

Putting women in their rightful place

I NEVER knew my biological father. It has never bothered me then nor now. But then in that regard, I am not an exception but rather the norm for many in Africa, where millions of children are raised by single, divorced, abandoned or widowed women. While men always seem to be able to father children with a choice to opt in or out of parenthood, often women have no such choice.

A recent report by the South African Institute of Race Relations estimates that between 1996 and 2010 the number of children who lived under the same roof as their fathers decreased to 37 percent, and those with absent but living fathers increased to 47 percent. Black children are the most affected, at 51 percent, while only 17 percent of white children and 13 percent of Indian children are living without fathers. For the estimated 9 million children in South Africa who don't know their fathers, often the one person they know is their mother – a woman. This is not merely a South African peculiarity, but a global reality for children and women of African descent.

According to US government statistics, 72 percent of African-American children are born to unmarried mothers, compared with 17 percent of Asians, 29 percent of whites, and 41 percent overall across the US.

So when it is said it takes a village to raise an African child, in reality it means women, who bear this responsibility diligently against all odds.

Despite this immense responsibility and history, the problem for women isn't necessarily the challenge of raising the children, but how they are ultimately "rewarded".

Rather than being their grateful protectors, the most suffering women endure is at the hands of the boys they raise to become men, who ultimately turn against them – often not just in abandonment, expecting them to be "barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen", and when they dare challenge, retaliate with violence.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), domestic violence is a global problem affecting millions of women.

In a 2005 study on women's health and domestic violence, the WHO found that 56 percent of women in Tanzania and 71 percent of women in Ethiopia's rural areas reported beatings or other forms of violence by husbands or intimate partners.

Violence against women goes beyond beatings. It includes forced marriage, dowry-related violence, marital rape, sexual harassment, intimidation at work, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilisation, trafficking, forced prostitution and genital mutilation in other parts of Africa.

This violence continues because women continue to live without much protection from the law.

In Kenya the family protection bill criminalising wife beating and other forms of domestic violence was enacted only after years of protests and lobbying by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and "fortunately" some outraged men and parliamentarians.

In Nigeria, citing Islamic law, Sani Yerima, a senator married to a 13-year-old girl, opposed a constitutional amendment that set 18 years as the minimum age for marriage.

In Somalia a woman is reputed to have been paid \$150 restitution for the rape of her four-year-old daughter.

Women still bear the most responsibility when it comes to raising the children in our society – so it's an insult when they are excluded from positions of empowerment and decision-making, writes Thebe Ikalfeng



COLOURFUL MIX: Cultural dancers entertain the crowd that came to listen to President Jacob Zuma at a Women's Day celebration event at Peter Mokaba Stadium in Polokwane this week. Instead of celebrating a "happy women's month" the writer opines that we must champion a call for "happy women".

PICTURE: GCIS

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assertion that it may be the cock that crows, but it is the hen that lays the eggs.

Financial Mail reported that in a 2012 Business Women's Association Women in Leadership Census survey of JSE-listed companies, women represented 4 percent of chief executive or managing director positions in state-owned enterprises and government, 6 percent of board chair positions, 17 percent of directorships and 21 percent of executive manager positions.

Due to these low statistics, The 30% Club – Global Initiative for Women Representation on Companies Boards launched in South Africa this year. Their goal is to achieve 30 percent women on boards by 2015, in certain countries, including South Africa, by 2018.

This is not a favour but a sound economic imperative.

While it is laudable, recognising women such as Liberia's Sirleaf Johnson as the first African female president, Nigerian oil magnate Forunsho Alakija worth estimated at \$3.2bn (replacing Oprah Winfrey) as the richest black woman in the world (Sunday Times UK Rich List), Malawi's President Joyce Banda as the "Most Powerful Woman" in Africa (Forbes), or Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as the first chairperson of the Au Commission, should not be applauded as a moment of pride or progress, but a shameful reminder of the discrimination that women face today.

This August around the world, we pause yet again – for a day or few – to remember women in a "tradition" that started in the US, when the first national Women's Day was observed on February 28, 1909, following a declaration by the Socialist Party of America. In August 1910 an International Women's Conference was organised to precede the general meeting of the Socialist Second International in Copenhagen.

In South Africa we will remember the seminal women's march of August 9, 1956, when 20 000 women, led by Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Sophie Williams de Bruyn and Lilian Ngoyi of the Federation of South African Women, marched to Prime Minister JG Strijdom's office at the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against pass laws,

with an unequivocal warning:

"Strijdom, *wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo* – you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock."

Tired of being marginalised and typecast as politically inept, immature and homebound, women are rising to break male-erected barriers and fight for their complete emancipation. It is often said that behind every successful man is a woman. But in South Africa women have not only been behind, but often at the forefront of the liberation of the country.

Where would Mandela be without Winnie Mandela or, lately, Graça Machel. Oliver Tambo without Adelaide. Walter Sisulu without Albertina. Joe Slovo without Ruth First?

Or, more importantly, were would we all be without women?

In 1963, a young Miriam Makeba, the first black African woman to win a Grammy Award (shared with Harry Belafonte in 1965) took the fight to the men at the UN to challenge another form of discrimination – apartheid.

"I ask you and all the leaders of the world, would you act differently, would you keep silent and do nothing if you were in our place?"

That question is as relevant about apartheid then as it is about how society treats women today.

Paraphrasing scripture, John F Kennedy once said, "to whom much is given, much is expected".

Too much is expected of women,

for too little in return.

Women represent 52 percent of the South African population, but only 44 percent of the workforce – and 20 percent of these women are domestic workers.

Our minimum wage for domestic workers, which ranges between R1 056.35 and R1 746 per month, is not a just return.

A ministry for women (and children) or a day in a year is an insult to them.

Inspired by the women of 1956 and Marilyn Monroe, who once said "women who seek to be equal with men lack ambition", women, clearly the superior sex, must go beyond seeking equal rights – and stamp their authority.

Globally, instead of celebrating a "happy women's month" we must champion a call for "happy women". All efforts should be geared toward returning women to their rightful place – away from the crèche, kitchen and abuse, and at the centre of every decision about our present and our future.

In the end, we must remember, like Abraham Lincoln acknowledged, "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my mother".

Thank you mom. And thank you grandma.

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Forum

An H grade in upholding ethics

THERE are South Africans who think President Jacob Zuma still has revolutionary ethics and morality.

I was one of the people who argued that the reasons for the two weeks' postponement of the Arms Procurement Commission was justified.

At the same time, we must be vigilant that a panel of commissioners is not advancing a "second but covert agenda". History tells us that in upholding revolutionary morals and ethics, our president gets graded an H.

The president did everything to avoid having his day in court, appointing a "lapdog" judge to evade the long arm of the law. That he did not appoint a retired judge was no mistake.

The "clean" president has not voluntarily taken the ANC and the nation into his confidence about his trip to Mauritius with Schabir Shaik to meet Alain Thetard. He opposed attempts by the Scorpions to investigate offshore

accounts that are not his. His name is in a diary that is kept in Mauritius and he blocked the Scorpions from getting it.

History and facts will always tell us that the president likes to surround himself with compromised people such as Mac Maharaj, Vusi Momo, Richard Mdluli, Willem Heath and Nomgcobo Jiba.

Everything was done to hide information about the R206 million spent on his palace to ensure his family and cows live comfortably. This mother of all scandals and his visit to Mauritius could bring down leadership in other countries where ethics and openness are never compromised.

The setting up of this commission is not Zuma's choice; he knew that courts would have ruled against him. Public pressure forced him to deal with Sicelo Shiceka, Gwen Mahlangu-Nkabinde, Dina Pule and Siphiwe Nyanda. He has never praised Thuli Madonsela, but he has praised Julius Malema when he was

still his henchman.

The weakening of Zwelinzima Vavi, the co-optation of the SACP into the corruption agenda, the death of SA National Civic Organisation, the Cope confusion, the lack of progressive NGOs and biased media will assist beneficiaries of corruption in the arms deal to conceal information and the commissioners to pursue a "second but covert agenda".

We all know Vavi's statement that never again would he march and attend night vigils in solidarity with those charged with corruption angered Number One. His loose tongue has weakened him.

We must plead with the commissioners to act professionally and ethically, hence my worry that the commission must report to Zuma, whose name is central and dominant in the mud.

Siyanda Mhlongo
KwaDukuza

Fifty Shades of Grey spells death to family traditions

RUNAWAY best-seller *Fifty Shades of Grey* can best be described as an internal peep at bedroom "malfunctions" – as if today's promiscuous generation needed a treatise on how to dilly-dally.

The celluloid version will fuel audiences' desires to get even bolder. Not since DH Lawrence shocked England with a bold look at sexual mores, has a novel so enraptured the reader.

Alternatively titled *The Filthy Shades of Grey*, the book has been regarded by moral crusaders as anti-marriage, stating that the '60s sexual revolution has received a shot in the arm with this

open invitation to pursue premarital or extramarital liaisons, thereby relegating marriage to the back burner.

With marriages "murdered" by outrageous dowry demands, commitments even rarer, easier availability of partners through dating agencies and on-line link-ups, and a great accent on zero population growth, this bedroom "chat-a-logue" will ensure that familial ties, family business empires, weddings and family reunions all die a slow death.

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Dictators ignore public opinion at their peril

THE conspiracy of silence surrounding the outcome of the elections in Zimbabwe is truly staggering. The election results were carefully choreographed by powerful forces to achieve the desired outcome.

Power politics in Africa is complex and whoever wields power is intoxicated by it. He or she exhibits a propensity to carry on without the slight consideration of relinquishing the attributes of authority.

One thing history teaches us is that no ruler or leader will rule forever and records show that there is no "rise and rise" in any given account of any leader but a "rise and fall".

When a state becomes bankrupt with regard to governance, the determination of the people cannot afford to be denied indefinitely.

In the 1789 French Revolution, it was

through the peasants that the revolution unfolded.

History is replete with dictators who underestimate the dynamic forces that could seize the momentum and play a major role in political transformation. Why do dictators want to cling to power forever? Why cannot they simply step down and hand over power for a peaceful transition?

Sadly, dictators never learn. What we have witnessed over the years is a total violation of human rights as dictator after dictator has ridden roughshod over their countrymen.

The idea of cushioning dictators with amnesty after leaving office should never be tolerated if our future generations are to learn the right way.

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