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Women's Identities and Power

In the opening part of this chapter, I explore the meaning of power (but would not lay claim to undertaking an exhaustive exploration of the meaning of the subject), and make a case for why women need to attain or gain power, reorder unequal relationships of power, and resist repressive power in all spheres of life. In the two sections that follow, I link the identities of women that have emerged in the preceding chapters with women's abilities to attain political power, their experience of violence, and their abilities to resist violence.

Power

Nesbit and Wilson (2005) observed that definitions of power 'range from a view of power as brute force, through debates about individual versus structural capacities, to power as a complex social force that exists in, and produces, imbricated networks of shifting and contested relationships' (p. 496). On his part, Blackburn (1996) was of the view that 'the power of an individual or institution is the ability to achieve something, whether by right or by control or influence'. He further stated that power is 'the ability to mobilize economic, social or political forces in order to achieve a result' (pp. 295–296).

One assumes that the power resources which Marshall (1998) identified as wealth and control over jobs; numerical support; competence; expert knowledge; control of information; organizational capacity; control of instruments of force; occupation of certain social positions, etc., are among the economic, social or political forces that individuals, groups and institutions can mobilize to achieve a result. I would add that participation in decision-making processes as equals, not on assumption of equality, should be regarded as a power resource because of the possibilities that it represents. Nesbit and Wilson (2005) pointed out another approach to understanding power, and that is the view that 'power operates unseen and unacknowledged "behind the actor's back" to influence people and

their activities. For example, social forces such as class, race and gender largely determine people's actions and thoughts'.

As we had indicated in Chapter Five, Foucault (1980) alerted us to the fact that we see power in terms of the apparatus of state; think power outside economic considerations unimportant; and believe that we do not exercise power, 'others' do. Foucault contended that in spite of the omnipotence of state apparatus, the state cannot take over the entire field of actual power relations, and so, it has to depend on, and work through existing power relations. He believed that power is 'present in the smallest, apparently most inconsequential human interaction' (Brookfield 2001:7), and is exercised through the body, sexuality, family, kinship, knowledge, technology, and so on. From Foucault's position, we can deduce that power is present in all spheres and institutions of life; in both the private sphere (home or domestic) and the public sphere (community, government).

Foucault (1980) believed that power is manifested in the modes of surveillance, regulation or discipline that adapt human beings to the surrounding social structure. And, the power of society is not limited to its ability to prevent people from doing bad things, but it includes the control of self-definition and the preferred way of living of its members (Foucault cited in Blackburn 1996). Foucault's thoughts around power manifesting as modes of surveillance, regulation, or discipline posit a positive and negative view of the power of society, and it is important because it focuses attention on the uses to which power and power resources can be deployed. When power resources are mobilized or utilized to enhance the capabilities of persons, groups and institutions, they become enablers and are viewed positively. However, when they inhibit capabilities, they are viewed as disablers, dead hands and repressive. Foucault then rightly cautioned that it is erroneous to think of power as inhibiting, controlling and repressive alone. He believed that resistance to power is found right at the point where power relations are exercised. Power, then, can represent both repression and resistance, with the implication that there can be no single locus and mode of power, because different individuals and groups can exercise different modes of power, at different times, and in such are to be found the possibilities of different kinds of resistances.

Surely, resistance to power can be forged by accessing and mobilizing the same power resources that can be used to inhibit and control, and by acts of individual will or active agency. The implication of these is that how we define power, how we relate to, and use power and power resources will be dependent on our value orientation, belief system and frames of reference.

But what do these mean for Nigerian women? Our relationship with power, or more specifically, our lack of access to power resources, contributes significantly to our low social status. Apart from numerical strength, on aggregate, when compared with men, women do not have those power resources that

Marshall identified (wealth and control over jobs; competence; expert knowledge; control of information; organizational capacity; control of instruments of force; and occupation of certain social positions), so they cannot mobilize what they do not have to influence decisions, policies, and behaviours and attitudes that will enhance the capabilities of women.

Interestingly, it is through education (formal, non-formal and informal) that persons and groups can acquire some of the power resources that Marshall identified. We recall that education is one of the key elements in the analyses and understanding of the processes that construct women's identities, and how the resultant identities empower or disempower women in this book. Through education, persons and groups acquire competence and expert knowledge; are able to gain control of information and strengthen organizational capacity; and are able to create wealth and control jobs; and also participate, seemingly as equals, in decision-making processes. This means that education, broadly conceived, ought to help women gain access to some of those power resources that they presently lack. Ordinarily, this would mean that highly literate women, that is women with higher education, already possess some power resources, and so they should be able to utilize and mobilize them to enhance their own and other women's capabilities.

The catch here, however, is that women who have gone through higher education, and who have had at least fourteen years of formal schooling, have also been influenced by that power that Nesbit and Wilson described as operating 'unseen and unacknowledged behind the actor's back to influence people and their activities'. Within the teaching-learning context, this power operates through the hidden curriculum. Outside classrooms, within and outside institutions of learning, the power operates through the processes of informal learning and socialization.

Unfortunately, when this power, the 'hidden power', tries unsuccessfully to inhibit women, especially highly literate women, from developing their capabilities, other tactics are employed. The more overt power resources are deployed, especially by men, who possess some other types of power resources that women do not have access to, even by virtue of the acquisition of formal education. We shall return to this point later in this chapter.

So, why do women need power? First, women need to attain or gain power in at least three different arenas because many women do not have the power resources already identified and because they need to resist hidden power. The first arena in which they need to gain power is that of the state. They need to become state actors. State power goes a long way in determining what rights and privileges a group can have; whether or not a group will have access to key resources and facilities; and whether a group can resist those characteristics that have been socially and institutionally applied to the group, and individuals within

the group, which define their rights and duties, and affect the quality of their lives (Wiley 1994).

Of course, it is not just by being state actors that women can access power resources. Women can also access power resources such as competence, expert knowledge, control of information, and organizational capacity, through civil society movements. Armed with these power resources and their numerical strength, through civil society movements, women can influence and challenge state policies, as well as institutional and individual actions that inhibit women's capabilities. Being able to participate in civil society activities and mobilizing resources provided by civil society groups, to enhance the capabilities of women and other disadvantaged groups represent a positive exercise of power.

Another arena where women in Nigeria need to resist hidden power and gain power is the cultural sphere. An important power resource through which women can gain power in the cultural sphere is participation, as equals with men, in the decision-making processes in that sphere. Represented in the cultural sphere are institutions (religious and traditional institutions, the media, the educational system, and the home) where norms and values are determined, where knowledge is created and disseminated, and where moral standards (especially the moral defaults of the powerful {Alvin Gouldner, cited in Marshall 1998}) and beliefs are conventionalized and held up as sacrosanct.

The second reason women need power is because as human beings, women have the right to be(come) whatever they want to be, and they should not be denied that right. Finally, there are women who share values with men about how to enhance the capabilities of the majority of Nigerians. So, there is strength (in quantitative and qualitative terms) in having these groups of women pushing/ encouraging those viewpoints/positions, policies, attitudes and behaviour as participants with men in the process of governance and also as members of civil society.

While quite a number of Nigerian women already have some power resources, the ones that higher education grants them, many semi-literate and illiterate Nigerian women do not possess many power resources. However, both categories of women, literate women in particular, are as yet struggling to become state actors, struggling to build or be part of the women's movement; they are still unable to participate as equals with men in the decision-making processes in the cultural sphere, and they still have to consciously or unconsciously contend with hidden power which works against them. In the circumstances, the social status of Nigerian women is still low.

So, the question for the rest of this chapter is: would the identities of women that have emerged thus far in this book, especially in Chapter Four, assist women to gain productive power and resist repressive power?

Women's Identities and Women's Abilities to Attain Political Power

On aggregate, the responses that women gave to questions in respect of women's civic-political participation; the roles of women in the private and public spheres; what women consider to be their identities, and men's perception of women's identities, have implications for whether or not women can gain power, or transform power relationships. The task here is to determine how empowering and disempowering women's identities can be.

The following are the identities of women that have emerged from this study: first, is the individual character of women that influences and is influenced by their relationships with other people, their work ethic and performance at work. Second, is claiming and valuing those qualities and ascriptions that make men the male gender – some of their characters and their roles as breadwinners. Third, is the acceptance of the socially constructed female, one that is subordinate to and inferior to men. The last is the acceptance of what is deemed feminine – care, feeling, nurturing – but which has the potential for being put to productive use.

Men who think women should aspire to any political office do not appear to constitute a real problem to women attaining political power because their position is already positive. Many of them have implicitly and, at times, explicitly acknowledged two of the four identities of women that we have identified in this study as representing the potential that will help women perform well if they attain political leadership. The identities are: women's character (meticulous, trustworthy, firm, honest, not partial) and how it influences their relationship with others; their work ethic and performance; and, the positive view of women's femininity (care, feeling, nurturing) and its potential for productive use if women attain political power. Fortunately, men who support women and women (both literate and semi-literate) who affirm women are united in this respect.

However, and unfortunately too, most of the men who support women and women who affirm women also accept, mainly implicitly, women's subordination to men in private, especially given the assumption that women can better handle care-giving than men. Although they may not accept it, they are in agreement with the people who insist that women should be submissive to men and should therefore take subordinate positions to men in the public sphere. They reinforce women's identities as subordinate to men. The point here is not that women are subordinate to men because they cook or care for children/home/husband. The point is that the women in this study all work outside the home, and so they are co-breadwinners. None works full-time inside the home as a care-giver. We recall that only a handful of all the categories of respondents who would support women in their aspiration to attain political power considered women's and men's roles at home as the same, complementary or about partnering.

Partnership is about fair distribution of rights, responsibilities and privileges. When a wife who is a co-breadwinner returns home after work to do care-giving and the husband does not partake in care-giving, the husband is being accorded, or is insisting on a privilege which patriarchy confers on him, and which his wife does not enjoy. When a husband who is a co-breadwinner insists on taking final decisions on matters concerning the family, he is insisting on a right and privilege that he is not granting his wife. When he then implicitly (through all kinds of backhanded tactics) insists that his wife picks the bills equally with him, he is clearly not sharing responsibilities commensurate with the rights and privileges that he enjoys in the home. In this case then, the woman is subordinate to the husband. Clearly, the subordination of a wife to the husband is implied in the response of one of the male respondents who said a woman should contest elections to public office, provided she has her husband's permission. The stress here is on permission. Only subordinates take permission from their superiors; partners or persons who are equals hold discussions, to agree or reach some compromise or disagree.

In addition, when many women and men believe that women should play the role of care-giver at home, and also aspire to political leadership if they wish, they fail to realize that women who spend much of their time shuttling between cooking, caring for the children/home/husband and breadwinning will not have much time left to partake in civic-political affairs. That is to say they will not have much time left to take part in the decision-making processes that have consequences for whether or not they can feed their children well; they can continue to work (in both the formal and informal sectors), and they will be drawn into conflicts, the sources of which they do not know and understand, and conflicts for which they are going to reap little and lose much. Clearly, also, they will not be able to take part in decision-making processes that can stem or heighten violence on their gender, and those that can pauperize women the more, and so increase their powerlessness and vulnerability.

The point that is being made here is that women and men who believe that women should aspire to any political office, and who also accept as given, the view/position that women are the sole care-givers, reinforce the view that women are subordinate to men, and they are the same with persons who think women should not aspire to certain positions because they are flexible and the home will suffer, and so they push women farther off from political power.

The obvious hindrance to women attaining political power in this study are the men and women who do not believe that women should lead men (because of all kinds of reasons, including the views that women are flexible, the home will suffer, religion forbids it, etc.) and some of those who will support women provided they meet conditions such as: 'will not misbehave when she gets there' or 'can balance domestic work with public duties'. The women in this group are those women who have accepted and internalized the view that men are superior

to women, and they somewhat feel comfortable with it. Some play along with the view that men are superior because they think or know that there are immediate benefits to be reaped from playing along or conceding superiority to men. Many of the men in this category view women negatively, and they are also the types of men that have attempted to make women feel, or who have actually made women feel inferior at home/family, in educational institutions, the workplace and in the public.

These men say women ought to be flexible and that they are flexible. When they say women are flexible, they devalue flexibility, which accords with femininity, and so they say women cannot lead because they are flexible. They also say women ought to be flexible – meaning they should be pliable, indecisive, and not masculine. That is, they should not be bold, courageous, aggressive and firm. Given men's earlier position about flexibility, this means women should not begin to think of taking up leadership roles, since those are the characteristics of a leader. What this means is that they would rather have women remain flexible, and confirm they are flexible, so that they would have good grounds to continue to deny women leadership roles in the private and public spheres.

They also insist that women are care-givers, while men are breadwinners. They say women are best suited to the private sphere, where they will take subordinate position to men and then add the emotional blackmail – which is that the children will suffer if women give up their role of care-giving for political leadership. They refuse to acknowledge that women are breadwinners, because to do so will be to challenge their leadership roles, both in the public and private spheres.

They choose to ignore the fact that they know that a lot of women possess the characteristics that men lay claim to (courage, boldness, aggression) because if they acknowledge these characteristics in women, there will really be no grounds for them to continue to claim superiority over women, except on the basis of their male organs, patriarchy and religion, and these are shaky grounds. We recall that one semi-literate woman had said there is no special role for the male organ in leadership positions. Today, patriarchy is male privilege, whereas female and male respondents in this study have said men and women are created by God, and are equal before God.

Men who would not support women's aspiration to political positions, and so proffered a whole range of explanations for the position they have taken, are obviously putting up resistance to women attaining political power.

The Greed/Lust for Power and the Preservative Nature of Power

The resistance to women gaining political power is not because there is overwhelming evidence to show that women are incapable of holding the positions. The resistance appears to be what the male Christian leader in Lokoja referred to as the greed/lust for power by men. It appears that men cannot just

think of loosening their grip on power. The female Christian leader in Ibadan who is also an academic, one of the women that the Anglican Church in Nigeria had refused to ordain as priests, agreed with the male Christian leader in Lokoja when she said it appears that men are afraid of loosening their grip on power. In her view, the ordained ministry should not be about power but service because, after all, 'minister' means 'servant'. This is equally true of participation in secular politics. Persons who attain political power do not see themselves as holding the positions in trust for the people that they supposedly represent. Rather, they are excited about wielding oppressive power. We take two scenarios. If women are truly caring, loving, or nurturing and have truly internalized the positive aspects of the socially constructed notions of femininity, and many of them begin to occupy top political offices (or the topmost jobs in churches and mosques), it may just be, as many women hope, that they will perform better than their male counterparts who have monopolized governance, both secular and religious, and so, they may put the men to shame. There will be limited violent conflicts, economic and social deprivations, and corruption. In other words, women may humanize the public sphere and performance. Now, men do not want to experiment, since they do not know how it would turn out. So, they will continue to devalue their own notions of the feminine, the traits that they would rather women have. By devaluing what they insist is feminine, they will ensure that women do not aspire to, and get to the top political and religious positions.

On the other hand, if some women are indeed like the men who presently wield political power, as some women have indicated, and men know it, men will forever block such women from gaining power because the women may, as one man indicated, oppress men. If this group of women gets into power, men's 'presidential role in macro society' will probably become insecure. Given this, men then block this group of women with all manner of tactics – divide and rule (women won't for women); lies (they are mentally and emotionally unstable); and emotional blackmail (the children will suffer).

Clearly, the identity of women that men would rather women favour, which is being feminine and subordinate to men, is not empowering. The identities that most women explicitly favour – their character; some of the characteristics ascribed to men, breadwinning – and positive views of the feminine – care, feeling and nurturing – have great potential for empowering women, but we should briefly focus on character, for it would seem that the rest of the identities of women can, and do take a cue from it.

Before we examine women's character, we need to remind ourselves that the women in this study have challenged sexism mainly through their internal resistance to oppression. They have also challenged men's domination in public by pointing out the beauty of their own character and the positive aspects of their femininity that make them potentially better materials than men for public service, especially political leadership. They have deconstructed male superiority

by claiming and valuing their roles at home as breadwinners and co-breadwinners, and the fact that they possess some characteristics that are ascribed to men – courage, boldness, aggression, etc. However, the women concede to patriarchy, especially in the private sphere, thereby diminishing their abilities to transform relations of power, both at home and in the public sphere. By conceding to patriarchy, women inadvertently place limits on their abilities to: gain power, including the power to resist oppression; improve their economic well-being and reduce violence on women.

The Character of Women

We had observed that the traditional or indigenous education system in Nigeria covered, amongst others, the development of character. Fafunwa (1974) observed that 'indigenous African education places considerable emphasis on character training', adding that 'J.A. Majasan in his study of Yoruba education identified character training and religious education as the two main objectives of Yoruba education, and showed that other objectives were pursued through the latter.' Fafunwa also indicated that parents in traditional Nigerian society were concerned that their children should be upright, honest, kind and helpful to others and would go a long way to ensure that their children imbibed these values. He also stated that 'each child or youth is also expected to know about hospitality, etiquette and other social graces' (p. 21). Fafunwa further said that traditional education in the area of character training was severe, and that while persons would tolerate the absence of other aspects of education, the absence of 'good character' was thought to be a shameful thing, not just on the individual, but also on his immediate and extended family. Thus, among the Yoruba of Nigeria, when a person displays uprightness, kindness, etiquette, hospitality, and so on, it is said that: *Oni iwa* –meaning that s/he has character, but more appropriately, s/he has beauty of character. Today, there is a tendency to believe that a person who is cultured, that is, the one who has imbibed the norms and values of her community, whether negative or positive, is the one with beauty of character.

A point to note here is that throughout the section of his book that deals with the development of character, Fafunwa refers to the moulding of the character of 'each child', 'youth' and the 'individual' by the community. One does not therefore get the impression that the Yoruba, for example, expected particular character traits of their female children, as distinct from their male children. In other sections of the book, in dealing with respect for elders and peers for example, he is specific about how men and women were expected to greet elders.

Given the identities of women that have emerged from this study, we can conclude that the traditional belief about beauty of character still subsists among women, many of whom defined themselves through their character. We can take a quick look at the character of the female respondents in this study in

Appendix II. Of course, we can take the position that because women have been socialized to think first in terms of their character, one should not be surprised that they defined themselves more through their character.

Given the responses in the different sections of this book, it does not appear that men hold true to the ideals of good character. This is because women and men accused men of being corrupt, callous, dishonest and deceitful while some male respondents stated that women are light-hearted as regards corruption and 'women do not have much courage to mismanage money'. This means that to steal public funds requires courage, or amounts to being courageous, and women do not have the courage, because men have also said they are more courageous than women.

One important point that needs to be raised is that the Nigerian society of today is not exactly the same as the traditional society that Fafunwa described. He referred, for example, to the introduction of Islam, and the provision of additional instruction in character development by the Qur'anic schools (Fafunwa 1974). The same happened with the introduction of Christianity, especially with the work of the missionaries through the mission schools. The Islamic and Christian religions that were introduced to the country had no doubt been fused with the norms and values of the societies of the persons who brought the religions to Nigeria, and who also wrote the values and norms of the religions into our hearts and laws. The point that is being made is that the Europeans who brought Christianity to Nigeria, and the colonial administrators who were Christians, considered that sharp differences existed between the roles of men and women in the public and private spheres of life. They transferred this to our hearts and laws, and this worked to alter the status of Nigerian Women (Afonja and Aina 1995). Concomitantly, women were and are being evaluated, not in terms of the traditional beauty of character that Fafunwa described, but in terms of whether they are cultured – that is, according to the extent to which they have imbibed the norms and values prescribed by the new religions, or more appropriately, by the leaders/preachers of the new religions who are mostly men.

Now, unfortunately, a woman who is cultured is equated with a woman with beauty of character. The central plank of the difference between men and women by European values, 'when' the first set of missionaries came to Nigeria and according to the interpretations of the Bible that many religious leaders propagated then and do now, is that women are subject to men, and so they should be submissive to men. In this study, we have observed that a large percentage of our respondents are religious and they partake actively in the activities of their religious groups more than they partake in the activities of other groups. We have noted among most literate and semi-literate women that subordination to men is implicitly taken as given. We have also observed that Muslim and Christian religious leaders, especially female religious leaders, send

conflicting signals to women and inadvertently reinforce male superiority. The point that is being made is that women and their characters are being judged, in the main, by how submissive, how flexible and pliable they are in their relationship with men.

We take the Yoruba proverb that says, '*Iyawo so iwa nu, o ni oun ko ni ori oko'*, which translates to: a woman who loses her character complains of being unlucky with marriage. This statement implies that a woman's character is responsible for her marital woes (Yusuf 1995). It is not usually said that the man has no character because as Fashina (2001) had observed, 'It is expected that it is a woman who should possess the character that would be attractive to a man, and that will bring out the best in him' (p. 99).

Now we cannot turn back the hand of the clock, so we do not know how far back this proverb dates, and whether indeed Yoruba women were expected to bear the burden of good character way back before colonialism and before the advent of the missionaries. However, Fafunwa, as we have earlier noted, said children, youths and individuals were expected to be of good character. Definitely, there is a motive for or a benefit that will accrue to persons who insist that women bear the burden of good character in 'consensual' relationships.

Fortunately, there is another Yoruba proverb that makes it clear that women were not expected to bear the burden of good character in traditional Yoruba thought system. The proverb says: '*Iwa ni ewa omo eniyan, toju iwa re.*' This means 'character is beauty, watch/mind/nurture your character'. It is never said that, '*Iwa ni ewa obinrin*' or '*Iwa ni ewa okunrin*' – that is, 'character is the beauty of a woman' or 'character is the beauty of a man'. With respect to the earlier proverb which is oft-quoted, the woman who is cultured in a marriage is the one who is thought to possess beauty of character. If the cultured woman is the one that is deemed to have character, then character in this case is disempowering, except if we believe that being subordinate to men will improve the economic well-being of Nigerian women, end violence on Nigerian women, and help Nigerian women change relations of power, build a strong women's movement and occupy top political offices.

Given the aggregate of women's description of their character in this study, it does not appear that they think of themselves as cultured. Rather, it appears they think they possess beauty of character, and this is potentially empowering, as many women and men have pointed out when they supported women aspiring to political leadership, and this represents a possibility. The challenge, however, is that women concede to patriarchy. We cannot therefore assume that those women who described themselves as 'good', 'well behaved' and 'not troublesome' have not done so from the point of view of how cultured they think they are. If this is the case, their 'character' is potentially disempowering.

The point is that the Christian and Islamic religions that many of the women in this study subscribe to have been shown (especially by female religious lea-

ders) to prescribe the subordination of women to men. When women accept this and mould their character to suit the injunction, they cannot then, by any logic, desire to lead any group comprising male and female members. They cannot be imams, they cannot be ordained priests of the Anglican Church in Nigeria, they cannot contest for political positions, and then, the thought of becoming a State Governor or the President of the country would be heresy. Even if they were not interested in political offices, they would not also care to build parallel, powerful women's organizations (the women's movement), through which they can actively pursue and struggle for their strategic gender interests, because they would not even see any need to build such organizations or movements.

Clearly, also, a religion that preaches the subordination of one human being to another cannot but be disempowering, given the greed/lust for power among human beings, especially among men, as it then becomes the basis for all manner of oppression: gender, race, class, generational, etc.

The Identities of Women (the Character of Women), Women's Experience of Violence and Ability to Resist Violence

In this section, we proceed to link the discourse on the character of women (we recall that many women had identified their character as defining who they are and what they believe) with the dominant discourse on why women experience violence. We should not forget that the reason why women and men believe women experience violence is implicit in the type of advice that they had given, or would give to victims and potential victims of violence respectively.

In the preceding paragraphs, we tried to show that in pre-Islamic, pre-Christian and pre-colonial Yoruba thought system, character was gender neutral, but that today, given the influences of the new religions and colonialism, women are expected to bear the burden of good character and beauty of character. It was also observed that women who defined who they were and what they believed in terms of the beauty of character in the traditional Yoruba sense, for example, had an identity that was empowering; whereas, those who believed that they had good character traits because they were submissive/subordinate to men, in line with what the new religions (Christianity and Islam) and the culture of those who colonized our country prescribed, had an identity that would not empower them.

The results of the analyses of data in Chapter Five, which is the chapter that dealt with women's experience of violence, make our position about *iwa* – good character/beauty of character – very clear. We should not forget that the same religions in which some women and men rooted their beliefs about what women's character ought to be (that of women being subordinate/submissive to men), have been shown by both the literate men and many religious leaders in this study as being intolerant of violence on women. However, in the following paragraphs, we make the point that an insistence that women be subordinate to

men, as prescribed by Christianity and Islam, and the seeming intolerance of the two religions for violence against women throw up a basic contradiction, given, especially, the preservative nature of power. The point is that if a religion prescribes the subordination of women to men, and religious leaders preach this at every available opportunity, and followers believe it, violence, whether rape or battery, then becomes the means to ensure that women abide by the injunction. We should remember that it is the dominant voice in our society, the voice that concedes many privileges to men that determines what it means for women to be submissive to men.

In this work, we found that men perceived women as: weaker vessels; fragile; not courageous; not bold; care-givers; not mentally and emotionally stable; and they thought women are flexible and ought to be flexible. Given this view of who women are, it is expected, as the sacred texts have prescribed, that women be subject to men who are: breadwinners; bold; courageous; aggressive; etc. When women question men's views and actions, and taken-for-granted positions; when they confront men who attempt to treat them like mules; when they show themselves as courageous; and when they show that they are inflexible and are not sexual objects, they are deemed to be stubborn and not submissive. According to this thinking, a good woman, that is a woman with 'character', is the one who is meek, and flexible, and the bad woman is the one who is inflexible, perhaps outspoken and defends her interest vigorously. And so, some of the women and men in this study believed that battery is a 'natural' consequence of stubbornness and non-submissiveness. We recall that a respondent said he could hit a woman to establish the presidential role of a man in the house and to check the woman's excesses. Another said he could hit a woman if extremely provoked, to teach her to avoid confrontation.

We also recall that Aanwo, a literate female respondent who had articulated the role of women in the private sphere of life in terms of equality with men, was a victim of battery. She had also indicated that people thought it was normal for a man to hit a stubborn woman. The truth in Nigeria today is that, amidst plenty of religiosity, women who articulate views that reflect fairness and equality with men in marriage are deemed not to be submissive, and hence stubborn. We must not also forget that about half of the semi-literate women, and at least one literate woman, said women who had been hit by their husbands were stubborn, they were not submissive, and they had bad character. This is rather unfortunate, for what this means is that women believe that a person in 'authority' or position of power has the right to use force to maintain that authority (hooks 1984).

The point is that the insistence that women should be submissive to men sets the stage for men to heap violence on women, and it results in violence against women. Just the same way that an insistence that children obey parents

unquestioningly, for example, results in both women (who are the main victims of all kinds of violence) and men, heaping violence on children.

Paradoxically, a woman or a girl who has 'character', that is a girl who is meek, gentle, and respects elders and persons in positions of 'authority' is an easy prey for (habitual) sexual abusers. When these totally corrupt and unkind men have abused girls and women whom society had taught to be meek, gentle, respectful and attractive, the same society, especially women who have made themselves gatekeepers for the views, norms and values that privilege men, then blame the victims for: being badly behaved; dressing badly and wildly; for walking around at night; not comporting themselves well; and, not praying hard enough. The truth is that women who have been taught to be meek and gentle and 'good' cannot defend themselves vigorously against rape and sexual harassment while the abuses are on, and after the experience, they are unable to talk about it because of the fear that they will be condemned as bad.

Conversely, women who have shown that they are inflexible, courageous, not sexual objects and not subordinate to men, have been victims of rape and sexual harassment because men (who are habitual sexual abusers; who lack discipline; who are aware of the pervasive culture of impunity, and the negative attitude towards rape victims and women who are not submissive in our society), want to show the women 'their place'. In cases like these, persons who would usually blame women for everything would say the rape victim had a bad attitude towards men and was haughty; otherwise she would have been able to handle the situation better.

By the traditional Yoruba view of character, and the type of character education that Fafunwa had indicated that a child, a youth and an individual was given in traditional Nigerian communities, men who visit violence of any kind on women lack character – '*iwa*'.

We have to acknowledge that the opposition of religious leaders (both the traditional and new religions) to violence against women and the fact that some of the literate men opposed violence on women on the basis of their religious beliefs gives hope, and represents a possibility. The task would be to get the religious leaders to privilege the transformative aspects of their religions. We note, for instance, that contrary to the Qur'anic injunction that places the burden of maintaining chastity on both Muslim men and women, as it requires that men and women lower their gaze, adherents of the religion (and Christians as well) make a big issue of women's 'bad' and 'wild' dressing. They then emphasize the injunction that says women should cover up their bodies. Also, instead of emphasizing the biblical injunction that urges men to love their wives as Christ loves the Church, Christians emphasize the injunction that urges women to submit to their husbands.