

## **Communication and Violence against Women and Children as Power Relations**

**John I, Ukam & Julia N. Mogu**

Mass Communication Department,  
Cross River University of Technology,  
Calabar-Nigeria

Email: [thrrag@yahoo.com](mailto:thrrag@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

In recent space-time, so much emphasis has been placed on issues which concern gender related violence and the relationships which exist between communication and violence against women and children. To wit, governmental and non-governmental organizations : local, national and international - have been concerned with how to enforce and eradicate chronic problems relating to gender inequality and other primitive patriarchal vestiges, which have been very detrimental to the realisation of the essence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the status of women, the rights of a child and other charters and conventions of the United Nations Organization like the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the United Nations Convention on the Child. The current essay is a critical analysis of the respective issues listed here from the perspective of Communication and Media studies

Key Words: Communication, Violence, Women and Children

### **Introduction**

This paper therefore attempts to establish the relationships between communication and violence against women and children on the one hand and the fact that the whole essence of communication and violence against women and children is simply the expression of power relations on the other. To achieve this, efforts was made to give a general idea of what communication is, what constitutes violence and violence is again sub-categorised into economic, political, social, cultural and intellectual violence. There is also attempt to

operationalise what power relation is. The reason for this explanation of concepts is to enhance in the understanding of the fact that communication and violence against women and children is an expression of power relations.

### **Operationalization of Concepts**

In Bridgman's logic it is often more reasonable to operationalize concepts rather than to make attempt at striking their fundamental meanings, a sometimes very tedious task to embark upon. According to Bridgman's logic, to find the length of an object from the view point of Einsteinian physics,

We have to perform certain physical operations. The concept of length is therefore fixed when the operations by which length is measured are fixed: that is, the concept of length involves as much as and nothing more than the set of operations by which length is determined. In general. We mean by any concept nothing more than a set of operations; the concept is synonymous with a corresponding set of operations. (1927)

This is the approach in this segment, except that ours shall be intellectual operations rather than physical. To discuss communication and violence against women and children as power relations therefore, the operational -Definitions of the key concepts shall be given. Communication: Communication has been seen by (Frolov, I p. )as:

a category of idealist philosophy denoting intercourse in which the self is revealed in another... Communication finds its fullest expression in the existentialism of Jasper and in modern French personalism.

In essence, the concept of communication is predicated on the position that social contract is essentially a contract of transaction; the parties being involve are supposed to be complimentarily bond in

## ***John I, Ukam***

mission, vision and mutual obligations. In this sense, what is communicated to the receiver must fall within the field of perception and cognition of the encoder and decoder of the message in a complimentary manner.

Baran, Stanley J. (2002 p.4-5). On the other hand sees communication as:

The transmission of a message from a source to a receiver... express in term of the basic element of the communication process, communication occurs when a source sends a message through a medium to a receiver producing the effect.

On what is communication, Wilson, Des (1997p.110) cited different authorities to drive home his view asfollows:

Communication is seen as one human activity employing both traditional and modern media and channels for reaching the diverse audiences located in various sectors of this global village. Yet in the predominant literature in the field, most scholars prefer to speak mainly of the mass media of communication which employ western technology for the dissemination of information or messages, ft is in this vein that Theodor Ardornor and Max Horkhiemer (1972) refer to the mass media as the 'culture industry', while Louis Althusser (197J) view the as the 'ideological state apparatuses'. As ideological state apparatuses, the mass media project and reflect culture and communicatipn and they can thus be seen as the great fabric upon which the tapestry of society knit.

While it is necessary to acknowledge the linkage that Wilson has here establish between communication and culture, it is important to note that culture industry or ideological state apparatuses are social institutions, vehicles so the reflection of the state of the society

(mirror of culture) and the conveyor belt of the spirits of the time. In this sense, the quiddity of media of communication is culture loaded. One can then say that violence, being a form of reflection of culture is a communication process. To really appreciate the relationship, it is necessary to discuss violence and violence against women and children in the next segment.

### **Violence against Women and Children**

Attempts to define violence are r 29 dinous and varied according to the aims of these definitions. Th so many definitions that one can conveniently argue that they are no of definitions of violence. The Encarta Dictionary 2006 for instance, four entries for what violence is:

1. physical; the use of physical force to injure somebody or damage things
2. destructive force; the use of extreme, destructive, or uncontrollable force, especially of natural events. The violence of the storm.
3. Fervour; intensity of feeling or expression. The violence of her response to our suggestion.
4. Criminal Law; the illegal use of unjustified force, or the intimidating effect created by the threat of this.

This term (violate) is classified into the following subheadings by Kirkpatrick, Betty 1987the Roget Thesaurus: To force ill treat, misuse, disobey, not to observe, debauch, and to be impious, it can also mean misuse non-observance, undutiful ness, rape and impiety. The new advanced learners Dictionary by S. Hornby et al see violence as the noun of violate, which itself mean to break (an oath a treaty etc); an act contrary to what ones conscience tells one to do, and or to act toward (a sacred place or somebody's seclusion etc) without proper respect Having seen this far about the definition of violence, it can be summarised that violence is a breach of trust, the act of applying force the process of abusing people human rights and the process of rationalising the said act of violation through the use of culture industries; traditional and modern media.

It can be seen to mean suppression or the act or art of inflicting pains. Psychological, economic, political, physical and intellectual against a person, a group of person caste, class and nation or a nation state or gender classification based on sex. Violence can also mean the use of force (soldiers, Police, prison jurisprudence), an art of oppression. It is commonly sense to be taken to mean violate.

Violation from what we have seen so far has no bound. It can be channelled toward the human psychophysics. It could be promoted by economic, social, cultural, religious, philosophical, racial, nationality, class or gender position. In any case, the effect of the said violation is always devastating. Since this work is not to analyse the effects of violence, to give a very thorough analysis of how the various facets can impact on humanity will be out of context here, hence it has to be left out. This does not however mean that efforts shall not be made to show the inter relationship between each of the aforementioned. To do so, let us first look at the concept Violence against women (gender based violence) and Violence against children (child abuse). Gender based violence: According to the United Nation Declaration for Women article one and two, violence against women is defined as: any act of gender based violence, that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to human, including threat to the use of such acts of coercion, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

From the said definition, the declaration went further to give a full description of what violence against women is as the description but is not limited to:

- a. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family including battering, sexual abuse of female children in households, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non spousal violence and violence related to exploitation
- b. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational

institution and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution or physical and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, whenever it occurs.

In a sense, the United Nations Organisation realised that all forms of discriminations on the basis of sex tend to render some form of advantages to the males, and disadvantages to the females. It was on this basis that the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women was enacted. This was adopted by the world Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 25 June, 1993. The Declaration asserts that:

**Article 1**

For the purpose of the present Convention, the term 'discrimination against women' shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

**Article 2**

State parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and to this end undertake to;

- a. To embody the principles of equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein and to ensure, through legislative and other appropriate means, the political realisation of these principles.
- b. To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women;
- c. To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination;

## *John I, Ukam*

- d. To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation.
- e. To take all appropriate measures to eliminate all discrimination against women by any person, organisation or enterprise;
- f. To take all appropriate measures including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;
- g. To repeal all national provisions which constitute discrimination against women.

What it further means is that, violence against women is a crime so that any person or group of persons who indulges or encourages the act, or those who indulge in the crime are partners in the said criminality against women who have also even defined or categorized as humans. This position can best be collaborated with the position in Article 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which asserts that:

1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reasons and conscience and should act toward one another in- a spirit of brotherhood.
2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language religion, political or other opinion, national and social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made in the basis of political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non self governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

The universal Declaration of Human rights in other words sees human as all persons or groups of persons of all race, sex, language and land and clime, people of all ages, professions, nationalities and if all kinds of pigmentations. Hence, violence against women means

violence against humans, since women are humans which include children. From a logical point of view; the above argument can be represented thus:

All persons are humans  
Women and children are persons  
Therefore women and children are humans

What this implies is that violence against women and children could be defined as any form of human rights violation. If this is correct, then article 3 of the United Nations Declaration for women is correct. This article says that:

Women and in extension children are entitled to equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom in the political economic, social, cultural, civil or any other fields. These rights include;

- (a) The Rights to life
- (b) The Rights to equality
- (c) The Rights to liberty and security of persons
- (d) The Rights to equal protection under the law
- (e) The Rights to be free from all discriminations
- (f) The Rights to the higher standard attainable of physical and mental health
- (g) The Rights to just and favourable conditions of work
- (h) The Rights not to be subjected to torture, or to cruel, or in-human or degrading treatment or punishment.

Having operationalised violence and what violence against women and children is made of, it would equally be necessary look at what power and power relations means.

POWER: This has been seen as right control, authority or person or organisation having great authority. In the Roget Thesaurus, power is treated as a social volition, authority, governance, rule, subjection, rectorship, superiority etc. It sub-classification enlists all forms of governance and political organisation -ecclesiastism, monarchy of all forms, republicanism, federalism, feudal system, patriarchy,



## ***John I, Ukam***

matriarchy, paternalism, government by ballot box etc. This implies that power is the capacity to affect organisational outcomes.

Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Power in Organisation* (1981) on the other hand, sees power as a "force sufficient to change the probability of an individual's behaviour from what it would have been in the absence of the force". John Kenneth Gaibraith, (1983) in the *Anatomy of power* on the other hand sees power as the probability of sociological theory. That power is that force that one can exert in improving ones will on the behaviour of others. What all these means is that power is an agents potential at a given time, which is meant to influence the attitude and behaviour of people in the direction desired by the agent.

Gregory Moorhead and Ricky W. Griffin classified power into legitimate power, that granted by virtue of one's position in the organization; Reward power, which has to do with the extent to which a person controls rewards that are valued by another, coercive power, the power with the ability to punish or physically or psychologically harm someone else. These forms of power could as well inflict political and socio-economic harms. Also in this categorization, we have expert power, control over expertise and power through identification otherwise referred to as reference. All these powers have their organisationalbehavioural functions, but these functions shall not be treated here.

Writing from sociological perspective, Lewis A. Coser and Bernard Rosenberg (1969) see power and authority Power that is the ability to determine the behaviour of others in accordance with ones own wishes. Goldhammer and Shill in Coser and Rosenberg (1969p.145) asset that 'a person may have power to the extent that her influence the behaviour of others in accordance with his own intention'. According to them, these major forms of power could be distinguished in terms of types of influence brought to bear upon the subordinated individual. What it implies is that the power holder could exercise his power accruing to them either through force, domination (command and request) or through manipulation. They

are also of the view that most legitimacy for their acts that they claim the "right to rule" as they do.

If there is legitimacy of the exercise of power as acknowledged by the subordinated individuals we then speak of legitimate power, if it is not, we call it coercion, provided the intention of the power holder is realised. Legitimate power is regarded as legal when the recognition of legitimacy rest on a belief of the subordinated individuals in the legality of the laws, decrees, and directives promulgated by the power holder, traditional when the recognition of legitimacy rest on a belief in the sanctity of the tradition by virtue of which the power holder exercise his power and the traditional sanctity of the orders which he issues and charismatic when the recognition of legitimacy rest on a devotion to personal qualities of the power holders. Usually, of course these personal qualities are or appear to the followers to be extraordinary qualities such as sanctity and heroism.

Whatsoever, the classification systems are and the definition of power, Bierstedt, Robert (1974p. 128) is of the view that: the power structure of society is not an insignificant problem. In any realistic sense, it is both a sociological (i.e. scientific) and a social (i.e. a moral) problem. According to him, it has traditionally been a problem in political philosophy. But, like so many other problems of the political character, it has its root which is deeper than the polis and read into the community itself. He further insists that power primitive basis and ultimate locus. To put this more succinctly, it is apparent that all power is an expression of forms of relations; political power-like economic, financial, industrial and military. In essence therefore, every society is shot through with power relations - the power a father exercise over his minor child, a master over his slaves, a teacher over his pupils, the victor over the vanquished, the blackmailer over his victim, the warder over his prisoners, the attorney over his lieutenants, a captain over his crew, a creditor over a debtor, the male over the females and so on through the status relationship of society.

What the aforementioned is that one of the main function of social organisation, (a communication institution) is the expression of power to govern human activities, coordinating a contradictory individual or group interest and to subordinating them to a single authority either by persuasion or by coercion. In the transition from capitalism to socialism, for instance, power becomes an instrument for suppressing the exploiter classes and building a social relation of a new type. The best summary to the concept power can be drawn from Robert Bierstedts(1974p.134) that:

1. Power is a social phenomenon per excellence and not merely a political or economic phenomenon.
2. It is useful to distinguish power from prestige, from influence from dominance from rights and from force and from authority.
3. Power is latent force, force is manifest power and authority is institutionalized power.
4. Power which has its incidence only in social apposition of some kind appears in different ways in. formal organisation, in informal organisation and in unorganised community and
5. The source and necessary components of power reside in a combination of numbers (especially majorities) social organization, and sources.

### **What then are Relations?**

The Roget Thesaurus edited by (Kirkpatrick 1987) classifications of relations is many. They include relatedness, connectedness, rapport, reference, respect, regard, bearing, direction. Power relation is closely linked with the different trends or forms of sociation. What this means is that the form of sociation and consequent socialization in our society has much to with our general exposure, indoctrination and what our attitude to life is. Let us base our power relations from the point of our sociation. We would see that the prevalent culture or civilization which include our knowledge, belief; art, morals laws; language structure, sense of rationality; custom and capacity, capability and habits acquired by man as a member of society is dependent on who rule or who is in control of authority and has

power at a particular point in time. This assertion is best expressed in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels German Ideology (1978p. 128) when they say that:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas. The class which is the ruling material force of the society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal consequently control the means of mental production so that the class of t 29 who lack the means of production are subject to it. A more simpimea analysis of the above except can be seen in "the Communist Manifesto (1977p.35) which assert that

The history of hither to existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and Slave, Patrician and plebeian Lord and Serf guild matter and journey man, is a word, oppressor and oppressed stood on constant on an uninterrupted now hidden now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, a in the common ruin of the contending classes.

The manifesto further explains that in the earlier epoch of history there have been complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social ranks such social ranks like the patrician, knights, plebeian, slaves, feudal lords, vassals guild masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs, in almost all these class again subordinate gradation.

Class antagonism in modern capitalist state has not been destroyed; rather new conditions of oppression have emerged with new forms of struggles supplanting old ones. Some of these new conditions of power relation are the antagonism between the two major classes or families of the world; the haves and the have notes. discrimination based on colour or pigmentation, like apartheid in the former South Africa; discrimination or society spirit based on religion, nationality, educational and financial background etc. In each of these cases, there is the constant battle to eliminate, reconstruct and dominate.

## ***John I, Ukam***

These positions are all communication processes aimed at expressing the dominance of the class that has the ruling material and cultural production forces over those that do not have. This can best be explained when we view other definitions of communication. For instance. Gamble, Teri Kwal and Michael Gamble (2002 p.9) see communication as follows:

During interpersonal communication you think about, talk with, learn about, reason with, and evaluate yourself, In contrast, when you engage in interpersonal communication, you interact with another, learn about him or her and act in ways that help sustain or terminate your relationship. When you participate in group communication, you interact with a limited number of others, work to share information, develop ideas, make decisions, solve problems offer support, or have fun. Through public communication, you inform, and persuade the members of the audience to hold certain attitudes, values or beliefs so that they will think, believe or act in a particular way; on the other hand, you can also function as a member of an audience, in which case another person would do the same for you. During mass communication the media entertain, inform and persuade you. You in turn, have the ability to use your viewing and bind habits to influence the media. During online or machine assisted communication, you navigate cyber-space as you converse, research on strange ideas, and build up relationship with others using computer and the internet. Whatever the nature or type of communication, however, a communicative act itself is characterized by the interplay of certain element

What the said elaborate quote implies is that communication is the sum of all cultural intercourse in any given society. This set of intercourse is a progressions designed to fit all within the frame of the ruling of the hegemony class, in accordance with the spirit of the

times. In essence, what passes for communication is the capsule of prevailing intellectual political-economic ethical and cultural material forces. To this extent, therefore, the media messages are ideologically loaded, expressing the ruling intellectual and economic production relations. This implies that as communication in a capitalist society is an expression of capitalism, so is it in a patriarchy, with the media images absolutely loaded with patriarchal hegemony. This is what Tubbs, Steward L. and Sylvia Moss (1996p.6) had in mind when they posit that:

Communication is the sharing of experience.. .what makes human communication unique is the superior ability to create and to use symbols, for it is this ability that enables the human to "share experience indirectly and vicariously" .. .that human communication is the process of creating a meaning between two or more people.

This position further consolidates the already expressed positions. As all meanings are inherent in cultures, so is communication and violence against women simply the meanings and the crux of patriarchal interaction. Realising that communication and violence against women and children reflects the process of sharing meaning between the repository of andro-normative system and the receivers, women and children. And as language is a mirror of philosophy, so are the vehicle of culture transfer, media of communication and the symbol of human total development. This is the kind of position that Frolov, I. (1984p.216) had in mind when he asserts -"at;

Language is a sign-system fulfilling the cognitive and communicative function...is a social phenomenon arising in the course development of social production relations and its indispensable aspect a means of co-ordination of human activities.

To this point one can assert that "the process in which people share information, ideas, and feelings" Hybel, Sandra and Richard L.

## *John I, Ukam*

Weaver II (1998p.6) can be said to be the reflection of the existing socio-cultural and economic production and power relations. If this follows, then communication and violence against women and children is the expression of the ruling patriarchal power relations. In other words one can refer to it as the planting of patriarchal hegemony or imperialism. What it means further is that patriarchy plant its authority with all the means of expressive and receptive communication device available to sustain patriarchal cultural, ideological, technological and media dominance.

This is a form of human knowledge, perfected through social labour, which forms the basis for every new stage in man's productive and historical life. This is not a 'knowledge' which is abstractly forced in the head. It is materialised in production, embodied in social organisation, advanced through development in practical as well as theoretical techniques; and above all, preserved in and transmitted through the media of communication. Just like we have seen that Marx and Engels have posited that under capitalism<sup>29</sup> production, the means of mental labour are expropriated by the ruling classes. So it is in the case of patriarchal hegemony. And just like we have come to the realization according to Marx and Engels (1978p.130) that:

the class which is the ruling material force is at the same time its ruling intellectual force... which has control over the means of mental production so that generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it... and like the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideas expression of the dominant material relationship... grasped as ideas;

So is the case with patriarchal hegemony or imperialism. Like the Ruling material force rules as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch. Like they rule as thinkers, as producer of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of ideas, of their age, so is it with patriarchy.

To this end therefore, Child marriage, female genital mutilation, inflator treatment and consequent statues of women, discrimination of women in employment widowhood rites and other violence against women and children are the reflection of male oriented campaign for dominance. The philosophic, 41 ns and axiological rationalization of this heinous crime is as good as western oriental imperialism. It is as derogatory as Gestapo military regimes all over the world with their various deceit or subterfuge; it is baseless like the capitalist culture industries - schools, clubs, social organisation, political parry's election. They are all out to impose the dominance of the ruling material forces.

The challenge ahead is collaborative work to liberate humans from the shackles of exploitations base on sex or gender, and the meeting of degrading treatment of any human irrespective of his/her land or clime. This can be realised through the use of educ 29 l method to create critical consciousness for the realisation of a 6000: free world. To realise this, a method of information integration referred to as Modified Dialogical Method should be applied. In this method of knowledge integration, the learner is requested to display what he/she knows and on this basis the trainer in the principle of dialogue would go ahead to expound they do not know. In this sense they would, be involved in a mutual knowledge sharing on the basis of equality. Following this principle, the previous patriarchal knowledge integration model which sees the student or the learner as an empty receptacle where the teacher dishes knowledge into is demystified. The teacher learns rather than banks into the student as the student as well learns from the in a humanistic manner. It is the position of this paper that it is only in this kind of learning or knowledge integration model that the society can be humanised. When this kind of learning environment is established, the teacher and the student, the children and the women would reify themselves in a progressive and humanistic dialogue. This kind of dialogue can only be initiated by the oppressed groups, the women and children realising that it takes the power of the oppressed to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressors.



### References

- Amnesty international (1991) A Guide to African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, London; Amnesty International.
- Asouzu Innocent (2004) the method and Principle of Complimentary Reflecto in and Beyond Africa, IkotEkpene: Cheedal Press.
- Barrow, Robins (1982) Inju: 42 nequality and Ethics: a Philosophical Approach, Norfolk: 42 nd Noble Books
- Blackburn, Sam, Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy. Oxford; Oxford University Press.
- Barran Stanley, J. (2002) Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture, Boston: McGraw Hill.
- BiersedtRobert(1974) Sociology, (Fourth Edition) New York; McGraw Hill.
- Coser, Lewis and Bernard Rosenberg,-(1972) Sociological Theory: A Book of Reading (Second Edition), McGraw Hill Press.
- Domminick, Joseph (1997) Dynamics of Mss Comm 29 ion, New York: McGraw Hill.
- Donelly, jones H. et al (1992) Management, Homewood: IRWN.
- Frolov, I. Dictionary of Philosophy, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Gamble Teri Kwal and Micheal Gamble, (2002) Communication Works, New York; McGraw Hill.
- Hobbes, Thomas, Leviathan, Cambrdge,: Cambridge University Press.
- Hybel, Saundra and Richard Weaver II (1987) Communicating Effectively (Second Edition) New York: Random House Publishers.
- Griffin, Ricky W. (1981) Management 9second Edition) New York: Houghton andMifflin. Marx, Karl and F. Engels(1977) Manifesto of the communist Party, Moscow; Progress Publishers. Marx, Karl and F. Engels(1976) The German Ideology, Moscow: Progress Publishers. Tubb Stewart L. and Sylvia Moss(1991) Effective Communication, New York: McGraw Hill
- United Nations (2001) The International Bills of Rights (Fact Sheet 2), Geneva: UnitedNation High Commission for Human Rights.
- United Nations ( 2001) Discrimination against Women: The Convention and the Committee, (Fact Sheet 22), Geneva: United Nation High Commission for Human Rights.

*Communication and Violence against Women.....*

Wilson, Des (1997) *Communication and Social Action\** Port Harcourt:  
Spark Group publishers.