

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS OF EDUCATING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND ACTIONS IN THEIR MISSION FOR EMANCIPATION AND CHANGE: DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICES

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In this paper, the writer analysed the problems caused by the absence of leadership from educated women in the long process of the emancipation of women in Ethiopia or in the generation of a women's movement or feminism. Why is such feminist leadership crucial? It's known that women's leadership and participation are marked as important indicators of gender equality, democracy and transparency. There are global efforts to study different forms of leadership to analyse the gaps and problems in order to come up with leadership forms compensating for those. One of these is feminist leadership. However, everything that is amiss with the current masculine forms of leadership might not necessarily be corrected by feminist or feminine leadership. In Ethiopia, authoritarianism or the excessive exercise of authority and hierarchy offer no much room for women's leadership due to the lower positioning of women in the hierarchy. For women, to be born and raised within such culture, these top-down approaches form a barrier to the emergence of their leadership. The lack of critical insights also covers the shortcomings and problems. In such situations, what kind of leadership could best benefit educated women in Ethiopia to lead women's emancipation? And how can this become a reality? Many of the barriers are slowly being revealed. They are historical and continuous. For instance, the socio-cultural and religious environment blended with political authority has been the norm in Ethiopia for centuries. Within these, women, have been always at a disadvantaged position, denied freedom and progress.

Keywords: challenges and problems, educating, emancipation, women's leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The masculine political culture is inherent in the traditional make-up of society where there is no room for women's leadership. This trend is not only observed among the ruling party at present, but also among the emerging opposition groups. This was observed among educated active women who were co-opted by these parties. They realized that they were merely symbolic and instrumental in securing female voters for the party while those parties were completely void of any agenda on women's concerns and refused to acknowledge gender issues as a priority concern.

However, the political culture should not be seen as the only limitation to women's advancement. There is also an absence of any significant women's movement that could generate an emancipation agenda. Among the small group of educated, the level of consciousness had not reached the extent to promote and model a women's movement in the past. Many problems at the time could have contributed to this. Otherwise, Ethiopian history is rich in positive role models of daring, even death-defying women taking the lead. There were women who took risks and endured. In many countries across the world at present, women can be found enduring and taking risks under extremely repressive political systems, such as in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is crucial to realize here that each time frame and context produces its own heroines. One could wonder whether there are any such prominent personalities at present in Ethiopia daring to take a leadership role and provide structure to a women's movement.

The combined powers of the state and religion for centuries have added to the comprehensive internalization among women on the perceptions of their exclusion and subordination and on their leadership. With the influences of globalization, where Ethiopia finally could not isolate itself from, some changes have been filtering through causing for the defeat of some of these ancient perceptions, but more needs to be done to alter these. Some changes have started to surface, albeit very slowly.

At a global level, women's leadership has been gaining prominence in the twenty-first century, reaching out to the remotest grassroots communities. Supported by the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and other international instruments, an increasing number of women's organizations in many countries are setting up mechanisms to advance women's increased "enrolment" in politics. Centuries of discrimination are being revealed at an alarming rate where professional women have taken the lead in assisting and equipping their sisters in the process.

The reason for this is that women's leadership is increasingly being recognized as paramount in tackling gender disparities and finding solutions to the many gender problems in a given context and time frame. Relying on the patriarchal state apparatus to carry out this mission on its own has proven futile and women are increasingly carrying their own torch. The obvious expectation of increasing women's political leadership in numbers is that once a critical mass of women is in place, their interests and rights will gain a boost and many of their problems will be placed on the political agenda, enforcing solutions. However, as has been stressed by Rhode (1994), numbers are not enough to advance a women's agenda or achieve gender equality. What is primarily needed is feminist leadership: "elect *feminists*, not just females", because they are better equipped to alter the patriarchal political environment in order to institutionalize feminist initiatives. Disparities remain thus between countries and while women in some countries have succeeded better in taking advantage of political opportunities (like, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa), others are still lagging behind.

LITERATURE REVIEW

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS AMONG WOMEN IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is experiencing an upsurge of many new gender initiatives, often externally initiated. One of those related to the national elections in 2000. A few NGOs took the initiative to collaborate with donors and international agencies to promote women's leadership. This was accompanied by various seminars, discussions and meetings on the subject. Many of those, however, stressed similar points of focus and angles, namely: women's political leadership and the prevalent obstacles preventing them from gaining such positions. Plenty of solutions and ideas were forwarded to remedy those obstacles (Mintwab, 2005). The main concern is who will take up those ideas and accommodate the changes? Not the ruling party, where promotion of women's leadership does not fall within its margins of rhetoric on women's emancipation. Not the opposition, which is too weak on that front. Not civic actors, who lack the skills and capacity. And definitely not those who identified those obstacles because that is as far as their briefing went. The result is that many of those recommendations end up being shelved and forgotten, until new seminars are organized by different groups on the same issues discussing the same problems again. This repetitive action reveals the absence of a critical consciousness to move beyond the results of the first studies. There are no signs of new approaches, paradigms or focus areas. There is also no initiation to take up the task of challenging the educated women themselves, although that is a very sensitive area. The lack of unity also diminishes such responsibilities as it is considered better not to air one's critical insights instead of having too many that would reveal the hidden divisions.

The majority of leadership studies in Ethiopia present more or less the same arguments and foundation. A few scholars have conducted studies on the problems of women's leadership and presented their analytical findings on the causes. The first studies were enlightening and promising. But as the studies on the subject increased, they started to reflect a repetition of what was revealed in the first studies with minor alterations. The uniform detection of causes in most of the studies points to the universality of the problem. They are listed here:

Cultural, traditional and religious belief systems and barriers or ceilings (women's appropriate place and things they can do as dictated by their culture, tradition and religion)

Patriarchy (male chauvinism, refusing to accept or recognize female leadership)

Male control (husbands and other male relatives refusing to allow women to take up such roles)

Socialization (hierarchical destiny where women are taught to be submissive, passive, unquestioning and so on)

Women's perceptions of politics as a male domain**Lack of confidence in women's capabilities by males and females****Multiple roles of women (enormous workload)****Lack of assertiveness among women (low self-esteem)****Low level of education****Economic insecurity (lack of control over and access to resources and work overload)****Gender-based violence****Lack of role models****Poverty**

Professional glass ceiling (professional level of employment for women beyond which they are not supposed to move) (Azeb, 2003; Berouk, 2004; Meron, 2005). Each study tried to create greater understanding of the problems of women's leadership.

However, they did not move beyond rhetorical presentations that could take the concerns to newer heights and depths. For instance, none of the studies considered the decade's long gaps in women's leadership and what consequences that has for the re-starting of women's leadership. The rhetorical issues that are reflected in all of them, such as blaming society and culture, are not unique to Ethiopian society, but found in many traditional societies across the world. They can be overcome (Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Nigeria, Iran, Kuwait, and so forth). In fact, Ethiopian women are considered lucky with their legal system in order regarding women's rights (by their sisters in neighbouring countries). Based on this one could question what have they achieved that could be seen as outstanding in the region or in their own country? There is a conspicuous silence among educated women on the real problems of leadership and many don't go beyond the barriers mentioned above. But these external problems that are already in circulation, have now all been identified many years ago.

Then, what is remaining and/or overlooked? Perhaps the educated do not feel concerned with the enlisted problems assuming those not affecting them.

But who do they talk about then when they speak of the barriers affecting women's leadership? Which women are supposed to take up the leadership?

SYMBOLIC LEADERSHIP

Symbolic leadership is defined as leadership without any power, qualification or input. It is like a decoration, a symbol or a façade to occupy space and positions which could have been used by more suitable and qualified people. In Ethiopia, women appointed in political posts are seen as occupying symbolic leadership posts because they are merely symbolic in serving political interests. This is one of the reasons that they are often not taken serious by their male counterparts and constituencies (Delmar, 2005; Lenesil, 2006).

Linked to this, there is a serious flaw in many of the leadership studies that focus on the number of women entering politics. These studies fail to analyze that political positioning is not equal to authentic leadership. They only recognize the level of incompetence among the selected or appointed women and recommend development of their skills and capacities to remedy those. But none tangibly face the lack of decision making power (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003) and real leadership among these women. Real leadership is more demanding and includes experience, intellect, accountability, transparency, constituency backing and democracy. It definitely includes decision-making powers. Positioning is symbolic, shallow, arrogant and an imposition devoid of content. It has been a historic trait in Ethiopia to appease loyalists and exert control. It is a political gesture only to maintain the political status quo and secure the implementation of policies. This symbolic form of leadership is expected in the political climate of the country where one authoritarian ruler has replaced another for centuries. Political positioning of women takes the form of tokenism and therefore cannot serve as role model. This has a demoralizing impact on many who do not wish to be seen in such

posts. After all, at the end of the political posts of those positioned many leave silently without having made a difference. Such actions create a further backlash regarding women's leadership aspirations and acceptance. In a similar manner, politically and internationally agreed introduction of quotas cannot represent genuine leadership and has already created many forms of resistance, even though, from a gender angle, they are justified. Symbolic leadership does not serve the awakening of feminist consciousness but works as a diversion. Could educated women and the global feminist movement have fallen victim to this? In a few countries, women have realized the weak capacity of women placed in political leadership and have developed programmes to aid those women through capacity development and training. This, however, is not the case in Ethiopia. Despite the training, one has to be cautious that training alone cannot instill feminism in women as feminism is a process of individuation.

PROBLEMS OF PERCEPTION

Perceptions are the most crucial determinant in women's rights. They are taught and learned through socialization and indoctrination within a given socio-cultural setting. Over time, these become the norm, taken-for-granted and natural. In turn, perceptions inform agency and direct thought. In the Ethiopian context, perceptions are a historical product emerging through continuous and persistent political, religious and cultural discourses, where certain ethnic traits have been elevated as reflecting national identity. These have left serious marks on the perceptions of people of many things. And, as perceptions inform and guide views and visions, they determine possibilities and trends on women's emancipation.

Many among the educated religious women who are employed at gender/women's desks show extreme discrepancies. Some are not open for criticism of their religious views and consider it an offence to question those views.

This relative inability or unwillingness to face the problems makes it harder to engage educated religious women into challenging traditional systems of oppression in order to strategize for changes. There is no investigation or deep reflection on the link between religion and the fabric of patriarchy.

This shortcoming further obscures the extent and role of religion in women's oppression. And, as religion provides believers with a vantage point through which they interpret the world around them (Shaheed, 1989), educated religious women too fail to realize that their agency has been robbed from them and that they are wearing religious lenses. The main issue of concern in Ethiopian society is not whether women are religious or not, but their level of religiosity. This is a very important determinant in the approach and expectations educated women have of society and for the future. It also determines the emancipation course and speed. Many blame everything around them for their own shortcomings and lack of radicalism. Culture, history, tradition, government, the Derg, and occasionally religion, are not spared. This effectively puts a barrier around them, implying that they are not to be blamed for their inaction simply because they cannot. Equally observed is the level of indifference among the educated in this group who have surrendered to their religion and expect their god to help them in everything, from passing exams to finding husbands, rich men, jobs, solving marital problems, and so forth. When even the educated remain intoxicated, one can but wonder whether a breakthrough would ever be possible, or whether any change or advocacy for change will be received positively by these women.

Internalization is then closely associated with perceived social control even when there is no actual control. Leadership in traditional societies is a clear example of this where women affirm its masculine character and 'voluntarily' refrain from pursuing it. Ethiopia too has fallen under the global hype on how women's leadership can bring gender equality. There is a lot of talk about it, but not many educated women have leadership aspirations. This was affirmed in a study conducted by Yalew Endawoke, 2000 where it was revealed that educated women did not show any specific form of aspiration to take up leadership roles. Socio-cultural and religious ceilings have become internalized and prevent women from making demands or challenging existing patriarchal perceptions regarding the height of the ceilings. Many do not even consider defying the ceilings and demanding their place at the top. This lack of motivation and inhibited perception is very serious because, though the barriers are identified at various leadership training sessions and seminars, no genuine efforts are put into removing the barriers. Facts and figures do not tell the real story. Among the appointed few in political posts, the ceiling obviously forms a serious stumbling block beyond which educated women cannot move. This is obvious because of the practice of positioning. When party cadres are positioned in their posts, they are not required to possess the required intellect or skills. Eventually this turns against them.

Etsegennet (2003) noted that the educated "*simply lack a proactive spirit*" in this regard. The fear of visibility is tremendous. This brings into question the issue of leadership. While many among the educated, exposed women could play a meaningful role in providing leadership, they fail to do so. The issue could be not only whether they are gender sensitized, but also whether they lack the ambitions to become leaders. Many simply have never considered that option

and leave it to “others”, including outsiders and foreigners. This in turn contributes to the lack of local initiatives in the field. The almost indestructible cultural stereotypes add more weight to this inaction. And, though one can be assured that stereotypes can be overcome through education, when it concerns women’s leadership in Ethiopia, education plays no role in influencing people’s thoughts (Yalew, 2000). The educated have not shown any action yet to counter this.

The main question here is: Do educated women perceive that they have a role to play in the emancipation of women in Ethiopia? Are they sensitive and most importantly, capable, of taking up those challenges and making choices? The number of women exposed to international culture, issues, trends, discourses and practices has increased dramatically. However, many travel abroad not to learn new things, but mainly to have holidays or visit families or go for studies. Among the students, many return but do not convey their knowledge within their own organizations or in the country at large. Given kinds of radicalism or that you cannot bring this or that from abroad to change the traditional mindset at home. Travelling thus does not necessarily translate into transforming a person into a critical catalyst for change.

Similar perceptions are also found among educated women. Gender activists are found preaching practices they themselves fail to adhere to. If a gender desk worker from the government or NGO conducts training on gender roles and calls for an increased role for men in sharing domestic tasks, explaining why such is beneficial to society at large, why are they then hesitant to apply the same in their own lives? Among the older generation this is the most serious flaw observed which brings their credibility (and thus their leadership) into question. But among the younger generation similar forms of hypocritical perceptions can be observed where they use the country’s rigid culture to excuse their own distance. This dual mask among educated women is quite misleading. Among the few there is again a small proportion that could be credited for being genuine, but they are so few that their impact is not making any significant contribution yet.

Within this dual perception there are those who assume themselves to be experts in women’s concerns. The bureaucrats openly have a position of senior and junior women’s experts. Some women in civil society also claim to be experts. Considering the country’s educational status and lack of comprehensive gender training at the time, the word ‘expert’ is even questionable. Possessing the skills and knowledge does not automatically make one into a leader or activist just like speaking and lecturing does not make one into an expert. Calling oneself then a feminist is totally misleading because of lack of self transformation and radicalization.

AUTHORITARIAN TENDENCY AND HIERARCHY

Ethiopia has a long history of authoritarian rule where the different groups of people (divided by ethnicity, religion, gender, age, race, and so forth) were hierarchically structured in society. Authoritarianism and hierarchy determined undemocratic approaches in political rule and also informed relations between the different groups, including women. Women of the nobility had a higher ranking than men from lower hierarchies. As an ancient heritage, these traits are still found to be prevalent. Undemocratic tendencies are observed at practical all levels of society, from the top (government) to civic groups (NGOs, CSOs). The historical prevalence of consequent authoritarian regimes upholding hierarchies did not leave much time to practice democratic rule. Most leadership positions are held by people who were present during the emperor or the Derg regime. This means that they grew up in undemocratic settings where authoritarianism and hierarchy were norms. Women have not remained immune from these tendencies. As a product of society, they are initially in charge of carrying over the cultural heritage from generation to generation; they abide by these strict rules and divisions. Authoritarian structures and hierarchy are therefore also observed among women. These traits can be traced within organizational and institutional cultures.

Hierarchy and authoritarianism reflect top-down approaches. Within many institutions and organizations these are normal practice. For instance, among the bureaucrats in the government there is no doubt about the use of hierarchical ranking and top-down approaches. When one attends a meeting with the women’s machinery, the atmosphere changes from relaxed to tense. There will be no use of critical language. Instead, one has to be very cautious not to offend them and turn to accommodating approaches. It is not surprising that final decisions or conclusions always rest in their hands. The enforced cooperation between women’s desks in NGOs and bureaucrats of the women’s machinery also reflect such top-down tendencies in which the bureaucrats impose their dominance. Hierarchies are also present in different social settings and among different groups where those higher in the rank (for instance, directors, elders, males) have higher authority. This respect for authoritarian hierarchical structures is deeply ingrained among the masses in Ethiopian society and difficult to counter. In a top-down manner all societal relations and activities are ordered accordingly. At any level except the very highest, there is one that is higher up the hierarchy whose interests gain priority.

As a cultural trait, it becomes difficult to challenge hierarchy. It forms a serious stumbling block to consensus-building and organizing for change. It also prevents equality, democracy and leaves no room for critical dialogue. Bauman (1976:103) stipulates that “Distorted communication constitutes a situation of inequality between the partners of a

dialogue; the situation where one of the partners is incapable, or incapacitated, to the extent of not being able to take up a symmetrical posture toward his opposite ...". He asserts that "If such a situation takes place on a permanent basis, by institutionalized domination, it "deprives some partners from those means and assets without which taking an equal stand in dialogue becomes impossible" (ibid). To think that this practice is common in Ethiopia explains women's reluctance to take the initiative to tackle a problem, no matter how dire the situation. The hierarchical system is devoid of criticism, especially directed against those higher in the hierarchy. Evidence can be found of criticism that is hardly welcomed or appreciated at any level in society. Instead, it is always understood as a personal attack, including among the educated. Among the ruling party, its lack of tolerance for criticism leaves nothing to the imagination: one is either with or against the party. Among civil society it creates divisions and factions. This adds to the lengthy procedures and repetition of the same seminars or sees a return of the same people making the same mistakes while none dare to challenge them.

NEED FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

So little is done in the field of women's rights that whenever something emerges as a major achievement, the competition for getting credit increases. On average, the bureaucrats or women's machinery are the dominant players in the field of taking international and national credit for actions and achievements on women's rights in the country. Even when initiatives are undertaken in the form of enforced co-operation with civil society, the main acknowledgements go to the bureaucrats. This boosts their ego and confidence and encourages future exploitation.

This issue of taking credit or getting acknowledgement is disturbing. Working with the machinery is one of serious pretensions. The level of praise and compliments extended to it should actually indicate that something is wrong. It reflects the submission of civil society and helplessness of its actors. One has to be fully aware of such operations to grasp its depth and extent. However, as this is the only way to get approval for one's activities and obtain permission for implementation, many have no choice. Enforced cooperation also carries the risk of losing one's innovative ideas to the bureaucrats. It would not be the first time that genuine ideas have been whisked away by the bureaucrats and presented as their own (case of gender budgeting). Such practices are corrupt.

Acknowledgement is also demanded by educated women working in different areas on women's issues, who claim these as their monopoly. There are not many organizations doing the same, with the exception of the welfare areas of micro credit, literacy and healthcare for women. Given the dire situation of women, the level of competition is incomprehensible. The desire for credit or to be the first or the only one can defeat the whole cause of women's emancipation. It creates serious frustrations and divisions, causing some to abandon the struggle. This also hampers the formation of women's leadership because without humility leadership can become authoritarian and would not serve feminist ends. There is an urgent need to have many more women's organizations dealing with women's issues, due to the extent of the problems.

THE GENERATION GAP

Among the educated there are many serious issues which need to be viewed closely in order to grasp their action-inaction on women's emancipation in the country. One of the most visible and obvious concerns is the generation problem. The torch that was sparked by the now older generation in the late 1970s was not continued among the current generation. A generation ago women were actively striving to enter the education system and struggled for their rights. There were many women who contributed in the struggle to increase the school enrolment of girls (Pankhurst, 1991; Mulama, 2005). They persisted during that time to find their place in the masculine setting of Ethiopian society. These were educated women who were driven on their own to achieve and demand women's rights to education.

The older generation could be directly responsible for the level of inaction among the youth. Mothers are known to be the link to the past and hopes for the future. They play a strong role in changing society through their children. On the one hand thus, at the time women struggled to increase the access to higher education for their daughters, they could not isolate them from the influences of Western culture.

This has its own implications on the youth where many are focused on leaving the country and migrating.

On the other hand, the older generation remained resolute in their faith to their religion, assuring the indoctrination of the youngsters from a very tender age.

There are many youngsters at present with conservative belief patterns where change and transformation are not issues to be considered. This has left its mark on the continuation of the emancipation struggle of women. It is not an illusion to stress then that one is not born a feminist.

LACK OF ORGANIZATION AND NETWORKING

Women's organization and networking are crucial in their quest for emancipation. Organization provides ideology, direction, mission and vision and most importantly, leadership. Networking provides critical mass formation, solidarity and consensus building. Both are linked to bringing women together for a common agenda and joint action. With over 80 local organizations catering for women's programmes in the country, only 15 to 20 are fully women's organizations. Their focus areas are mainly in health care, micro credits, education and training. Beside these, there are over 30 international organizations and at least eight United Nations agencies with a gender desk.

There is one visible academic institution, the Institute of Gender Studies at Addis Ababa University and a few smaller department sections located in other universities such as Jimma University or at the Management Institute. Among all these, one of the most serious shortcomings in the quest for women's emancipation remains the historically influenced lack of organization. There is no clear consensus on the importance of getting organized, forming networks or creating a critical mass. Sporadic efforts have been made to form women's networks for the purpose of forming different organizations, but many weaken after their initiation and fail. The longest-lasting non-formal associations of women are at community level. These include the idirs, mahbers and the numerous work associations. But these do not have a political or feminist base. Similarly, various professional associations, such as women's poetry clubs or women's entrepreneurs' associations do not entertain a feminist agenda or women's emancipation.

The bureaucrats are also divided among themselves. The Women's Affairs Office (WAO) is the head and the branches in the regions are women's affairs bureaus (WABs). The desk operators at the various ministries are women's affairs departments (WADs). At the lower administrative organs of the ruling party, such as the woredas and kebelles, there are women's desks often staffed by one person. But such divisions do not imply an organized structure. Many women's affairs staff are more accountable directly to their line ministries or local government bodies than to the WAO. Some even complain that they are never involved in discussions, only given instructions. At other times, the WADs admitted that they are not cooperating unless in exceptional circumstances. Such weakness in networking creates hostility and undemocratic tendencies. Lower officials just follow orders and do not play a role in how the decisions are made.

CO-OPTATION AND SUBMISSION

Co-optation in this sense takes place where educated and radical women enter political or international institutions for work and then find their ideas and thought submersed under those of their employer. It is a form of toning down their activism and occupying them with so much bureaucratic work that they simply have no time to pursue their initial agendas. Many end up submitting to the new demands for different reasons, among them income and careerism.

Educated women are best placed to enter a relation with the state and influence policy making. Regrettably in the Ethiopian context, party affiliation rather than education is the main criterion for entering politics. This is why many women have been appointed to posts without the required intellect, skills or even experience. But, as long as the government is a relatively permanent entity changing once in 15 to 20 years, educated women realized the need to take action and work with whatever they have. And, if women genuinely want to work on women's issues, they have no alternative than to ally with the

WAO. Many are fully aware of the implications of such co-operation on their independence and freedom. However, they know that they have to work according to the perceived realities of the ruling party and its bureaucrats (WAO). Such imposed relationships cause many activists to become silent. The government also actively pursues such activists to service its own agenda (mainly at the international level). This has been noted also in Uganda by Sylvia Tamale (*Arise* 35, 2003). Cooptation results in the shelving women's emancipation and submission to political agendas. It literally undermines the independence of activists. The main problem with this collaboration is that it leaves oppressive structures undisturbed and carries the risk of losing ownership of one's projects.

DE-POLITICIZATION AND DE-RADICALIZATION OF THE GENDER AGENDA

De-politicization is the tendency to remove the political aspect of something. This has become common practice on the "woman question" paradigm of the ruling party in Ethiopia where women's emancipation is defined as women's active engagement in government policies.

It is also strategically used as an instrument to prevent women from political activism, lobbying and accusations against the government for its failures to advance women's interests.

Though the agenda of women's emancipation is dominated by the ruling party, it is stripped of its political characters. De-radicalization is the process of freeing something of its radical contents, goals, and elements. It is strategically applied to issues that are sensitive and which could jeopardize the status quo. With feminism closely linked to gender concerns, neither is welcomed at the moment in Ethiopia due to their radical demands which include structural challenges. The public is kept in a situation in which its focus points should remain within demarcated parameters, not upsetting the status quo.

De-politicization and de-radicalization are actively pursued and advanced as the correct approaches on women's issues and the ruling party's "woman question" program continues to be promoted as the official mantra for women's emancipation.

Co-optation and submission of gender activists, combined with the oppressive political and religious cultural traits, causes serious forms of dilution and misperceptions of women's concerns.

The political culture in Ethiopia is of such a nature that activists and their actions are often fitted into the dominant political ideology. Such ideology has no room for, and does not tolerate radicalism and political activism.

There are no known political activists, except for a few members of opposition parties (who have been silenced during the past few years). Repression contributes to de-radicalization and de-politicization, but women have found ways to address their issues in non-threatening languages and manners.

De-politicization and de-radicalization of women's concerns is often an outcome of the general approach on gender at the internationally level where gender issues are converted into development packages or development issues.

Women's rights are then read as their equal participation and contributions to the development processes and access to opportunities in doing so.

Various leading international institutions (World Bank, UN agencies) have added to such diversions setting the agenda of global discourses and defining what strategies are best to assure women's equality.

As a development approach women's practical needs are overemphasized while their strategic needs are ignored. Focusing on strategic needs would require a complete overhaul of systems and structures (Haddas, 2001). In this twenty-first century the overhaul of systems or structural changes is still not a desired approach. This international diversion of women's emancipation, away from structural challenges, does not go unnoticed among many political leaders, including Ethiopia.

Within this diversion, the ruling party in Ethiopia wishes to be seen as the champion of women's emancipation through its woman's question paradigm mainly because the paradigm is void of radicalism and politicism.

Gender activists aiming to work through the government or international organizations often find their passions and ideals curtailed.

Many end up sacrificing their radicalism in order to remain a player in the field. As a result, one often meets passionate women's rights advocates in the private who are silent at the professional level.

COMPETITION, SCHISM AND DEMISE

Competition is a contest or rivalry between different groups for resources, assignments, or other forms of gain. Women often form their own interest groups with friends or professional links. The different groups do not always find ways to cooperate and collaborate, and can also end up in competition against each other. Such groups might be small or big and can often undermine the genuine progress in given fields.

Groups can also lack cohesion, which leads to schisms. Schism is a split of existing forms perhaps due to different ideologies or objectives. When groups splinter into factions, the issues causing such divisions or competition also end up losing out. Often, they prematurely disappear. Batliwala (2008) observes how the "conflicts and schisms within and between groups has led to fragmentation and increasing competition for limited resources..." These include competition for recognition and acknowledgement. Educated Ethiopian women are no stranger to competition and schism although their acknowledgement is taboo. One is not expected to point a finger.

They are also engaged in rivalry mainly because many are employed as consultants and pursue high profile assignments on a competitive basis.

The institutions (such as the UN and bilateral or international agencies) demanding such consultation also increase the rivalry among the women. But rivalry was also present before this consultation contest came into existence.

Competition has serious implications for dialogue, cooperation, solidarity and partnership on women's emancipation. It also works as demise where prominent ideas can disappear.

For instance, when women get together to form a committee on voluntary basis for a cause, the leadership of that initiative becomes a contest. Once this is placed in the hands of a dominant person or group, there is no guarantee of its continuance or for it to become representative to all groups. Other groups slowly retreat and the initiative comes to an

end or low profiled.

CAREERISM AND THE ISSUE OF RELINQUISHING ONE'S PRINCIPLES

Suitcase feminism and career feminists are closely linked because these are highly skilled women who have the ultimate desire to pursue their own interests.

Careerism can have negative implications if it is accompanied by relinquishing one's integrity or principles. Women could be so driven that they become blinded and willing to give up their beliefs for the sake of personal growth and social status.

Careerism is destructive to activism. Many career women become immersed in huge international organizations. In such instances their main goal becomes to serve the best interests of these bodies rather than becoming active agents of change in Ethiopia.

This drive to careerism robs the country of great intellectual potential at the same time as it transforms these women into silent puppets. Tamale (2003:9) remarked in similar vein in Uganda that "*careerism has eaten so deeply into the Ugandan women's movement that many of us do not even practice what we preach as feminist principles*". It turns women into profit-seeking agents whose main interests are to sustain the situation. Solving a problem permanently is not an agenda because it would undermine their careers. They run the major risk of becoming depoliticized and deradicalized. They willingly sacrifice their principles for their careers.

For instance, women found actively campaigning for a cause might fail to do so again when career opportunities arise. Then too, in order to comply with the demands of high positions, some may shed their radical stance and become muted feminists in their eagerness to cater for their careers.

They become softened and even start speaking a different language.

Among the educated in the country, there were a few outstanding radicals who could have taken leadership roles. But many have taken the path of careerism and disappeared in silence.

Some continue working on women's issues in the country, others have left the country and others become suitcase feminists. The main thing is that careerism (not a bad thing given the dire poverty and employment status of the country) has robbed Ethiopia of so many potential feminists, radicals and leadership.

BRAIN DRAIN

A most serious concern in many developing countries, including on the continent of Africa, is the problem of brain drain. Brain drain is the emigration of highly skilled and educated individuals. The brain drain among feminists and woman leaders should not be taken lightly. As mentioned above, not every woman can become a leader and among this leadership there are even less feminists. With this scarcity, most of the radical elements leave the country to places of better intellectual opportunities. Others leave because of the repressive system and exhausting ways to move forward. Women have seen minor gains requiring enormous inputs taking decades. Such trying ways discourage many from continuing to waste their energy and time. It is not surprising that the majority may opt to seek better opportunities abroad. Very few educated women would think of returning to Ethiopia once abroad. The dire poverty and politically repressive situation are among some of the reasons for this.

Brain drain of gender activists entails a serious loss of human power and causes for an erosion in the quality of work. The departure of the highly educated leaves the country's gender problems to unskilled and undemocratic elements that lack sufficient radicalism to politicize the women's agenda. It also leaves women with a lesser education behind with great responsibilities for which they are not equipped. Many have barely a first degree but are found employed as experts in seats which would require high academic qualifications. This by itself negatively impacts the quality of work and reduces the level of efficiency. Brain drain, above all, has serious implications for the discourse on women's emancipation. Those who start something are not there to continue it. Genuine and vibrant initiatives become shelved or disappear because there is no one capable to continue them. With such realities, who will take up leadership and define its discourse when it is assured that, given the opportunity, she will also abandon the whole cause?

ADVOCACY AND INTELLECT

Advocacy is a purposeful act to speak out or act on behalf of women, trying to influence policies and promote their interests in a given area. Feminism includes constant lobbying for women's rights. This is why intellect is a prerequisite.

However, the average educated woman in Ethiopia does not engage in advocacy work. The few operating women's organizations in the NGO sector have other priorities. In fact, less than ten NGOs focusing on human rights, advocacy work and democracy were registered in 1995 (CRDA 1995, cited in Kassahun, 2002: 125).

For an organization to be registered as an advocacy organization and to be engaged in advocacy work are two different things in Ethiopia. Advocacy has two main components: theoretical work (desk research) and action. Theoretical advocacy is often subtle and evasive. It lacks guts and is not confrontational. Among the ten organizations registered as advocacy organizations, only one doing advocacy work in a radical manner was active and visible. The others have remained hidden, refraining from focusing on politically sensitive areas. Most of their work centers on the neutral areas of education and health. The lack of lobbying and advocacy could not only be blamed on low capacity, but also on lack of insight. It is a prerequisite to possess some level of critical awareness on the causes and consequences of the issue that is being advocated. To instigate advocacy work also demands personality transformation that borders on courage and willingness to take risks. Among the few knowledgeable women who possess a high analytical intellect there are again fewer daring personalities radically minded enough to take up the daunting task of taking the lead in advocacy work for women's rights. And while women dare in many countries and take up advocacy work while risking losing their freedom (Afghanistan, Iran) or even lives, Ethiopian women have not reached that stage yet. This has nothing to do with the state not being ready to accept activists. It is more about the educated and what they perceive as right or wrong timing. Perhaps the timing is not right for advocacy work. But then, the timing is never right to struggle for women's rights! It may take a long time for Ethiopia to find woman leaders daring to take up such challenges.

WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND FEMINISM IN ETHIOPIA AT PRESENT

The discussions in the previous sections reveal the vague presence of some indicators in the field that need deeper reflection. In the above discussion already provided evidence of the presence of a political programme and policy on women's emancipation among the ruling party. The discussions also reveal that this is not the only action in the field. Civil society women have been also active in their own ways. The following will be a conclusive summary aiming to provide structure to some of the nuances which might have been there for many years now but which have been ignored. This highlight could grant them recognition and realization leading to further studies. They can also serve as indicators of action among the educated.

There is a serious deficiency in research in such areas that could contribute to feminist ideology and there is no in-depth theorizing on the ideological parameters of women's emancipation, or on the "woman question of the government", or on the current flows of feminist and/or women's discourses, all requiring a critical mindset. History has revealed that there was no continuation of the initial steps to start a national women's movement among the Zemecha students during the Derg regime which had come to an abrupt end in 1976 during the Red Terror campaign. This study brought forth some clear indicators of four different forms of women's movements at the brink of emergence, vaguely present, covertly visible but not recognized. Though separate, they are connected by a thin or thick thread with one or more of the others. The four levels can be observed at the academic level, the ruling party/political level, the NGO/civil society level and the grassroots level. The conclusive discussions on these aims to provide some hints for actions among the educated to take them further and provide leadership on those.

THE ACADEMIC LEVEL

It took a long time for the academic sector to have an independent women's department. The emergence of the Institute of Gender Studies in 2005 raised many hopes and expectations. It had a sudden start, pushed by top-level politicians but it was also about time considering the many years that it was in the pipeline. The course did attract a few feminist expatriate lecturers. Regrettably many were there only for one semester or two and slowly phased out. Except for a radical coordinator, the department has been stripped of its feminist base. This seriously undermines the development of feminist epistemology and theorizing based on the local or regional (mainly African) context.

A few teachers from different departments (political, philosophy, sociology) have been actively pursuing a gender approach within their work. Most of the writings on women in those sectors could be credited to them. They, however, did not contain feminist theory. At the academic level two streams emerge as indicators of a movement: the intellectuals and at the level of epistemology. The intellectuals define curricula and are engaged in passing knowledge on to the next generation (lecturing). An academic curriculum is taking shape, defining the agenda of women's emancipation in the country. It is here where young students are molded into future feminists, activists and researchers. It is also here where the agenda is set on what students should learn about women's rights and emancipation. Though this trajectory is not

only closely connected to the ruling party's dictate, but also embedded in the real status of women in the country, it still has plenty of room to insert a feminist agenda cultivating critical consciousness. The production of gender and/or women's epistemology through research is the next indicator. The research and theses of lecturers and students reveal an insight and often also new outlooks on the different women's issues in the country. We notice a shift from passive language that aimed only to highlight the status of women in a given context, to more radical choices of themes in which daring issues are taken up for reflection. This implies the presence of a huge potential. But with a deficiency in in-depth theorizing and analysis this potential is wasted. They are also hindered in this from the political and cultural environment that prevents them from moving beyond a certain ceiling of analysis. After descriptive overviews of the problem, analytical research ends up merely repeating the same ills and spills with a few recommendations to which no one adheres. Perhaps more academic freedom and space could help the intellects to mature because research is the engine of change.

Nevertheless, there is a visible shaping of an intellectual movement at the academic level. Its curricula provide the direction, and the scope of the research and theses are its potential. The descriptive forms of current research on women's issues reveal the need to create awareness. Each research endeavour brings new insights. This is inspiring considering the poor documentation record in Ethiopia where such data have been absent for a long time.

THE RULING PARTY/POLITICAL LEVEL

Among the bureaucrats are women directly involved at the political level who support the status quo. They are women who work in the women's machinery from the highest to the lowest positions and in other political posts. Their mission is to promote the ruling party's "woman question" rhetoric as the ultimate mantra for women's emancipation. Above all, they are mainly symbolic and instrumental in the ruling party's political mission lacking decision-making power. As such, the emancipation of women is not their main concern.

Their political positioning allots them privileges that include power over civil society. They are at liberty to act on their own as long as that does not undermine the status quo. The outreach of the bureaucrats is tremendous. This means that they can effectively oversee the imposed implementation of the ruling party's national policy on women. This is often coerced and enforced. Combined with hierarchy and authoritarian rule, paternalism reigns supreme when it comes to gain mass support. The ruling party sees women as passive, ignorant, backward, voiceless objects who will be emancipated only if they take part in the policies of the state and give those their full support. The policy on women is built mainly around the power and privileges of party cadres. This imposed policy is not stable and could be easily shattered the moment the ruling party departs because it is upheld through repression, sanctions, coercion and force. Of course there are always chances that it may survive the end of the regime among its most dedicated followers.

It would be grossly misleading to call the actions of bureaucrats "state feminism" because they have no link to feminism and there are no feminists occupying party political posts. It is in fact more a form of robbing women of their freedom to make their own choices and imposing on them what the state assumes to be best for them. It is therefore ironic that many of the occupants of the women's machinery dare naming themselves feminists. They could not remotely compare themselves to real state feminism as is the case in Chile (Klatch, Rebecca, 2001) where the ruling party is actively pursuing the rights of women. They could also not be compared to the Nordic state models of women's emancipation.

Beside the bureaucrats, there are a small group of femocrats. The role of femocrats is a very difficult one. Due to the increasing complexity of women's demands, educated women enter politics aiming to play a more active role in influencing policies that affect them or particular groups in society. Such moves carry many challenges. For instance, once educated women enter politics, what is the guarantee that they will advance the interests of their constituencies? What is the guarantee that they won't be absorbed in their own political careers and swept away with the stream of privileges, advantages and power? At the moment there are no femocrats in Ethiopia, only bureaucrats.

Nevertheless, the ruling party, together with its watchdog, the Women's Affairs Office, imposes its "women question" among not only the rural masses of women, but also among civil society groups, the donor community and international organizations. This leads to a wave of actions built on the women's policy, resulting in discussions, conferences, meetings, training, documentation, and so forth. Despite its imposition, it is thus a political movement (if movement is to be understood as everything people do to improve the lives of women). Whether the movement gains support from society or not, it is there and active. It has leadership, a clear mission, actions and actors all working for a common goal. The risk of such movements is that they are not durable and upheld through repression. That explains why it fails to be recognized as such. With the change of the regime, this movement will be immediately shattered. Aware of this, the ruling party is engaged in mass campaigns (policies, programs, education curricula, and so forth) to assure its internalization. Once internalized by women, they will automatically carry it on as the just and correct approach to their

emancipation. It is a school of thought that is closely linked to “*womanism*”.

Therefore caution is advised to scholars when studying both. “*Womanism*” can be an independent school of thought on women’s advancement in Ethiopia, but also part of a political program featured throughout the country and inhibited in the “woman question”.

THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

People at grassroots level are not passive recipients as is often perceived. The party bureaucrats’ explicit focus on rural women (the National Policy on Ethiopian Women targets mostly rural women and the government pressure on all urban organizations to work in rural areas) is bearing some fruit. Though the grassroots cannot display its potential at the moment due to limited freedom and repression, this does not mean that it is ignorant. The combined actions of the party bureaucrats and the NGOs in whatever form (even if it is on the improvement of maternal health care or increased school enrolment of girls) reveals that there is potential waiting to mature and become active. Rural women have also shown that they are more direct in their approach and do not need complicated bureaucratic procedures to understand issues. The local social women’s associations, such as women’s *idirs*, *mahbers* and work associations, have served historically as a place of information exchange. These associations are currently also approached by many NGOs to reach women in remote areas. Through these associations women receive information, take part in training and become exposed to outsiders. This exposure is educational in itself as women learn to differentiate between the different actors and learn about their rights. They also learn to make their own choices and develop critical thinking. These traditional social associations do not have a political base, but they serve as good examples of women’s organizations.

Depending on their efforts, rural women are developing in their own pace and according to their own perceptions. As a group particularly in the grip of traditions, culture and religion and where patriarchy is at its peak, it is encouraging to observe a new generation of young girls turning against negative cultural practices (child marriages, FGM, abduction). The women in the rural areas, who comprise more than 80% of the population, have the potential to create a movement much sooner than the urbanites and academic intellectuals. They are struggling to access education and strive for professional careers in contrast to many of the urban youth who have different dreams. They have their vision unlike the educated and are also aiming for their targets. Perhaps they are waiting for the right leadership to take up their challenges.

The discussion above indicates the prospects of women’s movements at different levels in society. They can also be combined because the levels are interconnected and seldom stand on themselves. For instance, the grassroots is closely linked to the NGO and government levels as both work with them. The academic sector is linked to the NGOs and the government where the NGOs provide feedback from the grassroots. Given that these levels are not overtly clear, they are not picked up for further construction by activists. Each sector is in need of leaders who can define the vision, mission and direction of the movement. The vagueness and the inaction reveal the absence of such strong personalities. There is a serious task here among the educated to define the course of action.

FEMINISM IN ETHIOPIA

Finding signs of women’s movements is easier than locating feminism in Ethiopia. It is often misread as women’s activism. According to a few of the old generation activists in Ethiopia (women who had been part of the emerging women’s study groups among the EPRP and women who were students during the 1974 regime change), there was no feminism in the country at that time.

Despite two initial documents produced on the “woman question” and socialist theorizing, there were no active feminists among the groups. One of the papers was in fact written by a male student in Algeria in the early 1970s. This could explain the absolute silence after the Derg decimated the EPRP.

Had there been feminists around, they would have emerged again, because that is the identity of feminism: it cannot be silenced or contained.

When the Ethiopian Women’s Lawyers Association started to bring some visibility to women’s issues, women’s activism was being born. But this did not last long. The political confrontation was too short lived. Was it feminism in the making? Many of EWLA activists have now distanced themselves from politics. But this is not good for the feminist cause because it plays directly into the hands of the repressive ruler. The issue is that without political activism, there is a slim chance for feminism to emerge. Among the educated, feminism is only recent, since the introduction of the academic course at the Addis perceive it as a Western concept linked to lesbianism, individualism and the wrong types of freedom for women.

In Ababa University, being understood in its conceptual frame. Many in society may probably still addition, academic intellect does not automatically translate into feminism.

On one side Ethiopia lacks a firm voice against the deep-rooted sexism in society or demanding for transformational leadership. There are also no “hard-core advocates of women’s rights” or “brigade and paragons of intellect and courage who were the forerunners of feminism...” as Barenzi observed in Uganda (Barenzi, 2007). Perhaps there is the issue of silent feminism (as noted by Tilahun, 2005) or introvert feminists. But how can feminism be silent or introvert when there is no political rage? On the other hand, feminism is one of the most abused concepts in Ethiopia and this has nothing to

do with its misinterpretation. Everything women do is read as feminist action. There are many who talk about feminism in situations where there is no trace of feminism. Perhaps this could be read as an encouragement to motivate women. But it is still inappropriate to allocate concepts for purposes that are not feminist in content. There is often an unjust appropriation of the feminist ideology by the different stakeholders in society who have something to gain from it. This includes international distortion and co-optation and government bureaucrats, including powerful elites. Besides the ruling party, who seem to be implacably opposed to feminism, the wife of the ruler has different thoughts on this. Azeb Mesfin of Ethiopia sees herself, just like other first ladies on the continent, as a champion of women’s rights. Mama (1995) calls this phenomenon “*first-ladyism*” referring to elite women arrogating noble causes to their names without having the proper qualifications or experience, only their husbands’ power. They are not feminists but would not hesitate to call themselves so. However, given their power base, there are many educated women on the continent working with the first ladies. This could have many motives, among which perhaps to finally push women’s emancipation agenda forward through these women, or could it be also careerism?

At the moment the only visible school of thought is the vanguard “woman question” program of the ruling party. The invisible traces of historically cultivated “*womanism*” or “*motherism*” at all levels (government, civic sector, grassroots) are not realized yet. In these, the collective identity of women is stressed as precondition for their emancipation. In order for a woman in Ethiopia to be free and emancipated she has to free society first. She is burdened with the societal baggage. She has to assure that her husband has a job, that the child has food, and that there is water in the community or health centres or that her extended family is taken care of and that everyone around her is happy.

This distortion deprives and robs her of agency and individuality. It also shows how her emancipation is dismissed. She will thus never be emancipated because the burden is considered to be too heavy. This means that the emancipation of that woman lies in the condition to make a conscious choice to continue subordinating her own needs to that of others! Fortunately, a few educated women have, in their own ways, come to realize that individual freedom is paramount to collective happiness. The one who starts struggling for the collective is the one who has found the liberty to free herself first.

Among the educated, very few have stipulated the trajectory of women’s emancipation and what that would entail in Ethiopian society. What is their vision of emancipation and how would they like to achieve it? Some of the educated focus on Western schools of thought and call for a combination of liberal and radical feminism. Liberal would be used not to change the status quo and radical would be to inject subtly, within the politically allowed space, issues for change. However, political confrontation is not mentioned as the most serious aim. How radicalism can then be used, is not given further thought. It is important that Ethiopian feminism matures and be discovered from within its own practices. It should not be an element of pleasing and filling gaps, or imitation and copying from neighbours. Above all, it should be a factor of active pursuit of self-realization and personhood based on one’s own experiences and realities.

IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP

After all, all women are not born talented or gifted. There is no given statement that gender determines what kind of leadership is practiced and that due to women’s nurturing roles, women would become more democratic and less corrupt. Feminist leadership can also have many shapes and traits like male leadership and yet not be able to solve all of humanity’s problems.

The ongoing debates suggest that it is not feminist leadership as such that is important in women’s emancipation, but a kind of leadership that answers to local needs and is context specific. The type of radical feminist leadership in the West would not be accepted among women in Ethiopia, nor would it be tolerated by the ruling party. It is necessary to study the type of leadership women need and for what purpose. Given the context in the country that knows severe political repression and religiosity, women’s leadership could emerge in an intermediary form. This means that the leadership will have to reconcile the differences between the different fronts (state and women or religion and women, or society and women) in order to direct them towards a common goal. After all, women’s emancipation is a desired goal for all as it contains many positive impacts for the women and society at large, including politics and religion. Once the realization of women’s emancipation is clear, the question how women’s leadership can emerge, or be cultivated should be

addressed. In Ethiopian society, despite the many changes at legal level, the problem is that women do not aspire for leadership. This is a colossal issue of concern and becomes more problematic when they project this on to the next generation. As Scott (1981) indicates: "*Women continue to socialize girls away from male-dominated arenas, such as elective politics by public institutions.*" It is thus women, who (perhaps with the aim of protecting their daughters) and with the realization that the political culture in the country is unchanging due to its presence for centuries continue socializing their daughters to be good housewives, obey their husbands and not aspire for more. This could also explain the desire among many of the youngsters not to enter into professional careers, get married and uphold the traditional division of labour. It could also explain why the younger generation does not start its own organizations or actions on women.

For change to start, this is where it could be initiated. The older generation has to let go and create freedom for their daughters to define their own destiny. They have to break the chains they have been carrying and not transfer them on to their daughters. The socialization of girls needs to be reviewed from the societal angle, not just within the family. If the social system is still pushing girls into domesticity, there will be no desire for leadership. Then one can conduct many sorts of training, but they will miss the link to reality. Leadership training for girls should be not only in the class, but also in practice where society should be prepared to recognize them.

And here there is an urgent need to highlight more role models; role models who can set the stage for future leaders, as path breakers in creating political stability in women's leadership. The trend at present is that women's political posting is granted as tokenism. When those women depart, so does their post.

Women's leadership is therefore not difficult to comprehend. Difficulties arise from social settings and cultures that fail to create a conducive climate for women to aspire to leadership. In Ethiopia, the patriarchal culture has marginalized women for centuries and successfully excluded them from politics and leadership. The subjection of women has taken centuries and is fully internalized as the norm. But this can be overcome. Women all over the world have undergone similar forms of subjection lasting for centuries. Still, they manage to break through. In this, their education, exposure, consensus building and solidarity group formation is crucial. Women cannot continue blaming others for their own inaction and need to critically interrogate their own identities and desires. They need to free themselves from the patriarchal mindset (which is often enforced through religion). And, there are already many among the educated who have successfully done so. There are many who can speak with passion about their dreams on women's emancipation. But, that is where it often ends.

Political leadership of women is important because it can provide women with the much needed support to advance their concerns. Regrettably, political positioning of women is not sustainable and women need to struggle anew every time they enter politics. This can be very demanding, causing many to shun politics. It would be advantageous for women if they could move up from political entrance¹⁵⁴ to the next level of setting an agenda. For this to happen, their political roles should become standardised and the barriers to political entrance should be removed.

On the international front, women's political leadership is still actively promoted as an important precondition to their emancipation and empowerment. As Ethiopian society is still weak on accepting women's public roles, their leadership is not understood. Public campaigns and awareness-raising could alter this and women could take a lead in changing attitudes influencing opinion. This has already been started in the elections of 2000 where many women candidates took part in the elections. Leadership for women's emancipation is a very challenging form of leadership. It demands the active involvement of critical personalities who have a clear vision on women's emancipation. Consensual visions can be led by strong leadership. The lack of such critical individuals is one of the most serious problems in Ethiopia. Perhaps they remain hidden due to political repression. The educated are also not eager to take up the challenges against the status quo. Lobbying for rights, injustices or policy reforms are actively evaded. And it remains unclear whether a change in the political environment would contribute to the emergence of more radicals among educated women. This is a serious concern. If the educated had more freedom to intervene in their own emancipation trajectory, would they be able to do so? This is a challenge to their capacity, will power and commitment.

A further issue causing diversion on leadership is the issue of over-emphasis on challenging the ruling party and its policies, programs and strategies. Not only opposition parties, but also women are guilty of this. This is a historical heritage of the country continued for centuries and most visible among the different factions of political groups. Each focuses in detail and with much rigor on the deficiencies of the other instead of defining its own programmes. To a certain extent, the focus can be a point of departure to design one's own actions, but should not become the prime mission. Regrettably, that is almost always the case. This excessive focus saps their energy and is extremely time consuming. And it is precisely this diversion that has contributed to the major lack of alternative models (political, economic, social, feminist, and so forth) in the country. This approach needs urgent attention. In the Ethiopian context, if feminism is to emerge, it should be a feminism that is not engaged in revealing what the ruling party is doing or not doing, but should focus on what works best for the target and how to confront that at a political level. There is evidence in Ethiopian history depicting strong leadership among a few women. Those women had stepped outside the traditional

boundaries facing their own challenges of the time. Initially their daring acts might have stirred society, shocking many. But eventually they were embraced within the same society and used as good examples. Currently they are treated as heroines. Some had their own armies, others became powerful women in the nobility, and yet others possessed enormous property (all belonging to the elite). But they were individual personalities. They were exceptions. Their approaches were very good and could be imitated by women at present because of their inhibited practice of shock approaches. Shock approaches attempt to bring attention to a new, often socially or politically sensitive and taboo issue. They are comprehensive means to introduce radical demands and changes. Considering their initial unfamiliarity, the practice is to raise the issue in an audience and wait for it to be absorbed. The receipt of such approaches can cause a serious stir, an explosion or outburst of feelings and emotions. Many will be shocked, stunned, speechless, disgusted or even angry. This can be positive as it awakens consciousness on neglected issues. Such approaches can be effective in challenging rigid traditional structures, because they provide the opportunity to make a start. Once familiarity takes root, the issue becomes open for actions and debates. This is how feminist demands can also be initiated. It remains puzzling though why there are so few radical educated women in Ethiopia despite the increased access to higher education and opportunities to travel. It is often expected that increasingly higher levels of education contribute to the alteration of traditional perceptions. But this is not so obvious. Here it becomes evidence that a rapid increase in the number of educated women should not be read as an indicator of equality and emancipation or of radicalism and critical consciousness.

Among hundreds of educated, only a few emerge as radicals. This should be sufficient because it takes only one feminist to challenge the status quo. Ethiopia had a few radical activists in the Ethiopian Women Lawyer's Association. However, their legacy was short-lived. Upon finding themselves isolated and targeted, many have left the scene, either moving to less visible jobs or leaving the country. Once an organization has attracted attention from the ruling party in Ethiopia, it will be watched with long-term suspicion.¹⁶¹ The enduring repressive political climate leaves no room for freedom and one cannot wait for decades to become an activist. The departure of many radicals to places of better opportunities leads to a continuing vacuum in the field of feminism and leadership. At the moment there is no feminist leadership in Ethiopian society demanding women's equality, rights, democracy, transparency and freedom.

A difference can be made by these departed individuals if they actively continue their work from abroad in documenting, critically analyzing and engaging in theorizing and discursive practices on women's issues in their country. Regrettably, there is absolute silence on that front. The diaspora has done little to create awareness on the dire situation of women in the country. Many have been detached from reality for decades. This distance creates idolization of the country and the relative perceived status of women. At informal gatherings abroad one will often encounter voices giving an unrealistic depiction of the real situation. Perhaps the pride in their history and culture makes women omit the negative aspects. Isolation in new homelands also causes many to cling to the memories of their original homeland and the relative intercultural competition between different races further adds to the biased representation of issues. This over protectionism among the diaspora also causes for intolerance of differing views (Ministry of Education, 2005; Terry, 2004).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In this paper the writer affirms how agency and leadership are connected. With a radical agency that develops into a critical consciousness, leadership has a firm root. But with agency still arrested within traditional parameters, leadership remains a remote ideal.

The writer reflects on the challenges among educated women's leadership role in Ethiopia and discusses their approaches on women's emancipation in the country. It will assert that educated women in the country are not able to play a more proactive role in women's emancipation due to many reasons inherent in their own perceptions and actions that are linked to the boundaries of their agency. Formation of women's agency remains arrested under dominant patriarchal ideologies informing their thought, behaviour and attitudes. It is within these that limitations have taken root as norm. Otherwise, more women are educated at present and a few have even reached top professional levels. What is holding them back then to provide leadership on women's emancipation? This lack of a strong, independent feminist leadership is a serious handicap to women's movements and is not unique to Ethiopia. It is a serious challenge that needs urgent attention in this new millennium if women would like to secure sustainability for the little progress they have made so far. It is therefore important to reflect on what issues have been overlooked when analyzing educated women's leadership quest in the country. Women's leadership is a critical element in the long process of their emancipation. It defines strategies and directions and informs actions. Without leadership there can be no movement or agenda. Regrettably, women's leadership in Ethiopia has not moved beyond lip service. It is grossly absent at all levels in society (Antrobus, 2004; Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003).

Little has been done to remedy this. Given the religio-traditional setting of Ethiopian society, it was never considered an issue to be nurtured. Many women in leadership have emerged from outside these ancient structures.

As noted by Amare Bizuneh (2004), women's leadership emerge from their inherent social experiences and organizations. In the Ethiopian context though, these have not produced path breakers yet (there have been no critical voices among the women leaders in idirs, mahbers or work associations).

OBJECTIVES

Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

To assess the challenges and problems of educating women's leadership and actions in their mission for emancipation and change;

To explore the current status of educating women's leadership and actions in their mission for emancipation and change in Ethiopia;

To assess the extent of participation of women in different government activities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Therefore, this review paper discusses the challenges and problems of educating women's leadership and actions in their mission for emancipation and change. The review attempts in answering the following questions:

What are the benefits of educating women's leadership and actions in their mission for emancipation and change in Ethiopia?

What are the challenges and problems of educating women's leadership and actions in their mission for emancipation and change in Ethiopia?

Do women participate in different government sectors?

CONCLUSION

In this paper the writer has attempted to inventorize the gaps in women's leadership in Ethiopia that inhibit the formation of a women's movement or provide answers to the deficiencies in directing the emancipation discourse in the country. In the previous sections the writer critically discussed the many problems in women's emancipation and leadership from a historical past until the present and tried to find answers through analysis explaining why the educated have not been able to play a more proactive role on the emancipation of women in the country at large.

The EPRDF regime did not differ much on this form of control from the Derg, though packaging it more subtly within its state-led policies that aimed at deradicalization and depolitization of the "women's question" agenda. Quantitative data helped in identifying the gaps in women's status on different issues at the same time raising questions on those. It appears that women's status has not changed much since the time of the Derg, as is often proclaimed by the ruling party.

Both the Derg and the EPRDF took centralized control over the "woman question" leaving the most important target group, women, out of their discourse. This was obvious because their aim was not to promote the emancipation of women, but mainly to take control over it. And this control took shape in the form of a REWA, later WAO and now Ministry of Gender Affairs, which are mainly instruments to effect that control at the same time that they are used to spread and implement the party's policies in the field. Were the educated able to circumvent all these barriers at the polity and choose their own path? As discussed, there was not much room for independent action and discourse.

Women have been let down by the subsequent rulers who were too powerful, repressive and merciless. It is interesting to add here that neither generations of witch-hunt nor generations of political and cultural harshness ever succeeded in domesticating women, either in the world, or in Ethiopia. Fortunately there have been always fighters.

Experiences reveal that women find themselves back, learn everything all over again and start agitating for quick progress to catch up on lost centuries. Ethiopian women too have proven that they can fight back at times, using their own causes (such as campaigns against violence against women). This is a promising sign.

The educated in Ethiopia have been hampered in many ways for decades to take the lead in their own emancipation. Many have not stood still to analyze the causes and barriers preventing their advancement to strategize for change. The majority are too absorbed in activities that aim to mitigate their day-to-day challenges, because those are the most visible. The important role ideological roots plays in these is not considered. This negligence is also enforced through global influences like donors with their own missions. Given these, diverse ways are created to instill a false sense of emancipation among women while the structural roots remain largely undisturbed. For instance, the active promotion of women's economic empowerment gains more prominence because of its immediate and visible gains. How these gains play out to the advantage of the macro-economic policies of the politically repressive system remains hidden. The beneficiaries also fail to see that they become marginal pawns silenced through economic gains. Their emancipation becomes narrowed down to economic empowerment that will mitigate all social ills and inequalities.

Such a narrow approach to women's emancipation reduces the urge for social transformation. Economic impulses silence and prevent demands for comprehensive overhaul of social systems. These so-called changes are misleading as they do not carry durability and are also not connected to structural factors. They can be easily rolled back, as happened with the stopping of the women's development fund. Regrettably, due to the high poverty levels in Ethiopia many women aim for financial security even if it is for a short time. These short-term remedies have become the norm rather than the exception. Feminist theorizing could play a meaningful role here in revealing the real impacts of the short-term economic empowerment schemes and demand concrete interventions to achieve genuine and sustainable solutions in such approaches. It is noteworthy to consider that theorizing should not be the monopoly of the academic sector. In fact, the weakness of the educated sector could create a massive gap if action is not taken soon. Other sectors can contribute immensely through their analytical capacity and commitment. These include individual activists, social workers, female networks, and research institutions, among others, who could help in providing structures to participate in public discourses on women's emancipation. Not much focus is forthcoming yet, perhaps because theorizing is usually linked to the academic sector. The major aim should be to actively encourage academics and activists with critical insights to start documenting their analytical perceptions and thoughts. They have to start engaging in discursive practices, such as systematic writing, debating and documenting (journals) to chart the course on women's emancipation in the country. Such actions can galvanize theoretical discourses which can contribute to revealing the in-depth missing links to women's emancipation in the country.

The writer concludes this paper by tracing the presence of the emerging women's movement and feminism in the country. This can help in the search for answers on women's leadership. Leadership is known to be the key in both. With the identification of relevant indicators, it becomes easier to find out where leadership can fit in. This in turn can function as a signal to the educated concerned with women's emancipation and assist them to define ways how to claim leadership and become the main actors on their own emancipation.

Women's leadership is very complicated. It is not just electing or putting women in leadership posts that guarantee their leadership. There is a lot more involved. One of those is the expectation that the educated have a responsibility and role to play, especially in countries where there are not many highly educated women.

This is a colossal burden calling for the detailed scrutinization of these educated women's actions and inactions by feminists and scholars in order to find answers. In many countries, only a small group of women are in charge of all the work that benefits the masses of women at large.

This trend is mostly observable in societies where women have gained considerable rights and freedoms, such as in many Western societies and a few developing societies.

The prevailing progress of these societies could afford such pursuits. But in countries where women are still a marginalized group without many rights or freedoms, and where the group of educated women is still too insignificant to make a difference, the expectations remain high for them to make a difference.

There are countries in the African regions (many of Ethiopia's neighbours) where women's activism started from scratch struggling for policy reform and rights under trying circumstances. Those have not been perceived as examples to be imitated by Ethiopian women. There has seldom been an issue that was picked from neighbouring countries to demand similar reforms or rights in Ethiopia among the educated.

This passiveness is often blamed on the country's unique ancient history and political culture that is different from that of many African countries. But the pride of not being colonized for a long period has not left any significant mark, except that the country is one of the least developed and poorest nations on the African continent, where women's lives are subjected to ancient practices. And thus, while the educated have barely started to surface, many have washed their hands of collective responsibilities and are pursuing their independent careers, even if that is based on the collective reality. Only a few educated women could be identified as struggling slowly or silently to advance women's interests and

rights. They are not visible yet. That is why the above enlisted problems on women's leadership problems are serious issues to be considered if women's emancipation is desired. They are not to be seen as separate or isolated issues, but are in fact closely linked and have a common etiology.

Taking up one challenge could illuminate the addressing of many simultaneously. The most important prerequisite among the educated is to realize and critically investigate these concerns among themselves in order to strategize for action. It is a critical reflection inward to the consciousness and agency.

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