

Following a concert, media published photos of ladies in the audience wearing what is normally not seen in public though is common on the night entertainment scene. The various media outlets asked readers what they thought about such fashion. Soon it led to an outcry by some religious leaders claiming indecency. Government authorities including the Minister of Local government and police spokesperson threatened to reign in on what they called 'abusing culture'.

This debate about women dressing is not new, it has raged on intermittently fueled by conservative religious groups and leaders. In 2018 several top government officials made it clear that women's dressing was not an issue but the voyeurs who humiliate and objectify women were the problem. What is new is the state using coercive tools to take a side of the debate, which has grave consequences of a particular class, undermines free expression and business models to appease religious fundamentalists.

The saga hit another level when one Lilliane Mugabekazi was remanded by a court on 18<sup>th</sup> August with the charge of indecent exposure in public.

### **Influencing business model**

The arrest of Ms Mugabekazi sent shock waves as it not only appeared to be a violation of free expression rights, or even misogynic but indirectly threatened part of the sports, fashion, entertainment and night economy.

In the age of Instagram there is a significant global culture; from Shanghai through Lagos to Los Angeles there are shared values, behaviours, lifestyles and influences on consumer businesses.

The three richest black women below 60yrs in the world are Rihanna, Beyonce and Serena Williams all have posed in bikinis and wear freely as part of business. Some famous for being celebrities like the Kardashians and the local Shaddyboo pose freely to enhance business value.

Their example is not lost to the Instagram generation. Influencing is a big deal in the modern economy. Thus in an economy without much job/career prospects holding back such talent and opportunities is regressive.

Further the video vixen arrested had an example to follow; during CHOGM2022, at the same Kigali Arena there was a fashion show were clothing even more exposing

than hers were showcased.

It be noted that free dressing is long established part of modern black culture; the music video in hip-hop, rap, afro-pop etc gyrating bikini clad women are a standard. Similarly movies with mandatory sex scenes are shown on public Television, cinemas and the internet. Will TV stations and the internet be shut down?

Therefore artists and creators in those videos cannot be expected to behave otherwise at music concerts. For video vixens, party goers and ladies of the night, concerts and night entertainment spots have a particular culture.

In addition Kigali is a now a cosmopolitan city; post 1994 Rwandans who had lived in very diverse societies converged in the capital. Since then many more cultures have come in, some foreign students at universities in Kigali also wear skimpily and no one seems to care.

After sending thousands of students to colleges in almost all corners of the world and building broadband networks to ease internet and television access, it is rather odd to expect a stagnant culture among the younger generations.

### **Using the law to solve social issues**

One analyst has explained that when members of the elite face parenting challenges, they use the state to solve family failures. Not long ago, some government officials legislated very tough anti-drug laws after some of their children became addicts. The consequence was poor youth ending up with long prison terms while the elite children went to rehabilitation centers.

Trying to solve a parenting or preaching setback with coercive state force is the problem here. Those disappointed should preach harder, present better examples rather trample on rights and businesses of others.

Rape apologists are also enjoying the moment claiming skimpy dressing is tempting akin to saying one can eat food on display in the market for free because they are hungry. Gladly the courts of law have always dismissed such arguments.

### **Cosmetic women representation**

The debate has further exposed that the high numbers of women in top government offices and parliament is largely cosmetic. The deafening silence of the many

women in positions of power has been heard loud and clear. While some are competent technocrats, their capacity to freely express themselves on views without instructions from the men who appoint them is largely lacking.

In parliament the church holds strong sway, for example most women MPs opposed adjustments to abortion law despite its big benefit to vulnerable women whom they are supposed to be representing. According to top officials it took the ruling party to summon its caucus to the party secretariat and whip them into line. Years ago they refused to extend paid maternity leave.

However young educated women outside power are freely fighting back and keen to have an equal and just society.

All in all, trying to create a pure society is the most dangerous form of religion, racism or misogyny and all these evils have a common origin. It may seem subtle now but if it becomes entrenched that someone can impose their way of life on others, soon or later they would seek to use violence against those who view issues differently. To silence an emergent culture requires extreme and violent regimes akin of the Taliban.

In a country that decriminalized homosexuality, relaxed abortion laws to protect mothers and victims of rape, empowered women on family and property, and built fun places like Kisementi, it is very odd that it persecutes women over nightlife dressing which harms nobody and there is full consent for adults who partake in.

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