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ARSC 3206: Week 6- Black Women Leadership in Africa

This week’s collection of articles summarized the different organizing mechanisms that African women use to create a protocol for gender rights in their respective countries. Camara in “African Women and the Gender Equality Regime in Africa: From Patriarchy to Parity,” describes how colonization in African countries disrupted the political traditions in Africa, including the legacy of matriarchies: “...there is a matriarchal African tradition that can be opposed to the existing patriarchal one more widely known” (pg 64). Moreover, colonization further reified oppressive structures such as arpathied in South Africa or sparked civil conflicts in countries such as Congo; these examples are illustrated in “To Ghana Women and Women of African Descent,” where the speaker uses these examples of intracontinental conflict to stress the importance of African unity: “What is happening now in Congo is a grim reminder of what could so easily be repeated in any African territory...African leaders must recognize at once the pressing necessity for the states in Africa to come together in a political and economic union” (pg 112). Therefore, because of the impact of colonization, many African countries are creating a new foundation for governance, ones that were more in line with their political, social, cultural, and economic values pre-colonization.

One mechanism by which African women are trying to leverage their political power is through unity, as the speaker in “To Ghana Women and Women of African Descent” demonstrates. Unity was considered an important counteraction in the face of growing nationalism in countries like the United States and the Soviet Union. As these foreign powers devised unity within their countries and between other foreign powers, many African activists sought to do the same thing, specifically to preserve their newfound independence: “We have the choice of three things: to unite, to stand separately and disintegrate, or to sell ourselves to foreign powers” (pg 111). For women, the opportunity for African unity meant the chance to have gendered issues prioritized such as violence against women in occupied countries: “This Conference, organsed by the Ghana Women’s Movement which represents all women’s groups in the country, must ask the question...Why apartheid overlords shoot down defenceless women and children...to maintain white supremacy” (ibid). I think the understanding of unity was critical, especially for women who relied on their country’s independence to establish a new political priority. For one, unity increased the chances that countries would maintain their independence and could possibly inspire other independence movements. Women were an important group in establishing independence in their countries, as Camara argues: “Therefore, one might argue that women in Africa were “social entrepreneurs `` and''feminists `` long before the terms were invented” (pg 72). Secondly, unity meant that a uniform strategy for women’s liberation could be spread throughout the continent; while African women faced a diverse number of issues, unity meant that they could more easily transfer strategies to others back home, as described in the speech given in Ghana: “Not only can you carry back this message to the men of your respective countries, but, if you are convinced that unity is the right answer, you can also bring your feminine influence to bear in persuading your brothers, husbands and friends of the importance of African unity…” (pg 112). Unity meant that the strategy of appealing to the men who ultimately have more political power was one that could be transferred to women across the continent, but not imposed as strategy they must use.