
The Need for an International Focus

Elizabeth Archampong*

It is a pleasure for me to contribute to this first edition of *feminists@law*. I consider it important for *feminists@law* to develop an international focus, blending insights on feminist legal issues from around the globe. This international focus would ensure that trends in feminist thinking from around the world are kept in perspective; a feminist issue which is considered significantly resolved in one part of the world, may be a current challenge facing women in another part. For instance, law as a tool for getting states to perform their responsibilities of ensuring the personal safety of girls and women, women's right to own property and maternal health are issues for women worldwide but the challenge is at different levels of resolution in different parts of the world. Thus, *feminists@law*'s publication of articles reflecting issues at different points of the spectrum of women's challenges would provide insightful lessons for its readership the world over.

In this light, I consider it important that the difference in the needs of the average woman in Africa and other parts of the world, and the needs of elitist and well placed women be recognized. While food and income security, health, housing, are significant issues for the former, the latter may consider political participation and representation significant in the promotion and protection of women's rights. *feminists@law* needs to balance the development of both these "basic" and "aspirational" needs of women, blending in each edition a selection of articles that ensure that, in the words of a Ghanaian proverb, "the right hand bathes the left hand and the left hand bathes the right hand."

Further, it is important that *feminists@law*'s publications address the issue of women's limited access to formal education in Africa and other parts of the world. Low literacy among African women breeds low self-esteem and an inability to effectively challenge patriarchy. Moreover, many of Africa's challenges with health and poverty can be effectively eliminated with an educated populace. Women form over 50% of the population in most African countries and with sound education they can make a significant difference. As Kwegyir Aggrey, a renowned Ghanaian educationist put it, "the surest way to keep people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family."¹

* Faculty of Law, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. earchampong@yahoo.com.

¹ See Konotey-Ahulu F., "Dr. J E Kwegyir Aggrey is rather special" Modern Ghana, March 2007, online: <http://www.modernghana.com/news/132669/1/dr-j-e-kwegyir-aggrey-is-rather-special.html> accessed 29/11/10.

Increasingly, the drive to mainstream gender, in all state processes, is gaining momentum. Apusigah has observed that, “increasing realization of the differing effects, often negative, of gender-blind planning has sparked off moves to evoke differential treatment in planning for growth and development.”² Scholarly analysis of Ghana’s experience of structural adjustment and poverty reduction strategies reflects significant defects where gender and the social impact of such programmes are ignored.³ Also, political and economic decision making that does not incorporate a gender perspective tends to lead to skewed outcomes with limited benefits for women. I consider it important for *feminists@law*’s publications to encourage feminist legal theorizing on the role of gender in state policies, especially in Africa.

I also consider it important that *feminists@law* promote scholarly work on the issue of domestic violence. Violence against women has received attention at both the international and regional level. Although CEDAW does not directly address violence against women, the monitoring Committee for CEDAW has dealt with the issue in its General Recommendation No. 19 (1992), explaining that discrimination under CEDAW includes violence against women. At the regional level, Article 4 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa requires all State Parties to enact and enforce law to prohibit violence against women. Domestic violence poses significant challenges in most African communities. Socio-cultural practices and women’s low economic and political status have ensured that women continue to be viewed as property and subordinate to their male counterparts. The average Ghanaian man considers it appropriate to “discipline” a woman, leading to physical or psychological abuse.⁴ *feminists@law* can make a difference by promoting the publication of works that advance ways to effectively tackle gender violence, especially in African societies.

feminists@law’s open access status makes it a truly global journal and provides an opportunity to move feminist legal research forward. I reiterate my pleasure at being part of this first edition.

² Apusigah, A., “Gender Mainstreaming: The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy or is it?” Women in Action, August 2004, online: http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=512&Itemid=207 accessed 25/3/11.

³ See, for example, Kuenyehia, A., “The Impact of Structural Adjustment Programs on Women’s International Human Rights: The Example of Ghana” in *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives*, Rebecca J. Cook (ed) (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

⁴ See generally, Elizabeth Archampong, “Marital Rape – A Women’s Equality Issue in Ghana”, Unpublished paper prepared for The Equality Effect’s Three to be Free Project, available under Resources at <http://www.thequalityeffect.com>.
