

The matri-force as an option for sustainable development in Africa

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Introduction

The chapter analyses the matri-force as an alternative proposal for nurturing bio-cultural diversity toward sustainable development. Premised on the assertion that modernist development has contributed to the loss of traditional/indigenous values, the chapter advocates the reclamation of feminine values, exhibited in the matri-force, for reshaping efforts toward sustainable development. It draws on the Frafra's conception of *so-nifo* to explain the matri-force as women's unique way of cultivating and sustaining relationships across sex, ethnic and geographical barriers. It argues that the matri-force, as a feminine energy, facilitates the building of social relations and connections in ways that break these barriers and offer opportunities for bio-cultural diversity considerations. The works of Friedan (1983), Oyewumi (2004) and Shiva (1989) provide theoretical basis for the analysis. Rooting the matri-force in the feminine, the chapter shows how the *so-nifo* allows social, kinship and familial transgressions that build on 'blood' relations through matri-kin and yet maintain connections with patri-kin. It is argued that the matri-focality of the relationships makes possible the transgression of traditional kinship categorizations into matrilineal and patrilineal systems. The chapter demonstrates that as the unifying force, women nurture such relationships through recreating, sharing, conserving and extending the bonds. In conclusion, the harnessing of such values is advocated to nurture bio-cultural diversity toward the promotion of sustainable development in Africa.

The discourse on sustainable development is an old one. Its beginnings are traceable to the search for alternatives to development options that apply mechanical actions in the quest to modernize anything along the way. The unguarded recourse to science and technology, as the key tools of modernization and industrialization, left in their wake the destruction of cultures, peoples and nature, considered 'other', in unimagined proportions. The lack of bio-cultural diversity considerations not only resulted in the wanton destruction of human values but also social and natural relationships. This unhappy situation has necessitated and shaped proposed alternatives such as the call for the return to indigenous knowledges and ways, the engendering of development and the promotion of biodiversity (Hountundji, 1997; James, 1995; Odora Hoppers, 2002; Shiva, 1989). These alternatives offer opportunities for halting the scourge of the wanton destruction while promoting sustainable development. The proposals have also caused a shift from the limited considerations of sustainability in ways that expand biodiversity to include issues on cultural diversity. Bio-cultural diversity considerations have thus become necessary due to the annihilations that so-called indigenous cultures suffer in the modernist development quest.

As part of the process of fostering bio-cultural diversity, I propose that alternative initiatives should expand on values consideration. My proposition is premised on the fact of the centrality of values in the definition of cultures. Inarguably, Africa's current predicament can be traced to the insane material pillage and bio-piracy; the cultural domination and annihilations that have occurred in the process can be traced to ideological colonization. In their proposals for the decolonization of Africa, our early nationalist leaders appreciated the need for political and material but also ideological liberation. Nkrumah's (1964) conscientization project prioritized the recovery and revalorization of African values and dignity. Odora Hoppers (2002) furthers the nationalist agenda in her call for a reciprocal valorization of African knowledge systems as a way of reclaiming African identities and forging unique pathways for development.

In this chapter, I advocate for a values consideration in the form of the reclamation of the matri-force as an option for nurturing bio-cultural diversity toward the promotion of sustainable development. I corroborate essentialists' explanations that root the matri-force within the feminine. However, I move my discussions beyond essences to include existences. Contextualizing my discussions on the matri-force as manifests among the Frafra of northern Ghana, I explain the matri-force within the context of the *so-nifo*. I demonstrate that the matri-force represents the caring and nurturing spirit of humanity, which originates but transcends femininity. I argue that the caring and nurturing nature of the matri-force offers opportunities for promoting bio-cultural diversity with implications for sustainable development. This is traceable to values in the forms of recreating, conserving, sharing and extending, which I argue, are critical for sustainable living. I conclude by suggesting that development practitioners embark on a critical reexamination of their praxis against the backdrop of the wanton destruction in the wake of modernization and industrialization.

The matri-force alternative

The feminine energy that connects and generates life is what is being referred to here as the matri-force. It is the maternal spirit that keeps the body and soul of the family and community together. It is this force that generates and sustains communities and societies. It manifests as an unbreakable bond that outlives and connects all forms of relationships irrespective of their need, deed or creed. The strength of this energy lays not so much in its controlling and dominating power but its cooperative yet subversive spirit. This energy has been configured and represented in many ways resulting in varying meanings. These meanings have been shaped by particular histories and contexts. I write from an African setting, within Ghanaian contexts, drawing from northern Ghanaian and Frafra perspectives.

In many cases, it is the innate feminine quality of the matri-force that is stressed giving it an esoteric character. In spite of its roots in the esoteric, I argue that the matri-force also has a strong exoteric quality that complicates its meanings. It is also coded in particular cultural/historical (existential) meanings to give it the complexity often missed in lopsided analysis. Three significant and/or groundbreaking efforts to analyse what I term the matri-force are by Betty Friedan (1983), Vandana Shiva (1989)

and Oyeronke Oyewumi (2004). Friedan and Shiva, but also Oyewumi, analyse women's unique experiences from their particular yet shared historico-cultural contexts. Their analyses result in meanings that are as convergent as they are divergent. My work participates in further complicating analyses through corroboration and departure.

The feminine origins

The feminine origins of the matri-force are undisputable. The matri-force finds safe residence in the feminine due to its historical project of recovering and nurturing. It often manifests in soft toward hard politics, covert to underpin overt praxis and emotionalism in rationality. As well, it thrives in the subtle rather than imposing and in interdependence rather than independence. The complex nature of the matri-force defies the kind of either-or analyses that often result in binary oppositionality. The matri-force engages all and both ends to forge relationships that are unique in the ways that they transgress, bind and maintain the feminine essence of nurturing and care. The constant contestation of the last category of related qualities in the form of hard, overt, imposing, independence and rationality has meant an embrace of and sway toward the first category. Yet, it is the complex positioning of women as they live through their experiences on a daily basis that fosters such transgressions. Both Audre Lorde (1984) and Alice Walker (1984) write about how the realities of black women's lives defy simplification.

It is in such complexity that the transgressive character of the matri-force manifests itself. Although it originates in the feminine, it transgresses feminine boundaries to embrace the whole of humanity. Here again, Lorde and Walker demonstrate how women are able to connect beyond their selfish interests and yet not lose themselves in the process. Such connections and transgressions are possible through the nurturing and caring energies of the matri-force. Its nurturing and caring energies represent the humane side of being and existence, which I argue is essentially human. This critical human side lost its essence as 'man' assumed an all-conquering power. Besides, the matri-force, as a relational energy, connects with masculine and works to achieve 'the hard things' in a manner that is sustainable. That is where it finds appeal; its complexity. This complex manifestation of the matri-force, that which transcends the essential feminine and embraces the masculine, is minimized in the Friedanian and Shivarian articulations while exaggerated in Oyewumian analysis. Carl Jung, an Austrian psychologist, was perhaps the first to attempt an articulation of the complex connections of masculinities and femininities in ways that challenged existing dichotomized notions and bear semblance to what has been called the matri-force. Yet, his occupations with the innate and covert expressions, the unconscious, marred his ability to appreciate the transcendental and material manifestations of the matri-force. Hence, I look elsewhere for inspiration, to Friedan, a feminist analyst, and Shiva and Oyewumi, post-colonial thinkers. I turn to them in spite of their own conceptual challenges.

Writing from a western feminist standpoint, Betty Friedan (1983) articulates women's lived realities against their many contradictions in what she calls the 'feminine mystique'. She explains that there 'was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique'. For Friedan, the multiple roles and

locations of women are fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies. These, she locates in disjuncture between assigned and cultivated identities, popular and real images and, imposed and lived realities. Framing her experiences as feelings of angst, she explains her struggles and failure to find the language to describe those feelings. The naming of such feelings remains mystical, hence, the term 'eminine mystique'.

'The Feminine Mystique is a pioneering attempt to turn women's personal experiences into political issues' (Humm, 1992). It examines the subtlety of femininity in all of its multiplicity and complexity. Stacey (1986) explains that the "mystique" was Friedan's term for the "problem with no name" – the psychic distress experienced by women who had no public careers and were immured in domestic concerns (Humm, 1992). Enlightening as Friedan's configuration of this unique feminine experience is, it restricts meaning to the esoteric. This limits the use of her analysis for examining the exoteric, which, Friedan observes, impinges on and shapes women's experiences. Hence, Shiva's (1989) work on the 'feminine principle', which forges direct connection with nature and not just women's nature, is a closer and better approximation of the matri-force as I perceive it

In her analysis, Shiva (1989) forges an inextricable relationship between nature and women through what she calls the feminine principle. For Shiva, both nature and women inhabit the feminine principle. She asserts that:

women are embedded in nature, producing life with nature, are therefore taking the initiative in the recovery of nature. It is this recovery that I urge proponents of sustainable development through a bio-cultural diversity approach to turn.

For Shiva, the shared creative abilities equip women and nature, the shared quality of sustenance, with the potential for promoting diversity. In an earlier work, I elaborate on how the feminine principle translates into care, interdependence and ontological continuity (Apusigah, 2004).

Shiva's (1989) work gives substantive context and even content for forging sustainable development. By foregrounding her analysis in development, she is able to extend the use of the unique location of women in society and in nature to forge connectivity with nature. Yet, her dwelling on nature to the neglect of culture limits applicability beyond the essential. By culture here, I move meaning beyond ethnic and spatial binds to its generic use as a process coded in ethics and history. At the same time, Shiva's thought-provoking analysis entails several references to the many ways that women subvert negative and destructive cultural practices and systems to sustain nature and culture. I aim at exploring this implicit realization to expand analysis of nature in ways that foreground culture. Oyewumi (2004) opens that opportunity.

In her critique of colonizing discourses Oyeronke Oyewumi (2004) offers a comparable concept, *omoya* in her analysis of Yoruba social organizations. Oyewumi (2004) explains:

If there was one role-identity that defined females, it was the position of the mother. Within the household, members are grouped around different mother-child units described as *omoya*, literally 'children of one mother' or womb-sibling. Because of the matrifocality of many African systems, the mother is the pivot around which familial relationships are delineated and organised. Consequently, *omoya* is comparable in Yoruba culture to the nuclear sister in white American culture. The relationship among womb-siblings, like that of sisters in a nuclear family, is based on an understanding of common interests and borne out of a

shared experience. The defining shared experience that binds *omoya* in loyalty and unconditional love is the mother's womb. Therefore, the category '*omoya*', unlike 'sister,' transcends gender.

Omoya also transcends households; because matrilateral cousins are regarded as womb-siblings and perceived to be closer to one another than siblings who share the same father and who may even live in the same household. *Omoya* locates a person within a socially recognised grouping and underscores the significance of the mother-child connection in delineating and anchoring a child's place in the family. Thus these relationships are primary, privileged and should be protected above all others. In addition, *omoya* underscores the importance of motherhood as institution and as experience in the culture.

The painstaking manner in which Oyewumi explains *omoya* enables her to compare meanings and tease out complexities. She shows how *omoya* like *so-nifo*, to be explained shortly, draws from feminine bonds to build special relationships based on shared experiences and interests, as well as familial loyalties and unconditional love. The close semblance between the Yoruba and Frafra articulations of the matri-force offer opportunities for close comparison. Yet the purposes for which Oyewumi invokes the concept, confines her analysis to showing difference between African and Euro/western perceptions of relationships. My intent is to draw from and build on the unique articulations of matri-kin relationships in themselves and as they relate to patri-kin relationships to serve the greater purpose of rebuilding social relationships through the valorization of feminine perspectives in alternative development thinking. This agenda makes it possible to borrow from Friedan's western feminist perspective, Shiva's Indian eco-feminist perspective and Oyewumi's African anti-colonialist perspective. Taken together, they provide useful insights for articulating a local Frafra perspective, *so-nifo*, to facilitate an ex-local agenda for forging an alliance toward the re/insertion of feminine perspectives in bio-cultural diversity considerations.

So-nifo: The originary matri-force

So-nifo is the Gurune linguistic form and conceptual derivative of the matri-force. This Gurune linguistic articulation is gender neutral and hardly refers to sex identity, although it has strong gender implications in practice. Hence, *so-nifo*, in its originary state, presents as an asexual, gender-neutral phenomenon. Its originary words: *soo* and *nifo*, literally mean relation and eye, respectively.

The *soo* (relation) depicts familial bonds that transcend the ordinary. It represents a special type of bond that is possible only through blood ties. A *soo* or *soo-go* is thus a blood relationship that extends beyond biological relations by connecting all matri-kin. In Frafra, northern Ghana, and Ghanaian conceptions of being, 'blood' is one strong component that derives from the matri-line. Only those connected through the matri-line share blood. The children of blood sisters share the same blood and thus the special bond among matri-kin, while the children of blood sons do not. Hence, a male will have that special (blood) connection with his blood sisters and their children and not with his own children. The 'blood' referred to here extends beyond the mere chemical composition of cells presenting the red fluid that flows through the veins and is visible to the eye. It connotes energy, a spirituality that binds and moves people to connect beyond the visible. This resonates with Lorde's (1984) recollection:

'We remember the old traditions of power and strength and nurturance found in female bonding of African women'.

In an earlier presentation, my associates and I (Apusigah et al, 2005) found resonance in the existential ontology of the Akan of southern Ghana as follows:

The Akan account of being reflects a triple identity of the *okra*, *susum* and *bogyia*, often translated as the conscious, soul and blood. The *okra* is the spiritual element that connects the being to the superforce or supreme consciousness. The *susum* is the paternal force, [the soul], that signifies strength and the *bogyia* is the maternal force, the blood that forms and binds the family.

Connecting this Akan meaning to that of the Frafra, we explained further that:

Among the Frafra, the maternal force defines *soo-go*, (i.e., matri-force), a familial connection that derives only from a mother and connects some members of the family but not others through the *so-nifo* (matri-spiritual eye). It is through the *so-nifo* that witchcraft is shared. Wizards and witches are often described by the Gurunsi Frafra as: a *yeti me* (i.e., he/she sees) or *atara la nini* (he/she has eyes). The *so-nifo* is the spiritual eye and those with very strong or powerful spiritual eyes become witches and wizards. Since it is through *soo-ro* (matri-kin) that the spiritual eye is received, witchcraft can be passed down only through matri-kin. A son cannot pass it on as his children will possess the blood of their mother.

Although the Akan are considered matrilineal and the Frafra patrilineal, the two share similar conceptions regarding the matri-force. In kinship studies on and about African social systems, societies are often classified into matrilineal and patrilineal systems through analyses that often result in a dichotomy that sets up a binary oppositionality to return either-or positions. The matri-force concept defies such classifications and actually sets them into disrepute. It works from complex positions that return contradictions and fluidity in relationships that are not easily separable and indeed intricately connected.

The matri-force as a special bond that connects women and their blood relations connects them no matter where marriage takes them. It remains the main unifying force, and the strongest, I must add, as women marry into different families, communities, ethnicities and even nationalities. It persists in keeping the matri-line together in spite of physical location, social positioning and patriarchal dominance. It sustains not just the matriline but entire families, including patri-kin, no matter how dispersed. Its very essence does not preclude the male. It includes males and females in a way that allows them to at once belong to the patriline and/or matriline and yet remains connected to a transcending kinship bound together by the matri-force, the unifying energy.

It is the transgressive (cross-boundary or border) nature of the matri-force that has been missed by Shiva (feminine principle) and Friedan (feminine mystique) in their analysis but implied by Oyewumi (*omoya*) in her anti-colonial quest. This criticism should not be read as a denial of the essential feminine. As my analysis so far reveals, the matri-force is a derivative of the essential feminine.

The matri-force connects children (sons and daughters) in the matriline. They form one force field of matri-kin. However, it does not include the children of the males of that matriline as they belong to an entirely different force field. Yet, this second force field remains connected to the first because of the patri-kin connection of males of the first force field. The relationship between the matri-kin and patri-kin

fields is weak but not irrelevant or unimportant. Explanations attribute the weakness to the thickness of the 'blood'. Matri-kin share full blood while patri-kin share half blood. Although weak, patri-kin relations remain an important part of kinship relationships.

In earlier analysis, my associates and I made connections to the spiritual and material. In this analysis, I want to explore the potential of the matri-force as an option for sustainability. The special bonds that it forges among diverse family members across diverse boundaries (including spatial, linguistic, gender) are evidence of the ability to transgress barriers and subvert dominance. In an era of heightened and insane human desire for dominance, which has taken a great toll on cultural and biological diversity, the matri-force presents a unique opportunity that challenges this myopia. In the least, it serves as a useful metaphor in the process of re/thinking and re/negotiating development. I believe it is our only hope for human survival and sustainable development.

Sustainability within the context of the matri-force

Sustainability implies an ability to hold/maintain, renew/recreate and continue/extend resources, actions and things. It implies the continued capacity of nature and culture to support a mutually benefiting relationship. Nature is the essence of all things but for that essence to maintain its existence, it must be cultivated. Conversely, without an essence there will be no existence; nothing to cultivate. It was out of nothingness (void) that came matter, say the biblical historians and the great sages. It is an interdependent relationship that needs continuance. Unfortunately, modernist thought and practice lacks such comprehension, thus culminating in the massive destruction of suicidal and genocidal proportions that all living beings face; whether human, plant or animal.

Shiva (1989) asserts that the 'existence of the feminine principle is linked with diversity and sharing. Its destruction through homogenisation and privatisation leads to the destruction of the diversity and of the commons'. She offers the feminine principle as an option for restoring diversity and rescuing the commons. Like Shiva, I advocate the reclamation of the feminine principle (Apusigah, 2004). Unlike her, I want to draw on its principles for not just its essences but also for its existential value. I adopt the rather simplified meanings that she offers as a basis for engaging the inherent complexity better captured in the matri-force.

It is out of an appreciation of its intricate relationships across cultures and the dire consequences of the lack of it for nature and life forms that I dare to call for the retrieval and recovery of the matri-force. The retrieval and re/valorization of the matri-force will avail the critical tools for sustainable living and development in the forms of creating, preserving, renewing, sharing and extending.

Re/creating

The creative potential of the matri-force, which I draw from its innate reproductive ability, is critical for sustainable living. Although just one of the many abilities of women, reproduction is often essentialized and stressed for right or wrong reasons. In

this analysis, I want to stress women's reproductive role as a source of energy for production. The ability to reproduce creation (my Christian teachings take the better of me here), the same things in many ways and forms, presents lessons for sustainable living. It teaches lessons on production for renewal and consumption rather than mere consumption. In this age of mass production and high consumption, where, in many countries and cities of the world, the supermarket is the source of all things (groceries, clothes, supplies), life has become one of buying and selling and/or consuming and disposing: those who buy from producers at cheap prices and sell to consumers at large profit margins; those who buy in turn consume and dispose. Neither the retailer nor the consumer, the ultimate beneficiaries have or are willing to connect to the source: the land the giver of all things. Producers become the losers and marginalized in the race. The producers, as the marginalized, are also often pushed into unorthodox practices that ruin their relationships with the source as they struggle to survive an unfair trade relationship. Even when retailers claim to be producers, they remain the faceless giant corporations, whose greed in the form of maximum profits clouds all ethical judgment.

Right from the Industrial Revolution through the Green Revolution to current Globalization, forests have been shaved bare while water sources and bodies are dosed with chemical pollutants at unsurpassed levels. Agronomic practices and hi-tech options such as the use of chemical fertilizers, multiple cropping within a season, mono-cultural cropping and genetically modified seeds have not only distorted the natural creative chain but also set life on the path of destruction. The massive destruction within the last few centuries has been unsurpassed by any other period in ruining biological, cultural and hence bio-cultural diversity. The suicidal rate at which such destruction occurs is a case of the loss of our creative potential. What has been the norm is the consumptive tendency, which has been utterly destructive.

By getting in touch with the feminine side, reclaiming and reconnecting with the matri-force, we will be regaining our creative energies and our ability to reproduce. We will be re-imbued with the energy for making things out of the void. Making things for use, rather than using up things, will define productive ethics. This will bring us back to nature as we draw on our creative power for multiple purposes (use and re-use) rather than our consumption instincts that annihilate. Efforts at recycling wastes and renewing energy are clear examples of the creative (reproductive) spirit. Yet these remain marginal in our development efforts.

In Ghana and in many African countries, cities and towns are overwhelmed by the ever-growing mountains of household and industrial waste while the practice of simple recycling techniques could have saved us of not only our lives but also the huge sums of money spent on health and sanitation services. Plastics, glass, paper and wood products of all sorts are thrown out due to the lack of a system for recycle and reuse. Trees that have taken several years to grow are harvested within seconds and put into minimum use with significant elements thrown out as waste. For many African countries, after the requisite use for the product, largely as timber for furniture and building materials, the rest becomes waste. Such so-called waste is often badly disposed of and soon becomes an environmental menace. The high penchant to buy, use and throw out is rather too costly! There is a need to cultivate a preserving culture.

Conserving

Conservation is essential for longevity. Production can only be sustained if its life can be extended. In this case, reference is made of the source of production. By defying barriers, the matri-force extends itself beyond all boundaries. By so doing, it teaches lessons on conservation and the need to maintain connections at all costs. This suggests the need for constant efforts toward the maintenance of the bonds. Among the Frafra, even when the elderly cannot visit family, especially 'blood' relations, anymore, they send the young ones on their visitations. By so doing, they are not only maintaining their kinship relationships but they are also teaching and pushing the young to build and maintain them for posterity. They understand that relations must be nurtured if they are to last.

Conservation has meant ensuring the sustenance of the essence of things. It has meant growing nature in ways that do not annihilate its essence. Oftentimes, African cultural revivalists take a romantic standpoint that is myopic in the ways that it fails to appreciate growth and re/creation. They often view the African past as a static and pure state that must be recovered in its essential nature. Yet, even the essential African was not just guarding nature but utilizing nature too. Nature has been a major source of livelihood, producing food, shelter, clothing and water for the survival of the people. For some societies, living with and in nature is a way of life. To treat this relationship as if it were stable constitutes a simplistic viewing and misconstruction of the African reality. As a source of livelihood, nature and its benefits have been conserved and preserved by various indigenous cultures in order to extend and prolong its supply. The institution of rituals, taboos and festivals provide respite at particular times toward renewal and regeneration. The ban on hunting by the Dagbamba, fishing by the Fanti and noise by the Frafra and Ga of Ghana during certain times of the year is often projected as ritual on spirituality without acknowledging their critical conservationist components. Those are special times set aside as sacred for the regeneration of nature.

In Ghana, efforts to force punitive measures on communities in attempts to control and prevent bushfires have failed because they have lacked an understanding of the implications of such measures on the livelihoods of the peoples. Most importantly, they have failed to understand that rural and indigenous communities implemented systems in the past that worked until large-scale farming, lumbering and fishing arrived. They were able to conserve nature until the embrace of the development goggle, which has and continues to consume not just nature but also cultures. The conquering tendencies of new age development cloud its ability to share nature.

Sharing

Sharing is another important lesson that is offered through the matri-force as a creative and nurturing element of humanity. Nurtured from the womb, sharing is extended in a mother's unrelenting and unyielding efforts to keep her family together, especially her children. She connects with each member in special ways and through that connection, maintains relationships among all. Many a time, disagreeing siblings remark: 'well, after mom is gone, each for themselves'. This illustrates the mother's binding energy. Her nurturing spirit flows from the womb to birth and extends throughout her life and even beyond. She shares her finds and losses, her love and

bitterness, her joys and sorrows and her prosperity or deprivation. The African woman, as the foundation of the family becomes the pillar for such sharing. Even in the Diaspora, African women continue to connect their families in these ways. The popular soul food of the African American is an opportunity for such sharing.

Growing up as a Frafra child into womanhood, I was intrigued by the special role that women play in sharing not just their love and prosperity but also extending the sharing. During very difficult yearly famine times when food supplies are low, women become the strength of the family. The saying 'a woman is got to do what she is got to do', popular with African and African American women, is demonstrative of woman's sharing nature. As a young woman, I watched the anger and desperation in my father's eyes when he ran out of food rations and the hope in my mother's face as she consoled her family. She would immediately take control, go out of her home, to her relatives (those who could afford) and cause them to share so that she could extend their shares to her family. She always came back with some food and sometimes even more. I also recall other women relatives and even entire strangers coming to my house to share in our stacks. It was always the women who went out to bring food in difficult times. These women caused the male relatives (as fathers, brother, uncles, cousins and heads of households and families), who often stored the food, to share.

I recall the curious question I asked my mother this one time: 'Why are the women always begging?'. She replied, 'Because they are women, if they beg you give them' and she added 'Women have to feed their families, their children'. I did not know at the time to interrogate further. Nevertheless, I knew she was right. She always came back home with something. Anytime she went somewhere, she did. My father hardly did so. On hindsight, that must have contributed to ending my interrogation. That made the difference. I believe it is this appreciation of the sharing nature of women that informed the decision of the Ghana Education Service/Girls Education/World Food Programme project in Ghana to give food rations to mothers rather than fathers. The implementers understand the nurturing role of mothers.

The significance of sharing lies in its relevance in the promotion of relationships and connections even among entire strangers. The Yoruba saying: 'he [sic] who brings *kola* brings life' connotes the peace-making role of sharing. Premised on support and love, sharing enables connections that promote cohabitation and foster peaceful living. Sharing becomes a medium for connecting and caring for one another. Sharing as a value also extends to non-humans. When entrenched in good mores and collective ethics, sharing makes it possible to recognize, appreciate and support all those who matter within a particular space. Some form of the with-it-ness that postmodernist philosophers, Heidegger and Derrida, speak of resonates here.

Sharing becomes a recipe for promoting bio-cultural diversity to the extent that it allows peoples of diverse need, deed and creed to share space. As well, it allows humans to connect with other species in ways that allows them to share available space. As an entrenched value, it enables various species, human and non-human, diverse cultures, ethnicities and nationalities to appreciate one another and share the space available to them rather than exploit one another in the quest for dominance.

By extension, sharing makes possible bio-cultural diversity considerations in sustainable ways. The love and support for one another prevents one group from seeking to annihilate the other. Such considerations open possibilities for humans to

consider the possible implications of unguarded harvesting of natural resources. The connections and relationships established among the diverse cultures can promote cross-cultural understandings in ways that can strengthen cooperation and peaceful coexistence. It becomes possible to cultivate mutual respect for diverse cultures, share different cultural meanings and promote multiple perspectives, visions and viewpoints.

Extending

Through recreating, conserving and sharing, both nature and culture are extended into the future. Recreation ensures the making of life, conservation promotes life and sharing maintains life. In the process, life achieves extension. The extension of life manifests in the process of re/creating and reproducing life in varying forms. Like the mother's womb that continues the creative process to extend human life, this process is extended in multiple ways for all related and connected life forms to re/create themselves and support the creation of others. The creative process can best be viewed as a chain reaction that sustains itself when relationships are maintained. When humans appreciate and support relationships among themselves as well as those of other life forms, they unleash the regenerative energy in ways that fulfils and maintains creation.

The chain itself implies the conserving of the relationships. Unless human and non-human life forms exist in ways that support each other, the chain will be broken. If human activities do not preserve nature and if nature does not support human activities, life will be spinning and whirling its own doom. The world is currently paying dearly for the recklessness of past and continuing human activities. The deaths, displacements and destructions that are occurring in all parts of the world through the hurricanes and tsunamis are the price paid for global warming and its attendant melting of the polar ice to cause the rise of sea levels. The current imbalance in nature resulting from years of lack of bio-diversity considerations and its attendant loss of plant and animal species through selfish human activities is yet another price.

Unless humans learn to share and stop acting as if the world and all of its contents are their divine prerogative to destroy, the current suffering will continue. Unless humans live our lives by extending life to one another, we will be eating up our own. Unless humans live our lives by extending life to all other life forms, the ongoing genocides of nature and culture will continue. Our very existence and survival depends on our ability to think of, connect with and live in the future. The matri-force offers that opportunity through its extending element. The extending element is futuristic; seeking to promote longevity and accountability to posterity.

Reshaping the development agenda

The implications of the matri-force for sustainable development as discussed above in the form of nurturing, conserving, renewing, sharing and extending offer practical opportunities for reshaping development. Although it can be currently regarded as a metaphor for recovering and revalorizing indigenous knowledge forms, it also captures the lived realities of women and of humans while presenting interesting

connections for community and national development. These opportunities serve as critical learning points for cultivating essences for nurturing existence toward the promotion of bio-cultural diversity with implications for sustainable development.

The varying manifestations of the matri-force discussed above in its multiple sites of connectivity present a strong case for bio-cultural diversity. Its subversive and transgressive elements are informative. Above all, its roots in the feminine, with its creative and reproductive abilities, present a certain agency that sustains not just kinship ties among women but all of their offspring, no matter their location. The matri-force then is that creative and nurturing spirit of humanity. It is that which has been lost through development and yet sustained through women. It is this spirit that needs recovering in ongoing efforts toward sustainable development. It offers possibilities for rethinking development in very sustainable ways. This wealth of offerings exists among indigenous people. It is knowledge with practical relevance that has been nurtured and preserved by indigenous women for immediate benefits and for posterity. The knowledge and possibilities availed through the matri-force offer justification for endogenous development. It will therefore be intuitive to look in indigenous systems, draw from their unique ways but also realize that there are diversities from within, such as those among ethnicities and between men and women. Such diversities offer teachings, as those offered through the matri-force, for enriching endogenous development and promoting bio-cultural diversity. When the similarities but more so the diversities from within, as this chapter implies, are properly harnessed, internal inclusivity is fostered for sustained development and bio-cultural diversity.

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