

[00:00:29.710] - Alys Mumford

Hello and welcome to On the Engender, Scottish Women and the Vote. We hope you're enjoying this miniseries exploring the legacy of the suffrage movement in Scotland. In this episode, we'll hear from the third of the speakers we welcomed to our live podcast recording last year, Mukami McCrum. Mukami will be talking about the work of KWISA, the African Women in Scotland Association, the colonisation of history, African women we should all know about and excitingly the land of no men.

[00:00:54.200]

[Jingle]

[00:00:56.770] - Alys Mumford

I'm really delighted now to introduce our last Speaker, Mukami McCrum, who many of you will know from all the various things she's involved in. She's worked at senior management level in lots of different sectors with local, voluntary, international NGOs and government. Her last post was at the Equality Unit of the Scottish Government as policy manager on gender equality and violence against women. She is a relentless campaigner for justice, equality, human rights and for development in Africa. She also campaigns for the ending of all forms of gender based discrimination, including violence against women and girls and harmful traditional practises, especially FGM. She's travelled widely, she says, and has gained a great deal of knowledge, experience and a wide network of friends, colleagues and activists. And she's here today representing KWISA, the Kenyan Women in Scotland Association. She's going to be talking about some of their work, looking at the legacy of the vote and the exclusion of Black women in social movements in Scotland.

[00:01:43.870] - Mukami McCrum

I would like to start by thanking you Engender and really congratulate Nina and the team for what you're doing. When Emma was presenting the work and listening around the table I was thinking that KWISA is a mini, mini Engender, you know, that's KWISA our organisation. Because we deal - our members have the same challenges as have been listed and the census in particular is really interesting for me because when they introduced the ethnic question, most of us wanted to boycott because the General Register - of Scotland - there was a consultation and there was a strong move that we should be called BME, but we wanted to be called Africans on the census and that was because Black is not an ethnic identity. If the census was measuring the number of people in Scotland of a certain colour, then there should have been a list of colours, not just black. [Laughter]. Eventually we kind of won some ground, but I don't think that has translated to the system because not everybody has accepted the fact that the category should not - colour coding is not a good way of describing people. [Laughter] So being here, I was asked to speak about the - sort of, our exclusion from history and I kind of sometimes find it odd that visible as I am and visible as people who look like me are we are so invisible. Any one of you who like history and you watch the history of Scotland, you won't believe there's been Africans in this country since 16th century because we don't feature in any of the history programmes you see. And that is the question perhaps we need to be asking ourselves, how come - what's the exclusion process? We tend to talk about people being - we are not even on the margin of the page. We are off the margin altogether. And our struggle is to bring us, at least to the margin and maybe eventually to the centre of the page, somehow.

[00:04:19.710] - Mukami McCrum

African women have resisted oppression for a long, long time, really time immemorial. And they have contributed a great deal to the whole women's movement. It's not really a joke, but I said it before. It sounds like a joke. The movement started when the first woman in a cave in Africa said no. And that is when the women's movement started. But there was no record. There was no books, there was no slides to show what she did. But I'm sure women said no. And that spirit has moved on from one group to another throughout the generations. And what we have experienced in some cases is that we always try to catch up. We're always trying to be included. And if I gave you just a few names of the people in history, women who have made records, in the records. The unfortunate thing about African history, most of it was oral traditions. So unless you're interested in our traditions, you don't get a lot of written history. But you hear women like Nefertiti, everybody will know Nefertiti, the Egyptian Queen in 1200 BC. Other people know people like Makeda, the Queen of Sheba, who again, that was 960 BC. And Kandake, the impressive Ethiopia. Those were in antiquity. But there were

women who made a difference and who are involved in ruling the countries, where perhaps we are more familiar with the struggle for imperialism. I think when we talk about suffragettes because of the way we define it, if we're talking about representation and voting and being counted, you may not find that within the minority or the African communities because that was in the system of government. But women were always fighting to be included. If you're talking about decision-making process, about the economy, about the culture, about the social system. Women have always struggled to be part of that. When the Europeans came to Africa and they changed, they tried to change the system. They actually underestimated the role African women played in the society. They assumed the women were going to be at home, looking after children like the women they had taken with them to the country. But women were the farmers. They were the porters, the people who who looked up animals. They were the leaders of the country.

[00:07:16.210] - Mukami McCrum

I'll come back to our exhibition later on. But if we think about some of the women who are assisting the imperial system, women like Queen of Zaria of Nigeria, which is present day Nigeria. Ruled for many centuries - in the 16th century, we have Queen Nzinga Mbande. I think that one some people may know. I'm not going to give you all the details about them, but you'll find these women when they are described in whatever written literature we have, they are described as ruthless. We would say they were powerful, but women at times always use - again it's women who are strong or challenging, they are not complimentary. We have the Warriors of Dahomey in West Africa. They were called Amazon, the writings about the Amazon warrior. But Amazon is not always presented as a nice definition of a warrior. And we have the Aba Women in Nigeria, in 1929 who led the women's rebellion because they were fighting against the British system which introduced taxes, which actually made them unable now to feed their families. Remember, I said they were the one who managed the families. And the tax system was like the poor tax, the head of the house paid. But then they also wanted - when they realised the women were in a market, were fishing, they had the money they wanted to introduce that. And then she started a huge movement against the British Government at the time. We have the Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa in Ghana. Again, she fought against the British stronghold for quite a long time and won many battles. But unfortunately because women were not just fighting the British, they're also fighting the men. So usually you'll find their own men were not quite happy with the role the women were playing, and it would be the people who are betraying as well. So the list goes on and on. We did this because we have just gone through what is called African history recently. And we had an exhibition at the McDonald Road Library. We had women in the past, near past, and the current women that are making a difference in Africa and the rest of the world.

[00:09:50.490] - Mukami McCrum

You will know names during the civil rights movement and the slave trade, women like Harriet Tubman, who was a political activist. You may have heard of Queen Nanny of Jamaica. And also you have heard about the National American Women Suffrage Movement, which was again the women in 1890 after the Civil War when they realised that most of the soldiers who were fighting for the Union against the slave traders were killed, and the treatment and the harsh - the cruelty they received was terrible. So they were part of the movement, not just to stop the slavery but to be involved in the governance. You may have heard about people like Sojourner Truth, everybody knows her. But there were many others like that. And again, it's a long, long list, but post-independence because women didn't have votes either, even when the Government started forming in Africa because of our colonial government. And you know, they imported with them the same way they were treating women here. They transferred it to whatever they had colonised the countries. And so the colonial, the post -independence we had - and before independence - women who are actually fighting in the forest, women who are tired of being bullied and their lands taken, their children dying. And they had songs. One of the songs that were sang - they protested because the British wanted to poison their goats and their cattle. And now they don't have milk for the children. That was the song they were singing. And you had the Mau Mau who were in the forest, who are the freedom fighters, singing songs of a young woman who actually saw the British soldiers and their supporters and ran very far to go and warn them. So they managed to run away from their camp because somebody had betrayed them. So they would sing songs like that, which actually showed just how inclusive - how the women were included. Now you've had people like Graca Machel who was a big humanitarian. Wangari Maathai, most of you - if you don't know, I'll be really upset because she planted trees. She's a huge - she was

the first African woman to win a Nobel Prize. You have heard of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, she was the first woman, in Liberia, to become a President in Africa. And the one I really like at the moment is a woman called Rebecca Lolosoli, from Maasai. And when she protested against female genital mutilation and the men, including her husband, were beating her, she ran away and started a village where they call it Land of No Men. So they have grown, they even now have a school. She even has got photographs with Hillary Clinton. She got other women who are facing violence, they all went, moved from their camp, opened in an area called Samburu in Kenya and just built their own village and no men are allowed. So they rule the land. And ideally in my younger days, I would have done that. [Laughter]. But I was in Scotland.

[00:13:14.190] - Mukami McCrum

So coming back to the exhibition, Laura, one of our members of staff. We went on the procession and we really had a good time with many, many people. But again, we noticed very few of us. We could hardly count how many African women we saw there. But she heard about the centenary fund and she applied for funds. We thought, well, we need to do something because she did some research - she couldn't find any names of African women involved in the suffragette movement anywhere in the UK. And she spoke to me and I said, Laura, it is inconceivable knowing our heritage, knowing our pedigree, it's inconceivable that there was the women who were here during the suffragette movement who are not in any way involved even cleaning dishes or making cups of tea or even speaking about it. But it's a process of exclusion that - or their contribution not being recognised. And so we decided, fortunately, she applied for the funding and we got some money. And we decided, let's celebrate the struggles of women who have at one time and tell their story. If we are written out of history, let us write ourselves into history. And this is one of the pieces here you see - you saw the screen, it had a lot of images. We commissioned Fudge to do some artwork because we like what she does and we wanted to tell our story. Weaving is very important among the Africans, and we're trying to weave and how can we weave a story? And some of the pieces so - they were interactive. People could go and put bits on pieces. And we're also trying to show our stories are not linear. Our history is not linear.

[00:15:13.110] - Mukami McCrum

We have social relationships that influence what we do and where we go and really, our future. It's not a finished piece of work. It's not like a master hanging somewhere. And it's also recognising the people who came before us, the giants we called - who we stand on their shoulders. And this is how this piece of work came about. When we asked young people to come, they were amazed because it was running parallel with the exhibition at the library and people looking at that. They were telling us, how come we don't know all this? And because of that, we're trying now to do some intergenerational work between younger women and older women. And we have an event coming up. But I want to finish with something I like - I do quote men now and again. Samora Machel was the President of Mozambique, and he said that "emancipation of women is not an act of charity, the result of humanitarian or compassionate attitude. The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the revolution, a guarantee of its continuity and a precondition for its victory." And he said that in 1973, before he died. So thank you very much for listening.

[00:16:46.670]

[Applause]

[00:16:54.790] - Alys Mumford

Thanks so much to Mukami and make sure to check out the show notes for more information on all the women she mentioned in her talk. Our next episode in this miniseries will be looking at those in Scotland still excluded from the vote, including young women, trans and non-binary people, people in prison and women experiencing abuse.

[00:17:10.230]

[Jingle]

[00:17:16.250] - Amanda Stanley

This episode of On the Engender was hosted by Alys Mumford and was recorded live at Engender's

AGM in Edinburgh with Mukami McCrum. The podcast was produced by Amanda Stanley on behalf of Engender, and the jingle featured throughout was written and performed, and remixed especially for this series by Bossy Love. You can follow Engender on Twitter @EngenderScot and join in the conversation by using the hashtag #OnTheEngender.

[00:17:46.060]

[Jingle plays out]