organizers. It was an experience – one that I am willing to share with others although it is impossible to fully paint the picture of all that went on during that week. *One would have to be there to fully partake in the AWLI experience!*

It was one full week of intensive training. We had a great time of not just acquiring knowledge and skills but also sharing our skills. As a young mother of a 14month old girl, I was really encouraged by my Director, who saw the need for this training. Because of the importance of gaining skills as part of the empowerment process, The Meeting Place and Resource Center arranged for a Nanny, so that I wouldn't have to miss out because I was still breast feeding my baby. This way, I could concentrate without distractions and guilt.

We were 19 participants, many of whom live or work around the United Kingdom – all African women with a common goal. Women's rights and issues were thoroughly addressed and discussed. It was a week of interesting and educative dialogues, stimulating thoughts and ideas, creating new strategies, sharing and building these, ideas, and strategies together.

My understanding of several issues including the concepts of Feminism, Gender, Diversity Awareness, Personal Empowerment, Feminist Leadership, and Sexual Health has greatly increased. The Oral Herstory course highlighted how the past life experiences and skills of women, who have lived and died with the knowledge they had were never documented. Skills on how to document these experiences and knowledge were taught, and ideas shared. The thematic group work session was incredible. I feel that I have gained skills I can use to improve the Management of my Organisation (BWRC) as well as develop other Organisations. Perhaps more importantly, I have gained a lot to empower myself in the area of self development.

The location and the accommodation were superb. The image of the African woman was lifted up from the stereotypes of being second class citizens. The beautiful five star Hotel was situated away from the city, an ideal place for training without the usual distractions of shopping and other city activities. The Hotel was very comfortable and the staff were very accommodating. We had easy access to almost all the facilities in the Hotel (e.g. Jacuzzi, Sauna, Swimming pool, the fields for long walks, etc). We learnt that making time for relaxing and switching off is critical for women's health, and that being healthy is a vital part of empowerment.

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<sup>9</sup> African Women's Leadership Institute, a program run by Akina Mama wa Africa London

<sup>10</sup> By Fatima Rubi-Ibrahim, Resource Center for Black Women, ZH

I am indeed very grateful to my Organisation for giving me this wonderful opportunity to acquire knowledge in these fields and also to empower myself. With the skills I have learnt, I believe that I can achieve some of my goals. For instance, teaching African women in the Diaspora, how to develop their potentials and become professionals that are sought after. I will also use these acquired skills in engendering activities of my organisation to benefit women who see the need to be influenced.

To all the African women out there, I say that we all have something to offer and much to contribute to improve the negative Image we have in the countries where we have settled. We should not sit back and accept the stereotypes, and acts of discriminations and racism. We have a pivotal role to play in our own empowerment and emancipation. We must collectively press forward for positive change. We are also members of the societies we live in and we deserve to be given equal opportunities.

I am very, very grateful to AKINA MAMA WA AFRIKA for the institution of the African Women's Leadership Training.

# Reflections on white sisters: When sisterhood had to take a hike<sup>11</sup>

My sisters and I, **WE** had a common vision  
That, as women, **WE** would challenge the patriarch  
and eradicate all forms of discrimination  
against all of US sisters

My sisters and I,  
**WE** would sit together and plan  
But they would define sisterhood  
and they would monopolise feminism  
And I, through falsely understood solidarity,  
Continued to speak of **US** and went on all **OUR** meetings and demonstrations

My sisters and I, **WE** worked on concepts for **OUR** projects  
But, they had access to OUR funds  
They decided **OUR** agenda  
And because I understood solidarity to mean **WE, US**  
So I supported them, believing it to be a common agenda

And then I notice that it is my sisters  
Who discriminated against me  
Who called me stupid and refuse to acknowledge my skills  
It was my sisters who  
Insisted I become like them, in order to get legitimacy  
It was my sisters who could only interact with me  
If I appeared weaker or felt inferior

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<sup>11</sup> Zeedah Meierhofer-Mangeli, *Resource Center for Black Women, ZH*

It was my sisters, who taught their children to abuse mine,  
It was my sisters who married men  
that constructed institutions which oppressed me  
It was my sisters who called me ugly and reduced me to a dancing colourfully dressed  
nonentity

So I re defined my sense of solidarity  
I redefined my sense of self, womanhood and sisterhood  
And I changed my attitude to wards my white sisters

Now I decide **WHO** is part of my sisterhood  
I decide when my white sisters and I are **US**  
Sisterhood had to take a hike,  
and they are no longer an automatic part my WE  
Unless I am an equal part of **OUR** Agenda

**O**

## Migration and Health<sup>12</sup>

The Constitution of the World Health Organisation (WHO), 1948, defines health as ‘a complete state of physical, mental and social well being and not just the absence of disease’. WHO goes one step further and brings the notion of health into the realm of ethics and social justice: it defines the enjoyment of the highest attainable level of health as ‘one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition’.

The definition of health that best allows for the analysis of the interface between health and globalisation is from the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986) which says ‘Health is created where people live, love, work and play’. This charter understands health as a resource for living and places it in the context of everyday life.

What do these definitions mean for us migrant women in Switzerland? Are we healthy? Do we do enough for our mental, physical, sexual and reproductive health?

My own personal experience illustrates some of the challenges that confront Black migrant women in Europe. The Centre for black women pulled me from the brink of a bad case of depression after the birth of my first child<sup>13</sup>. When my husband and I arrived from Kenya, we quickly settled – I started attending German language classes; he went back to work and we decided to start a family. However, we, or rather I, did not pay enough attention to the toll migration would take.

**By its very nature, migration is a series of losses and gains, and it is often not one for one.**

I had left a promising career, the centre of a loving and supportive social circle, family, friends and all things familiar for the love of my husband. The pressure to cope with my new roles as foreigner, Black woman (I had always taken my blackness for granted since I had lived in Kenya all my life), housewife (in Kenya we both had been professionals) and shortly afterwards, mother, threw me completely off balance. I suffered from a deep sense of dislocation and dissonance and could hardly manage the simplest tasks. My husband panicked and contacted a social worker who gave me the number of the Centre. *When I got there and talked with one of the women, I felt the madness recede and my senses come back. It was, and continues to be a safe space for Black women. Only when you are safe do you feel well.*

To return to the definitions above, health is a resource for living and takes place in everyday life. The Centre is a place that offers a platform for us migrants to deal with the ambiguities and opportunities that come with our new lives. This open discussion and exchange of ideas is vital for mental health which I would say is the resource one should guard most.

The Center offers information and links to other organisations that work with and for migrants. It has run seminars and information evenings for migrants on topics like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Reproductive Health and Sexual Health, and Spirituality.

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<sup>12</sup> Ruth Fux-Limo, resource Center for Black Women ZH

<sup>13</sup> According to Patricia McFadden, “The mining of our personal experiences is a critical feminist resource and analytical tool”

In Switzerland, the official policy on the health of migrants is open and supportive. However, there are cases of inadequate access to health care by some migrants due to language and cultural barriers, and lack of knowledge and information on the part of the migrant. The Centre for Black women works to bridge these gaps. In some circumstances, migrants are seen as a threat to the indigenous population due to communicable disease e.g. HIV and Tuberculosis. To its credit, the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (SFOPH) has maintained its professionalism and continues to fund research and projects specifically dedicated to migrant health. We at the Centre are putting together a project document and look forward to working with the SFOPH in the effort to deliver adequate health care to the increasing migrant population.

Treffpunkt Schwarze Frauen - Resource Centre for Black Women

**2004 Programmes**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Target group</b>
January		
<b>2.1.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	<b>for Black women</b>
<b>9.1.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	<b>for Black women</b>
<b>16.1.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	<b>for Black women</b>
<b>23.1.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	<b>for Black women</b>
<b>30.1.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>	<b>open to the public</b>
February		
<b>6.2.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	
<b>13.2.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	
<b>20.2.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	
<b>27.2.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>	<b>open to the public</b>
March		
<b>5.3.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	
<b>12.3.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	
<b>19.3.04</b>	<b>Youth Event</b>	<b>open to public</b>
<b>26.3.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>	<b>open to the public</b>
April		
<b>2.4.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	<b>for Black women</b>
<b>9.4.04</b>	<b>Spirituality</b>	
<b>16.4.04</b>	<b>Karfreitag</b>	
<b>23.4.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	
<b>30.4.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>	
May		
<b>7.5.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	
<b>14.5.04</b>	<b>Dialogue 1: with Brothers</b>	
<b>21.5.04</b>	<b>Treff / Market day /</b>	
<b>28.5.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>	
June		
<b>4.6.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>	
<b>11.6.04</b>	<b>Treff / Exhibition /</b>	
<b>18.6.04</b>	<b>Youth Event</b>	
<b>25.6.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>	

<b>July</b>	
<b>2.7.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>
<b>9.7.04</b>	<b>Treff / Spirituality</b>
<b>16.7.04</b>	<b>Treff / Message through Art</b>
<b>23.7.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>
<b>30.7.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>
<b>August</b>	
<b>6.8.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>
<b>13.8.04</b>	<b>Seminar for Migrant Women</b>
<b>20.8.04</b>	<b>Exhibition</b>
<b>27.8.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>
<b>September</b>	
<b>3.9.04</b>	<b>Treff / Video evening</b>
<b>10.8.04</b>	<b>Seminar for Black Youth</b>
<b>17.9.04</b>	<b>Benefit Gala</b>
<b>24.9.04</b>	<b>Conference</b>
<b>October</b>	
<b>1.10.04</b>	<b>White women Black men</b>
<b>8.10.04</b>	<b>Treff / FGM/ Health</b>
<b>15.10.04</b>	<b>Photo exhibition/girls in armed conflict</b>
<b>22.10.04</b>	<b>Youth event</b>
<b>29.10.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>
<b>November</b>	
<b>5.11.04</b>	<b>Treff /</b>
<b>12.11.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>
<b>19.11.04</b>	<b>International Conference 10 years Center</b>
<b>26.11.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>
<b>December</b>	
<b>3.12.04</b>	<b>Treff / Reflection of past year</b>
<b>10.12.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>
<b>17.12.04</b>	<b>Treff</b>
<b>24.12.04</b>	<b>Meet &amp; Eat</b>
<b>31.12.04</b>	

**Dates for Special projects such as those listed below will be announced later**