

REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE GENDER AND AFRICAN STUDIES GROUP, BABCOCK UNIVERSITY (BUGAS)

BY

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PREAMBLE

We thank the Babcock University Administration, particularly the President/Vice Chancellor, Babcock University, The Senior Vice presidents and Deans of Schools and the general administration for the support given to BUGAS to execute a highly successful conference

CONFERENCE REPORT

The inaugural International Conference of the Gender and African Studies Group, Babcock University BUGAS took place between the 2nd and 5th of October 2106 at Babcock Business School, Babcock University. The International Conference themed “GENDER, CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES” had as its keynote speakers two distinguished scholars in the field of African Studies and Gender Studies – Dr. Insa Nolte of the Department of African Studies and Anthropology, University of Birmingham, UK, and Professor Akinyemi Akintunde of the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures and the Center for African Studies, University of Florida.

Prof Insa Nolte’s address titled “Gender and Muslim-Christian Relations: Women’s Emotional Labour and Everyday Religious Harmony in Southwest Nigeria” addressed ways in which we can think of conflict as a development factor. Using inter-religious marriages among Christian and Moslem couples, Dr Nolte underscored the strategies of conflict management and the forms of emotional labour women put into place to ensure harmony in the peculiar situations they find themselves. According to Dr Nolte, many researchers look at conflict as a result of differences, however it is important to study ways in which differences do not produce conflict.

Prof Akintunde Akinyemi’s keynote address was titled “Sexism in African Politics”. In the well-researched paper, Prof Akinyemi demonstrated with proven statistics the marginalisation of women in African politics. He provided an historical survey of women’s relegation in politics in the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial era. He provided contemporary instances of sexism in Nigerian politics and recommended the establishment of a centre for women’s studies. Prof Akinyemi affirmed that women are not asking for concessions but their rights.

In addition to the keynotes, a Special Plenary Roundtable on New Directions in Gender Studies in Africa was featured. Participants identified ways in contemporary times that the girl child is still discriminated against and areas of new researches in gender studies.

The conference has a total of one hundred and twelve papers presented within the two days in twelve different panels with themes across Gender Portrayals in African Literature, Gender in Religion, Gender, Culture and Politics, among others. The highly successful Conference had over two hundred registered participants from various universities across all the geopolitical zones of Nigeria, some of whom did not present papers.

ABOUT BUGAS

The idea of this group began with discussions between the two conveners of this conference and coordinators of BUGAS. The idea of a forum for the discussion of women within the African context has always been a part of the relationship between the two conveners of this conference. As colleagues at Babcock University specialising in their separate fields on these issues, they often lamented the absence of academic opportunities within the institution for the discussion and expression of ideas and research related to gender and women's issues, and the relationship of this to African studies generally. They conferred and brainstormed together and ... the Gender and African Studies Group at Babcock University (BUGAS) was born.

The Gender and African Studies Group is conceived as an intellectual forum for the generation, discussion, analysis, refinement and dissemination of ideas about gender, women, African studies and related themes from an interdisciplinary perspective, and with reference to national, international and transnational frames. It is a research group committed both to advancing academic knowledge about these issues, and to meaningfully contributing to the search for solutions. The Group currently has the capacity to liaise with government agencies, non-governmental organisations, international agencies, and the academic community towards achieving its aims. BUGAS is uniquely positioned to carry out these objectives because of its qualified, committed, focused and principled leadership; its current location in Babcock University, a national centre of educational excellence; the variegated professional networks available from the fusion of networks of the membership from various disciplinary and professional backgrounds; and the demonstrated commitment to integrity and accountability.

The Vision of BUGAS is to be a dynamic intellectual platform for research, training and dissemination of information about women and men and about African peoples towards the realisation of practical advancement in their individual and collective social, economic and political positions. Our mission is the generation, discussion, analysis, refinement and dissemination of ideas about gender, women, African studies and related themes from an interdisciplinary perspective, and with reference to national, international and transnational frames. We engage in research, training/capacity building, information dissemination, collaboration and linkages.

Membership of this group translates Babcock University. The group, which will eventually transform into an association hopes to birth new chapters in various institutions across the country and the continent.

BUGAS has existed since 2012, but it was officially inaugurated on the 10th of April, 2013 by the Director of Research and International Cooperation (RIC), Babcock University, Prof Grace O Tayo. So far, the Gender and African Studies Group has embarked on some vital programmes and publications. The first in the series of its publications was titled *Women in Africa: Contexts, Rights, Hegemonies*, a very successful book coedited by the coordinators. We also published *Fieldwork in Nigerian Oral Literatures* edited by Mobolanle Sotunsa and Akinloye Ojo, Director Institute of African Studies, University of Georgia, a product of BUGAS' emerging international character. Aside books, BUGAS has proposed and organized a vibrant panel on Women's Studies in Africa: Engaging a New Generation of Scholars at the conference of the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) held at the University of Ibadan in October 2015. Similarly they convened a stimulating panel discussion at the 2015 Babcock University Colloquium on Female Academics in a Changing Society and the Babcock Mission, which achieved wide publicity for the group and set discussions on gender sensitivity and mainstreaming in the institution and beyond.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This unique conference is only the beginning of several series of international conferences which will take place not only in Babcock University, but in other institutions and locations within and outside the shores of Nigeria. BUGAS activities will transcend conferences and publications to include formation of research streams, attracting grants and facilitating fellowships and awards for BUGAS members. Plans are underway for a writing workshop, the floating of an international journal, and other initiatives for which BUGAS is actively seeking collaborators, grants and other support. BUGAS also will engage in linkages with similar groups, create an online presence on the website from which members will get information .

In this regard, just like Babcock University's optimistic byline says, the future is BRIGHT for BUGAS.

CONCLUSION

We thank members of BUGAS in Babcock University and beyond , the university administration and everyone who supports the BUGAS vision.