

Response to Transnational Feminism in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence in Africa

by Annalisa Choy

Professor Cynthia Grant Bowman makes interesting observations in her forthcoming article *Transnational Feminism in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence in Africa*. Her article focuses on how transnational feminism is reflected in current state of Ghanaian domestic violence law, and the proposed remedies for this massive problem. Although the state of IPV in Ghana is much improved from its first identification in the early twenty-first century, there is still much to be done in with regard to both legal and non-legal remedies. On the legal side, the Domestic Violence Act needs stricter enforcement mechanisms and means of implementation. However, much can be done on the non-legal side as well.

As Professor Bowman indicates in her article, transnational feminism involves communication “with deep sensitivity to the importance of differing contexts.” Viewed under this lens, the findings from early studies of IPV in Ghana can help shed light on IPV remedies that may be most effective in Ghana. The survey by the International Federation of Women Lawyers showed that most Ghanaian women thought it was acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if it did not cause serious injury. Even more revealing, the Georgetown International Women’s Rights Clinic found that it was widely accepted that a husband had the right to physically discipline his wife, especially when she threatened his superiority. In addition, traditional community leaders would respond to complaints of IPV by encouraging the victims to conform. The widespread acceptance of physical discipline was not confined to the household, as evidenced by the fact that female teacher would hit young girls in their classes to prepare them for when their husbands hit them later on.

The fact that women would only want to utilize mediation by chiefs and elders, combined with the work of community action teams, rather than pursuing legal remedies, tells us something about an important non-legal remedy to this problem in Ghana. Accordingly, Bowman is right when she emphasizes the importance of non-legal remedies in tackling the IPV problem in Ghana.

Another non-legal remedy that I found important, and that needs to be exploited more is the use of interventions that combat educating young children. It is not only important that measures be taken against IPV at its current state, but that we combat IPV through future generations. The masculinity culture can be changed, slowly, through progressive generations. It would be extremely difficult to change the “equality undermines men’s dignity” mindset in one fell swoop. However, teaching young children away from that mentality, if successful, would have very beneficial effects in the years to come, when those young men grow up and get married themselves.

Another angle that might be important for Ghana was combating IPV through the medical system. If medical professionals were to take reporting potential cases of IPV more stringently, it would help. However, there is the fear that women would not seek medical care if they knew they were displaying the symptoms of IPV and did not want to implicate their husbands.