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The Dark Shadow of Masculinities and Women's Emancipation Agenda

The specific objectives of the women's emancipation agenda that have more or less remained recurrent include: abolishing illiteracy, making female life expectancy 65 years old globally, making it possible for women to be self-sufficient, passing laws of equality to ensure a truly equitable socio-economic framework, launching public campaigns to abolish discrimination, and the adoption of national policies to abolish all obstacles women face. When one considers this list, it becomes abundantly clear that masculinities – especially in the hegemonic sense – are a dark shadow on these objectives.

Some argue that masculinities may be in crisis, as seen in the gay movement (Beynon 2002). While on the face of it, men are in power structurally and in theory, they are confronted by the possibility of disempowerment from working class women (Silberschmidt 2005). But overall, hegemonic masculinities, in the sense of men being socialised to dominate women, politically, socially and economically, remain very strong (cf. Izugbara 2005). For reasons of scope and quest for relevance I shall restrict my argument mainly to sub-Saharan Africa.

In many patriarchal societies in Africa (and these are very many indeed), educating a male child is more of a priority than educating a girl child. But amidst this, men still ascribe to what is evidently a stock phrase that says, 'when you edu-

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cate a woman, you educate the whole nation'. However, in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa effective measures for universal free primary education are on disheartening and shaky ground. Female birth mortality rates are still an important topic of concern in Africa. Despite the fact that women predominate in the process of production, men disproportionately own what the women overwhelmingly produce. Discrimination against women is still far from over, for example, in the work place in Kenya.

To the above list I add some aspects that are in tandem with our times, but were absent during the Nairobi Conference. With the advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is emerging that women are on the receiving end (Kiai et al., 2003: 14). Concerning information technology, the question of empowering women through information facilitation is at best in the preliminary stages. The future on this one still looks less bright because the gap between men and women in education, though not a gulf, is still uncomfortable enough.

I need not paint a very gloomy picture. It is true that since the Nairobi Conference

women have made remarkable strides in their emancipation agenda. Historically it is so that in Africa we have a first elected female president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia. Rwanda is noticeable in terms of empowering women in the government. The present Tanzanian government under President Kikwete has made history by appointing seven women ministers and ten deputy ministers. South Africa's record on empowering women in the government is also remarkable and so on.

Alongside this, ever since the advent of serious gender studies on the African continent about thirty years ago (Mama 2000), much has been done in many matters concerning women's emancipation. And there are a host of women organisations that have performed remarkably, for example, The African Women's Development and Communication Network, the Forum for African Women Educationists, the Association of African Women for Research and Development and so on. Here, it is instructive to note that CODESRIA has done what was expected of it and I am sure it will continue doing this through its Gender Institute that has been very active in many matters concerning women. For example, the following have been tackled: violence against women, gender and literature, and masculinities. This has indeed been striking because of the high calibre resource personnel and the rigorous laureate selection process that CODESRIA employs.

In general, when we talk of gender sensitisation and gender consciousness, big strides have been made. Even topics that were for a long time considered taboo, such as sexuality (especially matters that negatively affect female sexuality), are being rigorously discussed on the African continent.

However, amidst the above, the following questions arise. Yes we have President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and the present Tanzanian government. Let us borrow something from architecture. Whereas a belly-bottomed structure is desirable, a top-bellied structure may be considered dangerous. So how many women at the grassroots are iron ladies (whatever the masculine connotations of iron lady) in Liberia, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Africa and so on?

It is true that CODESRIA and a host of women-oriented academic think tanks have done a good job in gender sensitisation. But the question at the heart of our article now comes to the fore. If we accept our premise that masculinities, especially in the hegemonic sense, are a dark shadow over women's emancipation agenda, how have the dismaying masculine ideological and power structures been dismantled this far? Power is about relations in difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures. And Ideology is the way meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds (Wodak 2002). In dealing with the gender tree how much of the root has been tackled? Closely related to this, how have men as the privileged stratum reacted to women's emancipation agenda? And which is the appropriate way to go about achieving this agenda?

In addressing the first question let me start with this personal experience. Last year by accident, I found myself attending a standard eight prayer meeting at a primary school. As the pastor reminded the candidates of the need for self-confidence in the forthcoming Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination, he repeatedly emphasised the fact that they should face the exam like men (it is a mixed school). I also recollect that in his dedicated final prayer he emphasised the same. No feathers were ruffled among either the parents or the pupils (this school has very well-informed parents). In the context of the pastor's preaching one can easily produce a disclaimer when cornered to the

effect that in the Bible, the word men refers to both men and women. But it is reasonably clear that the pastor was referring to the 'hero man'. In fact, many African nations are littered with masculine symbols as national emblems in the name of the bull, the cock, the lion and so on.

Let us move away from the setting of a primary school to the university. Since I made my debut in the university about twenty-one years ago, I have only seen one lady vying for the position of the chairperson in the university students' government. Most of the time women stand for the position of the treasurer or what is currently being called the position of director of finance. In this connection what comes to mind is that President Johnson-Sirleaf has appointed a female finance minister, Dr Antoinette Sayeh. President Kikwete has also appointed a female finance minister, Zakia Meghji. But the succinct question is: against the pastor's scenario and the university students' government reality, what are the implications for the historic undertakings of the presidents of Liberia and Tanzania?

The other example we consider also exposes the uneven ideological and power structures that again favour men. On Citizen Radio (Kenya) on 25 February 2006, a few seconds before the 7.00 p.m. news bulletin, there was a man apparently talking in reference to the current buzz topic of corruption in Kenya who said, 'the prostitutes of today were once virgins'. To an overwhelming number of Kenyans, prostitutes are mainly women. Many a time when the police make a swoop, they normally arrest the female prostitutes and not the men, because the men are normally seen as male clients (cf. *Daily Nation* 18 October 1991). What ideological and power structures do we read deep into this relation? How can a national radio station air such an utterance under the rubric of a catch phrase before a news bulletin? What is more dismaying is that it literally goes unnoticed by many. By the pretence of a disclaimer the male speaker of the above utterance could still get off the hook if cornered: men can also be virgins and prostitutes.

These few examples explicate one point: that despite the strides in gender sensitisation and consciousness pertinent to disadvantaged woman, uneven masculine ideological and power structures still remain remarkably strong. And beware, they could be concealed and

they could also have adapted to women's consciousness. This means that, for instance, you need a more critical lens to make transparent some masculine utterances. Moreover, to mention a few practices, violence against women by men is rampant in Africa (Oyekanmi 2000). In Kenya in 2005, rape perpetrated by men against women was the number one crime (Onyango forthcoming) and female genital mutilation (strongly influenced by masculine undercurrents) has remained alarmingly persistent in some areas of the continent.

The above scenario reveals that more has still to be done to shed light on the dark shadow of masculinities and women's emancipation agenda. In this case, it is prudent to suggest that critical theories are going to play an important role in making transparent the concealed masculine ideologies and power structures in both discourse and actual practice, since presumably, something tangible has been done in creating gender awareness. Secondly, education is important for the women's agenda. Indeed, if the objective of women's emancipation is to be consolidated, the aim should now be higher than just eradicating illiteracy. When sound education is given to women the gap between men and women in social, economic and political spheres will be significantly reduced, and again it should not be in the top-belly fashion but the other way round. Hand in hand with this it will be important to focus on the critical pedagogy of the underprivileged (women) and also the critical pedagogy of the privileged (men), since, in my view, the question of women's emancipation is a dialectical one: masculinities are not less vital than femininities.

The agenda of women's emancipation is a Millennium Development Goal. If African governments were to place a gender element (both femininities and masculinities) more emphatically at the core of their curricula than is the case today, we will not be focussing on a receding horizon.

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'Some Women Are Stubborn': Power, Violence against Women and the Challenges of Religion

Although many well-meaning scholars, activists and religious leaders are comfortable with the psychological model of explanation of the abuse of women, violence against women is actually an inevitable consequence of the unequal relations of power between men and women in many societies. This paper posits that the insistence that women be subordinate to men, as prescribed by Christianity and Islam, and the seeming intolerance of violence against women by the two dominant religions in Nigeria throw up a basic contradiction, given the preservative nature of power. This position is largely informed by the analyses of data collected from semi-literate and highly literate women, highly literate men, and religious leaders through open-ended and lengthy questionnaires and in-depth interviews during fieldwork in the second half of 2004 in two state capitals, Lokoja in Kogi State, and Ibadan in Oyo State.

The interface of power and violence

Paulo Freire (1993), Michel Foucault (1980) and bell hooks (1984) offer illuminating views on the relationship between power and violence. According to hooks, 'the Western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority is ... the root cause of violence against women, of adult violence against children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominated' (1984: 118). Foucault provides a deep and broad view of power. He alerts us to the fact that individuals see power in terms of state apparatuses alone, and individuals also believe that they do not exercise power, 'others' do (Mejiuni and

Obilade 2004: 240). Foucault argued that power is 'present in the smallest, apparently most inconsequential human interactions' (Brookfield 2001: 7). This power is exercised through the body, sexuality, family, kinship, knowledge, technology, etc. For Foucault, resistance to power is to be found at the point where power relations are exercised: 'there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight (because every power relationship implies... a strategy of struggle' (Brookfield 2001: 17).

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With respect to the preservative nature of power, hooks observes that any group in power is likely to use coercive authority to maintain itself if challenged. It is therefore not surprising that when women put up resistance to their oppression and domination by men, men visit violence on them to maintain their dominant position. In this respect, Freire states that 'violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons – not by those who are oppressed, exploited and unrecognized' (1993: 55). To maintain dominance over others, the victims of violence themselves, having imbibed the view that the powerful need to maintain their authority over the powerless through coercion, also mete out violence to others even less powerful.

Violence becomes a habit when the powerless do not resist violence in a produc-

tive way. Though macabre, the powerful then enjoy meting out violence to the powerless, especially where the environment is conducive; for instance, where the culture of silence and the culture of impunity are pervasive. This explains why men hit, rape, sexually harass and exploit women who are 'gentle', 'meek', 'good', and 'feminine', but who are socially, economically, culturally and politically less powerful than they are. This is also the reason men mete out violence to babies, children and mentally-retarded persons who trust them and/or do not have the capacity to object to their violation.

Unfortunately, violence against women as a means of preserving men's power and as a habit continues to thrive in the context of a distorted view of God and his will, and an unfair and inequitable insistence on adherence to what we have been told are God's injunctions. According to Freire (1993: 61), 'under the sway of magic and myth, the oppressed see their suffering as the will of God', adding 'as if God were the creator of this "organised disorder"'.

For lack of space, we reproduce the experiences of a few women, and the advice they give or would give to victims of violence. Also, we look at the reasons some men gave for their ability to hit women. Some of the responses throw light on the observations made thus far, and inform the paragraphs that follow.

Women's experience of violence, men's capacity to exhibit violence and advice on violence

In the study mentioned above, twenty-three out of eighty-six literate women in formal work or students, and forty out of