

riages and feel that only by stifling their spouses' talents and creativity can they be sure of their stand in a relationship. Such a man appreciates the pay slip his wife brings home but begrudges her the right to enjoy working for it. Nora's husband wanted her to look dowdy and slave at her dull job because that way she would not be interesting to any other man—and he could be certain of his hold on her. It was not until they were separated that she began to grow professionally and personally.

Most African men also prefer pliable, "feminine," submissive women to ones who might not so readily accept dictation. Having such an "understanding" wife guarantees them immunity from rational arguments and discussions between them whenever there is a conflict of views. And it also establishes the matrimonial homes as their kingdoms and assures them of undivided (and unthinking) loyalty from their loving subjects. Such a position of male privilege is not possible with a more dynamic and demanding wife, so they are less likely to be chosen as a spouse. And if they are, then they are not allowed to properly express themselves because it makes their husbands feel less intelligent than the wife—and that is hardly acceptable in our male-dominated society. And finally, intelligent, aggressive women who are easily capable of earning a living for themselves (and children if there are any) are unacceptable because they would rather have a divorce than accept subjugation of their rights.

But men continue to demand that their women be "womanly" (a pseudonym for docile) and less "emasculating." An intelligent woman prefers divorce to degradation. One woman told me "I can see myself spending the rest of my life alone. I don't rejoice about it, but one can only take so much crap from men."

Nora has been separated from her husband for 5 years now. She had been married for

an equal number of years. At 32, Nora looks 27 and is a Sales Manager for an international company based in Nairobi. Nora's 8,000 shillings a month job allows her to travel extensively on company expense. Her ex-husband, a well-known professional and playboy, has custody of the couple's son, who is under 10 years old. Nora hopes the final decree of divorce will come through soon because, she says, this will psychologically enhance her sense of freedom.

"I used to be a dreary person," Nora mused over lunch recently. "I had no time for my face or hair. I looked forty during the years I was married, and my husband liked it that way. He wanted me looking bad because other guys wouldn't look at me then." Nora thinks her ex-husband, who was educated abroad, "got the bad part of foreign education. He is one of those stupidly educated men." Before they married, Nora envisaged a happy and prosperous life for herself and her husband. She reasoned that since they were both well-educated, attractive people they would pool their resources together to form a harmonious matrimony. The first six months of their marriage, she says, were like a dream come true. "I'd make love to him each night and I desperately wanted to have a baby."

But after their first wedding anniversary things began to change. He started coming home late and drunk, and would insist that a hot meal be prepared regardless of the time. Nora began to complain about his behaviour, and in retaliation perhaps, he started dating other women openly. And Nora soon found herself paying for all household expenses from her salary of 2,500/- while her husband squandered his 10,000/- a month on mistresses and other excesses. She left him a few times but each time he would beg her to come back, vowing to mend his ways. As is the case with so many women confronted by such men, Nora would believe him and return. The hard decision to actually get a divorce came upon her

**With the greater economic independence women now enjoy and which enables them to support their family, husbands will have to contribute to the household chores and provide genuine companionship in the home.**

**Otherwise, there will be no reason for a woman to stay married, as many have already decided.**

sister's death, when she asked her husband for a train ticket to travel home for the funeral because she had no money in the bank then. She couldn't believe it when he flatly refused to give her the money! His excuse was that he was sure she was more concerned about seeing her old boy-friends down home than with her sister's death. "He locked me in the bathroom overnight when I returned from my sister's funeral. That was the last straw." According to Nora, her husband took no interest in her career and often complained to her about her apparent departure from "African" values—meaning that she would not accept him as the unconditional head of the household.

After the final break, Nora went through a depression that lasted six months, but she was determined to salvage her life and during those six months she lost excess weight, learnt how to swim and enrolled in a French class. She suddenly found herself free to see her friends and her career began an upward swing.

"Being divorced has been the best thing that happened to me," Nora said. "I started living like a human being. I don't want to go about like a servant. My marriage had become no more than an oppressive contract."

In the five years that Nora has been separated from her husband she has built her mother a house and is currently building one for herself. Her career has skyrocketed and so has her social life. Today, Nora finds it necessary to have an unlisted telephone in her cosy suburban flat, where groups of her friends often assemble for food and wine. "Security was a major reason for my marriage. The moment you can get your own security you don't need any man, and this is total woman's liberation," she said. Her new-found social, economic and emotional freedom has made Nora realize the absurdity of considering status as important in a relationship. These days, Nora says she dates men for what they are, not what