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SWS Distinguished Feminist Lecture: Feminist Political Economy in a Globalized World: African Women Migrants in South Africa and the United States

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***FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD:
African Women Migrants in South Africa and the United States***

SWS Distinguished Feminist Lecture

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Based on research conducted over the past two decades, this lecture examines how the feminist political economy perspective can aid us in understanding the experiences of two populations of African women: Zimbabwean women cross-border traders in South Africa and African immigrant women in the northeastern United States. Feminist political economy compels us to explore the impact of the current phase of globalization as well as the roles of intersectionality and agency in the lives of African women. This research stems from fieldwork conducted in Harare and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe and Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa, as well as in metropolitan Boston and Philadelphia. Despite the many challenges that African migrant women face in these different venues, they continue to demonstrate much creativity and resilience and, in the process, they contribute to community development.

Keywords: gender, race, migration, globalization, intersectionality

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continent and in the Diaspora have benefitted greatly from the “sisterhood” that I have experienced from many members of SWS. For this, I am very grateful. I would also like to thank Precious Robinson and Anisha Thornabar who provided research assistance on this project and I extend a special thanks to Jo Reger and colleagues at *Gender and Society* who provided editorial assistance on this piece. Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to: Mary J. Osirim, Office of the Provost, Bryn Mawr College, 101 North Merion Avenue, Bryn Mawr, PA, USA; email: mosirim@brynmawr.edu.

In this article, I discuss my work with Zimbabwean women cross-border traders and African immigrant women in the United States within the paradigm of what I call “feminist political economy.” In considering these two case studies based on my research over the past two decades, I find that these women have experienced much marginalization as migrants, but despite these challenges, they have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate a great deal of agency and resilience in their communities. Why did I decide to explore African women migrants in these two contexts? Why is this important? In the contemporary period, the study of migration around the globe needs no explanation – it is arguably the single most important social phenomenon of our times. But how did I become involved in such work? What led me to this place?

In the late 1980s I began what would become a 20-year study of women in the microenterprise sectors of urban southwestern Nigeria and Zimbabwe.¹ This topic was of critical importance to me since African states were experiencing very high rates of rural to urban migration accompanied by substantial un- and underemployment. Needless to say, this was particularly acute for poor and low-income women. Becoming entrepreneurs in the

microenterprise sector was regarded as a key means of employment generation. In fact, participation in the microenterprise sector of sub-Saharan Africa was the second major area of income-earning for women after agriculture (Adomako Ampofo et al. 2004, 2009).

Given the economic crises that most African nations experienced in the 1980s and '90s, just about every one of these nations was mandated by the international financial community to adopt a structural adjustment program; Nigeria began the program in 1985 and Zimbabwe was on the latter end in 1991.² As a result of this mandate, these and other African states were forced to adopt a neoliberal agenda as part of their programs. This generally meant trade liberalization; devaluation of the currency; the privatization of many public corporations and other government functions; a reduction in civil service employment; the removal of government subsidies from vital social services such as education, health care, housing and transportation; as well as a limit to the activities of labor unions. In the case of Zimbabwe, 40,000 public sector workers lost their jobs – a sector, which in the 1980s, had significantly expanded employment and social services in response to the major commitment made to increase equality between women and men (Osirim 2009). As a result of massive layoffs, many women (and men) entered the microenterprise sector as a means of supporting their families and communities. More men entering this sector significantly increased the competition and decreased the profitability of women's enterprises, and, in the case of Zimbabwe, this led to more women engaging in cross-border trade with South Africa.³ (Chiliya, Masocha, and Zindiya 2012; Mwaniki 2011).

Women and children bore the brunt of the economic and political crises in sub-Saharan African nations. This finding was clearly revealed in my qualitative study of 157 women entrepreneurs in the microenterprise section in Harare and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe from 1991-1999, and another 20 cross-border traders in the late 1990s, the latter with whom I followed up

with observations in the early 2000s. On the other hand, economic crises, austerity and adjustment programs led many African residents to turn to international migration as a means of supporting their families (Arthur 2009; Arthur, Takougang and Owusu 2012). Those who were generally most able to migrate were in the middle classes and above, and while this was the case for many African nations that subsequently experienced a brain-drain, it also is the case that some who were in lower socio-economic levels were able to leave.

Africans have been migrating to the United States in noticeable numbers since the late 1970s and '80s. While their numbers have been small, they are certainly growing. The growth is evident among recently arrived immigrants. When compared with other major groups who arrived in the United States in the past 15 years, Africans had the fastest growth, with the population more than doubling from 2000 to 2015 (see Figure 1). Further, long-standing civil wars and regional conflicts also led to a significant number of African refugees, some going to Europe and others to the United States (e.g., those going to the United States from Liberia). Thus, in Greater Philadelphia, for example, the largest African population is from Liberia where many came as refugees. Many Ethiopians in Greater Boston and Philadelphia also came as refugees. Given the incredible importance placed on immigration as a national and certainly a global issue while realizing that immigration is a gendered issue (more about that later), and considering the major growth in immigration from Africa in the recent period, it seemed very important to explore the experiences of African immigrant women in the United States.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 Here]

In response to the major crises affecting many African states, African women cross-border traders from Zimbabwe to South Africa and African women from other areas of the continent - especially West Africa – who migrate to the United States often experience

marginalization in the labor market in their home and host societies. Globalization and neo-liberalism in the Global North and South create precarious circumstances for many at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy, and women disproportionately find themselves at the bottom. The current phase of globalization requires flexible labor. My work demonstrates, however, that despite the difficulties these women experience due to their intersectional statuses in these societies (based on their gender, race, class or perceived class status, religion, immigrant status, etc.), these women are resilient and demonstrate agency in some very difficult circumstances. It is important to note that African women migrants in the United States, even those who are not low-income per se, experience a great deal of marginality based on their intersectional statuses. My own work conducting 55 in-depth interviews with African women and men in Greater Boston and Philadelphia over the past decade revealed that this is very much the case, but at the same time, the women have developed coping strategies to address their marginalization (Osirim 2011, 2012).

WHAT IS THE MAJOR THEORY THAT INFORMS MY WORK?

Feminist political economy is the paradigm that informs my work and enables me to make sense of the experiences of the two major populations that I will discuss today. This perspective stems from conflict theories in the sociology of development and helps us to more fully grasp the experiences of many women in Global South societies. I have defined this perspective as having three major aspects.

First, this theory maintains that both internal factors (specific problems within states) and external factors (relationships between states in the Global South, the Northern hegemonic powers and international financial institutions) have to be taken into account when assessing a nation's prospects for development. The global capitalist system, in combination with domestic

factors, reinforces inequality between the rich and the poor as well as between women and men. This occurs because there persists an international division of labor in the world that is still gendered – for many decades, young women, for example, have become the major producers in many global assembly lines and an important source of available, low-cost labor. Feminist scholars have continued to draw our attention to the segmentation of the labor market worldwide, which is still quite gendered (Fernandez-Kelly 1994; Sassen 1998; Moghadam 2000, 2005). Today, we can think also about the critical role that both external and internal factors, especially neoliberal economic policies, play in labor migration, and how this has become a very gendered process. Among the women entrepreneurs in the microenterprise sector that I have worked with for years, in some sectors, such as crocheting and knitting, cross-border trade with South Africa was viewed as essential to keeping their families afloat (Osirim 2007, 2009).

The economic crisis, which began in the early 1990s in Zimbabwe, was joined by a political crisis by the end of the decade and continues today, leading to challenges in the microenterprise sector for women. First, governments continued to make promises about improving the conditions of the markets where they worked (for those who actually worked in markets), but of course, under conditions of economic scarcity and crisis, these improvements never came. Second, women in this sector faced a major challenge from men who increasingly entered this sector as they lost more and more jobs in the formal sector of the economy. Some men even took up the sale of foodstuffs, as they witnessed or perceived how lucrative this was for many women. Men began to encroach seriously on women's space.⁴

Another major aspect of the feminist political economy paradigm is intersectionality. Feminist scholars in this area recognize the connections among capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy in structuring life experiences, especially for women of color and poor and lower-class

women. African feminists, such as Desiree Lewis (2000) and Patricia McFadden (2001), have noted how the intersection of gender, race, class and imperialism have played a key role in the lives of Global South women. This has resulted in their placement disproportionately at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy in their nations. Within the Global North context and shown in my work, African immigrant women face the increased effects of intersectionality in the host society, given their race, gender, immigrant status and sometimes religion.

Third, the paradigm acknowledges women's agency, empowerment and resistance in the face of challenges, such as those posed by neoliberalism. In response to the negative effects of globalization on women's labor force participation around the world, many women have formed transnational feminist networks - such as Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), the Women's Environment and Development Network (WEDO) and others - in an attempt to resist further growth in inequality and further deterioration of their status (Moghadam 2005). The entry of Zimbabwean cross-border traders into South Africa to sell their goods, and their formation and participation in new organizations in response to state actions and to address their needs, are examples of their agency. African women immigrants in my study developed a "new Pan-Africanism" and formed organizations to respond to the marginalization, improve their lives, improve the lives of their families and improve their communities "back-home." Before we discuss the first case, a bit of background on the Zimbabwean context is in order. After a bitter liberation war, which began in the mid-1960s and lasted 15 years, Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain in 1980. From that time until November 2017 (a period of 37 years), President Robert Mugabe was at the helm of the Zimbabwean state. Last November, Mugabe was replaced as President in a bloodless transition by his then Vice President, Emmerson Mnangagwa. In the nation's elections in July 2018, Mnangagwa was officially elected President.

In 1991 the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) was established, which led to massive unemployment, the removal of price controls, devaluation, restrictions on imports, and restrictions on labor unions with about 40,000 civil servants losing their jobs (Osirim 2009). Women entrepreneurs in the microenterprise sector faced increased competition from women and men as more and more people were laid off. More women became engaged in cross-border trade as a way to improve the profitability of their businesses and to support their families (Muzvidziwa 1998; Peberdy and Rogerson 2000; Chiliya, Masocha, and Zindiye 2012). The economic crisis was coupled by a political crisis by early 2000 and, unfortunately, persists today. Note that there is a major gap in the figures for the estimated unemployment rate in Zimbabwe – a lower figure of 11.3 percent is the official government figure from about 2015, but 80-to-95 percent is what is frequently given by the international media, international organizations and the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).⁵

Unfortunately, the economic and political crises that affected Zimbabwe in the 1990s and 2000s persists today. President Mugabe, who is now 94 years old, continued as one of the most controversial heads of state until recently, leading the nation to be considered a pariah on the world stage (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). Unemployment has remained incredibly high over the past two decades with estimates as high as 95 percent. Needless to say, many families have left the nation and migrated to South Africa, Europe and Australia. While women have certainly migrated, more men have left the country and left wives behind in an effort to find employment and make a better life. Throughout this period, the microenterprise sector has grown substantially, especially in the numbers of women who left market trade in major markets in the cities to sell along city streets, mainly in an attempt to attract shoppers on their way home. For the most part, women who are increasingly poor cannot afford to pay for licenses to trade in the

center of town. Under such conditions of economic crisis, women in the microenterprise sector continued to be ignored by the state, except in situations where they are supposedly “disobeying” the law – and then, they are harassed, fined and sometimes arrested. In May 2005, Zimbabwean women again were disproportionately affected by the state’s attempt to remove eyesores from their cities in a government campaign called “Operation Murambatsvina.” Large urban settlements were destroyed, including women’s microenterprises, and families were forced to relocate. Many believe that this was done largely in areas where the opposition political party had large support – in retribution for votes “against” ZANU-PF, the major political party in the nation that has governed since independence. But again, the poor, disproportionately women and children were on the receiving end of the state’s negative, destructive actions. Many saw this action as resembling the forced displacement of black South Africans under apartheid. Such destruction is not new to sub-Saharan African societies, but in the new millennium Zimbabwe is the worst offender. For example, 2.4 million Zimbabweans were displaced from 2000 to 2005 (Meldrum 2006).

According to the [Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions](#) (ZCTU), over 60 percent of Zimbabwean women working in both the formal and informal sector are now the breadwinners in their families, as their husbands have succumbed to HIV/AIDS or were retrenched from their jobs.

[INSERT MAP of ZIMBABWE HERE]

I included a map of Zimbabwe and the surrounding Southern African nations to indicate the kinds of distances that cross-border traders travel – during the period of my study and continuing today (see Figure 2). In my work, I mainly interviewed entrepreneurs based in Harare who traveled to Johannesburg via bus. They would leave Harare, often go straight to

Bulawayo, the second largest city in the country, and then travel by bus to Beitbridge, a border crossing spot. The distance from Harare to Beitbridge is about 311 miles, which is an eight-hour ride by bus, but most often this is a lot longer depending on bus routes (through Bulawayo, for example).

CASE STUDY I: ZIMBABWEAN CROCHETERS AS CROSS-BORDER TRADERS

Under the current phase of globalization and economic crises in Zimbabwe, to make ends meet more and more women took to cross-border trade with South Africa, taking the handmade sweaters, doilies, bedspreads, and tablecloths they made to South Africa to sell. This trade has significantly expanded today and includes the trade in food throughout the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), although South Africa is still a primary destination for many. Although these traders obtained visas, these were most often not documents that enabled them to work in the country. When they arrived at the border and then in South Africa, they were often harassed by customs officials as well as the police, with some women raped by these government officials (Rutherford 2008; Chiliya, Masocha, and Zindiye 2012). These traders frequently had their goods stolen or confiscated by the police and were fined (Chiliya, Masocha and Zindiye 2012). In South Africa, here I especially mean in both Johannesburg and Cape Town, the Zimbabwean women selling in the markets are often easily identifiable by what they are selling, most especially the crocheted goods, since crocheting is quite unique to Zimbabwe on the continent and even in the region.⁶ They are identified as outsiders and, in a nation that has experienced centuries of race-based stratification, the Zimbabweans are quickly identified as lower class, migrant/immigrant women who are unwelcome. There is a great deal of hostility against foreigners (Rutherford 2008). But, despite the very negative treatment they received and the very difficult conditions under which they worked (often sitting on the bare ground behind

the major train station in Johannesburg breathing in the smoke from the fires that often burned in the markets), they persisted. They also sold in the flea markets and went door-to-door selling their goods in the townships, such as in Soweto. When selling in the townships, they could be paid in used clothing as opposed to money. Then, they would take these used clothes back to Zimbabwe to sell. Some cross-border traders also used money they earned from their trading to buy high-tech equipment in Johannesburg, which they then sold in Harare. Others were involved in a more “triangular” trade in the region and also brought items to sell in Zambia, before returning home to Zimbabwe. These women remained resilient through the entire process. Despite the harassment from the police and threats or physical abuse from them and others, and despite the harsh conditions of life trading outdoors all day with the unpleasant fumes, they insisted they would continue to engage in this trade since it was the best available means for them to support their families.

As I mentioned earlier, cross-border trade between Zimbabwe and South Africa continues today in earnest. The African Development Bank estimates about 65 percent of the Zimbabwean population of 13 million relies on the microenterprise sector to survive. About three million Zimbabweans, mostly women (estimated to be about 75 percent) make a living as cross-border traders with South Africa (and some more broadly buying/selling in Botswana as well) (Mambondiyani 2015). Overall, informal cross-border trade provides incomes to about 43 percent of the sub-Saharan African population. Thirty to 40 percent of all trade in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries is informal sector trade. Formal sector trade in Africa has the longest customs process in the world – something like 12 days. (Lesser and Morse-Leeman 2009).

How do Zimbabwean women cross-border traders demonstrate their agency and resilience? In 2000, the Zimbabwean Cross-Border Traders Association was established with a mandate: “ to enhance the capacity of affiliated traders through provisions of services and advocacy for an enabling environment. [The vision is to attain] high standards of living and conducive trading conditions for all traders” (Zimbabwe Cross-Border Traders Association 2015, pg.4). Although this association has both women and men as members, it is an important vehicle for Zimbabwean women since they constitute the majority of cross-border traders.

Another example of Zimbabwean women cross-border traders’ agency is in the formation of rotating credit schemes (rounds). These refer to a group of traders coming together to save an agreed upon sum of money on a predetermined day at regular intervals. The money obtained after the collection is given to an individual and the process is repeated until everyone in the group has had a turn. This assists traders in buying the necessary goods they need to either make or purchase the goods they will sell abroad. It also helps them meet the costs of family expenses.

I mention these as examples of women cross-border traders’ agency and vehicles in which they expressed their resilience. In early July 2016, there was a very vivid example of this – there were major demonstrations and riots at Beitbridge because traders were being told that they could not import certain goods without import licenses. This was a policy put in place by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce – the policy is supposed to refer to manufactured goods and not raw materials. Some of the banned goods are cooking oil, toiletries, building materials and even fabric. It is the latter in particular which has incited the ire of women traders, and especially the Zimbabwean Cross-Border Traders Association. They have remarked that not only is there a permit price (about \$30), but that fabrics are needed for local Zimbabwean clothing manufacture and when you go to the Ministry there is no one there to assist you in

obtaining the permits. In response to these actions, there were major demonstrations, including the burning of buildings at the Beitbridge border on July 3, 2016. A week later, the government met with the Zimbabwe Cross-Border Traders' Association secretary-general Augustine Tawanda. He reported: "One of the key outcomes of the meeting is for a quota or import gap to be granted to the small-scale players. What was agreed was that the industry ministry must set aside a certain amount of tonnage, which should allow traffic by the small-scale player. You will still need to get an import license, but the difference will be that it will be a bulk license allocated to the association responsible for that particular sector (Zwinoira and Mandizha 2016, pg. 1). A review committee was established with representatives from the ministry and the cross-border traders to oversee the implementation of the revised policy on import licenses: "Basically, the thinking is we [the review committee] want to identify where our industry has got productive capacity for national consumption and where it does not have. The difference between them is what we are calling the import gap, which is what will be brought in so that the trader does not have to individually go to the ministry" (Zwinoira and Mandizha 2016, pg. 1).

In addition to the problems that cross-border traders experience because of police harassment, corruption (demanding money to do their business), theft of their goods, etc., unfortunately at least two women have been killed and several have been kidnapped. Cross-border traders often take rides in open trucks these days to avoid the lengthy more circuitous rides on the buses. These open trucks are often run by young men who also find themselves in the situation of precarity and thus, have begun transport businesses. Poor and low-income women are often desperate to find less stressful, low-cost transportation across the Zimbabwean-South African border. Unfortunately, this puts many women in very dangerous situations.

CASE STUDY 2: AFRICAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

As stated above, the feminist political economy paradigm also assists us in understanding the experiences of African immigrant women in the United States. In this second case, I will apply this perspective to an examination of the experiences of African immigrant women in the northeastern United States, namely to those in the Boston and Philadelphia metropolitan areas. Both are understudied areas of immigration in the country. How does feminist political economy assist us in making sense of the lives of African immigrant women in the U.S.? Again, this is accomplished by exploring three major areas, as follows.

Political Economy in Their Home Countries

Globalization, civil wars and gender-based discrimination particularly in their nations of origin, among other factors, lead these women to leave their nations in search of better lives for themselves and their families (Arthur 2009; Arthur, Takougang and Owusu 2012; Okome 2005; Osirim 2012). These conditions were especially exacerbated during the period of economic crises and adjustment, leading to further escalations of unemployment on the continent. Jaworsky et al. (2012) argues that different places such as major cities versus smaller localities have varying regimes of power and resources. The fluctuating relationship to global capital impacts immigrant experiences and their positioning within geopolitical power structures.

Intersectionality

While African women certainly experience discrimination based on their gender identity on the continent, this has intensified for many of them in the United States, particularly for some based on the added features of race, ethnicity, immigrant status, and on occasion religion. While I will not discuss this in detail here, some African women migrate to the United States for reasons other than economic ones or in combination with economic ones. For example, they

may leave their nations of origin to escape bad marriages, to escape female genital cutting (FGC) and/or such procedures being applied to their daughters.

Agency in the United States

African immigrant women have clearly exhibited their agency and resilience in response to the negative experiences they have encountered in the United States. They have formed a new Pan-Africanism. Linked to the work of Bryce-Laporte (1993) and the African Union, this new Pan-Africanism is formed when the racism that various black populations experience in the U.S. leads them to bond across ethnic and national lines. The African Union has called for the “unity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among the peoples of Africa and the African states” (Boyce-Davies and M’Bow 2007, pg. 15). It is often the experiences of racism and to some extent classism that lead some African immigrants to bond with other Africans, African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans to achieve access to educational, income and occupational resources vital to their mobility in the United States. African immigrant women often demonstrate this Pan-Africanism in organizations that they create to address the negative experiences they and others have encountered in the United States. Jaworsky et al. (2012) encourages us to consider the important role that cultural organizations and their leaders have in the transnational immigrant experience.

Context and Methods

One of the very interesting developments regarding immigration is the growth of migrants from the African region in the last few years. For example, census reports noted that the African-born only numbered 691,000 in 2000, but in 2015 they numbered about 1.7 million and nearly 2 million today (see Figure D).

Following are a few other major facts about African immigrants and refugees. First, they are the most educated population in the United States with about half of their population holding college degrees (about 18 percent or so have graduate degrees). Second, the largest African-born populations in the United States are Nigerians, Egyptians, Ethiopians and Ghanaians. In the cities of my research in Boston, the Cape Verdeans, the Nigerians and the Ethiopians are the largest African-born populations; in Philadelphia, the Liberians, the Nigerians and the Ethiopians are the largest African-born populations. And third, Massachusetts is among the top 10 states with the largest number of African immigrants. The top states with the largest populations of African immigrants are New York, Maryland, Texas and Florida. But over the last decade or so, African immigration has spread to a variety of states in the west and the midwest as well - South Dakota and Minnesota, for example.

In my study of 55 African immigrants, participants consisted of those who began and owned businesses and/or who were leaders of African organizations. To be included in the study, those involved in African organizations had to be officers in the group. This qualitative study, which began in 2006, involved in-depth interviewing of 30 women and 25 men in these two metropolitan regions. Snowball sampling was used to select the participants, and interviews lasted two-three hours. Respondents were questioned about many areas of their business and personal lives including their educational, employment and migration histories; their decision to migrate to the U.S.; their sense of identity in their home and host societies; their role in and development of their enterprises and/or organizations over time; and their experiences as African immigrants in this country. Interviews of African entrepreneurs and community leaders continue as part of this study, but my discussion here is based on interviews conducted from 2006 – 2013.

These two maps document the areas of African business and organizational activities that are part of this study.

[INSERT FIGURES 3a and 3b HERE]

In Greater Philadelphia, West Philadelphia is the major area where most of their businesses are located and much community organizing takes place. It is an historically African American area of the city. Many African markets, hairdressers, restaurants, churches, and other African businesses are located in what is called the Baltimore corridor region. These border the University City area (where the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University are located) and proceed north to Cobbs Creek and Upper Darby. Many African immigrants, however, do not live in West Philadelphia – some do, but they are generally more scattered residentially in the suburbs surrounding the city – e.g., in Upper Darby and Montgomery County. Southwest Philadelphia is another important area of settlement. There is a large Liberian community that resides there. In Boston, many African-owned businesses can be found in several historically African American areas of the city including: Dorchester, Roxbury, Hyde Park and Mattapan. African markets, churches, hair salons and small hair care businesses and boutiques can be found in these areas. The South End is also an important site for some African businesses, such as restaurants.

Although my study yielded some very rich data concerning many aspects of African immigrant lives in Greater Boston and Philadelphia, in this discussion I will focus first on their intersectional identities, which played a major role in the lives of African women. The racism, sexism and classism that others experienced worked against them as well, and these identities were frequently compounded by immigrant status. Many of these women also experienced precarity in the labor market – they most often had the benefit of formal education from home,

sometimes as much as secondary school and even university educations, but they encountered grave problems in securing stable employment in the United States. Thus, they sought out new opportunities for income-earning – they built on the skills they had. This often translated into work as entrepreneurs in ethnic businesses. For several women in my study, this meant starting African stores, selling foodstuffs from “home” or hair products. It also meant starting restaurants and churches. For many Senegalese hair braiders, creating braiding salons in cities like Philadelphia significantly contributed to economic well-being in their home and host societies as well as increased authority for women in the households. Women’s success in this area changed the balance of power between women and men in their families and communities (see Babou 2013).

In his work on African immigrant women in the United States, Arthur (2009) noted that both race and ethnicity played a critical role in the treatment of African women in the United States. As one immigrant woman, Kendra said: “In America, people identify you purely by your racial and ethnic attributes. And being Black has become like a burden for me...In America, people treat you with disdain and a condescending attitude because we are black. We encountered that in Denmark, but not to the same degree. Here in America...people do not see beyond your race (Arthur 2009, pg. 77). African women also noted the negative treatment they received in the United States based on perceptions about religious identity. Women refugees reported being shunned when they went to parks where their children liked to play if they were dressed in Muslim attire. This distrust and fear of Muslims in the United States and elsewhere around the globe certainly increased post-9/11, but the discomfort with and discriminatory treatment of many Muslims predates the events of September 11, 2001.

In her work on African immigrant nurses in Washington, D.C., Showers (2015) discovered that they are disproportionately found in the lowest positions in their profession, with many employed in nursing homes. Her study, based on in-depth interviews with 42 women from Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone, found that African women's racial and ethnic identities were a major source of discrimination. Compared to being middle class in their home nations, they experienced downward mobility in the United States. As a result, these African immigrants "equated whiteness with success in the world of work and explored strategies to gain entry into white-dominated fields. [There is] a paradox for black African immigrants who are racialized as blacks in the US racial context and experience racial discrimination but also employ strategies of assimilating into whiteness to gain upward mobility" (Showers 2015, pgs. 1827-1828).

African immigrant women in my study experienced intersectionality concerning many aspects of their identities: their gender, race, class (or perceived class position) and immigrant status. They talked about the ways these factors affected their lives and those of their children and their prospects for mobility. Discrimination on the basis of their identities was experienced in so many interactions with institutions. As noted by a community leader in Greater Boston I interviewed:

There are still pockets of discrimination here and there. Even in the schools, black children are having a lot of difficulties. They are being taught by white teachers and the way they are being taught, immigrants from Africa who are new residents, the teachers teach the bare minimum. They have already pre-judged them. They discriminate based on their accents. Yes, going to a

restaurant, for example, you want a chair that is visible but they put you in a dark corner. Even in doctor's offices, they want to put others before you, so I had to change doctors.

Perhaps some of the most consistent examples of discrimination were experienced in attempts to try and get loans for one's business, church or organization. Of course, there is a long history of discrimination in borrowing experienced by women and populations of color in the United States, as well as by many businesspersons in the microenterprise sectors in the Global South. Further, entrepreneurs in my study also found that due to their intersectional statuses, they were only supposed to participate in certain segments of the economy - in particular "ethnic niches." These issues were discussed by African women in my study. A pastor in Boston said:

We are trying to buy the new Church. We were turned down even in our own bank. We bank with them...it is a major bank. We are buying it below value. [He] said, "I do not think this is the right building for you." There is no concrete reason he turned us down. We were recommended to another bank; the interest was too high, so we did not take the loan. We have gone to a Vietnamese bank and they gave us the loan.

And an entrepreneur who owned a beauty supply shop in Greater Philadelphia said:

This business is not supposed to be a black business. There are more Asian businesses in this field. Many blacks come here and ask to speak to the owner. This used to be a problem. Because of this, we lose some customers to the

Koreans. They think you [we] go to the Koreans, buy from them and then raise the price. They think the Koreans are going to be cheaper. They come to this store and also think that I am not the owner. Even when they go to trade shows... the Koreans come with money. The Koreans have their own banks; blacks have difficulty getting loans. Often you cannot compete with the Korean-owned businesses. If you are not strong on this, they will buy you out. Many black businesses have closed... You can't go to the bank and get money and the Koreans have their own institutions.

Although African immigrant women were disadvantaged in many ways due to their intersecting statuses, they were very resilient in terms of the discrimination they faced due to sexism, racism, classism and xenophobia, just to name a few of the many challenges to their identities. They demonstrated agency and resilience through the formation of a new Pan-Africanism, as illustrated in several of their community organizations. These groups assisted them in addressing the discrimination they faced and in maintaining their families and communities.

Demonstrating Agency, Creativity and Resilience

In his earlier work examining the experiences of Caribbean immigrants in the United States, the sociologist Bryce-Laporte (1993) discovered that Caribbean immigrants formed a Pan-Africanism to assist them in dealing with the racism and classism that they experienced. Today, I argue, building on this earlier concept and data from my study, African immigrants in the United States have formed a new Pan-Africanism linked to the work of Bryce-Laporte (1993)

and the African Union. The Union has called for the “unity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among the peoples of Africa and the African states” (Boyce-Davies and M’Bow 2007, pg. 15).

It is often the experience of racism, immigrant status, sexism and classism that leads some African immigrants to bond with other Africans, African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans to achieve access to the educational, income and occupational resources vital to their mobility in the United States.

The new Pan-Africanism for the women in my sample most often revolved around creating associations to meet the needs of women from many African and other black populations in the United States. Although African immigrant women in my study did maintain close connections to relatives at “home” by sending remittances, maintaining business ties and sometimes building and renting homes to family members, they were more focused on the development of their communities in their “host” society. They were strongly committed to addressing the needs of African populations in their local communities in the United States. Many African women in my sample had children in this country, and they were very concerned that their prospects for a better life could be realized here.

One of the places where this new Pan-Africanism is very visible, very much alive, is at Kilimanjaro Restaurant in West Philadelphia. This is an important meeting place for social, community and professional activities among many Africans – individually and as part of organizations. In addition, Youmaa, the owner, caters many events for these organizations, as well as The Mayor’s Commission on African and Caribbean Immigrant Affairs and AFRICOM, the Coalition of African Communities in the Delaware Valley. These organizations bring together African and Caribbean immigrants from many nations and frequently work together with African Americans to improve the living conditions and life chances for all of these groups.

African women in Greater Boston and Philadelphia have played a major role in founding and leading many organizations focused on African immigrants' issues as well as the concerns of populations from the African Diaspora. Some of these associations are focused on women's issues, while others address issues of the community as a whole.

One of the best examples of the new Pan-Africanism is seen in the work of Africom, the Coalition of African Communities. A Nigerian woman played a major role in its establishment and later a Liberian woman was elected President. Africom is the umbrella organization for African and Caribbean organizations committed to improving the welfare of their community members. Each major African and Caribbean association in the region sends a representative to Africom where the organization provides services to immigrants and refugees from these regions in such areas as "facilitating family access to health and social services, with a special focus on women, children and the youth; promoting economic development; working with the School District of Philadelphia in alerting them to some of the traumatic experiences of African immigrant and refugee children, e.g. Sudanese refugees and providing referrals to free or reduced fee legal services for immigration issues" (AFRICOM <http://www.africom-philly.org>).

The African Family Health Organization (AFAHO) was founded by a Senegalese woman in Philadelphia to address and improve the long-term health needs of African and Caribbean populations. AFAHO takes a very holistic approach to meeting the myriad needs of poor and low-income African and African Diaspora immigrants, with a particular focus on women and children. It provides a wide-range of health programs in such areas as HIV/AIDS prevention education, breast cancer awareness and a behavioral health program. AFAHO runs a childcare co-op and a teen pregnancy prevention program, and it currently seeks to provide housing for a small number of such women and children, some who also are out of status. Thus far, AFAHO

has provided direct services to about 800 members of the African and Caribbean immigrant communities and reaches another 1000 individuals through community outreach. The organization is really making a difference in the lives of immigrant and refugee women. As one woman stated on the AFAHO web site:

I had newly arrived in Philadelphia from Africa, did not speak any English and was seven months pregnant. I was afraid to go to the hospital because my papers had expired and I did not want trouble. I was talking to a friend one day about my problem and she told me not to worry, she will call AFAHO and make an appointment for me and they would help me. I am so glad I found AFAHO. They gave me an HIV test, which came back positive. I was so scared because I thought me and my baby would die, but today, I have a healthy HIV negative baby boy because the wonderful people at AFAHO took me to a doctor where I got medicines that saved my baby's life (AFAHO <http://www.afaho.net/>).

The Adbar Ethiopian Women's Alliance, the oldest Ethiopian Women's Organization in the U.S. and located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, also is an example of the new Pan-Africanism. It has become a broader African women's "umbrella" organization, provides significant social services to African immigrant women generally, and is a space where women can share their stories and come to terms with common problems. Not only does it provide literacy training and legal assistance with immigration issues for recent arrivals, but also it has

become a very important voice for African and women's issues (Adbar Ethiopian Women's Alliance www.ethiopianwomen.org/). The Alliance has served as a major advocate in the policy arena for women who experience domestic violence and female genital cutting, as well as a center for discussion and counseling. The founder of this group realized that not only do many African women experience these challenges, but they also often accept blame for these issues.

CONCLUSION

This SWS Distinguished Feminist Lecture demonstrates how the feminist political economy paradigm can assist us in understanding the experiences of African women migrants in different national contexts – Zimbabwean women working as cross-border traders in South Africa and African immigrant women in the northeastern United States. Through an analysis of the impact of the current phase of globalization on these societies, the role of intersectionality in their lives and their incredible agency, I have shown that despite the many challenges African women face, they continue to exhibit resilience. In the process, they establish and maintain communities on both sides of the Atlantic and, despite the odds, they are saving lives. They are the change-agents of whom we can all be proud!

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NOTES – this goes before the references – please move

1. The microenterprise sector, often referred to as the informal sector or the second economy, generally consists of enterprises with 10 or fewer employees, with most of these businesses employing five or fewer workers. For many years, the microenterprise sector was the major area of economic activity for the largest segments of the population in sub-Saharan Africa,

and thus I found the term “informal” economy to be pejorative and a misnomer, and I began to use the term “microenterprise.”

2. Structural Adjustment Programs were essentially commonplace in many Global South nations with some of these policies beginning significantly in the 1970s and ‘80s, for example in Latin America and the Caribbean.
3. Cross-border trade with South Africa was not new for poor and low-income Zimbabwean women in the 1990s; many had been engaged in such work prior to the beginning of majority rule in South Africa in 1994. However, the numbers of black Zimbabwean women engaged in such trade substantially grew during the period of economic crisis beginning in the 1990s.
4. The crossing of gendered occupational boundaries also is noted in other regions during periods of economic crisis and adjustment. Gracia Clark (1994) also noted that men were increasingly found trading in foodstuffs during the period of economic crisis and adjustment in Ghana.
5. An incredibly broad range of unemployment statistics has been given for Zimbabwe over the past decade. In 2014, the Zimbabwe Statistics Society (Zimstat) stated that the official Labor Force Survey indicated that 11.3 percent of the population was unemployed. The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) News has indicated figures of 90-95 percent for this same period. For a discussion of the range of unemployment statistics for Zimbabwe in recent years see, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-42116932>.
6. During the colonial period, many black Zimbabwean women learned how to knit and crochet from white women who taught this craft to individuals and through women’s clubs. These skills also were taught to black women in home economics classes in schools, where

education was gendered by race, teaching black women the skills they would need in working as domestics (Schmidt 1992; Barnes 1999).