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African Moral Fibre as the Lost Glory in Combating Violence against Women

By Lilian Cheelo Siwila

Abstract

Africa, like any other society, embodies particular moral responsibilities that govern the way society is to be ruled. These morals, which are embedded in people’s belief systems and worldviews, are transmitted from generation to generation. The gendered nature of these morals can be reflected in the way women and girls are protected and respected in their communities. Since the holistic mothering roles of women are viewed as the highest order of society, heinous crimes like violating a woman are seen as taboo in that society. Among the Tonga people of Zambia, where this study is located, raping or beating a woman is considered inhuman, and those men who are involved in such acts are brought before the chiefs to receive punishment from their fellow men. In some cases, such perpetrators not only receive physical disciplining, but also are meant to pay the family of the girl a prescribed number of cows as compensation for their crimes. Later, they also need to participate in a ritual of cleansing to purify the community. Therefore, the concept of “protecting women” is perceived as a form of moral responsibility by the community. This paper aims to reflect on how the weakening of this glorious cultural tradition has left many women and girls exposed to all forms of abuse. The paper will use the narrative approach as its methodology, while feminist cultural hermeneutics and the community’s moral responsibilities will be used as the two theoretical frameworks of the research.

Keywords: Moral responsibility, Tonga, women and girls, culture, feminism, abuse

Introduction

African moral systems were once assumed as the prescribed order of community life. Among most ethnic groups, morality was upheld and guarded as something that informed every aspect of people’s lives. Rules governing the communities were inscribed and followed so rigorously that breaking any of these rules attracted heavy punishment for the offender. In such societies, community life included nature, the living, and the living dead, who were governed by moral codes that focused on creating harmony among members of the community. Mbiti argues that moral processes are primarily concerned with the maintenance of good relationships among individuals and the establishment of justice and individual rights in society. Those principles that connect people are right, while those that separate them are seen as wrong (Mbiti, 1969). For example, violence against any of the established orders of community life, like nature, the living, and the living dead, was viewed as a taboo, and a transgression to the community of the living, the ancestors, and the Supreme Being. Such transgressions are seen as creating divisions within communities. The paper uses the Ubuntu concept to demonstrate how the much-commended community life, which was used as a tool to fight against gender-based violence earlier, has failed to maintain that status at present, especially in combating violence against women and children. Community life in African

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countries during the pre-colonial period meant the protection of every individual. Respect for humanity is cardinal to positive moral living. My growing up in a traditional African extended family structure with the presence of grandparents exposed me to several positive moral values regarding the protection and respect for women in society. Every woman in the village was to be treated like a mother, while every girl child was seen as a sister. Respect for women was cardinal, as they were viewed as the mothers of the communities.

This paper aims to seek ways in which traditional ways of addressing violence against women can be revisited. In discussing the need to return to the lost glory of such a tradition in which respect for all humanity was paramount, the present paper will explore different ways society dealt with sex offenders in the pre-colonial period. Secondly, the paper will focus on society’s need for an ideal man in the fight against violence against women. The study will also highlight how women negotiate patriarchal spaces for their self-empowerment. Some of the questions will be, “How were women viewed in pre-colonial society?” What kind of moral codes were imposed on communities to fight violence against women? How did African communities move away from these moral codes to situations of devastating violence against women, experienced in our societies today? To effectively answer these questions, it is important to reflect on the brief history of how society was structured during the pre-colonial and colonial eras as far as issues of violence against women are concerned.

**African Women during the Pre-colonial and Colonial Era**

In the present discussion of the position of women during the pre-colonial era, the paper concurs with the view of R. Adewale, who argues that it is tempting to romanticize the pre-colonial period in Africa as the “good old days,” when women enjoyed unprecedented powers and were almost on the same status as men, but a deeper examination of the period also reveals that women, as wives, were also victims of violence which was unleashed on them through some traditional practices (Alewade, 2007, pp. 294-252). This is an important point to consider creating objectivity in the study, as it is an indisputable fact that there has not been a period in human history, when women and girls were free from any form of violence. What this paper aims to do is show how pre-colonial societies dealt with issues of violence against women and how some of these practices could be applied to the current situation. Each era in history has its historical challenges, and thus approaches to gender-based violence must reflect on the past as we attempt to make sense of what is happening now and how to deal with the future. Africans believe that without a past, history, and way of life, people cannot exist. As a result, by reflecting on the past, the paper hopes to draw some positive elements for combating violence against women while also denouncing some elements of the past that were extremely harsh towards women.

Another point to consider in discussing the position of women in the pre-colonial era is the lack of knowledge that exists about the lives of women. Although, according to Moagi & Mtombeni, there has been a mass production of scholarly works on women during the colonial and postcolonial periods of southern Africa by scholars such as Cherrly Walker, Jeffy Guy, Elizabeth A. Eldredge, Sabelo Ndlou-Gatsheni, Jennifer Weir, Hugh Arthur Stayt, Norma Masuku, Eileen Jensen Krige, and Jane Parpart, there are certainly some worrying gaps in the literature on the status of pre-colonial women in Africa. The author further argues that:

This gap is a serious wound in the history of women in Africa. It suggests that women had no history or played insignificant roles in pre-colonial societies. One of the reasons for this omission is that the production of mainstream historical literature was done by men, about men, and for men. The widely held view that pre-colonial societies in Africa were steeped in the patriarchal order, diminished women, and
consigned them to the domestic sphere is problematic. Pre-colonial societies might have worshipped the god of patriarchy, but women and their active participation in their communities were never back stage. (Moagi, and Mtombeni, 2020, p. 3)

The idea of women not being active during the pre-colonial period not only distorts history as far as gender studies in Africa are concerned but also contributes to how women are spoken of and spoken about even in present-day scholarship. Moagi and Mtombeni argue that women were valued and recognized during the pre-colonial era. Although gender-roles were assigned according to the sex-gender division of labour, this did not play many significant roles to domesticate one gender (Moagi, 2020, pp. 1–20). Both men and women enjoyed a shared division of labor; they worked in the fields together, built their houses together, fetched firewood and sought food collectively. This kind of gendered division of labor was, however, not the same across the continent. Some of these gendered divisions of labor were contextual. For example, among the majority of ethnic groups in southern Africa, men collected firewood, escorted women to fetch water when it was deemed dangerous for them to walk alone, and both men and women participated in farming. Men acted as protectors of the family, especially women and children. These acts were developed from the education that was received during the pre-colonial era before the arrival of the early Europeans on the African continent. Africans received a type of community-based education that emphasized the socialization of young boys and girls into the basic elements of African culture during the pre-colonial era. A major focus of this socialization process was its emphasis on respecting the elders of the community (Alewade, 2007, pp. 234-252). Relationships between men and women, husbands and wives, and parents and children were built on this kind of informal education (Adewale, 2007).

The situation, however, changed with the arrival of the colonizers and missionaries. During the colonial era, women’s roles in society began to be challenged. While talking about the impact of the arrival of the colonizers and missionaries on the African continent, Sheldon argues that:

[...] women’s prior experience of work and income that was under their control was both overlooked and diminished. Men, seen as household heads, gained authority about dealing with the political system. Women were marginalized. Women also faced new burdens in areas where men were removed from local work and responsibilities and forced to labour in colonial enterprises, usually for little or no remuneration. In many cases, women remained in the rural home with increased work in family agriculture and for the household, including maintaining ties with kin, upholding ritual activities, and enduring months and sometimes years of the absence of the husband and other male kin. (Sheldon, 2017, p. 1)

The present scenario, where women have to carry the burden of all the domestic chores, is the result of the changes outlined by Sheldon above. In some cases, these new changes also contributed to gender-based violence. While men focused on forced unpaid or paid labor, women’s increased labor in the domestic spheres offered them no payment. As a result, men started to use this paid-work concept as a source of power to control women in their homes. Scholars such as Parratt and Siwila have argued that the current gendered division of labor in society was also influenced by the Victorian model of family that saw women as homemakers, housewives, or stay home mothers. Although the housewife syndrome could have worked well in its original context, the African community struggled to embrace the concept objectively to the extent that even today, women who are playing this role in their marriages are undermined as dependent on their spouses without considering the role that
they play within the home to support the family. The concept of paid work becomes the fundamental point of one’s contribution to the welfare of the family. Bringing money home was then associated with being a provider and head of the family. Although the family, in some contexts, could survive from the local produce managed by the wife, men who engaged in paid labor were given more authority in the marriage. It is this kind of masculinity that this paper is trying to interrogate. Weir’s work concludes that women in pre-colonial southern Africa were not restricted to the domestic space; they performed leadership roles in the military, economic, and religious domains of their communities (Weir, 2000, pp. 3-23). In addition to the question of how work was divided between men and women, the paper will also look at how people in pre-colonial societies dealt with sexual violence like rape.

**Sexual violence in the Colonial and Postcolonial Era**

During the pre-colonial era, sex was treated as a sacred reality. Although there is not much evidence in terms of written records on this matter, the reality can be drawn from a variety of practices that were associated with sex. For example, sex outside marriage was a taboo, and hence to engage in sex for an unmarried person, especially for women, was not acceptable unless ascribed to a particular ritual. In some instances, it also merited a curse and brought shame to the family and community at large. This is why the issue of rape, premarital pregnancy, and any form of sexual practice outside marriage that was not prescribed in the moral codes of society was punishable. The belief was that a sexual act should not be performed just for the sake of having pleasure. Rather, every sexual act should have a purpose. When it came to rape, some societies, like the Tonga in Zambia, thought it was a serious crime that deserved harsh punishment. The term used for rape is *kujata* (literally meaning forcing yourself on someone). From a patriarchal perspective, it was believed that raping a woman was a sign of weakness. A man who raped a woman was said to be a coward, who was not man enough to negotiate for safe sex. This however does not mean that there were no rape cases in the community. On the contrary, the point the paper tries to raise is the way the community responded to the issue of rape once reported. As a result, rape cases were typically resolved through local courts or by a village headman within the community. The kind of stigma that rapists suffered was punishment in itself. Sometimes, the offender needed to compensate for his crime by offering cows or goats to the offended family, or the offender would have to marry the girl to cleanse the polluted village. In some cases, even after marrying the girl, the offender would have to continue paying lobola and the other payments to the community.

In terms of the girls who got pregnant before marriage, the person responsible for the act had to compensate for it by paying high prices. If the man wished to marry the girl, his lobola was relinquished. The term “damage,” although dehumanizing to women as commonly assumed by most African feminist scholars, was used to define the loss of virginity on the part of the girl. Payment for the damage was also seen as a form of punishment for the man for taking the girl’s virginity. This is because virginity in the African tradition was held in such high esteem that any act that led to the loss of virginity was unlawful and punishable. In the Tonga tradition, breaking the girl’s virginity is called “kumulyaciliya”, literally meaning “eating something that is still raw.” Speaking on the subject, Moagi and Mtombeni claim:

Isigodhlo accommodated the “flowers” of the Zulu nation that were supposed to be nurtured and protected at any cost. This explains why young men who plucked the flowers without permission from the King or their fathers were harshly dealt with. Young boys were supposed to get permission from their fathers to marry, those who hlobonga were punished for violating the girls. (Moagi, and Mtombeni 2020, p.7)
Although African people were viewed as promiscuous during the colonial era, this claim stood to be contested. The reality of the matter is that sex in the African context had many rules and regulations that governed many aspects associated with engaging in sexual activities. In reality, African people’s way of life, many ritual practices associated with sex, the symbolic nature of the language used for sex, and the sacredness of the practice direct an outsider to think that African people were promiscuous. Sex was so profound that even couples could not express their romantic life publicly, especially in front of their children. Therefore, the public expression of any type of sexual familiarity that was against the accepted norms of society was unacceptable. This practice was also followed in the Abrahamic religions, like Christianity. These restrictions that were put upon sexual acts testify to the fact that sexual violence, such as rape, which was a public expression of sex in a non-prescribed norm, could not be condoned in such societies. Some African feminist scholars like Siwila have identified practices such as widow sexual cleansing, child marriage, and initiation ceremonies as responsible for non-consensual sex, which ultimately leads to physical violence like rape (Siwila, 2009, pp. 75-89). Some critics argue marriage is the center of patriarchy (Phiri, 2003, pp. 5-21).

A Need to Return to the Ideal Man in the Fight for Violence against Women

In response to the main point of this paper, which is to find positive ways to deal with violence against women in the past, it is important to think about what men can do to stop this behaviour. The discussions above present two types of men during the pre-colonial era: the ideal man with positive masculinity and the bad man with hegemonic masculinity. The paper uses the approach of borrowing history from the past to see how the past can be used to inform the present. The high rate of gender-based violence in most parts of Africa suggests that the search for a redemptive ideal man is inevitable. The literature presented in this study has demonstrated that during the pre-colonial era, the concept of the ideal man was something that was upheld by the community as far as the protection of women and girls was concerned. When talking about the ideal man, Beynon argues that not all men will choose to behave differently and accept change if it entails losing their hegemonic privileges (Beynon, 2002). Therefore, even in the period under study, not all men stood as ideal men, and even those who did stand for the ideal could find themselves performing other types of masculinity when it suited them. This is because of the fluidity of masculinities such that men, while performing some kind of hegemonic masculinity, also manifest positive masculinities that lead to the birthing of an ideal man who is an acceptable model of masculinity in the community. Chitando and Chirongoma see the ideal man as someone who positively uses his power and hegemony and produces redemptive masculinity (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012, pp.113-127). Traditionally, in most African societies, including the southern region of Africa, a man is accepted into the family of a girl for marriage provided he manifests qualities such as provider, protector, and nonviolent. This was confirmed during marriage negotiations, when the girl was being presented to the family of the man. During this ritual, the family of the girl will bring at least three girls including the bride covered with blankets. The family of the groom is then asked to identify the bride-to-be, and once they identify the groom, the girl’s family asks them whether they notice any scars of abuse on the body of the girl. The bride’s family urges the groom’s family by metaphorically saying that “we have presented to you a complete flower with all the petals still intact and fresh please we want to see our flower in this same way always with no scars”. The ideal men here are advocating for the bride’s protection from domestic violence. In many instances, scholars have associated these words with the issue of virginity, arguing that here the completeness of the bride means that she is still a virgin. These critics conclude their arguments by referring to the patriarchal nature of marriage and lobola negotiations (Phiri, 2003, pp. 5-21; Oduyoye, 1995). While this
may be true of the practice, there are aspects of this process that need to be highlighted for their essence to protect women from abusive marriages. Kanyoro advocates in her work on feminist cultural hermeneutics, arguing that not all aspects of the cultural tradition are bad, and there are many positive elements within our cultural practices that need to be acknowledged for their value in the community (Kanyoro, 2002). She then calls for cultural hermeneutics to identify positive aspects of culture that can be used for women’s empowerment.

When it comes to the selection of a man to marry a girl, the family of the girl is more interested in knowing the qualities of the person than what he does for a living. The position of the man in the community in terms of his moral standing was significant to the family before they could release their girl for marriage. This also included the kind of family the man came from. The ‘who’ other than the ‘what’ of a man intending to marry was a search for the ideal man whose moral standing is accepted by the community. They search for the one who can fulfill his role as a nonviolent protector of his wife and children. In addition, Lubunga Eshuwa shows how men in his ethnic group were expected to act:

> When a man is in the village, children and women feel secure, “men should always be on the front line of any procession and they should sleep in front” are used to assert men’s position of authority and responsibility. Men’s sense of protection was nourished with heroic tales in which mythical men of the past challenged lions and other ferocious animals, to the point of risking their lives to prove their manhood. In certain cases, the exploits of outstanding ancestors or forefathers of the clan are evoked to instil courage to the young ones. Risk-taking, heroism, power and self-determination are among the attributes that are often associated with manhood. (Eshuwa, 2012, p. 77)

Besides just being an obligation for men to display their manhood in this way, men also find pleasure in being the ideal man. Rather than abusing women, all the heroism and power were directed towards the protection of women. As the ideal man’s role and identity began to change, especially during the colonial era, this concept of the ideal man gradually disappeared from the scene. What factors contributed to men behaving differently toward women? While factors associated with colonial and missionary influences are highlighted in this paper, a further investigation would be viable in as far as the search for factors leading to violence against women is concerned. In his study on male headship among the men in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Zambia Van Klinken challenges the concept as a kind of masculinity that is oppressive to women (Van Klinken, 2011, pp.104-124). Feminist scholars such as Ruether, writing from a Christian perspective, have condemned the tradition of promoting patriarchal anthropology, which promoted the subjection of women in marriage and family life (Ruether, 1985). Despite these reservations, the quest for the lost glory of African values in the fight against gender-based violence will continue to necessitate the search for the ideal man.

**Culture Diffusion as a Source of Violence against Women**

Another factor that is worth noting in the search for positive African value systems is the problem of cultural diffusion. When western culture was introduced to the continent, it found other forms of cultures that were already oppressive to women, posing a challenge to African values. The coming of colonizers and missionaries weakened Africa’s traditional values and practices, as Africans became more oriented toward western cultures, which permeated almost all facets of their lives and activities. So, different aspects that shaped African cultures in terms of socio-economic, legal, and religious aspects were all diffused in
western culture. Adewale observes that these teachings were reinforced mainly by some elements of semantic religious teachings (Adewale, 2007, pp. 234-252). Borapai argues that the church interpreted the word of God and passed on the same to the judicial courts (Borapai, 1995, pp. 164-177). It assigned the woman a subservient role. Highlighting its teachings on the story of the creation (Genesis 2:21-24), the church asserted that a woman was never created as a person in her own right, but rather she was extracted from the rib of a man, and so she was nothing but a part of him. She has no identity apart from the identity of her husband. This was the basis of the enactment of the unity of spouse act under English common law, which also formed the basis of legislation in many African countries (Adewale, 2007, p. 242):

[...] when marriage is viewed under statutory law, common law or Islamic law the wife was put at a great disadvantage. Many of these discriminatory matrimonial laws which were enacted during the colonial period still exists in the law books of many African countries today only waiting to be challenged. Many of these laws give license to husbands to physically “chastise” their wives whenever they consider it necessary to do so. Because women were not involved in the law-making, and males were the architects of the laws, they reflect androcentric perceptions and values. (Adewale, 2007, pp. 242-243)

The diffusion of western culture into African culture does not necessarily mean a spell of bad omen for Africa, but rather the argument here is that Africa’s cultural values seem to be camouflaged by western culture, making them less relevant and, in some cases, perpetuating the oppression of women. For example, the religion that Africans welcomed and embraced so well seems to have brought in a new culture as far as marriage life is concerned. Colonialism and missionary endeavours also strengthened some of the patriarchal tendencies that already existed in the continent. Emmanuel Akyeampong and Hippolyte Fofack state that:

missionary presence in Africa from the early 19th century, their endeavours to remake African families monogamous and nuclear, and their encouragement of African participation in the market as a civilizing influence the embers of individualism and fathers secluded women in the domestic domain under the Christian discourse of “respectability”. African chiefs and male elders argued alongside missionaries and colonial officials that African women did not belong in towns. (Akyeampong & Fofack, 2014, p.45)

Culture diffusion, therefore, calls for cultural hermeneutics so that the new form of culture to be birthed is scrutinized and assessed for its redemptive elements. Unless and until this occurs, Africans will remain trapped between two cannons: the cannon of missionary and colonial culture and the cannon of African culture (Madipaone, 2003). Challenging this kind of cultural diffusion will also require interrogating all aspects of missionary and colonial influences on legal, religious, and customary laws that are active in the African communities.

Towards a Call to Revisit Indigenous Value Systems in the Fight of Violence against Women

As I write this paper, some African countries are observing 16 days of activism in the fight against gender-based violence during a time when countries unite together to reflect on ways to curb this epidemic. The questions that beg to be answered as we see cases of rape and killing rising every day are as follows: Have African men lost all respect for human life to such an extent that killing a partner is no longer seen as an issue, especially after inflicting
the harm of raping the person? Where is the much-proclaimed Ubuntu in African societies? What happened to the societal morals that governed the communities? It is from this context that the paper attempts to find ways of creating a conversation around the need to revisit these moral values and seek redemptive elements from them. Benson O. Igboin argues that:

Throughout humanity, all communities hold particular kinds of values that determine how their community has to be governed. In the African communities values may be ideas that propel man’s (sic) daily actions. In other words, they are the standard which members of the community adhere to in their personal and communal interaction towards the achievement of the goals. It is they that determine those who are to be praised or reprimanded for their actions. In another sense, values refer to what is ‘good’ or ‘desired’. In the descriptive sense, value can mean the worth of something as when an article is evaluated. Values can be institutional and cherished by individual and by a group of people. (Igboin, 2011, p. 3)

The central theme that runs through the veins of African morality is the concept of community. Therefore, it is the community’s responsibility to see how these values are applied and responded to by the members of the community. Verhoef and Michel argue that community is the main element of human existence in African society (Verhoef & Michel, 2006, p.396). People are closely interconnected with one another in a lifestyle-oriented to the other. They further highlight that the “We” of the African ethos is a shared experience, a body of collective experience, and an understanding that one’s experiences are never entirely one’s own. Thus, experiences such as sexual abuse were not seen as the problem of the victim alone, but the whole community. The “We” in this case is a thoroughly fused collective “We,” which refers to the concern and responsibility of others in the community. The interrelationship between communities means that everyone in the community is an important member, who must care for those around them. The fundamental state of interrelation within the African universe extends to the concept of personhood. One is not a person without a relationship with the whole community. A person is seen through the community; as the African proverb goes, you see a forest before you see trees. Verhoef and Michel confirm that, unlike the western view of a person as an individual, the concept of a person in the African worldview is most importantly that of the community (Verhoef & Michel, 2006, p. 396). One does not focus on oneself as a distinct entity, but in relation to others. “The individual is not a human being as he is part of the social order of the Community” (Verhoef & Michel, 2006. p. 396). Therefore, community social responsibility was acted on as one of the codes used to fight gender-based violence. Incidents of wife-beating, rape, and other forms of violence against women were dealt with through community social responsibility. The challenge that we face today is the death of this community life, where the “We” has changed to “I.” Individualism has not only distorted the image of Ubuntu, but destroyed the African values of seeing the other in the spirit of community life. As much as most scholars, especially those of African descent, are still trying to appraise Ubuntu, the unfortunate thing is that Ubuntu itself has lost its value and hence there is a need to revisit its meaning, especially in the area of gender-based violence.

**Feminist Epistemology as a Source for Women’s Agency**

Another key issue that needs to be highlighted in this study is the role of various women’s agency in fighting violence against women. Research on violence against women has always pointed to the vulnerability of women at the mercy of patriarchy, and yet women have in many ways devised strategies to negotiate their way through patriarchal spaces. Research conducted by Phiri and Nadar highlights that women in KwaZulu Natal
demonstrated how nuptial songs can be used as tools for communicating women’s agency (Phiri and Nadar, 2009, pp. 5-21). The scholars cited the nuptial song that the bride’s sisters sing to the groom, advising him not to abuse the wife but rather to send her back home should they experience any marital conflict. (See the song below):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wesibalihayi Wesibalimbuyiseleekhaya} \\
\text{Ungambulali} \\
\text{Ungamushayi} \\
\text{Umekwehlulambuyiseleakhaya} \\
\text{Brother-in-law, brother-in-law, bring her home} \\
\text{Don’t kill her} \\
\text{Don’t hit her} \\
\text{If you can’t manage her, bring her home.¹}
\end{align*}
\]

The authors conclude that the song acknowledges violence in marriage; it also acts as a strategy to provide a solution for the prevention of violence, while, at the same time, empowering the wife through the strong support system of the family.

Another example of women’s agency fighting violence against women in marriage was to be found through the use of beads. Oduyoye argues that beads are a symbol of women’s expression of femininity (Oduyoye, 2002), while Moyo sees beads as a source of power for women to control their sexual lives (Moyo, 2005, pp. 30–52). Traditionally, besides those worn around the waist and other parts of the body, women owned three strands of beads that were very special for their sexual lives. These three strands of beads—red beads, black beads, and white beads—were hung on the wall of the bedroom. Each of these colours has a specific meaning. For example, when a woman hangs the red beads, she refers to the menstrual process she is going through, and so physical intimacy is discouraged because menstrual blood is deemed to be impure. Hanging the black beads means that the couple is experiencing bereavement or some unhealthy situation in the family, and so sexual relations are postponed. The white beads mean that the woman is available for a sexual relationship. Since men were taught about these sexual regulations during premarital counselling, they were obliged to obey the instructions. Such practices tend to override the dominant voices that argue that African women have never had the power to negotiate for safe sex. Kaunda and Kaunda argue that African women use the same oppressive structures such as rituals to negate and resist patriarchal oppression (Kaunda & Kaunda, 2021, pp. 27–43). These spaces, they argue, provide women with subtle ways of constructing gendered spaces that enable them to attain sexual desire and pleasure in marriage. This demonstrates women’s power to also negotiate for safe sex and how it helps them to address violence in marriage. Nnaemeka proposes “nego feminism,” a feminism of negotiating patriarchal spaces, arguing that “in the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of “give and take/exchange” and “cope with successfully/go around” (Nnaemeka, 2004, p. 378). Nnaemeka continues to argue that African feminism challenges us through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal...
land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines. This is one aspect that needs to be upheld in our fight against violence against women. African women need to tread carefully in their negotiations around patriarchy. Knowing when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts (Nnaemeka, 2004, p.378). It is such approaches that are required in our current context to address violence against women.

Conclusion

Violence against women and children is as old as human history, and yet as history unfolds, the situation is becoming so prevalent that it has attracted a serious call for action from all sectors of life in some parts of the continent. The aim of this paper, as previously stated, is not to argue that the pre-colonial era did not experience any form of violence against women. On the contrary, the paper tried to demonstrate how the tools used to address gender-based violence during this period seemed to have worked to the advantage of women. In particular, the community spirit approach and its Ubuntu concept have paramount relevance in the modern context. The paper, therefore, emphasizes the need to borrow some of the traditional tools to combat injustices in society. The paper also called for cultural hermeneutics that would be able to retrieve some positive elements from the frenzied culture. I conclude this paper by also proposing a nego feminist approach to negotiating ‘patriarchal land mines’, as Nnaemeka would call them, towards the empowerment of women in sexual decision-making.

Note


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