

# empower

WOMEN'S HEALTH & EQUAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE (WHER)  
BI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

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## At Last!

We are ecstatic to be back with the second issue of our bi-annual newsletter – EMPOWER! Each day I am more grateful to be a representative of this amazing community where we work together to create an avenue for justice, equality, love, understanding and togetherness. We are hoping that our work will be a challenge to everyone to raise their voices in unity with ours as we continue on this quest for equality in a society where women are often faced with discrimination and violence.

In this century, in fact in 2016, a certain leader, whose name is not worth mentioning, while attending a press conference with the first female Chancellor of Germany, claimed that his wife's place is in his kitchen, his living room and in the "other room." Some others mock women without remorse to score cheap political points, to chain us in the kitchen, yet we rise!

In a world where women's voices seem irrelevant and weak, where

women freely expressing their sexualities is seen as taboo, we speak!

With the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, and other homophobic policies steering violence, fear, anxiety towards us, and causing us so much pain and tears, we thrive!

We bring to you our diverse voices through artwork, poems and stories. These words are our true emotions and thoughts and we have more to tell you. I hope you enjoy it!

- Akudo Oguaghamba  
(Executive Director)



*empower*



UNTITLED *by Ayo Collins*

# PITCH BLACK ASH

*By Njabby Nyathi*

Pitch black Ash.  
I reach into the closet of my memory  
To try and find an occasion where my skin  
Pitch  
Black  
Was not seen as a sin  
As a burden  
Sodom and Gomorrah to the masses  
As a disgrace  
A reason to bleach  
Burn  
And destroy.  
Pitch black Ash.

I've been everything to the world  
By virtue of my skin not having had the ability  
The apparent grace and class  
To aspire to a whiteness that forms the basis of my self-hate.  
Pitch black Ash.  
You've done nothing for me  
In your name I have suffered injustices that are burnt into my soul  
That are ingrained into my being  
That neither the mirror nor those who look straight at me and call me  
ugly  
Can never erase

Pitch black Ash  
I've had to relearn myself that you and you alone can ever reach deeply  
enough into yourself  
To find the love they deprived you of  
To rid yourself of a stigma you never solicited  
That you didn't create  
That you cannot seem to shake no matter how hard  
How deep  
How painful  
The trembling in your core tries  
Pitch black Ash.

You are neither a nightmare  
Nor a curse.  
You are a force.  
You defy even the Phoenix that rises from the ashes  
You are born of ash  
You have risen through the burning of your own kind  
Come out embodying the very furnace that is inherent to your being  
The furnace that they have over and over and over again  
Used to try and destroy you.  
Tailored and beaten into a submission that you can never fall into  
That was never made for you  
A submission that  
Against the odds, you still defy  
Pitch black Ash  
You are majestic

You are the Queen of Shiba  
Dark-skinned medusa  
Dreaded beauty with the nappy hair  
Fear of the white man  
The pride of my spirit  
The carefree laughter of my people

Pitch black Ash I applaud you  
You've stood the test of ridicule  
Even from your own kind  
Of hatred  
Backlash that you will never fully understand  
Even from me

The one who should carry you with pride  
The one who should know better  
And still here you stand  
Reminding me that I am regal before anything else  
That the goddesses of these lands gave you to me as a gift from the  
sun  
A reward  
In the very end  
For the woman I'd unfortunately have to fight to be

You are the toil of my people in the burning sun on a hot day  
Never tired  
A representation of strength  
The survival of an entire people  
Resilient  
Pitch  
Black  
Ash.

I cannot thank you enough for how far you've brought  
For raising me from my fetal position  
To the bending of my knees  
From crawling to becoming a runner  
From submission to fighting  
From complacency to revolution  
Pitch black Ash.

You've saved me from myself  
You've kept the darkness  
My demons at bay  
With your  
Soft caresses  
Your rough demeanor  
Your cut that isn't meant for all to appreciate  
Pitch black Ash.  
Dreaded beauty with the nappy hair.  
Pitch black Ash.  
Pride of our nation  
Pitch black Ash.  
Pitch black Ash.  
PITCH BLACK ASH.

## MY STORY: A DAY I WILL NEVER FORGET IN A RUSH

*By Gloria Nwigwe*

It all happened as if I was dreaming. Hmmm, but unfortunately, it was reality.

My life was almost shattered in the twinkle of an eye, and I paid for it dearly.

March (2016) was a horrible month for me. I met a friend on social media, Facebook to be precise. We became close and intimate and would talk to each other on the phone almost every day. This lasted for more than a year before we decided to meet each other face to face. Little did I know, everything was fake -- the chat, the call, the female voice I was used to hearing, it was all a lie.

On that horrible day, I went to see her, picturing the description she gave me in my head. She had told me that her driver would come pick me up because she was very busy at home. With a free mind, I accepted. Upon reaching her bus stop, I saw the driver and became furious, for no reason my inner mind asked me not to go but I couldn't listen. There is a proverb that says "when a dog wants to die, it loses its sense of perceiving defecate", at that time all I wanted was to see my long awaited friend, so I followed the driver. When we got to the home, the driver asked me to wait for her in the room that she was coming. Immediately, I entered the house and saw two guys with different weapons. One had a gun and the other one had a machete. My mind flew and I became afraid. They instructed me not to shout or else they will kill me, so I

*(Continued on page 8)*

## THAT CHOICE

*By "A"*

Thirteen years into my marriage, I fell in love with a woman. I am married to a good man though. He is loving (in his own special way), God fearing, kind, and loyal. He is a wonderful father to our five kids. We have a happy home together, although I am currently living in a different country.

For thirteen years, I never knew it was possible to fall in love, but for the first time I am experiencing feelings that surpass anything I have ever felt before. Her name is... let me call her "Desire". I know her from back in my university years, she's a friend and due to our closeness, she also grew to become a close family friend. Before I got married, I remember we had an intimate, special connection. I knew there was something between us, but I refused to define it and I ran away. I got married, we lived apart with little to no communication.

So, remember I am a married woman and I am supposed to be "straight", right? I am not sure a straight woman could be in love with another woman. Desire has made me question my sexuality. Can someone say exactly how it feels to be a lesbian? I've always asked myself how it could be possible to have such a deep connection and unwavering feelings for someone of the same sex? I didn't understand this kind of love until seeing her again after 13 years, it was impossible to hold myself together. I fell deeply, madly in love.

It felt so wrong the way she made me feel. It terrifies me so when I moan out loud from my sleep. And then I remember, my husband and my five kids. The shame, the fear, the courage all at the same time and then I

*(Continued on page 9)*

## ZION

*By Njabby Nyathi*

My breath hitched  
Stuck in my throat in the form of a shocked sob  
One that I could never allow myself to release  
You see  
When you are a black woman  
Not even your emotions belong to you  
You are Zion to the nation  
And Zion  
Can never be seen to fall

And so I swallowed  
Pushed the thought as far back as my sub-conscious  
As far back as I  
Could afford  
Dusted the specks of sand accumulating on my dark jeans  
And stood  
The rustling of the leaves meant it was time to fight again  
And so  
That is what I did.

## THICK AND BLACK

*By Hadiza Selaboy*

Thick and black is on my head  
like an impatient Calabash soon to drop  
and flow on my back like satin and silk  
Thick and black I itch and scratch  
all day long I feel distraught  
scissors at hand to grant my wish  
Thick and black it twists and turns  
thick as snakes on Medusa's head  
capable of striking down her foes  
Thick and black my glittery gold  
priceless treasure that can't be sold  
Mother's gift to give my child  
Thick and black it broke my comb  
but shea butter I have to end my doom  
my afro tresses shall grow so soft  
Thick and black has turned to grey  
I'm glad I lived to see this day  
for thick and black I'll pass away.

# WHER Activity Highlights

September  
2016

Attended the 13th AWID International Forum  
Community Paralegal & Human Rights Peer Educators Training Workshop



October  
2016

Attended the 59th Session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR)



November  
2016

Community Paralegal & Human Rights Peer Educators Training Workshop



December  
2016

International Human Rights Day Celebration & Social Networking Events  
Attended ILGA World Conference



February  
2017

Community Paralegal & Human Rights Peer Educators Training Workshop



March  
2017

International Women's Day Consciousness Raising Activity - Film/Discussion

April  
2017

WHER Staff Retreat



Check out our upcoming events!

## MY LOVE FOR YOU

*By Akudo Oguaghamba*

I met you when you met me  
I fell in love even without knowing it  
I know no other  
I have no issues committing, especially when I trust  
And I trusted you

I grew up with you, I never gave any other a chance  
You were my everything and I celebrated you with every passion within me  
I served you, I toiled for you, I fought for you  
But in the end, after everything – you rejected me

Not only did you reject me, my love  
You hate me, you despise me with the same level of passion that I love you  
You even mobilized people to destroy me, to kill me, to rape me, to humiliate me  
I am constantly hiding, in shame and fear, my tears soak my pillow

I remained with you, pleading and hoping  
Hoping that one day you will see me, and smile at me  
Stretching out your hand to hold me in your bosom  
And tell me that everything will be okay – this is but a dream

Just a dream – I don't want to wake up  
My pains know no bounds, I feel my heart jump out of my chest all the time  
Not knowing what you and your followers will do next  
Yet I love you, still - why, I asked

Just let me stay with you  
Let me breathe the air around you, let me love you regardless  
you said no, I disgust you and do not belong with you  
just because I am who I am  
just because of things I cannot change about me  
I have prayed and fasted and wished this away  
I have hated and punished myself for so long  
I have tried to conform, to be who you want

My dear country Nigeria,  
For I have loved you so  
Yet you reach out to me, and you crushed my soul & hope  
Blocking your ears to my pleas and supplications  
I shall rise above, like a phoenix I shall rise again

*("My Story: A Day I Will Never Forget in a Rush" continued from page 4)*

closed my mouth with my hand as I was crying for help. They collected my phone worth of 400 US dollars, my jewelry, sum of N17, 000 cash, and my laptop. They also striped me naked and were snapping pictures of me, asking me to turn around for them to take nude pictures of me, and while all this was going on, I was still pleading for my life, begging them to let me go. They shut me up and asked me to call my relatives so that they can pay 300,000 for my freedom. I called a few people with the phone on speaker and to no avail I was with them for more than 3 hours! When it became dark at night, they asked me to dress up, after dressing up, they threatened to take me to police station to report to them that I am a lesbian and that I am guilty of 14 years imprisonment. I cried like I have never done before, pleaded to them to let me go and I told them the worth of my phone that they can sell it for a good price. After much pleading and crying, they told me that if I ever come back here to look for them that they will upload my nude pictures to all social media and that I was so lucky that they didn't rape me or beat the lesbian out of me, that I should thank my lucky stars that they are in good moods and for me to know that I am not the first or the tenth person that they have dealt with. So they took me back to the bus stop and left me stranded. At that time I was grateful to God that am alive to testify and to tell of the story.

My advice to all community members is to be very, very careful when dealing with people they don't know because it's high time we embrace safety and security measures for our own good. We don't have to be carried away by someone we barely know, also be careful of the people we meet through social media, some of them are fake and are like hungry lions looking for whom to devour.

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## WOMAN *of Influence*



### SANDRA AGUEBOR

*"Nigeria's First Female Car Mechanic"*

Born in Benin City, Nigeria, Sandra Aguebor's passion for mechanics was alive and well at a young age. While many discouraged her from following her dreams of becoming an auto mechanic, she was not deterred, graduating from university with a degree in mechanical engineering and taking a job working at Nigeria Railway Corporation. Years of experience later, she opened her own auto-garage and founded the Lady Mechanics Initiative, an organization that teaches women from various backgrounds how to repair cars and become financially independent. Since founding LMI in 2004, more than 700 women have graduated from her program and many have gone on to open their own shops. A true inspiration to women and girls alike, Aguebor, is a shining example of what it means to never give up on your dreams.

<https://face2faceafrica.com/article/nigerias-first-lady-mechanic-sandra-aguebor>

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# *empower*

*("That Choice" continued from page 4)*

see her and the shame, the fear, and the circle of feelings just continue.

The thing about how we feel for each other is that, it isn't just sexual, we connect in so many ways. I couldn't just imagine an intimate relationship with another woman or even visualize it. With her it is fate invented. I couldn't hide my feelings anymore; I must let her know. I want to hold her, feel her and laugh with her.

"Hey, can I tell you something? I am dying inside"

"OMG! Are you okay?"

She looked at me and I died a little. I knew it was now or never, and so I told her. It killed me to find out that she is in a committed relationship with someone she loves and they live together. But what destroyed me the most was learning she loved me for years, she waited for me to see her but I was bent on doing my duties to my family, to the world and I let my angel pass me by. Now she is happy with someone else and I must live with my reality – with my husband and kids. There is no passing day I do not think of her, dream of her and wish she could hold me in her arms, just once. Even though I knew I liked women, especially Desire, I believed this feeling would go away after I got married. I made a choice 13years ago, that I must live with for the rest of my life even when my soul belongs to someone else. What am I now? Straight?

## FUCK FEMEN

*By Soraya*



I use my body and mind as a weapon for decolonization and de-sexualization, which is a delicate matter because our bodies are so used to being exoticized. So as a response to Femen girls, I made a shoot using lipstick and my "big fat ass".

## STRANGE

*By Chazbee*

I feel a feeling but I know not what  
A longing so scares my thought  
I fight a war in my heart of wither sought

I feel for the one I have but cannot HAVE  
I feel the right-wrong feelings that hail  
Should I, should I not sail?

For boobs and feminine hug and love I long  
And I fear that my fever so high is tolled  
Who will believe a girl could long for boobs and vee?  
Oh my head be cool and live.

Mama will curse and toss  
Friends will tense and flee but my thought thus grow  
And I guess I'm stuck in scrolls  
But for boobs and vee I still hunger and troll

I love the girl that's smart and fair  
She looks calm, fierce, and thorough like fire  
You give me chills and butterflies thus  
I need your love and caress

But who will hear of this longing I have  
The thought they say is sin  
Making judgments for God like saints  
I plead to be left in my "sin and sail"  
If this feeling so sweet is wrong  
Then heaven is far not what I "see"

Die not sweet thoughts  
I have the girl I crave in my mind  
And there I shall erect a castle befitting her queenship  
If in my thought she puts to stay  
I will serve her hole till she loves my world aloe.

Since this feeling I know not what!!!  
The girl in my thoughts I choose to love.

# WHER UPCOMING EVENTS

**May 2017**

Financial Empowerment  
Workshop



**May 2017**

IDAHOT Commemoration Activity  
& Consciousness Raising Activity

**May 2017**

Human Rights  
Sensitization Forum



**July 2017**

Human Rights Sensitization Forum &  
Community Paralegal Training  
Workshop

**August 2017**

Peer  
Counselors  
Training



**October 2017**

African Commission on Human  
and People's Rights

## ISLAND

*By Chazbee*

My body hungers for you  
My head bids for you  
I dream of you all day  
My heart needs the pleasure you beget  
The pleasure that lingers even after you depart

I want to take you away to the Island of pleasure  
You and me on the bed of the ocean  
Clothed in nothing but our birth wear  
Your bosom glaring at me with beckoning stares

I want to trace my finger through the ridges of your nakedness  
Burry my fingers at the edge of your waterfall  
Tracing my tongue from your face down to your inner forest of pleasure  
Listening to your heart beat like the throng sound from the waterfall

You will beg my tongue to do more my darling  
With moans announcing your approval of my hunts  
Sucking in my tongue like a wild banana, we will stare at us and smile  
We will feel the pleasure and giggle

With the ocean fresh breeze we will be filled  
You will cause my tongue to lick through you  
To the point of your utmost pleasure  
Then I will bury my head in your cave of passion  
That cave by now is flowing with tasty water  
Licking as if I am searching for diamonds and being filled from  
The sonorous song you make under your breath  
Gyrating under me like I am the best beat maker

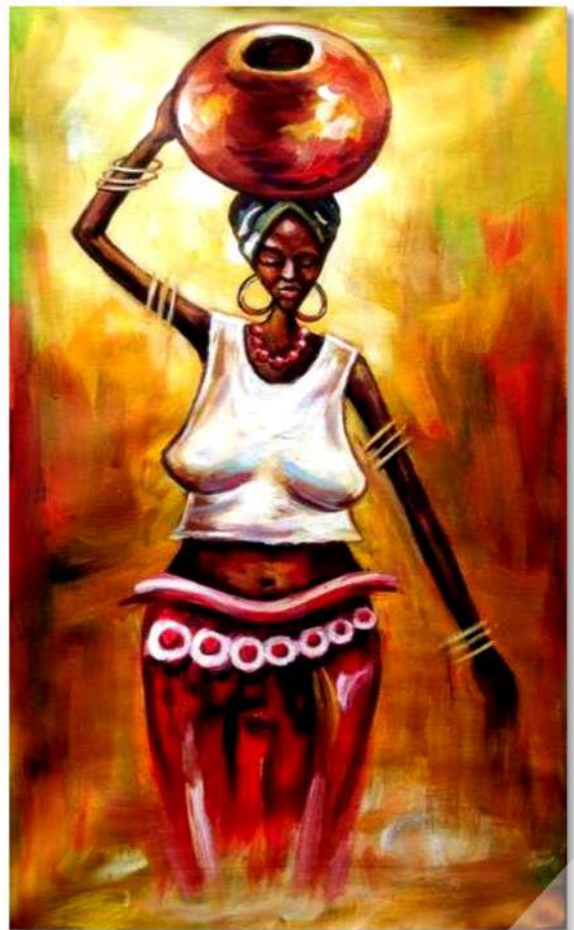
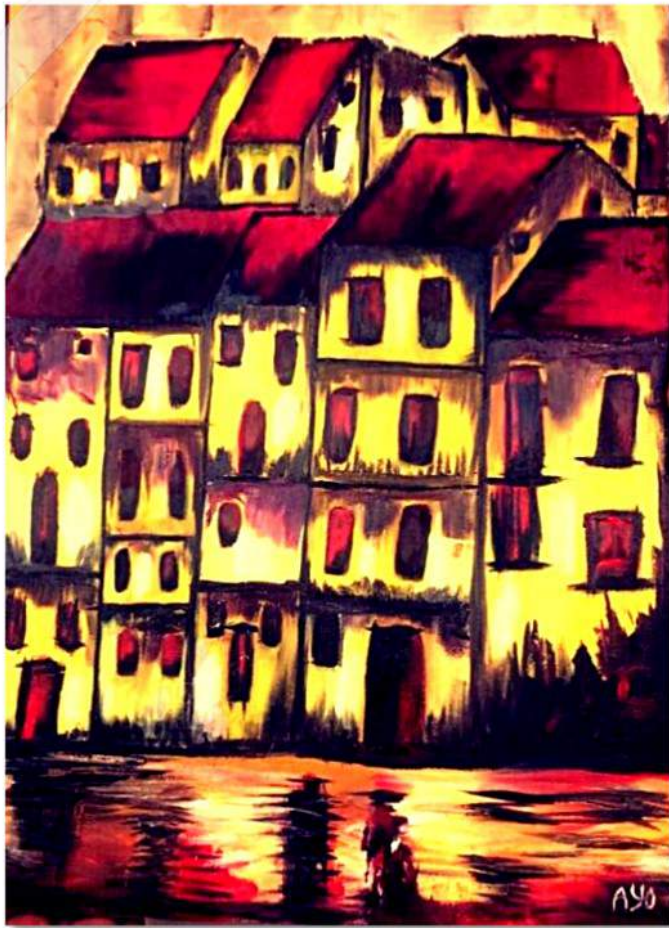
Hummmmm! Becomes both our chorus and your gyrating tempo increases  
You then add to the song, the verse that I love the most  
"Just like that baby", "Just like that love"..  
That's the inspiration I desire  
With your hand directing my head to that part of perfection

Then comes the great announcement  
"I am gonna come baby, make me come for you", you say  
I will nudge you to "come" cos I await your arrival  
Of course that's why we are here  
To make you "come" to this place we love so much  
Your face, a combination of wicked gentleness  
And your body as soft as a wet foam  
You will whine your waist non-stop  
Touching my hands and "speaking in tongues" then  
With the Latino waist move your cave explodes in my face

The royal arrival to my island  
The shake and waist work that follows  
That is how you announce your arrival

Your island overflowing with crystal water  
My mouth full and drunk, the shy look of pleasure you give me  
Smiling like we just met  
That look of absolute satisfaction,  
I am filled with pride and joy cos I just made you mine  
My pride keeps rising till you turn over and say  
"Now it's your turn"

*empower*



UNTITLED WORKS by *Ayo Collins*

## MY HEADSTONE READ "BELOVED DAUGHTER"

*By Fikayo Balogun*

It was a summer evening.  
The breeze turned leaves  
into jellyfishes,  
then ran across the field of grass  
and I crushed blades  
beneath my feet  
on my way to find love.

Love pulled me  
by my crown,  
pinned my face  
to the rocky scales  
of the baobab tree  
and yanked my skirt away.

Ice wind rushed between my legs,  
flushed  
my will, my freedom  
through my mouth  
with every scream  
of  
NO!  
Don't!  
Please!

He slammed away  
till he released his poison  
inside of me.  
His toxic glow  
exploded through my veins  
till my heart  
became stone still.

Crushed berries  
was my bed,  
dead leaves hugged  
my naked body.  
I could feel  
the sting  
of a thousand bees  
between my legs  
as the earth soaked up  
the slimy liquid  
dripping from my core.

"You woke the sleeping dragon with your giggle, love," he said.  
I wanted to scream  
"Don't tell me it was my fault that your mind is a sink hole."  
I came to find love,  
No one warned me that men had become wolves devouring  
every beating heart.

No one sent me a memo or was it lost in the mail  
like my soul.

I wanted to scream, but my cords  
had lost the will for words.  
I watched him  
zip up the murder weapon. He laughed  
his laughter flew ahead of his thirsty boots  
as he beat a path away  
from my battered soul.

I died that summer evening  
My headstone read  
"Beloved daughter, she loved berries."  
I was buried deep  
on a wasted land  
with no berry tree.  
The priest said  
I died an unholy death, like  
it was my fault  
that no one saw that  
I died, long before  
I became dead.

The world asked me to speak,  
I said  
Words are  
dogs without bites,  
bees without stings,  
kings without crowns.  
Words can't describe  
the injustice  
that has been dealt  
to my very soul.

Words would buy you justice,  
they said.  
I told them, I came  
from a line of novelty,  
a city of  
virgin maidens, frail fairies,  
white hills and red mountains.  
A vast land of  
berries graced upon by  
things  
scarce and pure like  
unicorns.

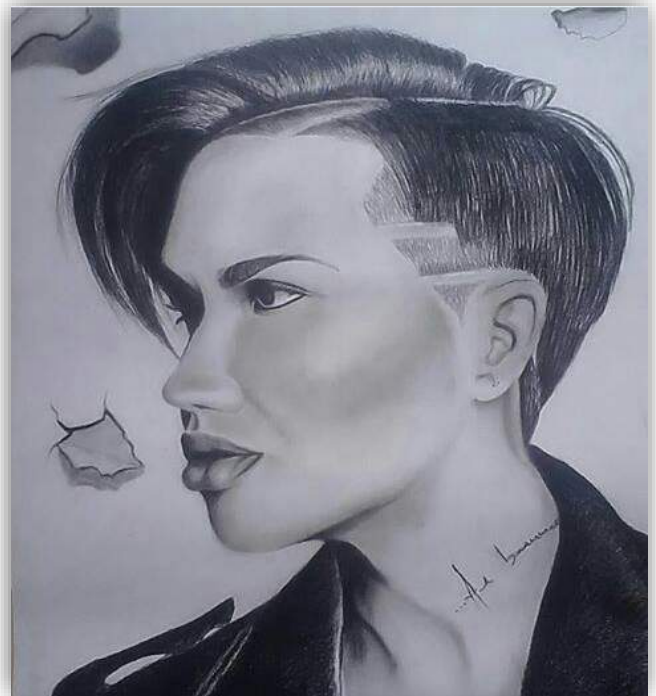
But what has been taken from me  
is my life with my soul  
ripped from its root.  
I have disappeared into oblivion,  
words cannot bring me back.

“CELESBIAN” FAN ART

*By XtiahannaArt*



Samira Wiley & Lauren Morelli



Ruby Rose

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# Contributor PAGE

## The Who's Who of This Issue

### "A"

"A" is a 41 year old university professor. She has come to discover her sexual orientation later in life and although she is married, her heart belongs to someone special.

### Akudo Oguaghamba

Akudo Oguaghamba is a Human Rights Educator and Defender. She is the founder and Executive Director of Women's Health and Equal Rights (WHER) Initiative, Nigeria. She serves on the Steering Committee of the Solidarity Alliance for Human Rights (SAHR), Nigeria, a coalition of organizations working to advance the rights and promote the well-being of LGBT and other sexual minorities in Nigeria. She is also serving on the Board of PAN-AFRICAN ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) as Co – Chair (Female). She is passionate and committed to the advancement of social justice including sexual rights and gender equality.

### Ayo Collins

With a passion for art since childhood, Ayo Collins is a talented and up-incoming artist. She holds a BSC in International Relations and strives to beautify her environment and the art world in general with her work.

### Chazbee

Chazbee is a budding, bisexual poet who has been writing for 15 years. She is most inspired by situational events, people, and emotions.

### Chinue Igwe (Editor)

Chinue Igwe is a feminist and activist, she works at a mental health non-profit and holds a degree in Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies. She has had the pleasure and privilege of designing and editing the first and second issues of the EMPOWER newsletter.

### Fikayo Balogun

Fikayo Balogun is a Nigerian poet, spoken-word artist and writer. She has performed to a varied audience at events in different locations in England, France, Togo and Nigeria, including the Croydon Hotel for the Black MUA Awards in 2014. Her passion for writing inspired her to pursue a Masters in Creative and Professional Writing from Roehampton University. She is also a member of Malika's Poetry Kitchen and other writing groups. She currently resides in London and blogs at [fikayobalogun.wordpress.com](http://fikayobalogun.wordpress.com)

### Gloria Nwigwe

Born on the 29th of March, Nwigwe Gloria C. hails from Imo State. She is a Science Laboratory Technology graduate from the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu, and is also a member of Nigeria's Institute of Science Laboratory Technology. She has worked with AIIICO insurance company in Lagos and at a financial house in Enugu. Above all else, she is a human rights activist.

### Hadiza Selaboy

Hadiza Selaboy is a 21 year old student of International Studies and Political Science in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Kaduna. She can be found at the Korean Cultural Center Nigeria mastering the art of taekwondo as a means of self defense and mental strength. Her path to becoming a feminist has been filled with like-minded women and role models from across the globe.

### XtiahannaArt

XtiahannaArt is a fair complexioned, calm, peaceful, and funny person. She resides in Ibadan and attends school in Ile-Ife. A quote that she lives by is: "I'm not a failure... Always a lesson". She derives her inspirations from the way in which the world sees women as a minority who needs to be controlled and oppressed because she sees women as a strong and passionate peoples.

## Our Sisters on the Continent

### Njabby Nyathi

Originally from the east rand of Gauteng, South Africa in the Ekurhuleni Municipality, Njabby Nyathi is a 22 year old law student studying at Stellenbosch University. These are her first published works and she credits her inspiration to what she feels most in the moment.

### Soraya

Soraya is an Algerian girl living in Paris. She works as a "modele vivante" sometimes and understands the ways in which bodies are linked to politics. As a feminist, she deals with a lot of white superiority in her spaces, visions, and definitions. She fights for an inclusive and powerful space in her life and for others.