

Reversed discrimination and the renegotiation of power in an African society

INTRODUCTION

Gender relations in Africa have always been important especially given the active involvement of women in production as well as reproduction processes. Women have always been actively involved in traditional economies as sole providers of food and nourishment whether such societies are agricultural or pastoral. More recently, women have been intricately involved in the production of goods and services which buoy both local and national economies of different African countries and could easily be noticed in various economic activities in both the traditional and cosmopolitan locale. But more importantly, women are sometimes solely responsible for social reproduction in their capacity as minders of children and young adults. It is usually their responsibility to pass on societal norms and values to the next generation of Africans by helping them understand the ethos and cultural practices of the society. What this suggests is that African women have always held an important place in society both traditional and modern. The difficulty, however, has always been in analysing the power relationships between the sexes in African societies and understanding them in relation to the objectives of the feminist movement, especially, its call for women's emancipation.

BETWEEN PATRIARCHY AND MATRIARCHY

A popular concept of traditional African societies that was fostered by early missionaries and consolidated by colonial officers and early anthropologist is that African societies are predominantly patriarchal and therefore profoundly male focused. This view may have originated from their understanding of the pattern of kinship relations and the distribution of power in society. Writing of the pastoral *Banyoro* of East Africa for instance, John Roscoe expressed a view that is common-placed by noting that «in every instance men

have greater honour paid to them than women, who receive little or none, either during life or death.»¹ This is despite acknowledging that men did much of the pastoral work of the tribe and that women enjoyed a considerable level of freedom, including a level of sexual freedom that he interpreted as polyandry. Again in his study of the traditions of the *Fang*, Georges Balandier observes, «women were the root of all competition because they were most in demand. It seemed that although the women were kept apart from male society, that is to say from the most highly organized and active section of society, the impurity of their nature was periodically proclaimed in order to confirm their subordination.»² This view not only portrays women as commodities that are controlled, traded and fought over by men but also demeans them thus making them to be sometimes instrumentally valuable while at others they are a little less than completely undesirable.

The trio of missionaries, colonial officers and early anthropologist did not only associate the subordination of women with patriarchal societies. In their view, matriarchy was nothing other than an elaborate camouflage that's hides the predominantly patriarchal values of such societies. Indeed for them, matrilineal societies could be said to be matrilineal in a patriarchal way, thus leaving men at the helm of the social power structure. In her study of the *Bemba* group of matrilineal communities, for instance, Annie Lebeuf observed:

*In these various matrilineal systems, although the female element, as such, acquires greater significance than in the systems mentioned earlier, yet the functions of these women who are, so to speak, the symbolic representatives of the matrilineal principle, do not exceed the functions fulfilled by women in the general division of labour between the sexes that is found in the societies in question, where the role of women does not impinge upon the purely masculine activities any more than it does in societies that are patrilineal descent is the rule*³.

Thus even though the line of descent is female and some semblance power is associated with various female political and social figures, Lebeuf identifies ultimate authority with active and aggressive men who are in complete control of events in the society.

On the other hand, there are theorists that maintain that the patriarchal façade that is usually associated with African societies are euro-centric in origin and do not adequately describe gender relations in Africa. They argue that a more egalitarian relationship existed between the sexes in traditional societies and that issues of dominance and subordination never arouse. Some theorists have used the concept of a dual-sex system to describe gender relations in traditional African societies in an attempt to portray the equanimity of the sexes. The idea here is that traditional African societies had separate but paral-

(1) Roscoe, John, *Twenty five Years in East Africa*. (New York: Negro University Press, 1969, p. 254.

(2) Balandier, Georges, *The Sociology of Black Africa*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1970, p. 153.

(3) Lebeuf, Annie, «The Role of Women in Political Organisation of African Societies» in Denise Paulme (ed.) *Women of Tropical Africa*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, p. 102.

lel social and political roles for both men and women, with a gendered system of checks and balances to avoid the subordination of one gender by the other. Using such extant phenomena as female priesthood and spirit mediums, motherhood of the community, male daughters and female husbands, women's economic activities and so on they argue that the euro-centric notion of women's global subordination was alien to African traditional systems. This view that Okonjo (1976) identified with the *Igbos* of Southern Nigeria is also associated with the *Yourubas* of southern Nigeria (Afonja 1986: 122-6), the *Luapula* of Zambia (Poewe 1981: 22), the *Shona/Ndebele* of Zimbabwe (Gaidzanwa (1992), among others.

The idea here is that early Europeans interpreted gender relations in Africa using the dominance-dependence pattern of male/female interaction of Western societies. According to Hubbard, «in traditional anthropological accounts, scholars have always projected contemporary assumptions of male supremacy and female social roles into the pasts that they have studied.»⁴ Hubbard's position is corroborated by the following answer of *Ashanti* elders to Rattray question as to why the elders never told him about the prominent role played by women in the political life of their society despite the fact that he had lived with them for a long time.

*The white man never asked us this; you have dealings and recognize only men; we supposed the European considered women of no account, and we know you do not recognize them as we have always done.*⁵

This shows that the everyday interaction of anthropologists, missionaries and colonial officers with local populations followed a pre-established western pattern and therefore affected the information that they gathered on African traditional societies. The above 1923 observation by Rattray notwithstanding, western scholars of African societies continue to interpret African and other non-western societies with Western concepts. This as Susan Kent observes is, «because one's own culture seems innate or «normal, «both male and female researchers sometimes are not aware that they are applying Western gender concepts to non-Western societies.»⁶ Thus, even today, issues of gender are often discussed using concepts and patterns of discourse that are generated in western societies.

Whatever the situation is or may have been in traditional African societies, there is no doubt that contact with the West altered and continue to alter perceptions of gender relations in Africa. In her assessment of the adverse impact of "colonial-imperialist" ideologies on African and third world women, Mohanty identified three important factors have affected gender relations in African.

(4) Hubbard 1979) quoted in Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory*. New York: Continuum, 1991, p. 284.

(5) Rattray, Capt. R. S. *Ashanti*. New York: Negro University Press 1969 p. 84.

- (1) the ideology of white masculinity as the norm;
- (2) the effects of colonial institutions and policies in transforming indigenous patriarchies and consolidating middle-class cultures globally; and
- (3) the rise of feminist politics and consciousness in colonial contest and against the backdrop of national liberation movements.⁷

Mohanty contends that the tendency of the colonialist and other westerners to relegate women to the “spheres of domestic tasks and private lives” led to the erosion of whatever social or political power they had in traditional societies. Also the introduction of wage labour and the monetary economy and the fact that wage employment was available mostly to males compromised the complementarity of male and female roles in traditional societies. Also, the colonial involvement of males in the political and administrative process contributed to the ascendancy of male power and privilege and the complete absence of any role allocations for women in the process. Thus whereas contact with the West increased the sphere of male authority and responsibility, the sphere of female authority and responsibility decreased as a result of that contact. The above changes in roles and expectations notwithstanding, it is not clear how gender harmony in traditional societies could have been affected by western interference if the added ingredient of western feminist ideas did not come into the equation.

THE BOTSWANA SITUATION

It is not clear what gender relations was like in traditional Botswana but one could hazard a guess that it was no different from what it was in other traditional African societies. As with other African groups, there are indications of an early matriarchal organisation of society even though contemporary records and oral traditions situates the society as patriarchal. There is, for instance, a strong affinity between the maternal uncle and his nephews and nieces such that «one is inclined to ask if this custom of mutually giving presents between uncle and nephew is a relic of a time when descent was counted as matrilineal rather than as we find it at present.»⁸ The present that Brown refers to above is predominantly patriarchal and as he confirms this when he says, «whatever may have been the position of women in the past and however great her influence, today everything points to women being regarded from a purely utilitarian point of view.»⁹ This view is corroborated by Schapera who observes,

(6) Kent, Susan, «Gender and Prehistory in Africa» in Susan Kent (ed.). *Gender in African Prehistory*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1998, p. 15.

(7) Davidson, Jean, *Gender, Lineage and Ethnicity in Southern Africa*. Oxford: Westview Press 1997, p. 34.

(8) Brown, Tom. *Among the Bantu Nomads*. New York: Negro University Press 1926 (repr. 1969) p. 53.

(9) *Ibid.* p. 63.

There is a well defined division of labour between the sexes, certain tasks being traditionally allotted to each. In tribal law, women are treated as perpetual minors, being subject for life to the authority of male guardians; they are also excluded from political assemblies, and though a few have recently acted as regents during the minority of a chief (e. g., among the Ngwaketse and Tswana), all political offices are normally confined to men. Formally, they were likewise barred from officiating at sacrifices and other religious ceremonies now no longer observed; they were, however and still are, some female magicians although this is essentially a male occupation¹⁰.

It is not clear how much of the above represents a true account of traditional Tswana society and how much of it is coloured by Schapera looking at the society through Western lenses. What can be confirmed is that contemporary Tswana society, which grew out of the traditional society that Schapera describes and which has also been influenced by colonialism is predominantly patriarchal.

Again, if we suppose that Schapera's description is accurate, it is not clear how this affected gender harmony or otherwise, what the situation had been concerning gender harmony in traditional Tswana society. Also it is not clear to what extent the colonial and postcolonial institutionalised subjugation of women was a product of the colonial adventure. It is also not clear whether the change in the status of women (if any) elicited some reaction from women such as could have affected gender harmony in the colonial period. What is certain is that post-colonial Botswana inherited a number of statutes, which were recognised as injurious to the development of women and this provided the impetus for the unionisation of women and their acceptance of western feminist ideology. Such statutes include,

- The Married Person's Act – by which the matrimonial domicile was defined as the husband's domicile at the time of marriage and where the marriage is contracted «in community of property» the husband assumes marital powers and thereby becomes the sole administrator of the joint estate.
- The Penal Code – which identifies the wife as the only partner in a marriage who could steal from their jointly owned estate, thus tacitly making the joint estate the property of the husband.
- The Companies Act – by which a woman married «in community of property» is prohibited from accepting the directorship of a company without the husband's consent and which by extension prevents a married woman from acquiring business loans and immovable property.
- The Citizenship Act – which denies citizenship rights to children born to a Botswana woman that are married to foreign men and not vice versa.
- The Deeds Registry Act – which prohibits the registration of immovable property in the name of a woman that is married «in community of property.»

(10) Schapera, I, *The Tswana*. London: Kegan Paul International 1953 (reprinted 1991) p. 31.

- The Adoption Act – which confers Botswana citizenship on an adopted child only if the adopting father is a Motswana.
- The Mines Act – which prohibits women from working underground in the mines.

The activities of the women's movement in Botswana was not only aimed at the repeal of these laws but was also aimed at ensuring equal participation of women in both the political and administrative hierarchies of the country.

In response to their demand for greater participation, the government set up the National Commission for Women and task it with the responsibility of building capacity and empowering women towards greater and equal participation in national affairs. The work of the commission has been very successful, not only have they been able to put in place various programmes of reversed discrimination but also because they have been able to sensitise the population on gender issues. For instance, public and political office holders are not only expected to use gender sensitive language in their public and private engagements, but are also required to be seen to be promoting issues of gender through their respective offices. Thus, government departments and public corporations are expected to have a gender policy, and this involves having a deliberate programme aimed at increasing the participation of women in the decision making cadre of the department or corporation.

But perhaps the most important achievement of the commission and of the women's movement in general has been the enactment of The Abolition of Marital Power Act of 2004. According to section 5 of The Act,

The effect of the abolition of marital power is to remove the restriction which the marital power places on the legal capacity of a wife and abolish the common law position of the husband as head of the family¹¹.

In effect, the Act does not only nullify the relevant section of The Married Persons Act but also nullifies the relevant section of The Companies Act, The Citizenship Act, The Deeds Registry Act, The Adoption Act and the relevant section of the Penal Code. It gives both parties «equal capacities to dispose of the joint estate; contract debts for which the joint estate is liable; and administer the joint estate.»¹² It redefines the domicile of a married woman as well as the domicile of a minor child as not necessarily being the domicile of the husband/father. In short, it defines each partner in the marriage contract as equals with equal duties and privileges.

There is no doubt that the reversed discrimination programmes of the Women's Commission and the enactment of The Abolition of Marital Power Act have been very beneficial to women and has promoted the status of women immeasurably. For instance, Bots-

(11) Republic of Botswana, the Abolition of Marital Power Act, 2004, section 5.

(12) Ibid. section 7.

wana now ranks very highly among nations, in terms of the number of women holding executive positions in the country; the school enrolment of females still outstrips that of males; newspapers openly defend women's rights; the police have the power to arrest and detain, for an indefinite period, any male that threaten a woman with grievous bodily harm or death. Even traditional chieftainship (which for a long time had been the exclusive preserve of men) can now be contested for and there is already a female paramount chief in office. Indeed, it is clear that in every facet of life the power of women is on the ascendancy.

PROBLEMS AND ABSURDITIES

The successes notwithstanding, there are some problems that are readily identifiable with the reversed discrimination programme of the women's commission as well as the abolitions on marital powers. The first is that the abolitions of marital powers only apply to civil marriages contracted in community of property and does not apply to marriages contracted under customary law. Under customary law, the husband still retains his marital power and privileges and can thereby make decisions that affect them both without her consent. This is despite the fact that there are no indications that women that are married under customary law fare better than those married under civil law. Without privilege of supporting data, one can still dare to suggest that the abuse of marital powers may actually be higher in customary marriages. This is because it is usually the poor and the uneducated that are most likely to contract customary marriages and it is the women in such situations that are least likely to know and demand their rights when such rights have been trampled upon by their marriage partner. The question then arises as to whether the rights of women in civil marriages are more important than the rights of women in customary marriages. The question also arises whether marital rights and access social and economic privileges are should only be guaranteed for women in privileged circumstances.

The second problem is that the Abolition of Marital Powers Act does not address certain traditional marriage practices that are known to be injurious to the status of women. In most African societies, Botswana inclusive, civil marriages are mostly conducted after the traditional marriage had been conducted. This is partly because tribal elders refuse to recognise civil marriages and partly because the pomp and ceremony of the traditional ceremony is usually attractive to youth, especially those that grew up in the city. Again the absence of the traditional ceremony is looked upon as an elopement (city marriage), which somehow soils the woman's honour. Thus most couples try to satisfy tradition by starting with a customary marriage and following that up with a civil marriage. But the traditional ceremony usually involves the payment of a bride price or bride wealth in the form of cash, cattle or other tradable goods, by the groom for the bride. In most traditional societies, it is usually understood that the marriage is not properly contracted until the groom completes payment of the price, which can sometimes be very steep. In some traditional

societies, it is regarded as a compensation of the bride's family by the groom for their loss of the reproductive powers of the bride. But despite the fact that many studies have identified this practice as one of the reasons for the subordination of women in marriage, it has not been addressed by the act, and neither has the women's movements made a case against it. Thus, whereas the women's movement professes to defend women's rights and reject all practices that demean the status of women, they turn a blind eye to traditional marriage ceremonies where women are traded as chattel but later object when women are treated as one within marriage.

The third problem is that women are generally unwilling to denounce the privileges that go along with subordination but would rather want to keep them along with the new marital powers. The capacity building of women does not orient them to stop expecting flowers from men or to otherwise also buy flowers for men, it does not orient them to open their doors and pull out their own seats or otherwise also open doors and pull out seats for men, it does not orient them speak out in a restaurant when the waiter routinely takes the bill to the man or to refuse his half-hearted objections to her settling of a part of the bill. It does not orient them to open the window and look outside when the dog barks at night. And even when trouble brews as a result of their actions in the management of the joint estate, the man is still expected to assume a prominent role in managing the crisis. In other words, a one-way flow of privileges continues to be maintained despite the abolition of marital powers.

Although the above might appear to be frivolous, it is an indication of a skewed programme of gender balance, which merely legislate gender equality without addressing the underlying problems and role allocations that go with gender subordination. Traditional male roles usually mirror the superior physical strength of the male and it is expected that males should achieve a certain degree of success in life. Males are traditionally cattle herders, which even though sometimes regarded as a lazy occupation, is also fraught with dangers because of the risk of confrontation with wild animals. Through the traditional *mafisa*¹³ programme, the male is expected to accumulate the cattle with which he will pay for his bride. He is also expected to provide a domicile for the family and increase his fortunes so as to protect his family with his wealth and influence. On the other hand, the role of women in traditional society does not place such high expectations on her. Thus when a woman heads a household, she is regarded as exceptional whereas if the same household is headed by a man, it is merely part of his duty. Again when a woman succeeds in any endeavour, it is exceptional whereas males are expected to be successful or otherwise face ridicule.

Although contemporary society has changed considerably, social expectations for males still remains high. Although the advent of wage labour and the migration of people to urban centres have broken part of the strangle hold of tradition on people's lives, it has

(13) A programme where poor adult males or youths herd cattle for wealthy cattle owners and are rewarded with the calf of every alternate birth in the flock.

not completely removed changed the sex roles in society and the expectations that come with such roles. The male child is still trained not to cry when hurt or run away when terrified, whereas the same is not expected of female children. The male child, irrespective of his circumstance, is still expected to pay for his bride and afford the other nuances that are associated with the male role. The uncle still has responsibilities towards his nieces and nephews, which the aunt does not have. Thus whereas the privileges that enabled men to function in these roles are gradually being eroded, the role expectations has not changed. Also, whereas there have been many capacity building programmes that target females, such programmes are not geared towards reversing the role expectations of males. Again the commission has not advocated for any special programme that will help men adjust to the new power situation. In other words, males have not been schooled to stop being “males” and females, though they have been schooled to pursue success in their own right, have not been schooled to stop expecting males to be “males”.

THE GENDER MAINSTREAMING PROGRAMME

The gender programme of the government has primarily been handled by the Women's Affairs Department and that the programme has been primarily focused on women empowerment and reversed discrimination. For instance, the Botswana National Gender Programme purports to look at «the relative roles and responsibilities of both men and women»¹⁴ but focuses primarily on and recognizes the girl child as a critical area of concern. Thus, its 1999 to 2003 short-term plan for action is primarily women centred and does not make any provisions for empowering the males to adjust to the new status of women. For instance, its public policy and programme of the action entails a «review of existing policies and programmes with the aim of making them more gender responsive and accessible, and to expand coverage.»¹⁵ The programmes that are being referred to include,

- Maternal and child health and family planning
- Policy relating to the continuing education of a pregnant school girl
- Day car and pre-school education programmes
- Vocational education and non-formal education
- Youth programmes in skills training
- Remote area dwellers and other poverty alleviation programmes
- Credit programmes.

(14) National Gender Programme (Popular Version). Gaborone: Government Printer, 1999, p. 1.

(15) Women's affairs Department, Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, Short Term Plan for Action: National Gender Programme 1999-2003, pp. 3-5.

Its plan for the development of new policies and programmes include,

- Cervical cancer education, screening and treatment
- Police protocol for handling victims of violence
- Sexual harassment at workplace
- Drug/ alcohol abuse services

Its policies to promote gender transformation and stop discrimination include,

- Affirmative action policy (_ of all senior management positions should be women)
- Development of gender policy in all ministries
- Guidelines for non discriminatory practices in recruitment
- Policies to promote men's participation in gender committees.

Although on the surface these programmes do not appear biased, but taken in context, the focus of the programme is much more apparent.

The focus of the programme is not surprising, especially in the post-Beijing context of women's development. Yet cautionary voices concerning the lopsided nature of the gender programme had already been raised long before the programme had been developed and such concerns should have been taken into account in developing the programme. One such concern was raised by Alice Mogwe who in her country analysis observed,

*The majority of projects are more women-oriented than gender-oriented. Their main aim is to empower women without conscious regard of the interactive role which both men and women play in society*¹⁶.

The same document also point out that, «current research conducted both within the government ministries and at the university do not use a definite gender approach. Research has been and continues to be women-focused.» The result of this has been that issues of gender are commonly understood as issues of women thus neglecting the men folk who in turn develop a laissez-faire attitude towards women issues.

Patriarchy is defined by Tusscher as «a set of social relations between men, which have a material base and which, although hierarchical, establish and create interdependence and solidarity among men which enable them to dominate women.»¹⁷ It is this definition of patriarchy that has been adopted by the women's commission and used as a basis for formulating a gender policy for the country. This view assumes that since traditional Botswana is often regarded as patriarchal that invariably, this translated to privileges for men and subjugation for all women. It also assumes that patriarchal institution benefits all

(16) Mogwe, Alice, *Country Gender Analysis: Botswana*; Prepared for the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), July, 1992, p. 27.

(17) Tusscher, Tersa, «Patriarchy, Capitalism and the New Right» in Judith Evans et. al (eds.), *Feminism and Political Theory*. London: Sage Pub. Ltd, 1986, p. 76.

men and disadvantages all women such that in reversing the trend, all men should be treated as the same. Thus the gender development policy and the activities of the women's movement in general is based on the belief that the rights of women can only be guaranteed when their position approximates that of men in all spheres. The primary method of achieving this is by reversing past injustices through a deliberate programme of affirmative action by which the interests of women is promoted over and above those of men so that, within the shortest span of time, women will catch up with men in all spheres of life.

PATRIARCHY AND REVERSED DISCRIMINATION

But patriarchy does not necessarily entail the subjugation of women, even though the feminist movement has adopted this definition for it. By its definition, a patriarch is merely the male head of a clan and his duties include the protection of all members of the clan as well as the settling of disputes between them. It is not merely position of privilege but also a position of responsibilities to which the patriarch is bound and by which his success as a patriarch is defined. In appropriating some of the productive resources of members of his clan, it is usually understood that the patriarch will use such resources for the general good of the clan. Where such resources have been properly used to benefit the clan, the patriarch inspires loyalty in his subjects but where the subjects perceive that the resources have been misappropriated, the patriarch may lose the respect of his people. There is no doubt that like any other system, patriarchy has been open to abuse and productive resources have been appropriated towards the personal aggrandizement of the patriarch, but this not peculiar to patriarchy but is common to most political systems. This has been clearly documented of matriarchal or otherwise androgynous societies. Thus, the stipulated use of patriarchy in contemporary feminist studies to portray the subjugation of women simply amounts to "giving a dog a bad name in order to hang it."

Again, it will be erroneous to conclude that even in societies where men benefited from patriarchy, that it was a collective contrivance by all men to control and appropriate the productive resources of women and that all men in such societies benefited from that contrivance. Society is not only divided into male and female, but also into young and old, rich and poor, lower and higher casts, etc. and sometimes the age, class and cast accords one more privileges than sex or gender. For instance, an older female of a higher class or cast can sometimes have the capacity to appropriate or control the productive resources of people in the lower class or cast more than any patriarch could, irrespective of whether such people are male or female. Thus it could be argued that even in those circumstances where the privileges of patriarchy have been abused, some women sometimes benefit more from it than some men. Although the above argument establishes that some men are subjugated under patriarchy, it is not a good defence of patriarchy because as Rowan observes, «values under patriarchy are supremacy values ... things must be divided into superior

and inferior and general supremacy given to that which is superior.»¹⁸ What this means is that the desire to appropriate and control the productive resources of others is generated by patriarchy and perpetually nurtured by it. Even if the above were true, it would be erroneous to assume that because patriarchy as a male institution generates supremacy values, the resultant hierarchy is entirely male and those who toil to pay for the hierarchy are entirely female. Nowhere else is this more apparent than in the current feminist project which, while retaining the supremacy values of patriarchy works toward benefiting as much from the resultant hierarchy as the males.

It is clear that not every man under patriarchy is a patriarch and that many men suffer under patriarchy, as do women. April Carter underscores this point when she defines patriarchy as «an institution whereby half the population which is female is controlled by half the population which is male, and deduced two main principles of patriarchy: men dominate women and older men dominate younger.»¹⁹ This view, despite its obvious partisanship underscores a basic truth of patriarchy and that is that younger men are also dominated and subjugated under patriarchy as women. Sherwin also supports this view when she defines patriarchy as «the rule of the fathers, with its hierarchal organisation of political life»²⁰. What is apparent from the above is that it is the older male who wields the power in patriarchy and that both younger males and females are subject to it. But even this is not entirely true because some older men are also dominated under patriarchy in the same way as women and younger. Viewed in this way, it is apparent that patriarchy has more to do with class and power than with sex and gender.

Although I had started out to discuss the negotiation of power between the sexes in Botswana, there is no doubt that some of the observations contained in the above could be generalised to cover the contemporary feminist movement. The gender programme in Botswana is a reflection of a dangerous trend in the women's movement, not only in Botswana but also around the world. The greatest appeal of the women's rights movement is not because women are people but because women are people and therefore women's rights are human right. But in contemporary practice, women are fast becoming like the Bolsheviks who after overthrowing the bourgeoisies in order to set up a mass movement, turned round to assume the very privileges that made the bourgeoisies abhorrent. In other words, the women's movement has abandoned the egalitarian message of the early suffragettes to pursue an elitist agenda that aims at securing privileges for a select few. What this means is that women's rights are no longer pursued as human rights that benefits a cross section of people but is now a scramble for power and privileges that is wholly aligned to the supremacy values of patriarchy.

(18) Rowan, John, *The Horned God*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, p. 9.

(19) Carter, April, *The Politics of Women's Rights*. London: Longman, 1988, p. 175.

(20) Sherwin, Susan, «Philosophical Methodology and Feminist methodology: Are they Compatible» in A. Gary and M. Pearsall (eds.) *Women, Knowledge and Reality*. New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 55.

The above does not, however, discount the basic assumption of the feminist movement that human society and its structures have generally been unfair to women. There is no doubt that in colonial and postcolonial African societies, the plethora of opportunities that were opened to males were not opened to females. But it is also true that a large majority of men were not sufficiently empowered to access these opportunities. It could be argued that the supremacy values of patriarchy that permeated society at the time made such men, even in their dis-empowered situation, to be better than the women in the same situation. But as has already been argued, there were women who in their disadvantaged position were better than some men. Be that as it may, the way to redress this is not to create new inequalities and friction between the sexes but rather to create more opportunities and build capacity so that the previously disadvantaged can move up in society. A power sharing arrangement between patriarchs and matriarchs that discounts the interests of the generality cannot address the basic inequalities in society but would rather leave young men and women disillusioned when their hope of joining the elite ranks of patriarchs and matriarchs are frustrated. It is clear that gender equity cannot be achieved by a mere dethronement of patriarchy but rather by a clear redefinition of roles and expectations followed by a concerted attempt to provide for the needs of different sections of the society in a just and equitable manner.

A policy of reversed discrimination that neglects social education and the redefinition of roles and expectations is potentially dangerous in the sense that it turns gender balancing into the war of the sexes. Although primary research into the fallouts of the Botswana gender programme has not been conducted, there is a perception that the inter gender violence that currently plagues the country, may be as a direct result of this neglect. The most horrific brand of this violence, which is locally referred as “passion killing”, involves the killing of one partner by the other who in most cases also commits suicide. According to police statistics, there were 54 such killings in 2003, 56 in 2004, 85 in 2005 (the year the abolition of marital powers act came into effect), 62 in 2006 and between January 1 and February 18, 2007, 14. Prior to 2003 the police department treated such cases as routine homicide and therefore did not keep any separate records of passion killings. This is also because before then, its incidence was not significant to warrant a separate homicide category. Indeed the president of the country confirmed this when he said, «the concept of passion killing is alien to our history and our culture»²¹

Although police statistics reveal that the victims of passion killing are both male and female, the general view in society is that it is men who kill women. For in stance, in a view that is representative of the general belief on passion killing, Lucas, observes,

Men who have lost power through the progressive empowerment of women feel thoroughly frustrated at their failure to handle relations, hence they resort to violence... asserts that the psychological theory of «frustration and aggression»²².

(21) Mogae, Festus, «Justice must be seen to be done – Mogae» *Daily News*, August 9, 2005.

What is interesting in the above is that it identifies the loss of power by men as the primary reason for passion killing. It is also significant that the rate of passion killing seems to follow the trend in women empowerment, with 2005, the year the abolition of marital power act came into effect, recording the highest incidence of passion killing. It is not clear whether the drop in 2006 is an indication of greater accommodation of the new power position of females by males or merely a temporary lull.

Interestingly, the police recommend «intensified public education/sensitisation» and the «provision of easily accessible and discrete counselling service»²³ as a mean of stemming the incidence of passion killing. The use of the word «discrete» by the police may be an indication that by their estimation, the public has not come to terms with the changing power relations and that persons seeking counselling may wish to do so discretely. Again their recommendations signify that engineering gender equity is not merely a matter of promoting the interest of one sex over that of the other but also involves investing time and resources in both sexes in such a way that none feels neglected by the process. It is significant that the police did not single out men as those who need education and sensitization but rather wants it to cover the whole society. This is an indication that it is not only people who loose power in a relationship that need to be trained on how to handle their loss of power. Those who gain power also need to be trained on how to wield their new power so as not to offend the sensibilities of the other party.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I had set out to look at the attempt by African societies to engineer gender balance through a process of reverse discrimination. In doing so I have looked at how the concept of patriarchy in contemporary feminist discourse has influenced the gender programme in a specific African society. I have made an exploratory review of the impact of reverse discrimination in a specific African society and tried to identify some of the fallouts of a lopsided approach to gender balancing. It is important, at this point to stress that issues of gender are primarily human rights issues and that when women demand equal access into privileges and opportunities, it is not because they are women but rather because they are human beings and as such deserve such an access. Thus issues of gender are primarily issues of the underprivileged and needs to be attended to as such. Creating a parallel hierarchy of privileges for women will not solve the problem of access for underprivileged men and women. A culture of looking after its own, which seems to be the primary approach of women's movements on issues of gender, is not only mistaken but ultimately dangerous for gender harmony.

(22) Lucas, T. Quoted in Gabathuse, R. «Killings without a reason» *Mmegi* Newspaper June 14, 2005. p. 6.

(23) Commissioner of Police, Ref.: POL 31/1/1XII (316).