

Training African women trade unionists in inter/national trade union movements in the 1950s and 1960s

A history under constraint

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Abstract

This article examines the agency and impact of African women in their capacities as trade union officials, course participants, educators, and labour activists in the 1950s and 1960s. Drawing on several union and party archives, the research comparatively focuses on the educational activities of the ICFTU, the WFTU, and their national affiliates, as well as correspondence with African labour leaders. It argues that the upsurge in union education and mobilities has not benefited women. Across the ideological divide of Cold War trade unionism, women's overall enrolment rates in various trade union colleges remained low. Aspiring women trade union officials, such as Kenya's Hilda Otieno, Nigeria's Agnes Adenowo, and North Rhodesia's Joyce Chanda, struggled against a patchwork of patriarchies in the organized labour movement and beyond. The article shows that male dominance was maintained within organized labour, regardless of the different political-ideological orientations and backgrounds of the male actors involved.

Keywords : African women trade unionists; union education; Cold War; patriarchy; International Confederation of Free Trade Unions; World Federation of Trade Unions

La formation des syndicalistes africaines au sein des mouvements syndicaux inter/nationaux. Une histoire sous contrainte

Résumé

Cet article prend pour objet l'*agency* et le rôle des femmes africaines en tant que responsables syndicales, participantes à des cours, éducatrices et militantes syndicales dans les années 1950 et 1960. S'appuyant sur plusieurs archives de syndicats et de partis, cet article montre que l'essor de la formation et de la mobilité syndicales n'a pas profité aux femmes. Au-delà des clivages idéologiques du syndicalisme en contexte de Guerre froide, le taux de participation des femmes aux différentes écoles de formation syndicale est resté faible. Les aspirantes à des postes de direction syndicale, telles que Hilda Otieno au Kenya, Agnes Adenowo au Nigeria et Joyce Chanda en Rhodésie du Nord, ont dû lutter contre nombre de comportements patriarcaux au sein du mouvement syndical et au-delà. L'article montre que la domination masculine s'est maintenue au sein du mouvement syndical, indépendamment des différents profils, orientations politiques et idéologiques des acteurs masculins impliqués.

Mots-clés : femmes africaines syndicalistes ; formation syndicale ; Guerre froide ; patriarcat ; Confédération internationale des syndicats libres ; Fédération syndicale mondiale



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Colonial officials in British-, French-, and Portuguese-ruled Africa imagined the African worker as male and urban; women were assigned the task of assuring the reproduction of the incipient working class.¹ Excluding sectors such as textiles and some other industries in South Africa, the waged labour force on the African continent during the 1950s and 1960s was largely male.² Although women's economic activity – agricultural work, urban marketing, and domestic labour, just to name a few – were crucial to overall economic activity, their contributions were relegated to the background, largely unmeasured, and therefore silenced.³ While women were underrepresented in the formal wage sector, this was even more the case in trade unions.⁴ This article maintains that despite their small absolute numbers, recovering the agency and impact of these African women union officials during the 1950s and 60s is a necessary exercise to balance an earlier historiography that has largely occluded women in their capacities as trade union officials, course participants, educators, and labour activists.⁵

The temporal scope of this research is delineated by the period of significant expansion in trade union education for Africans, commencing in the late 1950s. The post-World War Two anti-fascist alliance that led to the founding of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in 1945 broke down in 1949, with Western reformist unions establishing the ICFTU.⁶ The 1950s saw an intensification of competition between the WFTU and the ICFTU, and their respective models of economic development and social organization, state socialism and liberal capitalism. Their battle for the "hearts and minds" of trade unionists worldwide had a significant impact on the international labour movement.⁷ The simultaneous forces of decolonization and the Cold War served to further heighten "awareness of the injustice of global social and economic inequality."⁸

This research employs a global labour history approach to examining women's quest for education, networking, and transnational labour activism.⁹ As a comparative perspective on the provision of union education reveals, the international trade union confederations, in collaboration with their African counterparts, established residential trade union colleges that demanded a high commitment of financial, human, and professional resources.¹⁰ The ICFTU and WFTU and their national affiliates were not the only actors. Other organizations, such as the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU) and its national affiliates, as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO), were also involved in providing trade union education to Africans.¹¹ Women's organizations, both at the national and international levels,

¹ I would like to thank the managing editors of RHCA for their guidance throughout the process. I am also grateful to the editors for hosting the conference in Aubervilliers, including me in the issue, and proofreading my article. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions. I would also like to thank Susan Zimmermann and the team at ZARAH for the lively discussions and support. Online, accessed on 14 November 2024. URL: <https://zarah-ceu.org/>

² Bourel Étienne and Vadot Guillaume (2022), 'Le salariat, un objet devenu (trop) discret en études africaines', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 245-246, pp. 9-39.

³ Lefaucheux Marie-Hélène (1962), 'La contribution des femmes au développement économique et social des pays africains,' *Revue internationale du Travail*, 86(1), pp. 17-33; Bolanwe Awe (1991), 'Writing Women into History: The Nigerian Experience,' in K. M. Offen, R. Pierson, J. Rendall (eds.), *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, pp. 211-220.

⁴ Parpart Jane L. (1988), 'Women, Work and Collective Labour Action in Africa', in R. Southall (ed.), *Labour and Unions in Asia and Africa: Contemporary Issues*, New York, St. Martin's Press, p. 252.

⁵ For key Anglophone and Francophone studies, see, for example, Richards Yvette (2011), 'Labor's Gendered Misstep: The Women's Committee and African Women Workers, 1957-1968,' *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 44(3), pp. 415-442; Pascale Barthélémy (2022), *Sororité et colonialisme: Françaises et Africaines au temps de la guerre froide, 1944-1962*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne.

⁶ Carew Anthony (2000), 'A False Dawn: The World Federation of Trade Unions (1945-1949)', in A. Carew et al. (eds.), *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*, Bern, Peter Lang, pp. 165-186.

⁷ Lewis Su Lin (2019), "We Are Not Copyists": Socialist Networks and Non-Alignment from Below', in A. Philip Randolph's Asian Journey", *Journal of Social History*, 53(2), pp. 402-28.

⁸ Kott Sandrine (2024), *A World More Equal: An Internationalist Perspective on the Cold War*, translated by Arby Gharibian, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 5.

⁹ Betti Eloisa et al. (2022), 'Thinking the History of Women's Activism into Global Labor History', in E. Betti et al. (eds.), *Women, Work, and Activism: Chapters of an Inclusive History of Labor in the Long Twentieth Century*, New York, Central European University Press, pp. 1-31.

¹⁰ Harisch Immanuel (2023), 'Great Hopes, False Promises. African Trade Unions in the World of Organized Labor. Institutions, Networks, and Mobilities during the Cold War 1950s and 1960s,' PhD thesis, University of Vienna.

¹¹ For an article that uncovers aspects of IFCTU officials' connections with African unionists, see Blum Françoise (2012), 'Christian Doctrines and Practices of Solidarity in the 1960s', in B. Unfried and E. Himmelstöß (eds.), *Die eine Welt schaffen: Praktiken*

offered a variety of distinct yet occasionally overlapping networks and avenues for education and training.¹² The decolonization of large parts of the African continent further reconfigured and expanded trade union mobilities.¹³ By the mid to late 1960s, however, the financial resources allocated to union education had significantly declined. Many of these colleges had already been closed and transformed into party schools by African one-party governments, effectively ending this brief but fruitful period of union education.¹⁴

This article focuses on the educational activities of the ICFTU, the WFTU, and their national affiliates, as well as African unions that were either affiliated to the large federations or members of the UGTAN, and later the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF).¹⁵ The terms 'education' and 'training' embraced manifold forms of education and training with varying durations and beneficiaries within the labour movement, including workers' education provided by women workers and/or union officials to (women) workers and union education, which included both general training and specialized courses for selected officials. As female students and graduates of various trade union colleges are followed in their pursuit of education, training, trade union activism, and transnational networking, this article examines female trade unionists from different parts of Africa. However, the language of instruction or the location of the school exerted a significant influence on the social composition at the respective institutions.¹⁶

The article argues that female trade unionists benefited much less from the massive upswing in trade union education. Male union officials curtailed, or even prevented, additional funding for women's union education, while women's overall enrolment rates at various colleges across the ideological divide of Cold War unionism remained low. African women trade unionists also struggled against a patchwork of patriarchies inherited from colonialization and other situations.¹⁷ However, despite the fierce structural resistance imposed and maintained by male officials, women have also made important advances, including periods of intense activity led by women trade unionists leading to the formation of women's committees within unions, discussions about equal pay, and demands for more educational opportunities for women workers.

The article builds on various trade union and party archives, such as those of the East German Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB) in Berlin, which also functions as a 'shadow archive' for WFTU documents, the French Confédération générale du travail (CGT) in Paris, and the ICFTU in Amsterdam, as well as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) at the University of Maryland in the United States. These sources still have limitations, however. A significant proportion of the archival documents were authored by men who held positions of authority within the unions or as college staff. An exception to this is the ICFTU archive, which houses extensive documentation on the ICFTU/ITS Women's Committee, including hundreds of letters from African women trade unionists, sorted by country.¹⁸

The article is structured into three parts, each of which chronologically documents the advances, resistances, and marginalization impacting African women unionists' struggles for education and training with various officials, bodies, and institutions of competing national and international labour organizations between the early 1950s and mid to late 1960s: the first with the ICFTU, its Women's Committee, and its

von 'Internationaler Solidarität' und 'Internationaler Entwicklung' / Create One World. Practices of 'International Solidarity' and 'International Development', Leipzig, Akademische Verlagsanstalt, pp. 157-168. On the ILO, see Maul Daniel, Luca Puddu and Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani (2019), 'The International Labour Organization', in S. Bellucci and A. Eckert (eds.), *General Labour History of Africa*, Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, pp. 223-264.

¹² Barthélémy Pascale and Panata Sara (2023), 'Militantes africaines et organisations féminines internationales dans la guerre froide. Un pragmatisme stratégique (1947-1963)', *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, 57(1), pp. 23-45.

¹³ Blum Françoise (2013), 'Une formation syndicale dans la Guinée de Sékou Touré: l'université ouvrière africaine, 1960-1965', *Revue historique*, 667(3), pp. 661-691.

¹⁴ Harisch I., 'Great Hopes, False Promises', op. cit..

¹⁵ The UGTAN, and later the AATUF, were expressions of African unionists' quest for organizational independence from the WFTU (and ICFTU). Anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, rather than the class struggle, were considered to be the main forces. See Siracusano Gabriele (2021), 'Trade union education in former French Africa (1959-1965): ideological transmission and the role of French and Italian communists', *Third World Quarterly*, 42(3), pp. 483-502.

¹⁶ At the ICFTU College in Uganda, for example, classes were conducted in English, and the female trade unionists were primarily from Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Tanzania, and other countries. At the trade union school in Guinea, students hailing from both Francophone and Lusophone Africa were enrolled.

¹⁷ Miescher Stephan F. and Lindsay Lisa A. 2003, 'Introduction: Men and Masculinities in Modern African History', in L. A. Lindsay and S. F. Miescher (eds.), *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, p. 3.

¹⁸ See the correspondence in the ICFTU/ITUC Archives, International Institute of Social History Amsterdam (IISH), 2390-97.

educational courses; the second with the WFTU and the educational courses provided by the WFTU and its national affiliates; and the third investigating interactions between African Women unionists and their male counterparts with a focus on education, training, and overall women's advancement within unions on the African continent.

African Women Unionists, the ICFTU and its Affiliates

After non-communist trade union centres had left the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in order to form the ICFTU in 1949, the new international federation sent missions to 26 countries in North, West, East, and Central Africa, identifying leadership training as a key need.¹⁹ During the early to mid 1950s, the ICFTU's educational efforts were most pronounced in Nigeria, the Gold Coast, and Kenya. The British colonial authorities were wary of the ICFTU's growing influence, and emphasized the British 'ideal' of 'non-political unionism'. They also feared growing anti-colonial sentiment within organized labour.²⁰ Women – in particular those in the colonized regions of the world – did not receive particular attention within the ICFTU at the time.²¹

Even before the achievement of independence, African union officials affiliated to the ICFTU had continuously called for the establishment of a permanent residential trade union college to accommodate the huge demand for education and training within Africa's growing organized labour movements. These pleas were finally considered at the ICFTU's First African Regional Conference, which was held in Accra in January 1957. In November 1958, with funding from the ICFTU's International Solidarity Fund, the first courses offered by the ICFTU's African Labour College began in Kampala.²² The new trade union college was a pioneering institution in many respects, and a shining example of international labour solidarity. It came to train more than six hundred leading union officials from all parts of Africa between 1958 and 1968, most of them from unions in Anglophone Africa affiliated to the ICFTU. However, in terms of gender equality the ICFTU-run institution catered largely for men. Of the 625 graduates from the African Labour College, only 26 were women. There were no women in nine courses, one woman in four courses, two women in three courses, four women in one six-month course and 12 women in one two-week course.²³

One important body that lobbied for women trade unionists' struggles globally was the Consultative Committee on Women Workers' Questions (Women's Committee). Amid fears of possible WFTU advances in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Belgian trade unionist Marcelle Dehareng was hired as secretary for women workers in the ICFTU secretariat on 1 March 1957.²⁴ The Women's Committee was jointly founded by the ICFTU and the International Trade Secretariats (ITS) in May 1957 and Dehareng came to play a key role in the body until her retirement in 1985.²⁵ The members of the Women's Committee made it clear that their ambitions to fight for better working conditions for women and bring more women into unionism extended to the "underdeveloped countries, or those which are now undergoing economic development."²⁶ The Women's Committee was concerned with issues such as equal pay, maternity protection, vocational training, and the handling of family responsibilities of women workers.²⁷ The Committee was slow to extend its contacts to Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Bureaucratic hurdles, mostly financial, limited membership to Europe and America. However, increasing pressure from the Committee

¹⁹ IISH 1188, Hammerton, "The College on the Equator. The Story of the ICFTU Educational Activities in Africa," [1958].

²⁰ Cooper Frederick (1996), *Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

²¹ Richards, Y., 'Labor's Gendered Misstep', op. cit.

²² The US AFL-CIO favored Tanganyika as the location of the college, while the British felt that Sierra Leone was the most suitable. Following extensive debate among the British TUC, the AFL-CIO, and the ICFTU, Uganda, which was then under British control, was selected as a compromise. See Minutes of W. A. C. Mathieson, 8 January 1958, The National Archives (TNA) Kew, Colonial Office, CO 859-1210. I thank Eric Burton for sharing these documents from the TNA with me.

²³ Richards, Y., 'Labor's Gendered Misstep', op.cit., p. 429.

²⁴ IISH, 2407a, H. A. Tulatz to general secretary, "Structure, scope and activities of the Women's Committee and Women's Section," Brussels, 23 June 1962.

²⁵ Laot Françoise 2015, 'La formation des travailleuses (1950-1968) : une revendication du syndicalisme mondial ? Contribution à une histoire dénationalisée de la formation des adultes,' *Le Mouvement social*, 253, pp. 84–85.

²⁶ IISH, 2407a, Joint ICFTU/ITS Consultative Committee on Women Workers' Questions. First meeting, Brussels, 28-29 May 1957.

²⁷ IISH 2389, ICFTU Executive Board, Women's Activities, Brussels, 30 November to 3 December 1964.

forced the ICFTU Executive Committee to fund more activities to promote women trade unionists in Africa. One of these, a seven-week women's course, was held at the ICFTU's African Labour College from 7 October to 30 November 1962, with 12 participants from seven countries.

Table 1. Second Women's Course (7 October to 30 November 1962) [7th Course] at the ICFTU African Labour College

Name	Address (Country)	Age	Occupation	Name of trade union	Position in the Union
Patricia M. Hill	Monrovia, Liberia	41	Typist, Financial Secretary	Domestic and Allied Workers Union, Monrovia, Liberia Congress of Industrial Unions	President
Keturah M. Ramushu	Kwenda, Southern Rhodesia	18	Receptionist	Textile and Allied Workers' Union	Deputy Secretary
Esther J. Phiri	Mpata-mutu Township, Luanshya, Northern Rhodesia	18	Typist	Miners' Union	Member
Dorothy M. Sherman	Monrovia, Liberia	26	Clerk	Domestic Workers and Allied Workers Union Liberia	Member
R. N. Simon	Bato, Western Cameroon	22	Typist	Cameroon Development Workers' Union	Member
Veronika G. Manna	Tiko, West Cameroon	21	Clerk	Cameroon Development Workers' Union	Member
Ressmah Rampersad	Piton La-pix, Mauritius	19	Clerk	Plantation Workers' Union	Clerk
Tolofisa Namatovu	Kampala, Uganda	34	Machinist	National Union of Clerical, Commercial & Technical Employees	Deputy shop steward
Susan Ojijo	Kampala, Uganda	21	Humidity tester	Uganda Tobacco Workers Union	Deputy Treasurer
I. B. Branch	Monrovia, Liberia	43	Stenographer	Domestic Workers and Allied Workers Union Liberia	Deputy Secretary
Juliana G. Wanjiru	Nakuru, Kenya	17	Typist	Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union	Branch Treasurer
Elizabeth Cirne	Gambia	21	Typist	Gambia Workers Union	Member
TOTAL	12				

Source: Course lists from IISH 1188 and 4021g.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza has argued that women were "too often passive recipients of a male-prepared educational programme that is at best lightly peppered with concerns about the state of women's participation in the trade union movement."²⁸ In the ICFTU's orbit, the years between 1962 and 1964 witnessed three course types that mitigated this standard condition. The first was short courses specifically tailored to women trade unionists and focusing on elementary trade union training. One such course was held in December 1962, and was attended by seventeen African women trade unionists from Uganda, Tanganyika,

²⁸ Zeleza Tiyambe (1988), *Labour, Trade Union Organisation and Women's Participation in Kenya 1963–1987*, Nairobi, Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Kenya, and Somalia.²⁹ Another short course for women, organized by Kampala College, was held in Nairobi in the same year.³⁰ The ICFTU's International Solidarity Fund Committee allocated a further US\$13,650 for women's activities concerning African unionists in 1963, among them further short courses in English- and French-speaking Africa.³¹ However, many of the short courses specifically targeting women workers from bottom up reproduced gendered stereotypes, as they focused on aspects such as sewing, knitting, and household hygiene.³² Furthermore, given that the language of instruction at Kampala College was English, the activities conducted in cooperation with the College exhibited a pronounced Anglophone selection bias. As evidenced by the 1962 women's course at Kampala (see table 1), the trainees originated from a diverse range of Anglophone countries in East, West, and Southern Africa (Mauritius being the exception). Their roles spanned from rank-and-file members to clerks, treasurers, deputy secretaries, and presidents. Various sectors were represented, including domestic, plantation, mining, and textiles. At the age of 41, Patricia M. Hill of Liberia held the office of president in her Domestic Workers' union, while four trainees were under the age of twenty.

The second course type was an elite six-month training course in general trade union matters with a particular focus on women's issues and international affairs for African women trade unionists at the ICFTU headquarters in Brussels. The programme was created by the ICFTU/ITS Women's Committee, in cooperation with various ICFTU departments. The requirements were that the trainee should be a "devoted trade unionist" and have "enough education to fully benefit from the training programme" and a "very good knowledge of English."³³ Kenyan Elisabeth Muturi, who took up a leading post in the Hotel and Domestic Workers' Union, successfully completed the traineeship. She concluded her stay in Europe with study tours through the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria before returning to Kenya in July 1964.³⁴ After her return, she acted as the Coordinator of Women's Activities at the Kenya Federation of Labour (KFL) and also taught at the KFL's Education Center. She was also active in feminist networking, organizing meetings of women trade unionists from various unions in the autumn of 1964.³⁵

A third and more extensive attempt to boost women's unionization was the joint ILO/ICFTU First African Regional Seminar on the Problems of Women Workers at the ICFTU's African Labour College in Kampala in December 1964.³⁶ The 18 participants felt that the trade union movement should make "greater use of the natural talents and qualities of African women to ensure the development of 'free' and democratic trade unions that would serve not only the interests of workers (predominantly imagined as male) but also those of the country as a whole."³⁷ The course was delivered both in English and in French³⁸ – which was not a typical working language within the ICFTU, whose activities in Eastern and Southern Africa were usually limited to Africans from the former Anglophone colonies, the working language of the African Labour College being exclusively English. In this sense, the new course format, although it was a one-off and was not repeated, opened the halls of the Kampala College not only to more women trade unionists in general but also to women unionists from Francophone Africa. It also demonstrated the importance of Kampala College as a key hub for these educational efforts, even though they lacked sustainability.

One important outlet for self-education and networking for African women workers and unionists was the ICFTU/ITS Women's Committee's journal *Women's News*, which was circulated across the African continent to colleges, offices, and headquarters of national ICFTU affiliates and industrial unions alike. African women union officials such as Flora Ngahyoma and Viola Watambga from Southern Rhodesia repeatedly

²⁹ IISH 3982, Women's Activities – Programme 1962, ICFTU Executive Board, Brussels, undated [1963].

³⁰ IISH 3982, Women's Activities – Programme 1962, ICFTU Executive Board, Brussels, undated [1963].

³¹ IISH 3982, Women's Activities – Requests for Allocation, ICFTU Executive Board, International Solidarity Fund Committee, Washington, D. C., January 1963.

³² Richards Y., 'Labor's Gendered Misstep', *op. cit.*, p. 426.

³³ IISH 2390, H. A. Tulatz to C. K. Lubembe, Brussels, 21 October 1963.

³⁴ Föger Katharina (2023), 'Gewerkschaftsbund goes global. Österreichische Gewerkschaftssolidarität mit dem Globalen Süden zwischen 1955 und 1965', *historia.scribere*, 15, p. 70.

³⁵ IISH 2389, ICFTU Executive Board, Brussels, 30 November – 3 December 1964, Agenda Item 3(c): Education. (ii) (Supplement) – Women's activities.

³⁶ From the 1960s onwards, the ILO prioritized Africa in the field of workers' education. See, for example, the International Labour Office (1967), *Evaluation and Prospects of Technical Assistance in Africa*, Geneva, ILO.

³⁷ Richards Y., 'Labor's Gendered Misstep', *op. cit.*, p. 428.

³⁸ J. W. Brügel, 'Die Gewerkschaftsschule am Äquator', *Praxis der Erwachsenenbildung*, 1965, pp. 116-118. Online, accessed on 4 January 2023. URL: <http://library.fes.de/gmh/main/pdf-files/gmh/1965/1965-02-Praxis.pdf>

expressed great appreciation for *Women's News* and the “little propaganda pamphlet” *Women Workers*, as its content led to a change of perspective: “I thought this Organisation [ICFTU] was for men not for women; but the Organisers have showed [sic!] us that even women can join the organisation by showing us the ‘WOMEN WORKERS’.”³⁹ *Women's News* and the correspondence surrounding it are a valuable source of information, as they allow us to gain insight into the perspectives and thoughts of African women unionists who had often participated in educational courses and/or training programmes conducted by the ICFTU.

However, after a promising drive between about 1962 and 1964, the ICFTU Executive Board, which had no woman on its staff until 1969, cut down on the spending intended for women trade unionists.⁴⁰ This was a result of the AFL-CIO’s substantial reduction in its financial contributions to the Solidarity Fund and its increasing engagement in bilateral relations outside the ICFTU, an example that was also followed by some other federations. Another contributing factor was the male leaders’ disregard for the activities of women unionists. The members of the ICFTU/ITS Women’s Committee were outraged when the ICFTU significantly downsized the funding available for their activities on the African continent.⁴¹ In a clear demonstration of its indifference to the Committee’s endeavours, the ICFTU’s International Solidarity Fund Committee allocated a mere US\$570 to the advancement of African women in trade unions, just 0.7% of the total budget allocated to the entire continent in the first half of 1966.⁴² This meant a serious setback in the financing of women’s activities by the ICFTU leadership.

Notwithstanding this growing resistance, African women unionists in various parts of the continent had already established contact with their “sisters,” the term typically employed by Anglophone women unionists when contacting other female unionists, both in Africa and Europe. They formed personal links and networks through training courses in their countries or in Kampala, study tours, correspondence with members of the ICFTU/ITS Women’s Committee, or publications such as *Women's News*. Nigerian women active in the United Labour Congress (ULC), an affiliate of the ICFTU, were among the most active respondents to the Women’s Committee’s activities and showcased their intense involvement in labour education and activism. In a broader context, Nigerian women’s organizations were at the vanguard of an intense debate on the subject of political participation during the 1950s.⁴³ In 1963, Elizabeth Asabor, Beatrice Simpson, and Agnes Adenowo had helped the ICFTU representative, H. P. Scherzel, to establish and run the first centre for adult and labour education in a working-class area close to Lagos with ICFTU funds. Within a month, the centre had set up four classes with 71 students.⁴⁴ When George McCray, who was sent from the AFL-CIO, and had been a lecturer at the Kampala College since its inception in 1958, visited the school in 1964, he was impressed with the programme and was convinced these were precisely the initiatives that would raise the profile and prestige of the ICFTU in Nigeria.⁴⁵ The fact that the male leadership of the ULC never cared to visit the centre or provided any kind of encouragement and support points to the entrenched paternalism, ignorance, and jealousy that also existed among African union leaders, which will be discussed in the third part of this article.⁴⁶

Elizabeth Asabor was a Kampala college alumnus, and was recommended for training at the ICFTU headquarters in Brussels. Agnes Adenowo first worked as the treasurer of the Youth Wing of the ULC. She was later also one of the secretaries of the Women’s Affairs Committee (WAC), which had been established within the ULC in 1966.⁴⁷ The WAC emphasized the need to engage in educational campaigns among the unions and “to carry on agitation [and] education among women employers and government officials.”⁴⁸ In addition to union activism, officials such as Adenowo were eager to further their knowledge and skills.

³⁹ First quote: IISH 2407c, Marcelle Dehareng to Flora Ngahyoma, Brussels, 6 February 1962. Second quote: IISH 2397a, Viola Watamba to Wilhemine Moik, ‘President of ICFTU’ [sic!], Salisbury, 11 October 1962. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁰ Laot F, ‘French Trade Unionists’, op. cit., p. 269.

⁴¹ Richards Y., ‘Marred by Dissimulation’, op. cit., p. 47.

⁴² IISH 3983, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. International Solidarity Fund Committee, Brussels, July 1966. Agenda Item F: ISF General – Requests for Allocations Educational, Women and Youth Activities. AFRICA.

⁴³ Panata Sara (2016), ‘Revendiquer des droits politiques au Nigéria. Le Women Movement dans les années 1950’, *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, 43, pp. 174-183.

⁴⁴ IISH 2396d, H. P. Scherzel to Marcelle Dehareng, 18 November 1963.

⁴⁵ IISH 2396d, George McCray to H. A. Tulatz, Ebute Metta, 25 February 1964.

⁴⁶ IISH 2396d, George McCray to H. A. Tulatz, Ebute Metta, 25 February 1964. The little echo these courses received was also criticized by Adenowo on several occasions.

⁴⁷ IISH 2396d, Marcelle Dehareng to Hannah C. Emesibe, Brussels, 17 January 1967.

⁴⁸ IISH 2396d, [Anonymous], Organising Women Workers, memorandum, not dated [1967].

Personal correspondence demonstrates Adenowo's determination. In July 1967, she approached the ICFTU's assistant general secretary Herbert Tulatz in Brussels in a personal letter. "In order to remind you," she wrote Tulatz, "about my insistence to attend a trade union educational course, possibly at the [ICFTU] Kampala College."⁴⁹ Adenowo's persistence, hard work, and networking capacity⁵⁰ were rewarded, as she was granted educational leave with pay from the ICFTU to attend the 18th course at African Labour College in spring 1968.⁵¹ At Kampala College, however, Adenowo's educational drive was soon crushed by sexual harassment and gender discrimination.⁵² The disturbances that followed the disciplinary measures Principal Ananaba took against the male course participants ultimately provided the Ugandan authorities with a welcome chance to close the college down. The closure of the prestigious Kampala College not only cut Adenowo's educational drive short, but for high-ranking ICFTU officials also represented the "end of an era with regard to education activities in Africa"⁵³ – an impression that was certainly also adversely impacted by frequent coups d'état and a growing authoritarianism. The reorientation and significant withdrawal of the ICFTU further constrained the already limited opportunities for African women unionists to receive education and training from international federations by the late 1960s.

African women unionists, the WFTU, and its affiliates

The WFTU was founded in the aftermath of the World War II in October 1945, uniting unions from capitalist, state-socialist, and colonial societies until the split in 1949.⁵⁴ In 1948, the WFTU proclaimed a declaration of principles advocating equal pay for women workers and arguing that women's work should not be considered to be in any way inferior to that of men.⁵⁵ The declaration emphasized the necessity to organize women in trade unions, especially in Africa and Asia.⁵⁶

One of the earliest courses offered by the WFTU, for around 160 African, Asian, and Latin American unionists, was run in Budapest between 1953 and 1955.⁵⁷ More research is needed to shed light on these early courses based on archival documents, and to trace the potential women unionists who attended these early courses. In June 1956, also in Budapest, the WFTU organized its First World Conference of Women Workers.⁵⁸ One idea that was born at the Conference was to organize an international training seminar for women unionists. It was held between 15 and 30 September 1957 in Zlenice, near Prague in the CSSR, and most of the 30 participants actually hailed from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. One of the seven key topics that were discussed centred around women's work and unionism in "capitalist, colonial, and semicolonial countries."⁵⁹ The WFTU was well aware of the ICFTU's creation of a trade union college for African unionists in Kampala in 1958, and established a central trade union college in Budapest for unionists from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in August 1959.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, as with the earlier WFTU courses, very little is known about the African participants at this college – including potential women trade unionists who pursued a course in Socialist Hungary.

Another trade union college that had the potential to cater for women trade unionists from French-speaking Africa and beyond was opened under the name African Workers' University (L'université ouvrière africaine) in 1960. A cooperation between the Pan-West African UGTAN, which was headquartered in

⁴⁹ IISH 2396d, Agnes Adenowo to Herbert Tulatz, Ebute-Metta (Lagos), 29 July 1967.

⁵⁰ Adenowo did also present her case to Nigerian trade union official Wogu Ananaba, who headed the AFRO office in Lagos at the time, but would be appointed Principal of Kampala College soon thereafter.

⁵¹ Richards Y., 'Labor's Gendered Misstep', op. cit., p. 437.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ IISH 4021a, ICFTU Inter-Office Memorandum', Marcelle Dehareng, January 1969.

⁵⁴ Carew A., 'A False Dawn', op. cit.

⁵⁵ Laot F., 'La Formation des Travailleuses', op. cit., p. 70; Wolf Johanna (2024), 'Women as Workers'. Discussions about Equal Pay in the World Federation of Trade Unions in the Late 1940s', in S. Çağatay et al. (eds.), *Through the Prism of Gender and Work: Women's Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond, 19th and 20th Centuries*, Leiden, Brill, pp. 202-230.

⁵⁶ Wolf J., 'Women as Workers', op. cit., p. 5.

⁵⁷ Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, Berlin (SAPMO BArch), DY 34/3291, Speech of Chleboun in 'Probleme des Inhalts der Ausbildung afrikanischer Gewerkschafter [...]', Bernau, 20 June 1963.

⁵⁸ For a perspective on the African women activists present in Budapest, consult Barthélémy P., *Sororité et colonialism*, op. cit., Chapter 6.

⁵⁹ Zimmermann Susan (2023), 'Spurring Women to Action? Communist-led Women's Trade Union-ism Between the Hungarian Shop Floor and Top-level Internationalism, 1947 to 1959', *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 31(2), p. 351.

⁶⁰ November András (1965), *L'Évolution du mouvement syndical en Afrique occidentale*, Paris, Mouton, pp. 197-99.

Conakry, and the WFTU, the college was first based in Dalaba and then moved to the capital Conakry.⁶¹ It was headed from its foundation in 1960 until 1965 by the French cégétiste Maurice Gastaud. The curriculum followed the WFTU's aim to "to create a conscious workers' union vanguard, ... [and] affirm the validity of class struggle in African society."⁶² While the majority of courses were conducted in French, there were also courses in Portuguese and subsequently in English. The student body therefore also comprised individuals from Portuguese Guinea, Angola, as well as from Anglophone Eastern and Southern Africa.⁶³ The course participants at the Conakry College came from a wide variety of sectors, including health, education, ports and docks, railroads, banks, mines and quarries, transport, and various other industries. Despite the diversity of trades and occupations, there was strong representation from the public sector.⁶⁴

From February 1960 to January 1965, 16 courses were organized, but only 26 course participants out of the total of 469 were women, a share of 5.5 per cent. Blum has stated that the archival records reveal no specific efforts to bring in more women to the African Workers' University.⁶⁵ The low share of women and the lack of initiatives to improve enrolment rates at Conakry College may seem surprising for a number of reasons. First of all, considering the standing of women in Guinea. Sékou Touré's PDG has been praised in a number of accounts for its comparatively progressive attitude and policies towards women's emancipation.⁶⁶ Guinea's president argued that the "emancipation of women must therefore be understood as one of the indispensable conditions for the progress of Guinean society."⁶⁷ Touré also linked the emancipation of women dialectically to the emancipation of men, since the "emancipation of women is the essential condition of the emancipation of man."⁶⁸

Guinean women played a crucial role in the extensive 1953 strike across French West Africa.⁶⁹ Women were decisive for the 'No' campaign of 1958 and the overall growth of the PDG. Along with the PDG's emphasis on women's equal status and equal access to education, the right of women to all occupations was affirmed. "Today," Dobert wrote in 1970, "women in Guinea direct traffic, drive tractors, become chemists, electronics experts, veterinarians and geologists."⁷⁰ Guinea's unions also had women in leading positions in the early 1960s, unlike most unions in African countries at the time.⁷¹ Camara Loffo, for example, was secretary for women affairs in the CNTG in 1960, and Madame Camara, born Keita Marguerite, was a member of the National Council of the Teachers' Union.⁷²

⁶¹ Blum F, 'Une formation syndicale', op. cit.

⁶² Siracusano G., 'Trade union education in former French Africa', op. cit., p. 490.

⁶³ Harisch I., 'Great Hopes, False Promises', op. cit., pp. 162-166.

⁶⁴ Blum F, 'Une formation syndicale', op. cit., p. 681.

⁶⁵ E-mail communication of the author with Françoise Blum, 19 December 2020.

⁶⁶ Schmidt Elizabeth (2002), "Emancipate Your Husbands! Women and Nationalism in Guinea, 1953-1958", in J. Allman, S. Geiger and N. Musisi (eds.), *Women in African Colonial Histories*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, pp. 282-304; Schmidt Elizabeth (2011), 'Trade Unions and Nationalism in French Guinea, 1945-1958', in C. Phelan (ed.), *Trade Unions in West Africa*, Oxford, Peter Lang, pp. 69-98.

⁶⁷ Dobert Margarita (1970), 'Liberation and the Women of Guinea. Under Sékou Touré's Rule his most ardent group of supporters has found dual emancipation', *Africa Report*, 15(7), p. 26.

⁶⁸ Dobert M., 'Liberation and the Women of Guinea', op. cit., p. 26.

⁶⁹ Dobert M., 'Liberation and the Women of Guinea', op. cit., p. 26.

⁷⁰ Dobert M., 'Liberation and the Women of Guinea', op. cit., p. 28.

⁷¹ For intriguing insights into leading women activists in parties and unions, such as Jeanne Martin Cissé, consult Pauthier Céline (2018), "La femme au pouvoir, ce n'est pas le monde à l'envers". Le militantisme au féminin en Guinée, des années 1950 à 1984' in M. Gomez-Perez (ed.), *Femmes, génération et agency en Afrique subsaharienne: vers de nouveaux défis*, Paris, Karthala, pp. 73-113.

⁷² Information collected from various Guinean delegations to the GDR on invitation of the FDGB. Consult the individual reports in SAPMO BArch, DY 34/16598 to DY 34/16600.

Table 2. Women unionists at the African Workers' University in Guinea, 1960

Name	Country	National Centre / Union / City	Occupation / Position	Course
Habi Traoré	Guinea	Dalaba	Typist	First Course (Dalaba, 6 to 22 February 1960)
Pai Diallo	Guinea	CNTG Conakry	Typist	First Course (Dalaba, 6 to 22 February 1960)
Tiguidanké Soumah	Guinea	CNTG Conakry	n. a.	
Fatoumata Barry	Guinea	Ministry of Public Health Conakry	Typist	Second Course (Dalaba, 24 June to 16 July 1960)
Mariama Barry (Mme)	Guinea	Secretary for the National Assembly	n. a.	Second Course (Dalaba, 24 June to 16 July 1960)
Anne Romage	Guinea	Dabola	Midwife	Second Course (Dalaba, 24 June to 16 July 1960)
Marguerite M'Baye	Guinea	Secretary at the Ministry of Information, Conakry	n. a.	Second Course (Dalaba, 24 June to 16 July 1960)
Dédé Dosseh	n. a.	n. a.	PTT, moved to Bernau ("partie à Bernao")	Third Course (Conakry, 3 to 28 December 1960)

Source: Maurice Gastaud, "Eléments critiques de l'exercice 1960 – et propositions pour 1961," Maurice Gastaud, African Workers' University, Conakry, 17 January 1961, IHS FMG CFD 16.

A closer look reveals that "out of a total of 26 [African] women [at the African Workers' University] no fewer than 22 were Guinean."⁷³ Unfortunately, Principal Gastaud does not explain the divergence in women's participation in his report, and nor does he give us more of a background on the female participants themselves. At a quantitative level, we can conclude that while Guinea was responsible for 22 women out of 261 Guinean course participants (an 8.4 per cent share of women), all the other African sending organizations outside Guinea taken together only nominated four women out of 208 course participants (1.9 per cent). This suggests at least two hypotheses. Firstly, Guinea's relatively progressive policies on women's empowerment had a positive impact on the proportion of women participants in the College. Secondly, the low share of women among other African national centres and individual trade unions may suggest a much lower awareness of gender issues in these labour organizations, and a corresponding tendency to bar women from travelling long distances and staying away from home at a residential college for several weeks. One decisive factor was that the process of selection and admission was controlled almost exclusively by male actors – trade union officials, liberation fighters, and politicians, from Europe and Africa.

Another factor that may make the low enrolment of women at Conakry College surprising is the WFTU's policy on women at global level, some of which has been outlined above. Archival evidence suggests that the other trade union colleges for African trade unionists run by the WFTU and/or its national affiliates in Eastern and Central Europe also had no interest in gender issues related to labour struggles. At the FDGB's Foreigners' Institute, which established at the Fritz Heckert trade union college in Bernau near

⁷³ Institut d'histoire sociale (IHS), CGT, Fonds Maurice Gastaud (FMG), (IHS FMG), 30 CFD-19, Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'Université ouvrière africaine de Conakry de janvier 1960 à mars 1965, Maurice Gastaud, 23. The translation is mine. I sincerely thank Gabriele Siracusano for kindly sharing the documents with me.

Berlin in 1960, there were few African women trade unionists – probably even fewer than there were at the college of the ICFTU in Kampala and the UGTAN-WFTU joint venture in Conakry. Eric Angermann concluded that the four women (out of 112 course participants, a 3.6 per cent share) attending the third and fourth courses were barely mentioned in staff reports, and that the low percentage of women among the staff was never recognized as a problem in either reports or discussions.⁷⁴ Moreover, in contrast to the ICFTU's Kampala College, few of the women arriving at the FDGB College were active trade unionists, and their level of interest in a course specifically designed for women trade unionists was low. They preferred to convince their hosts that they were eligible for other courses such as nursing or midwifery, or university studies such as medicine, sometimes citing the needs of their sending organizations and the male African “gatekeepers” with whom the relevant officials in the GDR were in contact.⁷⁵ One of these examples included the Zambian Pelluny Nkonde, who was only 16 years old when she arrived in the GDR in the autumn of 1961. With the approval of the FDGB, she changed her studies from the 18-month trade union course to train as a midwife, and she was later given a place at the boarding school of the Medical Academy in Dresden. In a joyful letter to the principal of Bernau College, she stated that upon completion of her studies in 1966, she intended to leave the GDR to pursue employment as a midwife in Zambia.⁷⁶ The example of Nkonde demonstrates successful strategic negotiation skills as well as the gendered aspect of these student mobilities, which often reinforced established gendered divisions of labour.⁷⁷

Discussions on trade union education within the orbit of the WFTU at colleges in both Africa and Europe demonstrated a similar ignorance towards women workers and unionists. A high-level meeting hosted jointly by the WFTU and the FDGB took place in April 1963 at the Fritz Heckert college in Bernau. Exclusively male (and with the exception of Sudanese WFTU Secretary Ibrahim Zakaria, exclusively white) union officials and principals of trade union colleges in Conakry, Bamako, Bernau, Prague, Moscow, and Sofia came together for this meeting.⁷⁸ This reveals a hierarchy of power within the WFTU, most obviously in gendered – no woman participated in the discussion – and racial terms. The transcripts of the WFTU's 1963 ‘exchange of experience’ show how the communist functionaries and educators, united in a spirit of ‘proletarian internationalism,’ aspired to forge a socialist workers’ vanguard on the African continent. While the ‘correct’ class background and precisely how to balance the preponderance in the courses of so-called petty bourgeois intellectuals over ordinary workers (in industry) and rank-and-file union members in admissions to the trade union colleges were debated at length at the meeting, but the abysmally low number of African women enrolled in the courses was not discussed at all.⁷⁹ Thus, the WFTU's highly publicized campaigns after the 1956 conference with the aim of bringing “women … more into the life and leadership of the unions,”⁸⁰ did not translate into any action towards African women unionists and their educational opportunities at WFTU-run colleges and courses.

⁷⁴ Angermann Eric (2018), ‘Ihr gehört auch zur Avantgarde’. Afrikanische Gewerkschafter an der FDGB-Hochschule Fritz Heckert (1961-1963), MA thesis, University of Göttingen, p. 56.

⁷⁵ Harisch I., ‘Great Hopes, False Promises’, op. cit., pp. 26-28, 210-214.

⁷⁶ SAPMO BArch, DY 79/617, Pelluny Nkonde to Heinz Deutschland, Dresden, 18 March 1966.

⁷⁷ For ‘strategic pragmatism’ as a lens on African women activists contacting and negotiating several organizations, consult Barthélémy P. and Panata S., ‘Militantes africaines’, op. cit.

⁷⁸ SAPMO BArch, DY 34/3291, ‘Probleme des Inhalts der Ausbildung afrikanischer Gewerkschafter [...]’, Bernau, 20 June 1963.

⁷⁹ For an in-depth discussion of the gathering see Harisch Immanuel R. and Burton Eric (2023), ‘The Missing Link? Western Communists as Mediators Between the East German FDGB, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), and African Trade Unions in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 103, pp. 292-311.

⁸⁰ Zimmermann S., ‘Spurring Women to Action?’, op. cit., p. 351.

Table 3. Women unionists at the FDGB Fritz Heckert College, 1960-1966

Name	Country / National Centre	Course	Additional Information
Lily Ayensu	Ghana / Ghana TUC	Second Course (13 September 1960 to April/May 1961)	
Rose Taylor	Ghana / Ghana TUC	Third Course (September 1961-March 1963)	On her return to Ghana, she worked at the TUC headquarters in Accra, and was involved in organizing international trade union conferences. She also studied at the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute.
Pelluny Nkonde	Northern Rhodesia	Third Course (September 1961-March 1963)	She arrived in the GDR in the autumn of 1961 at the age of 16 through an official agreement between the Northern Rhodesian and East German trade unions. She changed her studies to mid-wifery with the approval of the FDGB. She completed her studies in 1966 to return to independent Zambia.
Adelheid Ndjavera	South-West Africa	Fifth Course (September 1964-16 April 1966)	
Sane Abha	Uganda	Fifth Course (September 1964-16 April 1966)	With no background in trade unionism, she worked as a stenographer before beginning her studies in Bernau. Allegedly the daughter of a wealthy Indian businessman in Uganda, she had good connections with the Ugandan trade union leader John Reich, who recommended her for the scholarship in the GDR.

Source: Compiled from SAPMO BArch DY 79/205, DY 79/405, DY 79/443, DY 44/972, DY 79/977, DY 34/2134.

African Women unionists and Their Male Colleagues in Africa's Organized Labour Movements

Patriarchal structures severely curtailed female unionists' advances in the field of union education and training. Women aspiring towards a scholarship abroad were held back for a number of reasons, including resistance from parents, spouses, or the employer, as well as childcare duties spouses and/or the extended family were not willing to take over.⁸¹ Being single and childless certainly made the attainment of scholarships abroad easier. When one looks at African agency seriously, it is important not to underestimate the reproduction of patriarchal structures by male union leaders. In most national centres, it was male union leaders, whom I refer to as individual "gatekeepers", who were able to control the flow of funds, information and – not least – the distribution of scholarships between their union centre and international federations.⁸² As the principal of the FDGB Bernau College recalled, the selection of prospective course participants was de facto an African affair: "who was selected, under what conditions they came here – we [the college staff] did not know the selection criteria."⁸³ The personal networks of male leaders were also important. In the case of the Ghana TUC, General Secretary John K. Tettegah personally selected the first and second cohorts of Ghanaians, a total of almost thirty people, who received trade union training in the GDR.

⁸¹ Pugach Sara (2022), *African Students in East Germany, 1949-1975*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, pp. 70-71.

⁸² Harisch I., 'Great Hopes, False Promises', op. cit., pp. 26-28.

⁸³ Interview by the author with Heinz Deutschland and Ernst Hoffmann, Bernau, 14 April 2019.

If they were granted opportunities to further their skills and knowledge, women had to navigate the male-dominated environments: educational institutions such as the colleges in Kampala and Conakry were all staffed by men, and the majority of course participants were male. Yevette Richards has provided us with a number of experiences of women trade unionists from across Africa, including Elizabeth Cirne from Gambia, Florence Chinyani from Southern Rhodesia, Elizabeth Muturi from Kenya, and Elizabeth Asabor from Nigeria, who all attended the ICFTU's African Labour College.⁸⁴

Table 4. Women unionists at the ICFTU African Labour College, 1958-68

Name	Country	Age	Occupation	Name the trade union	Position in the Union	Course	Additional
Pauline M. Clark	Ghana	n. a.	National organizer	Broadcasting Workers' Union	National Women's Organizer of the TUC	2nd	
Cecile Suzette Boyjonauth	Mauritius (Vacoas)	21	Technical Laboratory Assistant	Female Workers' Union	Organizer	4th	
Florence H. Chinyani	Southern Rhodesia (Salisbury)	17	Under Secretary	Tailor & Garment Workers' Union	Under-Secretary	5th	
Elizabeth W. (Muturi)	Kenya	n. a.	Education	Domestic Hotel Workers' Union	Office Clerk	8th	Coordinator of women's activities for the Kenya Federation of Labour during the early 1960s, she attended the summer 1964 meeting of the ICFTU/ITS WC in Brussels. She maintained close contacts in the ICFTU/ITS Women's Committee and social democratic women's organizations in Europe.
Elizabeth I. Ajabor [Asabor]	Nigeria	n. a.	Education	K. Chalaral African Workers' Union	Treasurer	8th	Along with Beatrice Simpson and Agnes Adenowo, Asabor helped the ICFTU representative set up and run the first adult and workers' education centre in a working-class area near Lagos in 1963. After graduating from Kampala College, she was recommended for training at ICFTU headquarters in Brussels.
V. S. Mudzizu	Southern Rhodesia	n. a.	Education	Hotel and Catering Workers' Union	Administrative Secretary (Women's Affairs)	8th	

⁸⁴ Richards Y., 'Labor's Gendered Misstep', op. cit., pp. 429-433.

Joyce B. Chanda	Kitwe Northern Rhodesia)	27	Clerk	N. Rhodesian Mineworkers' Union	Women's Organizer	10th	She studied in the USA in 1961-1962 on a scholarship from the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). On her return to Northern Rhodesia, she was transferred from the UTUC to the offices of the Mineworkers' Union in Kitwe. She attended the tenth course at Kampala College from 3 February to 26 May 1964.
Clara Ukamaka Anyalor	Aba (Eastern Nigeria)	21	Accounts Clerk	E. N. D. C. & A. W. Union	Member	16th	
Cecilia Bokgathamang Tumelo	Salisbury (Southern Rhodesia)	32	Welfare Assistant	Municipal Workers' Union	Executive Member	16th	
Agnes Dina Adenowo	Nigeria	n. a.	Stenographer, Clerk	United Labour Congress (ULC)	Secretary	18th	She was a member of the ICFTU regional office team in Lagos and presidium member of the ICFTU's 3rd international women's conference in 1968. She was secretary of the Women's Affairs Committee (WAC) in Nigeria's United Labour Congress (ULC) and a stenographer in the AFRO office. She attended the 18th course at the African Labour College in Kampala in 1968.

Source: IISH 1188 and 4021g.

This section will present two micro case studies. The first is the scholarship for African women unionists at the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), which was once one of the largest unions in the USA. The African-American labour leader Maida Springer, who lobbied U.S. and international labour organizations from 1957, was the key figure behind the AFL-CIO Garment Workers Scholarship Program. In May 1961, the programme brought six participants to the USA, among them Joyce Chanda, who was probably the first African female unionist to study in the USA, seconded by the United Trades Union Congress (UTUC) of Northern Rhodesia.⁸⁵ The AFL-CIO financed the programme and the ILGWU, as an affiliate, provided its school and staff for the course.⁸⁶ In September 1961, while on a study tour through the

⁸⁵ Richards Yevette (2000), *Maida Springer: Pan-Africanist and International Labor Leader*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 223-226 and 332.

⁸⁶ AFL-CIO Archives, University of Maryland, AFL-CIO International Affairs Department, Country Files, RG18-001, Box 13, Zambia 1959-70, Maida Springer to J. K. Chivunga, Washington, 29 June 1962.

USA, UTUC President Jonathan Chivunga went to visit the ILGWU's facilities in New York, where Chanda was enrolled in the course. In a letter to George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO, Chivunga remarked:

I was impressed to see my own girl [Joyce Chanda] being so proud of it. I discussed the future position of my girl with Mrs. Maida Springer. I have decided that she [Joyce Chanda] will be in my office as my Secretary when she comes back and I have asked Maida to extend her stay if she cannot type efficiently and fast.⁸⁷

The phrase “my own girl” shows Chivunga’s paternalistic attitude towards Chanda. Furthermore, the UTUC President makes it clear to President Meany, possibly in order to underline his status and prestige, that he was able to autonomously decide where Chanda would go after her return from the USA. The letter also did not disappoint in terms of a disciplinary stance towards Chanda, as Chivunga made it clear that “[i]f Joyce Chanda has not behaved well Maida [Springer] will definitely report to you [Meany]. But I have every hope that she will prove herself to you to be a good and hard-working little girl.”⁸⁸ In addition to belittling Chanda, who was in her mid-twenties at the time, as a “little girl”, the message appears to indicate that women in the organized labour movement were required to prove in particular that they were worthy of being awarded a scholarship through hard work and dedication.

In the spring of 1962, Chanda returned to Northern Rhodesia from her nine-month scholarship abroad. According to her and Springer’s expectations, Chanda was to play a major organizational role in the Northern Rhodesian labour movement, while being employed by the UTUC.⁸⁹ In view of Chivunga’s claim to make her his personal secretary, the male UTUC officials in Northern Rhodesia did not seem particularly eager to promote a female official into the union’s hierarchy, despite her training abroad. In a letter to Springer, UTUC leaders Chivunga and Matthew Mwendapole claimed that they lacked the financial resources to pay Chanda’s salary – she was only working part-time on her return.⁹⁰ After Springer agreed to the UTUC’s request to subsidize her salary for five months, Mwendapole complained in a letter to Michael Ross, Director of the AFL-CIO’s International Affairs Department, that this raised an “interesting question”, since “Chanda’s wages will be higher than any other officer in the UTUC. [...] It is unfortunate that you were not aware of this.”⁹¹ After the five months of subsidies, the UTUC would not be able to keep Chanda, Mwendapole asserted. This incident is evidence of the fact that the benefits of a scholarship for women were often disregarded by senior male officers.

In June 1962, Chanda was suddenly transferred from the UTUC offices to the Mineworkers’ Union in Kitwe. Springer now stated that she would arrange for the transfer of US\$150, which included the subsidy for Chanda’s wages, to the Mineworkers’ Union.⁹² As a result of the UTUC leaders’ inferiority complex about Chanda, it was the Mineworkers’ Union, not the UTUC, that benefited from a newly-trained worker and the support of the AFL-CIO. In 1964, at the age of 27 and working as a clerk and women’s organizer for the Northern Rhodesian Mineworkers Union, Chanda attended the tenth course at the ICFTU’s African Labour College in Kampala.⁹³

A similar case study at a micro level involving women’s agency, education, and financial flows concerned the leading officials of the KFL and the Kenyan women’s union official Hilda Otieno. Between 1961 and 1963, Otieno was Deputy Director of Education in the Kenya Federation of Labour (KFL) and travelled through the ICFTU member states in the early 1960s, including to the first women’s conference in Vienna in 1963.⁹⁴ While on a study tour through West Germany, Otieno had apparently established friendships with a grassroots Women’s Group in Frankfurt led by the former communist and later SPD member Erna Lang. Through the ICFTU’s Assistant General Secretary Herbert Tulatz, who was a West German union official responsible for Education and Women, the Group had donated money to the KFL’s school, which was run by Otieno.⁹⁵ The school had begun offering daily classes in sewing, cookery, hygiene, nutrition, and English for workers’ wives in the KFL’s Solidarity House in April 1961, and within weeks, 35 women had enrolled. The first class graduated in 1962. The aims of these classes were to “avoid idleness” and promote

⁸⁷ AFL-CIO Archives, Box 13, J. K. Chivunga to President Meany, Kitwe [?], 22 September 1961. Author’s own italics.

⁸⁸ AFL-CIO Archives, Box 13, J. K. Chivunga to President Meany, Kitwe [?], 22 September 1961.

⁸⁹ AFL-CIO Archives, Box 13, Maida Springer to J. K. Chivunga, Washington, 29 June 1962.

⁹⁰ AFL-CIO Archives, Box 13, M. R. Mwendapole to Maida Springer, Kitwe, 5 April 1962.

⁹¹ AFL-CIO Archives, Box 13, M. R. Mwendapole to Michael Ross, Kitwe, 3 May 1962.

⁹² AFL-CIO Archives, Box 13, Maida Springer to J. K. Chivunga, Washington, 29 June 1962.

⁹³ Harisch I., ‘Great Hopes, False Promises’, op. cit., p. 525.

⁹⁴ Föger K., ‘Gewerkschaftsbund Goes Global’, op. cit.

⁹⁵ IISH 2396c, Erna Lang to Herbert Tulatz, Frankfurt, 30 November 1963.

adult literacy. The KFL also conducted weekend seminars across the country in order to encourage women workers' leadership, providing spaces where "women workers talked freely about their problems in the industry and the role they should play in a developing country such as Kenya."⁹⁶

The male Kenyan senior officials were far from happy about a grassroots donation being made directly to a woman official. In a furious letter to the ICFTU's General Secretary Omer Becu, KFL Assistant General Secretary (and Senator) Clement K. Lubembe complained that Otieno had received 914 Kenyan Shillings (1000 West German Marks) from an ICFTU representative in East Africa to be used by the KFL's Women's Section.⁹⁷ Lubembe and leading male officials were determined to act as the sole gatekeepers for financial flows to the KFL. While Lubembe's criticism that the KFL officials knew neither the source nor the intended use of the donated money is plausible, the way the whole affair was handled also suggests jealousy and a fear of loss of control, and shows no signs of joy that the Women's Section was able to acquire additional funds from abroad. Otieno was also threatened with disciplinary measures by Lubembe, and a few months later she was no longer working for the KFL.⁹⁸

Catherine Naswa Machyo has argued that in the case of Kenya's organized labour movement, the male character of personal networks at a national level – in particular the leadership circles of the national trade union centre – posed a significant barrier to women becoming organized in unions and aspiring to leadership positions, since "the informal procedures in the unions for nominations or appointments relied on established male networks."⁹⁹ Otieno's acquisition of funds for the KFL's school and women's activities without the knowledge of the male leadership of the KFL – probably due to a belief that if they became aware of it the male officials would decide to spend the money otherwise – can thus be viewed as a strategy to navigate the male union networks.

A similar case in point here is the (ultimately successful) application of Nigerian women's unionist Agnes Adenowo, whose activism and educational quest I have discussed above. She not only submitted her application for a scholarship at the ICFTU's African Labour College to the national centre, the ULC, but also wrote directly to high-ranking ICFTU officials reminding them of the importance of education and training for women officers in particular.¹⁰⁰ Adenowo wanted to make sure that her application was not 'lost' at the ULC's headquarter in Lagos because it came from a female applicant and might therefore deliberately never be forwarded by senior male officials to either Kampala College or the ICFTU headquarters in Brussels.

In many instances, the majority of white male trade union functionaries in both the ICFTU and the WFTU either actively resisted or sidelined aspects of gender such as a 'feminization' of union education, greater representation of women on courses, and tackling issues such as equal pay, childcare, and overall patriarchal structures that barred women from the higher echelons of trade unions. The perpetuation of male dominance cannot be attributed to a single political-ideological camp of the Cold War: it included leading officials in the ICFTU's Executive Board, male communists within the WFTU, 'liberal' and social-democratic oriented principals and lecturers at the trade union colleges, and African labour leaders who had a crucial say in the selection process for prospective course participants. Despite the resistance of the male leadership in the ICFTU, the ICFTU/ITS Women's Committee had an important influence on the increase in funding, the creation of educational opportunities, and an overall stronger commitment to the interests of women workers within the ICFTU and its member organizations. African women unionists such as those from Nigeria's ULC were among the most active respondents to this brief upsurge, which was fuelled by courses, publications, and the establishment of trade union colleges and workers' education centres.

Within the WFTU's orbit, gender was not taken into account. There was no coordinated initiative to increase the enrolment of (African) women at trade union colleges, as the African revolutionary vanguard was conceptualized as a male, urban wage labourer. The selection process depended to a large extent on Africans.

⁹⁶ IISH 2396c, 'Kenya Federation of Labour', letter from Walter Otieno to the ICFTU General Secretary, 13 December 1963.

⁹⁷ IISH 2396c, Clement K. Lubembe to Omer Becu, Nairobi, 29 June 1963.

⁹⁸ IISH 2396c, Clement K. Lubembe to Omer Becu, Nairobi, 29 June 1963; IISH 2396c, Herbert Tulatz to Erna Lang, Brussels, 10 December 1963.

⁹⁹ Machyo Catherine Naswa (2003), 'An Analysis of Women's Participation in Trade Union Leadership in Kenya', MA thesis, University of Nairobi, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ IISH 2396d, Agnes Adenowo to Herbert Tulatz, Ebute-Metta, 29 July 1967.

The comparatively high representation of Guinean women, in contrast to other parts of the continent, testified to the fact that that ideological commitment to women's advancement did translate into affirmative action. African labour leaders, activists, and politicians were the key agents in the process of distributing the scholarships, impacted by local male networks of friendship and patronage. Women returning from abroad were faced with obstacles from male union leaders, as were women officials who aimed to establish their own networks that would allow them to guard the outer gates so as to receive funds and other forms of material assistance. Overall, the episodes from various national and international trade union bodies and trade union colleges are representative of larger patterns within Africa's organized labour movements of the 1950s and 60s, when the room for manoeuvre enjoyed by women was restricted to agency in tight corners.

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