

Antecedents of Social Order and Flexibility in Africa before Foreign Infiltrations

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Abstract. The coming of European and the Arab people also brought European/Arabian cultural and social orientation, and the dislocation and disorientation of social and cultural order in Africa. Dynamic African womanhood become weakened and rendered ineffective and irrelevant because of European/Arabian orientations Women because weak vessels. As noted, with new orientations and the dislocation of the social cultural order in most African societies, came new orientations, the present paper explores the old order and the new dispensation.

1. Introduction

The earth started with creation and from this time, both genders have equal divine source of origin and distinctive roles to play in life according to most creation mythologies in Africa.

In the Yoruba mythology the first set of human being tried to come down from “ajule orun”. However, disaster struck when the men schemed the female member of the entourage aside. This was however rectified to restore order. Thus from the beginning, women had their place in the scheme and order of things that could not be easily replaced. This was different from the foreign order.

As succinctly put by Sofola (1991), the weakling of women lay deep in the psyche of men of the European culture (1991). Everything spoken by female lips was suspect. Women were identified with the lower, physical aspects of the human being, and men with higher, spiritual and

intellectual aspects. Women were therefore permanently relegated to a state of subordination and helplessness and dependence on men. She occupied the back seat of life and remained perpetually an appendage to the men (Sofola, 1991, p.7).

Sofola (1991) believed that the Arab culture was of greater devastation for the women than the European culture. As described by her, in Arab culture, she is neither to be seen nor heard. She appears to be an accident...(p.7).

Even in language, the deep seated psychological learnings manifest. For example, the English word woman has a male root “man” and the word female also follows the same line: “male” while human are used to refer to both genders. This is not usually the case in most African setting, for example, the Igbo language. The word for child Nwa is used as root word, for both male and female. That is, Nwa-Nyi for female.

In Yoruba language, male is called Okunrin, female is obirin and to refer to both genders in Yoruba, it is eniyan (human being). (Sofola 1991). In myths and proverbs, the same trend follows (Mowaiye Fagbemi, 2001).

All these are portrayals quite unlike what was operative from the western world where the crowning glory of a woman is the man and to be seen but not to be heard, and did not exert power to her cosmos.

Sofola (1991) went on to say that:

The new contemporary European system is completely and unhealthy male defined, male structured and executed. These foreign systems do not have any root for any other outside the egocentric self, while African traditional system in concept and actualization has room for many or more "The sky is always big enough for all birds to fly without colliding", a Yoruba proverb affirms.

Furthermore, in the new dispensation, there is only one channel of socio political power, and it is male from Arab/European cultures. In traditional Africa, there existed a dual-gender system in concept and actualization, from the smallest family unit to the Governing Council of the kingdoms. Consequently, both male and female citizens had equal channels for self-expression, self-realization, and relevance on all levels. It was not a battle where the women fights to clinch some of "men's power". This battle consequently has set in motion perpetual gender conflict that has now positioned the erstwhile healthy social order of traditional Africa against the Arab/European learning. Yet the battle seems hopeless because the male power control will not yield anything more than tokenism to the "intruding" aggressive female. And even at that, it would still be a male point of view and interpretation of life that will still prevail since the males predominate the relevant structure e.g, in the new order. The woman in a "male position" must display male psyche in perception and actualization. Even in official/professional garbs, it must be male. (Sofola, 1991, Mowaiye Fagbemi 2001).

2. Self-Image

The importance of self-image cannot but be emphasized. It produces self esteem and its by product. The social image of the female changed with the "new order" and in the new order", the bombardment of the "new image" begins at home and from the mass media, newspapers magazines, television, etc. and in the school from teachers, textbooks, etc. (Mowaiye Fagbemi, 2001).

From an early age, even before children are aware of distinct differences in the sexes,

assigned roles within the home and playthings given superimposes in the mind expectations from one's sex and how 'he is different from 'she' and vice-versa . While "he" can play with mechanical repairs, the opposite sex is discouraged from same. While the male is encouraged to explore the environment, to be adventurous, aggressive and inquisitive, if the female exhibits such behaviors, she is labeled tom-boy.

For fear of an unwanted label that may suggest that there is something wrong with her behavior, the female may relapse in her adventurous spirit. Further, the nurturing training given to female and encouraged in many ways, align with the sciences. For, there is nothing nurturing about science-only inquisitiveness and exploration. (Mowaiye Fagbemi 2001). In school, the stereotype in the home follows. Different factors within the school system combine to put off the female psychologically. Indoctrination takes its toll on the female psyche.

Graphic design of textbooks, pictorial materials, literacy style, topics and examples of scientist of note take the masculine form. Characters for modeling for the female in science are rare. Excelling in the sciences raises eyebrows. Taking to it is tending towards taking the extreme of what is not given. The young who has a flair for science looks around her and does not see a female science teacher. These coupled with overt comments of teachers and texts have a restrictive effect psychologically on the female. When experiences within the social milieu are imbibed, and the female makes her decision, the psychological reaction is not only that she moves far away from enrolment in the sciences, she encourages other sex mates to do the same (Mowaiye Fagbemi, 2001). This orientation leads to the disparity to be found in careers between males and females.

And on the level of self-image, it is what men have defined women to be that the women are taught in schools, in the media, and in the homes. And most devastating, is the image of a woman as helpless hanger-on to a man. She has no independent reality, not even as a daughter. She must always be behind the man, must be

seen but not heard, must be obediently submissive to her husband.

Understanding is crucial to the solution of any problem. To understand how the damage on the psyche of the African woman came about, the past must be explored, for a pathway to the future to be made.

Females need to internalize the awareness of how their situation came to be so in the present to be able to proffer solution to them. Differentials in education and science enrolment are not to much the effect of biological make-up. Courage and tenacity to uphold one's choice has to come in for female who wants to excel especially in an area like the sciences.

Parents should encourage female wards to follow their talents through, in the effort to bridge the differentials apparent in all fields. Teachers need to stop all forms of gender differentials in the curriculum and teaching that could endanger maximum female participation and enrolment in the sciences. Special training programs to facilitate maximum female participation and enrolment in education and the science should be adopted.

3. Conclusion

The dynamics of social constructs and gendered social constructions, perception and behaviors are as important as political, technological or economic constructs in any given society. For these constructs, behaviors and tendencies determine what operates in any given society and what operates determines the level of development. Therefore, the past must be understood within the framework of the present so that the present can not only be understood but also bring about that which can lead to a better future and a better society. Africa must have an enabling society for developmental purposes. This can be achieved speedily when female potentials are maximized and maximization can be hastened when African does not just copy orientations from the West or from the "East" without filtering such information and orientating. Going back to the

African root in gender orientation is most detestable.

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