



FEMINISM IN UGANDA

UGANDA GROUP

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1.0 Introduction

Uganda is an origin of many cultures, beliefs and traditions. Located in the east of Africa bordered by Lake Victoria and Tanzania to the southeast, Rwanda to the south west, Kenya to the east, Democratic Republic of Congo to the west and republic of South Sudan to the north, Uganda is endowed with beautiful tropical vegetation harboring many fauna and flora. The Ugandan population is primarily of African descent, consisting of thirteen principal ethnic groups, although there are actually 49 such groups in total. The rest of the population is made up of Asians and Europeans (around 1 percent) and a fluctuation of refugees escaping from crises in neighboring countries—most recently from Sudan, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At present Uganda holds a population of 31 million people with a male/ female ratio of 97:100.

The term ‘feminism’ has many different uses and its meanings are often contested. For example, some writers use the term ‘feminism’ to refer to a historically specific political movement in the US and Europe; other writers use it to refer to the belief that there are injustices against women, though there is no consensus on the exact list of these injustices. Although the term “feminism” has a history in English linked with women's activism from the late 19th century to the present, it is useful to distinguish feminist ideas or beliefs from feminist political movements, for even in periods where there has been no significant political activism around women's subordination, individuals have been concerned with and theorized about justice for women. So, for example, it makes sense to ask whether Plato was a feminist, given his view that women should be trained to rule (Republic, Book V), even though he was an exception in his historical context. (See e.g., Tuana 1994.)

2. Women in the Ugandan ancient days

Uganda was versed with many traditions, norms and beliefs from many tribes before the colonial period. Women were subordinate to men. At a tender age of 7, a girl was married off to a man enough to be her grandfather without her consent. With all the responsibility to get married off and those met in marriage and at such a tender age, were so tremendously against equal rights for women. For example; the girls in Sebbei tribe are circumcised so as to prepare them for marriage and sexually please their husbands. As for the women and girls in Buganda culture, they were not to eat

delicious foods but leave them for men such as chicken, eggs of which these are very nutritious and with consent that the food was cooked or animals reared by the women. The same Baganda tribe norms were; women do not to own land, are not to make opinion or contribute to leadership decision making. And surprisingly, most of the traditional women were comfortable with this. However, with respect to the elderly women traditional doctors normally referred to as “witches”, they were the exceptional ones whose advice or cautions were to be heard or listened to so as to protect the community/ tribe. This was in concern of predicting weathers, bad omens, future siting but still under the objection of the chief to give their opinion only when asked.

2.2 Impacts of slavery on feminism in Uganda

Uganda was one of the targets sources for slaves with male slaves taking the greater percentage than females. During and after the captivity of slaves, women were subjected to more suffering no access to land for settlement and crop growing as most of it was confiscated by raiders. The hope for peace and the little freedom for women were lost for not only men but women both who were left at home and those that were slaves. They lost there family friends and homes and cultural values. Most of these women faced inhumanity actions of sexual harassment, physical violence that brought psychological and body torture.

2.3 The inception of colonialism on feminism in Uganda

It was until the period of colonialism that came with changes and any differences that influenced the Ugandan cultures and the initiations of feminism and potential activists in Uganda. The Colonialism and Missionary periods mainly by European and Arabic people came with new conceptions/ ways and characteristics and values that the Ugandan people adopted as a way of living.

The effects of colonialism in Uganda were through ‘civilization’ that women were no longer considered as inferior. It was from this period until now; the women started owning jobs, acquired formal education, engaged in political affairs, and ran difficult technologies and so much more.

a) Religion was one of the colonial components that greatly initiated feminism in Uganda. Even though in this period the greater players in transforming the local

religion of the Ugandan people were men. Islamic religion which was the first religion to be introduced in Uganda was much more similar to the traditional religion of Ugandan. However, this religion prohibited women from coming out openly to society. in terms of public speech, the dress code of fully covering up body parts, women sitting in a separate section o,

In the Christian religion, women took up big roles in the society which opened great opportunities for women to gain equal rights in society as men did. Some of the women were preachers or assistants to the preachers. And for the catholic religion, women were devoted to offer there lives in terms of wealth and obedience to the God. These women become nuns/ sisters.

b) Education another concept introduced by missionaries mainly in central, eastern and southern Uganda. The formal education in schools was mainly meant for boys. However, the girl child education was promoted was promoted by missionaries and nun/ sisterhood missions in the 1930s. Boarding schools for girls were constructed. Girls were also encouraged to acquire higher education and

2.4 Independence of Uganda and effected on feminism in Uganda

Women job and business ownership boomed up in the capital city of Kampala. This was after the period of Uganda gaining her independence. Uganda had gone through a number of political conflicts, economic and social developments. Therefore women engaged themselves in economic activities of small scale trading, fishing, agriculture. The many women joined education institutes as teacher and some had professions of nursing and doctorate, engineering and most of them administering positions of secretaries. Other women joined the national army and fought or protected their countries.

2.5 Political developments and feminism in Uganda

H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni the president of Uganda and National Resistance Movement party brought many progressive changes in Ugandan affairs. He promoted the gender equity through empowering women. He further supported girl-child education by increasing by 1.5points free university admission points for girls. Women farmers in Uganda especially from Community Based Organizations were supported by giving them financial assistances for strengthening their agricultural activities. H.E

increased the percentage seat for women in parliament. He also in support of the women representatives in parliament established a woman's member parliament seat from each sub county in Uganda. H.E appointed former Hon. Wandera Kazibwe as the Vice president of Uganda. Also the government of Uganda has many political parties of which some are led by women. For example the Uganda People's Congress was led by Miria Obote.

Considering that women form more than 50 per cent of all population, the success of the reconstruction program so far means that the women of Uganda have positively taken up the challenge and are participating effectively in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country.

The former Hon. Mariam Matembe is a great activist for promotion of women rights. She supported the passing of the bill in parliament to enable women's emancipation in Uganda.

2.6 Health and feminism

a) The Ugandan government's Recovery Program include expansion and introduction of appropriate technologies which reduce the women's work load in the fields and at home so that they have more time for participation in Health Care activities and leisure.

b) For the three years 1984-86 Government formulated a plan for effective dissemination of information on health education, maternal and child health and Planned Parenthood. Under this plan, workshops are to be organized for the various categories of persons including Members of Parliament at national, regional and district levels. Physicians and other categories of health workers who are to execute the national plan have been identified and are undergoing the necessary orientation training.

c) A training scheme for nurses and midwives in maternal and health clinics has started. It is planned that by August 1986, 60 hospitals will be providing Planned Parenthood services in addition to the existing net work of the 60 clinics being managed by the Uganda Parenthood Association. Training courses for tutors and heads of health training institutions were started in March 1984 and the training or other cadres is continuing. Family planning materials and related equipment worth 300,000

United States Dollars have been offered to and accepted by the Planned Parenthood Association of Uganda to equip all the Maternal and Child Health Clinics.

2.7 Population programs and Feminism

According to Ugandan law, women are not prohibited from participating in any field of endeavor. The women have the same freedom as men to pursue any profession or employment. A woman and a man doing the same job are the same salary and are subject to the same terms and conditions of service. The Ugandan woman is free to marry a man of her choice.

Despite the law being non-discriminatory, there are still some traditional and cultural inhibitions and taboos which work against women and hinder their effective participation in population programs. A typical example is here a father has a daughter and a son in school. Should that father face financial difficulties, he would sell his bull to maintain the son in school but would be most reluctant to do the same for the daughter even if the daughter is the more brilliant and promising of his two children. It is this kind of traditional mentality which accounts as the main factor for the lower literacy rate amongst most women of Uganda.

The inhibitions for effective participation in population programs which the women in Uganda face are not dictated by law, but by traditions. There are several women organizations in Uganda. The organized groups of women are regarded as crucial in spearheading the participation of women in population activities. Most of such groups are in urban centers and work has begun to reach the majority of women who live in the rural areas.

The responsibility borne by the women of Uganda in the population programs and activities both in the urban and rural areas differ only in degree from the rest of Africa. The situation in Uganda is rapidly changing and giving more and more opportunities to women to participate effectively in public life. This is, however, a very optimistic statement. In order to encourage the process Government has announced the intention to bring before Parliament a Bill on Women's Charter, which is expected to lay emphasis on further legal protection of women against traditional and customary constraints. (See, UPC 12th September, 1984)

2.8 Uganda's Female Activist

Abuse of women's rights and the need for women to achieve better has led to the formation of women organizations and female activities coming up to fight and defend their rights. Many women organizations have been formulated in Uganda with a foundation and mission of empowering women. With the vision of women owning resources, achieving women rights and gender equity in all spheres of life by participating in decision making, living in peaceful and freedom both in their homes and in the society free from violence, among others.

A number of organizations such as Action for Development (ACFODE), International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), and Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT) among others have been established in the bid or strengthening and developing women so as to elevate them from poverty. Most of the Ugandan laws are not against achieving gender equity and therefore are in support of achieving the third millennium development goal.

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