



IN THE FACE OF ATTACKS OF BOORISHNESS AND MALE-VIOLENCE, THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONTINUES

In an article published by the New York Times on February 27, entitled «Republican Men and Women Are Changing Their Minds About How Women Should Behave,» three political science researchers point out that traditional gender roles have been in decline for decades: «The percentage of Americans who say ‘a woman’s place is in the home’ has steadily declined, from nearly 30% in 1972 to 6% in 2008. Over the decades, more people have come to believe that «women should play an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government”.

The change in trends in recent years is quite dramatic when the political leanings of respondents are taken into account. In the Views of the Electorate survey, the percentage of Republican men who believe women should return to their traditional roles increased from 28% in May 2022 to 48% in November 2024. Among Republican women, there was an increase from 23% to 37%. The opinions of Democrats, on the other hand, have not changed much.

The authors, who are researchers and not activists, point out, however, that simply affirming support for traditional gender roles does not necessarily mean adopting those roles. Time-use surveys in the United States show that married men and women are becoming more similar in the amount of time they spend on tasks such as housework and shopping, although women still spend more time on these activities than men.

I mention this article, which discusses the perception of women’s roles in the United States, in a context that may seem very different from that of West Africa, to underscore the fact that the issue of women’s rights, of equal opportunities and equal rights between girls and boys, between men and women, arises in much the same terms all over the world. And everywhere, reversals in public opinion, reversals in the positions of influential political, economic and social actors, reversals in perceptions, in practices, in laws, are possible at any time. There is no such thing as irreversible progress, no such thing as final achievements.

Violence against girls and women, inequalities in girls’ access to or retention in school, early marriages and their consequences, early pregnancies and the definitive denial of girls’ opportunities for education and empowerment, orders to married women not to work outside the home, the selective and opportunistic mobilization of religious texts, immutable African customs and traditions, the challenge of women’s effective participation in decision-making bodies, are all issues that were discussed with passion and precision on March 6 in Dakar.

This was during a half-day discussion on the achievements in women’s rights since two historic events, the African Regional Conference on Women in Dakar in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China in 1995. This conference marked an important turning point in the global program for gender equality. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted unanimously by 189 countries, set strategic goals and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality in 12 specific areas. Chaired by Professor Ndioro Ndiaye, former Minister for Social Development and former Minister for Women, Children and the Family, and accompanied by the leaders of the main networks of Senegalese women’s organizations, this meeting brought together dozens of strong, committed women who are aware of the progress made in Senegal, as well as the persistent inequalities and current threats to women’s rights. The idea was to create a space for the exchange of experiences, observations and new courses of action between the women who participated in the mobilizations of the 1990s and those of the new generation who must adapt the struggles to the current context.

My colleague Marième Cissé and I had the privilege of moderating some of these exchanges. While progress was welcomed and it is crucial to highlight it, particularly in the education of girls, which has made spectacular progress, the parity law that changed the composition of the Senegalese parliament, violence, discrimination, openly sexist discourse by influential people and the social acceptance of a high level of irresponsibility among

men were also openly discussed. The messages are clear: maintain the commitment, work with progressive men, anticipate obstacles in order to avoid them, discuss with everyone, especially with religious actors and all those who do not share the principle of gender equality or who accept it only on the condition that it remains a principle without any connection to reality.

The education of girls and boys, and I emphasize this last point, is crucial for the transformation of our societies. Education, culture, research, awareness-raising, public debate based on facts, analysis and arguments are at the heart of WATHI's mission. This month of March is an opportunity to share on all our platforms dozens of interviews, reference documents and virtual round tables on different dimensions of gender inequalities, women's rights and the well-being of girls and women.

In the introduction to a booklet of interviews that we published two years ago, on March 8, 2022, entitled «Getting our societies to move faster by giving women a voice», I thought that we no longer needed to argue for strict equality between men and women, that we no longer needed to explain «why inequalities must be eliminated», that we should only focus on «how we do it». I'm not so sure anymore. In the current climate, where all forms of extremism are becoming commonplace, where boorish behavior is tolerated, where the law of the strongest and perhaps even the dominant male is celebrated, we must continue to explain the «why» while working intensively on the «how» and «with whom».

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Selected recommendations

[Republican Men and Women Are Changing Their Minds About How Women Should Behave,](#)

[Débats citoyens sur la participation des femmes à la vie politique, économique et sociale au Sénégal,](#)

[Livret spécial de WATHI publié le 8 mars 2022 qui présente des extraits de témoignages de 31 femmes sénégalaises afin de faire entendre la voix des femmes sur la question des inégalités,](#)

[Les progrès, les défis et les menaces à la protection des droits de l'Homme par les institutions africaines, série d'entretiens,](#)

[Entretien avec Soyata Maiga, Rapporteuse spéciale sur les droits des femmes en Afrique,](#)

[Tamaro Touré, première femme inspecteur du travail et fondatrice de l'association des Villages d'Enfants SOS au Sénégal \(I\): Être une jeune fille dans la période coloniale,](#)

[Entretien avec Isis Noor Yalagi \(III\): Dans le vécu quotidien en Afrique, la femme est le socle de la société,](#)

[Entretien avec Dior Fall Sow, première femme procureure du Sénégal \(Partie II\), "Amener les populations à reconnaître davantage et à respecter les droits des femmes..."](#),

[Enseignement des STEM et égalité des genres en Afrique de l'Ouest : défis, opportunités, table ronde virtuelle,](#)

[Entretiens avec 20 femmes sénégalaises, vidéo récapitulative de WATHI,](#)

[Celles qui restent: la situation difficile des femmes d'émigrés - Aurélie Fontaine,](#)