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ROBINAH S. NAKABO

LIBERATED FOLLOWERSHIP AND  
PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIVE THOUGHT  
FOR MEANINGFUL FEMINIST ENGAGEMENT\*

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy and feminism in Uganda are subjects to be discussed with reservation. Arguments about feminism mostly collapse into one category – radical feminism. Even with this common speech that refers to feminism as radical feminism, it is not clear whether those who hold such a conception of feminism understand what exactly radical feminism is, or even what feminism is all about. Philosophy, which ought to be a discipline that aids in understanding concepts such as these, their usage and implications, is avoided at all costs by most Ugandans. It is common for someone to say that philosophy is a complex subject for confused individuals and there is no sense in one setting time aside for philosophical study. With such attitudes, one wonders why and whether Ugandans meaningfully participate in globally-uniting phenomena, for instance the annual “Women’s Day” celebrations set for 8 March. It is also intriguing that if they do, they do not yet engage in any discourse about perceptions of 8 March for females and males. What do they celebrate and how does it impact on their lives the rest of the year? The argument here is that in order to understand feminism and all it represents, philosophy is an important

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tool without which, Ugandan's wallow in endless prejudices and contradictions that do not help better interaction between women and men or to equally participate in globally discussed issues. In this paper, I attempt to answer: Why is philosophy not appealing to women in Uganda and what can be done to have changed attitudes?

## PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIVE THOUGHT AND LIBERATED FOLLOWERSHIP

Philosophical reflective thought in this paper is used in John Dewey's sense (1859–1952), where thought is not arbitrary, but follows a conscious sequence, each succeeding thought determining the next, which in turn leads back to the one it proceeds from. It involves rejecting or affirming beliefs depending on new evidence, experiences and conscious inquiry into the norm. Followership is used to denote the act of responding to goals, objectives, principles, values, and directives, all aimed at achieving a particular end for the fulfilment of a meaningful life. For followership to be liberated, it requires that one responds to goals, objectives, principles, values, and directives in an autonomous, as opposed to heteronomous, manner. This effectively happens with the application of philosophical reflective thought.

There are various reasons to explain the less enticing nature of philosophy and why it therefore cannot be of much use in creating critical feminist attitudes among women in Uganda. In this paper, I collapse them under deficiency in philosophical reflective thought<sup>1</sup> and liberated followership.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, by its very nature, reflective thought requires the discipline of hard mental work. Citing Whitehead, Ferre points out that it is hard exercise for the mind to take notice of what is, "always or almost always present".<sup>3</sup> That the method used, is noticing difference. Without awareness of this difference, the mind rarely reflects on everyday common occurrences. Whereas individuals in Uganda undeniably engage in cognitive activities, there might be need

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. DEWEY 1910, 1–6 (Para. 1).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CHALEFF 1995, 16.

<sup>3</sup> FERRE 1995, 23.

to improve this habit and make it more deliberate and intentional, as Dewey expressed it. Some people, perhaps, put in effort to critically reflect on their circumstances, but certain realities destabilise that assertion. Most mental activities are arbitrary and reactionary, or in this case Mbembe might say, it's a survival strategy to think like that, as he responded to the "[...] to desire freedom?" question.<sup>4</sup> Yet for reflective thought to be impactful, it must be intentional, portrayed in both explicit and implicit actions and speech. This is, however, not the case in most situations.

For instance, thoughtless advice from opinion leaders, such as encouraging people to have more children, and communication intended to address moral issues. The latter often finds quick solutions from coalesced social prescriptions, without reflection on present conditions and how they fit within a wider context. A case in point is the recent message from a high-profile person: the Queen of Buganda, Silvia Nagginda. On Radio Buganda one June morning, she was quoted on the nine o'clock news; advising men to take back their responsibility of telling women and their wives what to wear, and in a way, instructing men on what to like about women. This could be interpreted as a strategy to control both women's and men's sexualities. In the first instance, though society has changed immensely, she still falls back on the old way of thinking, where men treated their wives and women generally like children under their tutelage, to use Kant's conception.<sup>5</sup> This has implications for the current struggle for the emancipation of women. It takes us back many steps, because if we are reiterating the need for women to be actively engaged in decision-making and especially in matters that concern their lives, telling men to take charge once more is defeatist.

For one, she is admitting to the old prejudice that women need to be guided by men. In a way, she justifies the habit of keeping women rotating from the control of one male to another. From father to brother, who plays a symbolic role in 'giving away' the sister in marriage to the church, before the church hands her over to a would-be husband. Then the husband has full control, including what she has to wear as

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<sup>4</sup> O'NEILL 2018, Para. 9–11.

<sup>5</sup> KANT 1996, Para. 2–3.

she steps out of the house. Where is the emancipation of women then? What is emancipation for Ugandan society? Though these questions require time to conduct more research to answer them adequately, there is no harm in raising them now.

Another implication lies in the current struggle to have more women in political positions of authority, which is also used to measure the Gender Inequality Index (GII) by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). According to the UNDP, the empowerment of Uganda's women is rated as depending on 35 % of parliamentary seats currently occupied by women.<sup>6</sup> Imagine a female minister or head of any institution, public or private, giving instructions to a male colleague or subordinate, who refuses to co-operate on the grounds that these directions are coming from a woman. He diverts the argument to questioning her on whether her husband gave her permission to dress the way she is dressed! Many times, insubordinate males use such prejudices to put down or demean women's authority. Again, we find that advice from opinion leaders, such as the queen of Buganda, that is not well thought-out, leaves us nowhere in the struggle to realise women's political participation.

The current trend in domestic gender-based violence (DGBV) is also alarming. It is not clear whether changes in this phenomenon are related to more women attaining education and therefore harbouring different aspirations than before. What is clear is that presently, DGBV is leading to deaths. Whereas women would get a beating, sometimes with aggravated physical injury, presently their lives are in danger. Media outlets are replete with cases of spousal abuse and murder. *Agataliko nfuufu* YouTube videos provide standalone evidence. The causes are usually surrounded by avoidable actions or behaviour. Unlike before, now women are gaining ability in self-defence and sometimes instigate violence themselves, especially when there is a co-wife in the picture or the threat of losing property ownership is present. We are no longer surprised to hear that a woman hacked or beat her husband to death, or used acid in an attack on her victim. This is very extreme, but it is the reality. Therefore, for someone to suggest taking us back to the unjustifiable control of man over woman, is to

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<sup>6</sup> UNDP 2016, 216.

intensify this violent situation. A woman who wants to prove her freedom of expression in sexuality might not hesitate when mishandled by a husband, who has a false conception of authority over his spouse or partner. This is not to condone violence of any sort, but to show the likely effects of such thoughtless advice from opinion leaders.

Someone might wonder whether women can be lacking in self-control to such an extent that mere advice from a husband, or any male for that matter (since the queen seems to be suggesting that all men take charge of women's dressing styles), could trigger violent reactions. In fact, this counters the stereotype of women's passivity in DGBV acts. The situation is more complex. We note how a woman will bottle up anger and pain from constant abuse of any sort until such a time when one more comment will spiral into unexpected behaviour. Is self-control without limits? Socrates, in Plato's *Republic*, reminds us that excesses spill into their opposites.<sup>7</sup> It is no longer the "battered woman's syndrome", but retaliation of many women, on behalf of all former victims of DGBV.

Secondly, by the queen directing men to take charge of women's dressing styles, it signifies some kind of power drawn from the authority imbedded in her position as queen of Buganda. However, she shows that even with her power, as a woman, she can only make use of it in a way that fosters traditionally recognised ideals of the superiority of men and the submissiveness of women, whether married or not. This puts into question whether Uganda as a society is aware of these trends in other contexts. The queen, it should be expected, would be advising for an efficient and effective way of living that enables individuals to enjoy fulfilled lives and not to subordinate themselves to subjective dressing styles. Follett advised against following ideals that individuals have no part in creating.<sup>8</sup> We all need to be actively designing our lives, instead of sitting back and letting men do it for us. We need democracy in families. That is what the queen of Buganda should be using her power to advocate for. But that is to assume that she matches up to such a task. Nevertheless, as utopian as it might sound, it is very possible if she puts some serious thought into it.

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<sup>7</sup> PLATO 1998, Book III, 558.

<sup>8</sup> FOLLETT 1918, 20.

It might be argued that the queen has a duty to preserve the traditional social ideals of the Kingdom of Buganda. However, when it comes to appropriateness in dress, many never reflect on how women used to dress before the advent of foreigners. A few important body parts would get privilege of protection from view. It was the coming of foreigners that brought about the change. The *gomesi/busuuti*, which was recommended for ladies, started with the young ladies who were joining mission schools, such as Gayaza Junior School. The habit spread throughout the country. With time, it was incorporated into the culture to such an extent that without looking very closely, one would not know how traditional Baganda people used to dress. This *gomesi* started losing face partly because of its incompatibility with the weather, the cumbersome nature of the style and the fact that people always have the opportunity to do something different.<sup>9</sup> In a similar manner to the way a *gomesi* came to be recognised as traditional apparel for women in Buganda, in the same way other styles can be creatively incorporated. And since it is women who are concerned, they should join hands in deciding what is now appropriate. This appropriateness ought to take into consideration the fact that women no longer have to sit at home or work around the home, but sometimes have to travel over distances in search of gainful employment. The weather and the difficulties of public transportation can no longer accommodate certain ways of dressing. There is simply no time to dwell on traditional clothing, unless one is attending a traditional function. Otherwise, there is a lack of serious thought in dwelling on what women wear, when there are other life-threatening issues to be addressed. Whereas it is understandable for the queen to desire active participation in the preservation of traditional ideals, it is parochialism in disguise.

Thought should also be directed towards examining why the queen comes forward at this time to offer such advice. The first of its kind sprang from the infamous Anti-Pornography Act, also known as the “Miniskirt Bill”, which was contested in 2014. This temporarily caused chaos as women were undressed on the streets for ‘indecent’ dressing styles. In 2017, new directives emerged dictating how women

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<sup>9</sup> SHANTI UGANDA 2017.

and men were supposed to dress in public service. Whereas all workplaces ideally have ethical codes of conduct, this move is interpreted as targeting women mostly, although some men who prefer to dress in free style batik wear are also affected.<sup>10</sup> It must be the dissenting voices from such prescriptions that have prompted the queen of Buganda to come out with such a message. This implies, therefore, the symbolic traditional institutions, in a struggle to remain relevant in society, aligning with the government and allowing themselves to be used as tools of social control. Not only does the government have power over continued operation or not, symbolic traditional institutions also have power for social change, but can only be employed at the government's mercy.

One could ask: How impactful is the queen's message? This might be another voice in the wilderness on the part of young women, who are constantly exposed to new fashion trends on social media, popular music and film, someone might argue. However, the same message can be used by men to reinforce their control over their spouses. This might also trigger DGBV. But most importantly, such a message yields undue attention to women's bodies, which is what the message intends to avoid. The control of women's bodies and their sexuality in a way breeds a more sexualised society, because an attempt at repression only perpetuates it.<sup>11</sup> The queen's voice is an addition to other voices from religious and political leaders; this is what gives it potency. However, this potency leads to the abuse and violation of women's freedom of sexual expression.

Whereas moralising society is in itself expected, and though the debate can continue as to how this moralising should be implemented, one fundamental question is: why now? What is causing the need to do so? The 2014 argument in parliament was that women are raped because of their dressing styles. Others claim that women are a distraction to their male counterparts at work, with their provocative dressing styles. Currently, in Makerere University, cases of sexual harassment or 'sex for marks' as it is commonly referred to, points to the same issue that female students dress indecently and entice male lecturers, students

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<sup>10</sup> ATUHAIRE 2017.

<sup>11</sup> FOUCAULT 1978, 49.

and other male staff into sexual relations.<sup>12</sup> Whereas the agency of female students in this situation cannot be easily discarded, the argument insinuates that most men are an irrational lot, without self-control. It can also in a way justify paedophilia, since some men have been reported to having raped children, even infants and babies. There are many examples, but one can suffice. A 63-year-old Imam pleaded guilty to the defiling of a 2-year-old girl, claiming, “I saw my zip opening by itself”.<sup>13</sup> It also proves bestiality, as some men have been caught in sexual acts with animals. If all these acts have widely recognised terms, then they have been in existence for a long time. Why now?

It takes us back to the argument that moralising is directed towards a woman. A woman should be the one to be tamed, while a man remains brutishly free. In Luganda (one of the languages of the African Great Lakes region) the term commonly used is *okusajjalaata*. Literally translated this would mean ‘freedom to be and do whatever pleases him’. But this freedom is mainly connotatively related to his behaviour in selecting or acquiring sexual partners and how he treats them. This woman must follow streamlined directives ‘for her own good’. They advise a woman not to talk back to her husband. If not, she can be beaten, or the man will use his aforementioned freedom and in that case, he should not be blamed because the woman has provoked him; dress appropriately if you do not wish for rape; what does that say about the man? Moreover, one who is expected to be the leader at family level, but with no self-control? We should not be surprised then with alarming corruption, because most men in Uganda do not exercise self-control. Keep such men away from public finances, from any position of authority, because he has no control over himself. He cannot tell the difference between time for coitus and for work; between a child and a consensual woman for sex; between human beings and animals. If that is the case, why should we trust such men with positions of authority and expect no corruption or selfishly holding on tight, without giving others a chance, like President Museveni has done since 1986? The realisation that women are coming out of obscurity

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<sup>12</sup> TAMALE 2018, 19.

<sup>13</sup> PAPA 2018.

questions passive followership and threatens male supremacy, hence a desire to stay in charge. Unfortunately, most women like the queen are relaxed in reflecting on the wider meaning of such occurrences, which could be vital resources in our fight for emancipation and empowerment, but most importantly, liberated followership.

The most recent example is one of a famous female gospel musician. This lady divorced, but now seeks to find a new relationship with another male. Both are currently members of parliament and they have decided to get married. However, another woman has appeared, claiming that this is her would-be husband.<sup>14</sup> They had already started the traditional celebrations; one of which is a preliminary visit to the woman's home to meet the paternal aunt, who officiates the process of marriage. They already have a child and expect to have more as the man had promised to proceed with other celebrations, namely the introduction ceremony and church function, with an accompanying reception. On hearing this, the public took to the media to voice their disappointment. Not of the man who promised another woman marriage, but the woman in the new relationship. She is accused of apparently "stealing" another woman's man. There is so much in this phenomenon, conveniently hidden behind the comfortable way of thinking. A man is always left to his mischief. These two women started fighting each other with the help of society, while he goes about his business. Sadly, many women put up with such issues together, with the obscenity of birthing many children in competition, without reflecting on the conditions for their survival, as explored in *Woman and the New Race*.<sup>15</sup>

To take this deficiency in reflective thought and lack of liberated followership further, it would be interesting to hear what kind of advice comes from an individual with a feminist consciousness to a victim of DGBV and how widely contrasted that advice would be from one given by a "typical" Ugandan woman. This woman need not be illiterate or of low social standing, dwelling in rural or urban areas. What you would hear is a woman is supposed to act 'foolish' for the sake of her marriage. A woman is supposed to keep it together, in order not to

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<sup>14</sup> NSAMBA 2018.

<sup>15</sup> SANGER 1920, 28.

disintegrate her family. A woman is one who builds a home! A woman should not disclose the ills of her husband to shame him. No matter his behaviour, he must not be denied sex! If not, do not blame him, *bw'asajalaata*, as explained earlier. When a woman remembers these and more, she sustains the marriage through twenty-five years, thirty, sixty, with passivity in followership and then she has reason to celebrate those years of enduring marriage. Many people do celebrate and hear them narrate years of abuse, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment. "It would be a joy to celebrate when you make twenty-five years of marriage", I was informed by one concerned, unmarried family friend. "What would I be celebrating", I asked, "twenty-five years of foolishness?" "Yes, that is what makes a married woman", she replied. How alarming is that! In my mind, I am fighting and declaring how I do not wish to hear this celebratory subject at all.

This family friend chose not to be married, but encourages other women to accept the situation and give their all to reach that celebration. Occasionally reminiscing about what her aunt used to say when she was young, and proud to pass it on to anyone who cares to listen. As she speaks, there is no slight concern of what she really means or its implications; no critical reflection to at least find a middle ground, only emphasising the supremacy of the husband. She even provides examples of marriages where a wife had to be 'foolish' until the husband passed away. To my mind I ask, if so many women go through so much, is it reason enough to continue with this façade or to question the entire institution? To furnish my mind with so many examples of 'foolish' wives does not comfort me at all, yet that seems to be the goal. But as it is stated in *Crime and Punishment*, from a hundred rabbits you cannot make a horse. Several examples of wives who have endured abuse, does not make it alright. It makes me want to do something; if not for others, at least for myself. Since I cannot garner enough support, I start with myself – approach life differently with an intentional, critical reflective mind and liberated followership.

The advice to beget more children was advanced by one male Member of Parliament called Hajji Nadduli. One would expect that individuals would think hard before actually carrying this message through into action. Both the proposer and protagonists do not reflect on the implications of this seemingly innocuous advice. Many media

personalities have in fact made fun of Nadduli's call for more children, which makes it a light matter. However, reading Margaret Sanger's ideas on birth control, it becomes clear what dangers arise from such a call. Currently in Uganda, there are numerous land disputes that lead children to kill their parents, who are taking a long time to die and pass on property; siblings fighting over inheritances; many married couples at war due to property, but mostly land; neighbours encroach on each other's land causing fights and deaths. There is high crime in specific areas. Theft, rape, homicides are some of those crimes. Even increasing numbers in unemployment are partly caused by this malady of thoughtlessly begetting children.

The solution lies in a woman taking agency over her body<sup>16</sup> and liberating herself from passive followership. There are various conditions against this view, including religious and cultural ones. But unless a woman decides when and how often she conceives, many families will continue to live in poverty. Society has not made it any better by positioning women at the mercy of men, even in accessing contraceptives. Many utilise them in secret, and then come up with various excuses for not conceiving. Freedom is completely curtailed. If a woman refuses to get pregnant, a man has that 'freedom' to get another, often younger, woman for the 'job'. This too, having demeaning effects on the perception of the older woman, is pressure enough to make her accept conceiving, even if she could choose otherwise by ignoring social opinions. For society is replete with people who know the right number of children that makes a 'beautiful' family, yet offer nothing in contribution for the family's wellbeing. Many have acquiesced to this absurdity, with little consideration of the implications in various spheres of life, especially on women who many times are abandoned by their spouses when they cannot sustain the pressure. Incidentally, they do not retreat from begetting children, but move away to start another family with the view that the previous woman was a stress factor. Some have made it a habit to get into a relationship that they destroy once a woman conceives. Their argument is that a woman can survive with her children no matter what and that each child comes with its blessings. Most annoying is the fact that women

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<sup>16</sup> SANGER 1920, 57.

do not learn from others' experiences. The kind of plasticity Dewey writes of is not heeded.<sup>17</sup> Reason would demand that with the way men behave in this matter, women should take agency and only conceive if they are sure to stand alone, as the possibility of being abandoned by their male partners is high. They need to critically reflect on societal calls for more children to make a husband happy.

Fear is also a hindrance to many women, in their desire to shake off the shackles of oppression, to be liberated in followership. As I shared my reflections with Dr Jimmy Spire Ssentongo about the conference where this paper was first presented, and what I intended to talk about, he expressed his misgivings about the idea of not only women engaging in philosophical studies, but the entire population. He thinks that there is no visible role model in the discipline to encourage young minds to take up the subject. He also thinks that traditionally, there have been very few women philosophers, which has kept the discipline mainly for men. Dr Ssentongo is a columnist and political cartoonist with *The Observer* newspaper and also a teacher of philosophy. His ideas are widely read by young people and he inspires them to critical reflection. On the question of women living out the theory learnt in philosophy classes, he thinks the fear of being called names, swimming upstream, and the like, is not for most women in Uganda. This is no problem, but how many are willing to live that critical reflective mind? He thinks this fear cannot allow young women to relate their circumstances to what they learn in a philosophy class. Partly, the blame rests on the style and philosophical principles that guide education pursuits in Uganda. As Dewey says, teaching should be designed with practical elements included.<sup>18</sup> However, classwork and life outside it, even outside the class door, is totally contradictory. Many prefer fitting in with wider societal norms than secluding themselves, which mostly aids in nurturing a critical, reflective attitude. It is this separation of a critical reflective mind from social life that creates the fear to denounce oppression and gather courage to counter interests of those in authority that conflict with women's ideals.

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<sup>17</sup> DEWEY 1916, 49–58.

<sup>18</sup> DEWEY 1916, 281–285.

On the surface, this discussion with Dr Ssentongo focuses on women and their fear of failing to secure husbands, on account of being critical. The fundamental challenge he does not consider is the way changes are circumventing men's attitude towards a critically reflective woman. As strategies are made to educate a girl-child, and avail of all kinds of opportunities for a woman that were a reserve for men before, what strategies are in place for a man to accept these new changes in Uganda? How prepared are they to share domestic duties and financial responsibilities? Most important of all, how ready are they to share decision-making processes, without one compromising for the sake of showing subjectivity to the other? It is Follett who clearly explains the dangers of compromising.<sup>19</sup> Sooner or later ill-sentiments come up at a point when compromise is not substituted for integration of all ideas. Whereas women fear labels of insubordinate wife, and since failure of a marriage or any intimate relationship is always attributed to a woman's failure to 'keep the man satisfied', there is a need to question the preparedness of men to receive the changed woman, a new woman, a critically reflective woman.

## CONNECTION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Taking all of the above into account, one wonders whether international celebrations of Women's Day make much sense in Uganda. This year's celebrations (2018) were met with President Museveni sharing his strategies to avoid violence in case of disagreements with his wife, Janet Kataha Museveni, who is also the Minister for Education and Sports. He despises men who physically abuse their wives, and later call themselves men. This is laudable indeed. But why did we not hear that from the wife, since it was Women's Day? What is her side of the story? Of late, many women have lost their lives due to kidnapping and gruesome murder. Apart from reminding us of how this is being addressed, he praises himself for having brought peace in 1986. DGBV is on the rise, but he tells men to go away from their wives if they annoy them. How many men can afford 'to go away'? To

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<sup>19</sup> FOLLETT 1918, 39.

where? With what resources? Does he mean just taking a walk around the house, compound, which many do not have, or what? On such a day that honours women, one should expect strategies to make the country habitable, with all kinds of freedoms for women as they relate to men, not arbitrary talk.

“Women’s Day is the Independence Day for women”, says one informant in an informal conversation interview held in May 2018. He thinks it’s the day women are independent, because then a man ought to make an appearance in the kitchen. Walking through town on 8 March 2018, I overheard a female street vender ask a male vender whether he left home after cooking for his wife, which he laughed off and changed the subject. A group discussion about the same topic with some Makerere University students revealed that many conflate Women’s Day into Mother’s Day, to remember all the good things their mothers have done for them. I decided to approach this question informally because most of the time people respond normatively, instead of revealing the reality on the ground. For instance, a discussion with a male lecturer about Women’s Day yielded a response with some critical thought added to it, to show that Women’s Day is meant to appreciate the role women play in society. But all the informal conversations I had, reflected the attachment of Women’s Day to women’s domestic work and nothing more. So, if the day is taken to imply a day off from household chores for women, what happens the rest of the year? Comparatively, there is a need to research what other women, outside Africa, perceive of Women’s Day and men’s attitudes towards it. Clearly in Uganda, whereas it is a public holiday, its being associated with women’s domestic chores is too simplistic and reductionist. As with the celebrations I mentioned earlier of so many years in marriage as ‘fools’, Women’s Day celebrations in Uganda might also be a celebration of sustaining the year-round stereotypical image of a woman in Uganda.

It can also be said that Women’s Day is meant for a certain segment of society. The biggest percentage of women might go through the year without noticing the day because they are busy surviving. If that is the case, what relevance does this celebration bring to an everyday woman? If someone has to look for a day’s food for her children, she sees no business thinking about Women’s Day and yet it is

such women who should benefit from it. These reflections leave one empty and downcast for failure in solving the mystery of how to make such international celebrations relevant to all in society and make sense year-round. The language and concepts need to yield consistent meaning for all women.

CULTIVATING AND NURTURING CRITICAL  
REFLECTIVE THOUGHT AMIDST SOCIAL PRESSURE:  
A REFLEXIVE STANCE

The years between 2000 to 2003 were filled with mixed emotions, as I oscillated between gender and development (GAD) classes as my major and philosophy as a minor. This combination was suited to shaping my current views. I remember that many lectures in GAD were descriptions of what transpired in America and elsewhere to change the situation of women. Although very insightful, if it were not for the philosophy classes, I would have received unbalanced training in gender issues. I got the chance to apply philosophical dispositions of being critical, systematic and rational to understanding the theories in GAD studies. I could tell the difference between descriptions, analysis and normative attitudes towards a subject in discussion. I left Makerere University fulfilled and ready to face the world.

However, like the point Dr Ssentongo raised, that a woman has to choose between holding a critical reflective attitude or marriage and social life; reality slowly kicked in. The relationship of three years was in question. Someone who had been in support of my independent thought and attitude had started changing. A baby was on the way and I had no employment yet. I tried to be rational in my arguments for all major decisions, but many times, this was interpreted as being disrespectful. I had to make many compromises to make life better, but as Follett says, compromises come back to haunt whoever makes them.<sup>20</sup> I discovered that there is always a strong desire to live in the normative, yet situations call for something totally different.

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<sup>20</sup> FOLLETT 1918, 9.

The strongest instinct is to blame the other; I tried it for some time, but gave it up as soon I was reminded of the responsibility to shape my life. Others' ideas and opinions come and go, as we allow them and not the other way round.<sup>21</sup> At one point I realised that whatever starves, dies after a while. I had to ignore some attitudes, comments and advice from certain segments of society to put up a good fight. The "liberated follower" comes to mind at this point, similar to "the courageous follower".<sup>22</sup> I was determined to live a prejudice-free life, with only unavoidable contradictions. It has not been easy, but the struggle continues. This has come at a cost of losing friendships, spending too much time alone and rejecting certain advice from my elders. It has, however, given me leverage and peace of mind. I feel I have control over my life because I can make a choice, I express my mind, I take nothing for granted and I do not fear criticism. I attribute this to a few supportive people in my life; for one my mother, my guardian-father, and a professor, who is also my mentor. All women need to identify supportive connections that help them to own their decisions instead of playing blame games. Society might fail us through its structures, but ultimately, we have unrealised power to take charge. We have to constantly search for knowledge and wisdom through self-education to learn critical reflection and liberated followership.

## CONCLUSION AND A WAY FORWARD

I have argued in this paper that deficiency in philosophical reflection and liberated followership explain why the attitude towards feminism is negative. It is also made worse when many shun philosophy as a discipline, yet it acts as a tool for managing life's challenges. This is exacerbated by lack of liberated and courageous followership which speaks truth to authority, challenges prejudices, and breaks the shackles of oppression. Whereas my character and temperament may be related to stoicism, philosophy has helped in nurturing that critical reflective mind that helps me to take reflexive moments to search for the

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<sup>21</sup> SCHOPENHAUER 2004, 42.

<sup>22</sup> CHALEFF 1995, 16.

meaning of life and how they relate to my environment and others I share it with. I therefore suggest that more research be initiated, to help other females understand and make use of philosophical methodology as a way of life, to out-manoeuvre gender-related challenges. This can be achieved by first researching how philosophy can be incorporated into the curriculum, creating awareness about philosophy in primary and secondary schools, with a special focus on young women. I have deliberately left out the use of the term ‘feminism’ in my discussion because of the negative connotations attached to it in Uganda. However, with a philosophical attitude, there is no way one can fail to move closer to identifying with the term, whether male or female. In a way, philosophy as a tool can help individuals use the term themselves after availing themselves of enough examples subjected to critical, systematic and rational study. It is then that we can wholly and meaningfully benefit from celebrations that involve the rest of the world.



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