

# Conclusion and Recommendations

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I said in class one day that there were some people less entrapped than others by Plato's picture of the world. I said I thought we, after fifteen years of education, courtesy of the ruling class, might be more entrapped than others who had not received a start in life so close to the heart of the monster. My classmate, once a close friend, sister and colleague, has not spoken to me since then. I think the possibility that we were not the best spokespeople for all women made her fear for her self-worth and for her PhD (Reproduced in hooks 1984:13).

This is a paragraph from an open letter that one white female graduate student, a former classmate of Bell Hooks (African American feminist scholar) in a graduate class on feminist theory, wrote to Bell Hooks (Gloria Watkins). She wrote the letter to acknowledge her anger (part of the collective anger that was directed at Hooks in that class because of the kinds of issues that she raised), and express regret for her attacks on Hooks.

In this work, we have attempted to show how religion, socialization/informal learning/the hidden curriculum and tertiary education interface to construct women's identity, and how the construction presents undemocratic and flawed gender relations which lack rational justification. However, the potential for challenging and reordering the status quo exists in the women who perceive themselves as different from who men would rather they are.

Specifically, one of the conclusions reached in this book is that the identities of women (that is, the character of women), or more precisely, the identities that women favour, and or those that many men would rather women favour, represent a major factor in determining whether women have political power and whether women experience violence, and the actions that they are able to take when they experience violence. This is irrespective of the educational attainments of women. Allied to this, we also reached the conclusion that men would rather women favour identities that disempower and disable them because they have a need to preserve the power that dominates. Fortunately, from analysis of data, there are indications that formal education (and religion) will serve

women better in future if we pay attention to certain issues. Those issues are set forth in the paragraphs that follow.

### **Democratizing the Domestic Sphere**

First, we need to democratize the domestic sphere - the private sphere of life. We cannot take the submission of women to the will of men in the private sphere as a given, while we are advocating the equitable involvement of women in the public sphere, and seeking to eradicate violence against women in the private and public spheres. Men who have been socialized to see women as their subordinates in the private sphere cannot then move to the public sphere and see women as equals. Such men must believe that women who assert equality with them in the public sphere must be suffering from 'illusions of grandeur'. In the study reported in this book, very few men and women assumed the equality of men and women in the private and public spheres in the same breath.

While a handful of men who have gone through sex-role socialization of different shades cannot see any rational justification for the process, and so genuinely work for equitable gender relations in the private and public spheres, most men who see women as equals in the public do so grudgingly. They will themselves to do it, thus causing some of them to become split personalities, who preach equality of women with men, and 'accept' women as equals in public, but oppress their wives and children at home.

The point being made is that the concession that the female respondents in this book and women's rights activists, who wish to reorder gender relations to end violence against women, and for a democratic public sphere, presently, overtly and covertly, grant to patriarchy is untenable. To be stark, the argument is that we might be wasting too many resources mounting all those campaigns for women's political participation and for eliminating violence against women, when we concede that we should be submissive to men at home. I have often asked myself whether I walk this talk. I know that I have put up resistances, and there have been fallouts and pains as a result, but I am convinced that I have not failed woefully in the project.

Let me quickly add that for different reasons, many women do not see any problem with being submissive to their husbands, and not to all men, as many of the female respondents in this book took for granted and as the female Christian leader in Ibadan espoused. Some of the reasons women believed in the subjection of women to men in the private sphere include: the way things are; they do not just know any other way; religion prescribes it; the rewards and punishment for accepting and behaving according to norms are bountiful or grave.

The responses of female participants in this book to the roles of women in the private and public spheres are particularly instructive in this respect. While they take the submission of women to men in the private sphere as given, they

affirm women's ability to lead in civic-political capacities, the public sphere, strongly. They cite women's humaneness, their integrity, their character, their firmness, etc., as attesting to their capacity to govern. They also cite equality of men and women before God. These groups of women belong to the category of people who argue that unlike the private sphere, the public sphere is public because it is a space for everybody, and so, it is the business of government to regulate activities in the public in a fair, equitable and just manner.

However, the truth is that, as yet, persons do not come to the public sphere as equals. In the public sphere, wealth is determined by the attitudes, values and behaviours of those who own and or pay for the means of production and, to a lesser extent, by those who offer their labour (however conceived) in exchange for pay. There are men and women whose roles, and expectations and the values linked to those roles are usually well defined in their context; there are babies, children, teenagers, young adults, adults and senior citizens, and persons with disabilities in those groups, who have their strengths and frailties. Now, when we expect that persons who govern will regulate the public sphere in a fair, just and equitable manner, we forget that they also enter the public sphere, not as equals with one another, and they were also socialized as men and women.

### **Reordering Gender Relations in Cultural Institutions**

If women can break away from the belief that submission to a husband (and in-laws in some parts of Nigeria) is a given, then this next suggestion will strike a chord. There is a need to democratize the leadership of religious and traditional institutions with women and men who do not believe in the subjection of women to men. One was quite taken aback by the sharp and firm way the female Muslim leaders rejected the idea of a female Imam, and the appeal to due process and culture that the male Christian leaders used to camouflage resistance to women's ordination into priesthood. While this suggestion appears utopian, we can still take some practicable steps. We can encourage religious leaders to privilege the transformative aspects of their religion, given the multiple face of religion. And, there should be more involvement of gender activists (who do not concede to patriarchy at both the cognitive and practical aspects of their lives) in the activities of religious organizations, especially in tertiary institutions and in the discourse of religion and women in the larger society.

The positions of religious leaders on the issues that were explored in this book are pointers that feminist educators and other women's rights activists should search for and keep up-to-date information about religion, both the oppressive and the liberatory aspects, as it is currently preached and practiced in their communities.

Women in higher education institutions should, as a matter of urgency, encourage more female-oriented community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations to become very active in higher institutions. This

should take the wind off the activities of religious organizations in the institutions. If they approach their activities from potentially empowering frameworks, they can assist the young and older women in those institutions in a transformational learning process which may result in the transformation of their identities. Female students who become active participants in the activities of such organizations, or active participants in the organizations that they initiate, are likely to become leaders in the women's movement which can exercise the power to end the domination of women in Nigeria. There are women's organizations in Nigeria that are active in this respect. Some of them are: Women Against Rape, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation (WARSHE), headquartered in Ile-Ife; Female Leadership Forum (FLF), headquartered in Lagos; and BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, also headquartered in Lagos. The challenge is to have more of these organizations work with students all over the country, and to have the existing students and the ones that are yet to come on board constantly checking their frameworks and strategies.

One recommendation that is easy to implement is that the names of pupils in class registers in primary schools should be arranged in alphabetical order, and this should be done speedily. The argument that boys' names are listed before girls' names because organs of government want disaggregated data falls flat, smirks of laziness, and is a camouflage for discrimination. There is need for a general overhaul of the educational system, especially tertiary education in Nigeria. Tertiary institutions need to become centres of excellence for the production of knowledge and for setting the agenda to change the country, the continent and the black race through innovative and creative processes that honour the humanity of participants in the system. There is also an urgent need for tertiary institutions to set in motion the process of formulating and adopting anti-discrimination/anti-sexist and sexual harassment policies and procedures. As yet, only cases of harassment (usually badly handled) are resolved at the whims of the leadership of most institutions, at times using the institutions' codes of conduct, when they are available.

Socialization, informal learning and hidden power (exerted through cultural institutions and emotional relationships) matter. Feminist educators and other scholars/activists in Nigeria need to pay more attention to how cultural instruments and institutions, and other educative influences and agencies, impact the lives of women.

### **Monitoring the Character (*Iwa*) of Persons Who Shape Lives**

In addition, as one of the lecturers that we interviewed at the University of Ibadan suggested, the character of those who shape lives and mould other peoples' characters (lecturers, religious leaders and leadership of higher institutions) should be brought under constant scrutiny.

We noticed the interface of patriarchy and poverty. One would hope that persons who resolve economic dilemmas would use fair and just yardsticks instead of patriarchal norms. This is what is befitting of individuals, especially public officers who have *'Iwa'*.

Finally, I hope that other scholars and activists will work to expand and deepen some of the issues that have emanated from my interrogation of the process of the construction of women's identities and the role of formal, non-formal and informal education and religion in the process. For instance, how can we work to deconstruct, demystify, and neutralize (the sources of) power and also power resources that dominate, and then preserve itself, using seemingly rational arguments and the obviously irrational ones; emotional blackmail; physical coercion; the devaluation and valuing of qualities which others have that make the 'powerful' feel less powerful or very powerful; non-recognition of values that persons hold dear; and the appeal to God; so that such power becomes unattractive to women and other oppressed groups?

