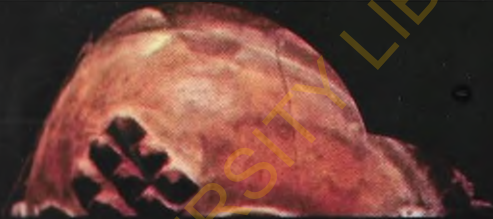# *African* CULTURES AND CIVILIZATION

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Edited by
**M.O Muritala
& O.C. Adesina**

AFRICAN CULTURES AND CIVILISATION
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DEDICATION

Dedicated to all lovers and Promoters of African Cultures

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GENDER AND AFRICAN CULTURES

Chinyere Ukpokolo

Introduction

The place of men and women in African societies is as varied as the peoples and cultures of the continent. Africa is constitutive of over two thousand peoples and cultures. This diversity is reflected in the peoples' expectations of how men and women ought to behave. As culture is dynamic, so also are cultural expectations of how men and women ought to behave in society. In post-colonial Africa, women have remained a marginalised group. For an accurate understanding of the place of men and women in postcolonial African society, there is the need to take into account the historical trajectory of the continent, and how this has shaped and continues to shape the peoples' cultures, including gender expectations. Against this understanding, this chapter focuses on gendered realities of the peoples of the continent, and how these have altered and continue to alter as a result of colonisation, missionalisation and globalisation.

Gender studies, as an aspect of scholarship has gained attention in the past few decades. It is, in fact, an offshoot of women studies of the 1970s. This period was marked not only by statements from government representatives and feminist activists about the importance of women in every sector of the society but also by determined efforts on the part of advocacy groups to achieve improvement in women's education, economic condition, political participation and, consequently, social status. Increasingly, discussions by and about women played important role in the political debates of the era. What informed this move was that first, research findings indicated women's invisibility in the events that made history, and second, official records suggested that women's voices were systematically left out. This situation implies that the story of the development of human society has been told largely

through male perspectives. In Africa, the situation has led to such questions as: Were women inactive in the events that made history prior to the European occupation of African continent? Were women a subjugated group, chattels of their husbands, who lacked participation in decision-making in their various societies prior to colonial contact as claimed in literature on Africa written by Western scholars? (See for example, Ottenberg 1962; Basden 1938 among others). What informed the invisibility of women in historical constructions or the marginalisation of women's roles in history? These are some of the basic questions that the studies tried to tackle and in the process projected women's perspective. The reason for women's exclusion has been put at the foot of colonialism with its Victorian male ideology, which subjugated women.

Despite the achievements of women's studies of the 1970s, scholars are of the opinion that for a better understanding of gender relations, study of men and women needs be carried out rather than 'men' or 'women'. This led to gender studies. Gender scholarship as a field of study gained attention in the 1980s in the field of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Philosophy and the natural sciences. This period witnessed the focus of interest, no longer on women alone but gender, that is, men and women. In the study of gender relations, it is brought to limelight the question of the differences between men and women and how these differences transform into access to resources, knowledge and power between the sexes. It is in this respect that the focus of this chapter is on gender, which includes women and men in the context of African cultures and societies. Examples have been drawn largely from the Yoruba, Asante, Kikuyu and Igbo societies.

Conceptual Clarifications
'Gender' and 'Sex'
'Gender' has a different meaning from the word 'sex', which is restricted to the biological identity as female or male. Sex, according to Greenglass (1982), is a person's biological status of male, female, or ambiguous (hermaphrodite). Certain behavioural phenomena follow from a person's biological status as a female or

male. For example, menstruation, lactation and gestation are sex-related female biological functions. Spermatogenesis and ejaculation are sex-specific male functions. Put differently, gender refers to the socio-cultural and psychological patterning of the differences between male and female. Gender is a social construct that apportions roles to individuals based on sex differentiation. Gender, therefore, stands for the non-physiological aspects of being female or male (Lips 1993). Similarly, Moser (1993) submits: "Gender has since been explained by feminist scholars as a role, a social category, as a practice, as a performance, as social construct, and sometimes as a combination of these" (Moser 1993: 433). West and Zimmerman (1991) conclude that gender is a 'doing' thing. Thus, gender is a culturally determined aspect of being male or female. It has come to be seen as socially construed structures that determine the appropriateness of actions in the relationships between males and females in society. It maps out restrictions, expectations, ethics and so on within which males and females are expected to operate, thereby creating gender roles for males and females. Bem (1987) in her work on 'Gender Schema Theory' discusses the influence of culture on the lens through which an individual perceives reality and, that which makes a child sex-typed. Thus, a highly enculturated individual perceives reality differently from less enculturated one. Obviously, while gender is culturally constructed, sex is a person's physiological aspect. It is also different from sexuality, which is one's sexual orientation, preferences, and behaviour.

The focus in gender studies is on the relations between men and women as they are expressed in terms of power, resources, ideology and so on. As Imam (1990) has rightly noted, focusing on women alone, (which is the feminist strategy), "is no more as accurate representation of social and economic phenomena than focusing on men alone" (Imam 1990: 245). In other words, if we keep on focusing our research on women alone we tend to fall into the mistakes of the earlier writers of African historiography where only men's point of view have been represented. Consequently, there is the need to study men and women for a better, clearer and overall picture of socio-political and economic realities. Gender issue has been seen as a political struggle over power and

resources just as in class and anti-imperialist analysis. A social science which does not acknowledge gender as an analytic category, Imam further affirms, is an impoverished and distorted science, and cannot accurately explain social realities and hence cannot provide a way out of the present crisis in Africa (Imam 1990). Gender relations are structured by ideologies and beliefs, practices, etc., which influence access to resources, rights and privileges and so on. In the quest for the socio-political development of African continent, gender mainstreaming is of great importance.

'Gender Roles' and 'Sex (Biological) Roles'

Gender role refers to "the set of behaviours socially defined as appropriate for one's sex" (Lips 1993: 49). Put differently, gender roles are those behaviours a culture or society defines as appropriate to one's sex identity. These culturally defined behaviours affect the choice of carrier, access to resources and so on. A person's gender-role, Greenglass (1982) further affirms, is a significant social fact. Its importance lies, among other things, on the fact that it has predictable consequences, not only for the individual, but also for the individual's relationship with others. This is because it is predicted on the expectations held about the characteristics, attitudes and likely behaviour of both men and women. In some cultures, masculine roles may include the repair of leaking roof, fishing, hunting, climbing of palm trees, etc., while feminine roles include cooking, childcare, house care, etc.

Sex roles are functions or roles, which a male or female assumes because of basic physiological or anatomical differences between the sexes. These roles are exclusive to one of the sexes. For example female sex roles are child bearing, lactation and gestation, while male sex roles include ovum fertilisation and the production of spermatozoa, which determine the sex of a child. Because these roles are biologically determined they are not exchangeable. Gender roles are exchangeable. Sex roles are the same in all societies, and at all periods. Gender roles change with time, class or experience. Gender roles are so tightly woven into the fabric of the society that no individual's development is free from their influence. Human, as a social being, is influenced by the

physical and cultural environments in which s/he is socialising. It is the culture that ultimately molds and forms the individual. This is because, as Sandra Bem has pointed out, culture is the lens through which an individual perceives reality. This is achieved through socialisation, which is a major process in the acquisition of gender roles. Gender roles vary from culture to culture. In other words, a cross-cultural study of men and women shows marked differences in the specific roles, behaviour and personality characteristics ascribed to men and women.

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes constitute of a variety of expectations about how an individual will look, act, think, and feel as a result of his or her sex identity. There are certain stereotypes associated with males and females, and these are dynamic, depend on social and cultural contexts, and thus vary across time and space; they are continually being reworked and their boundaries renegotiated. Although these boundaries are moveable in theory, nevertheless, transgressing them often invokes negative reactions from others. In her study of three New Guinea societies, for example, Mead (1935) notes that gender stereotypes vary across cultures and societies. In one of these societies, Arapesh, both males and females were socialised and were expected to be loving, caring, gentle, nurturing, responsive, co-operative, and willing to subordinate themselves to the needs of others. In Mundugumour, or head hunters, men and women were expected to be aggressive. For the Tchambuli, women were socialised to be dominant, unemotional, tend to be in-charge while men were usually less responsible and more emotionally inclined. These demonstrate that gender roles are culturally determined, so also are gender stereotypes.

Men and Women Stereotypes

In most cultures the prevailing gender stereotypes in operation are that men are expected to be sexually assertive, independent, competent, and unemotional or emotionally tough. They are equally viewed as being objective, active, competitive, adventurous, self-confident, ambitious, autocratic, stable, unexcitable, rational, courageous, daring, realistic, disorderly, logical, handsome, enterprising, loud, masculine, boastful, etc.

Women, on the other hand, are assumed to be the opposite. Women tend to be described as dependent, subjective, passive, feminine, appreciative, attractive, charming, dreamy, emotional, excitable, mild, sensitive, sentimental, submissive, talkative, weak, frivolous, flirtatious, fickle, nagging, nurturing and friendly. They are equally assumed as not being competitive, not adventurous, not assertive, and lacking self-confidence. Stereotypes are not given but formed in social relations. Through socialisation the individual learns of those ways acceptable by members of his or her group or society.

Socialisation

This is a process by which an individual acquires the attributes, language, norms, and values, in fact, the ethos necessary to function in a given society. Socialisation ensures conformity to the societal expectations and values. It also involves continuous learning to perform various social roles throughout one's lifetime. Through socialisation, gender roles and stereotypes are acquired and transmitted from one generation to the other. Let us look at some agents of socialisation.

Agents of Socialisation
Family
Parents are crucial agents of socialisation. In the home, the treatment of boys and girls are different. At times while the boy is playing or watching the television, the girl is called upon to assist in the kitchen. This trains the girl-child to see cooking as women's role. Also, the type of toys bought for each sex emphasises the expected gender roles. For instance, a boy is given balls, toy cars, etc., implying outdoor activities, while the girl is given dolls, teddy bear, (for cuddling to show the nurturing role), spoon, cooking pots, which implies domesticity.

School
Another important agent of socialisation is the school. Teachers and counsellors in schools help in molding the students according to cultural expectations. Through counselling, students are

encouraged on the choice of careers to make. For instance, a girl may be advised to register for 'Food and Nutrition' as subject because the knowledge acquired will help her in carrying out her role as a wife in future. A boy may be advised to pick up Visual Arts, Physics, or Technical Drawing. In these choices, different gender roles are emphasised for the sexes.

Peer Group

Peer group helps in gender role acquisition as children learn from one another. As children play together and interact they learn from one another. Part of what they learn is gender role expectation. Boys are encouraged to play with boys while girls play with girls.

Religious Institutions

Both Christian and Islamic religions have certain codes that guide the behaviour of men and women. In some churches men and women are not expected to sit at the same side in the church hall. Women and girls have their separate sections where they sit. This emphasises the differences between the sexes. Similarly, Islamic religion has certain tenets that guide men and women's behaviour, for instance, where to sit in the mosques, who will lead prayers, dressing, and so on. Religious institutions also have prescriptions on how to organise the family, and the roles of father and mother, boys and girls in the family.

The Media

Through TV commercials, newspapers and magazines, men and women are portrayed carrying out different activities that depict gender role differentiation. The portrayal of boys and girls in story books helps in gender roles acquisition. In most books, boys are portrayed as very active and intelligent while girls are passive, often asking for assistance.

Women in Precolonial African Societies: Examples

In precolonial Africa, women played crucial roles in the life of their societies. They were assigned roles in religion as priestesses and cultic functionaries and. In spite of the fact that many were

male-dominated, some gave room for women's participation as leaders (Orebiyi 2001:77; Afolayan 2006:1). Examples of these cults are Osun, Ogun and Sango. This is why titles like *Iya Sango* and *Iya Osun* exist. It is on record that the late Susan Wenger, Adunni Oloosa, was an important personality in Osun Osogbo, southwest Nigeria. What about Ayelala, a goddess among the Ilaje and Ijo Apoi people in Okitipupa area of Ondo State? The offering of the slave girl (who later became deified) to appease the gods of the land following a crime of sexual immorality should be seen as a form of sacrifice, on the part of women. Although she was forced to die, she is today worshipped. This demonstrates the integration of women in religious sphere. Another example is Queen Moremi of Ile-Ife, who offered herself to be captured by invading Igbo warriors and through this she was able to liberate her people (Fatokun 2010:136-138). Apart from cult related activities, women participated actively in community affairs. This is why in every Yoruba community there are female chiefs who are deeply involved in indigenous governance.

Among the Yoruba people also, motherhood is a cherished status, as in other African societies. The significance of this institution lies in the fact that children are seen as blessing in Africa, a connection between the living, the dead and the unborn; and symbolic of the society's capacity for regeneration. This is reflected in names children are given at birth and the sayings common amongst the peoples. Among the Igbo, for instance, *'Nneka'* means *'Mother is supreme'* while *'Nneamaka'* is interpreted as *'Mother is good'*. The Yoruba maxim *'Iya ni wura'* means 'Mother is gold' while the father is metaphorically referred to as 'Mirror'. Also the Tiv of the middle belt, Nigeria have names like *Ngodo* meaning 'Mother is good', and *Ngohemba*, which means 'Mother is great'. In training a child, greater responsibility is placed on the woman as she is also seen as the custodian of the values of the people.

The position of women in precolonial African societies can further be elucidated by looking at other roles that women played in their societies. Among the Kikuyu people of Kenya, a Bantu speaking people of east Africa, Patricia Stamp reported that the

society practiced dual sex organisation. Women were engaged in economic activities, battering the goods they produced such as pottery, honey and beer. They travelled to neighbouring pastoral areas battering their goods. Women had their power bases but excluded from men's meetings where decision affecting the life of all and sundry were taken. However, women had their age grades, which offered them opportunity for decision making. Two of these are the *Nyakinyua*, which comprises of women whose first child has been circumcised, and *Kang'ei*, women with uncircumcised children. Women had control over their economic resources. European incursion into the society, however, have detrimental effects on women's power bases as these were not recognised, and ultimately replaced with Western structures that undermined women's position. Among the Igbo people of west of River Niger, dual-sex political system also existed. The *omu* was regarded as the mother of the community while the *obi* was the leader and father of the community. For the Igbo east of the River Niger, the *umuada* or *umu okpu* played crucial roles in the affairs of their community, both in decision making and in peace making. As Ukpokolo (2012) noted, the Igbo associational life is highly gendered as men and women have their assemblies. However, resolutions arrived at in women's meetings are binding on women alone, while those of the men are binding on all members of the society. Women, however, have the rights of consultation which must not be violated as they also reserve the right to contest any resolution that did not promote common good. Women were also actively involved in the economic sector through trading, including long distance trading (see Ukpokolo 2016a), and had power over their resources. Colonialism and the subsequent culture change that accompanied the encounter have brought about drastic change on women's former power bases.

In Yoruba land, women were actively involved in economic activities, trading on craft goods and providing services such as hair dressing and cloth making. Women were also mostly responsible for the processing of agricultural produce and their subsequent sales in the markets. Participation in economic activities imbued women with a high sense of gender solidarity

based on mutual interests. They formed '*egbe*' (trade association). In the pre-colonial era, Yoruba women dominated the distribution and service sector. Through economic power women were able to rise to positions of political authority. Sanday (1979: 177) noted that the fact that economic power preceded political authority is not surprising, and that power over strategic resources has been frequently noted to be antecedent to or at least correlated to the development of economic and political authority. People like Iyalode Efunsetan was one of such women who, through economic power, gained political importance (see Awe 1992). As Ukpokolo (2016b) noted, in the religious sphere, women in precolonial Yoruba society played significant roles as priestesses, and till today some deities are female in Yorubaland. Similarly, women could also be *Ifa* priests. The Yoruba cosmology therefore recognises that men and women are complementary and therefore none is superior to the other. In the political sphere, women could be *oba* as recorded in Ondo and Oyo in precolonial Yoruba.

In precolonial Ghana, the Queen mother, referred to *Asantehemmaa*, played crucial role in the political system of the Akan peoples. The Akan is a cultural group in Ghana located in the Ashanti region of the southern Ghana and Ivory Coast. The queen mother had her own stool, which symbolised power and authority. Stoeltje (2003) noted that unlike in some African societies where women leaders derived their power through their relationship, the queen mother in Akan land derived hers by her qualification. She noted that among the Akan people, "both the queen mother and a chief must be members of the same royal family...In some instances, the queen mother may, in fact, be the biological mother of the chief...but more often they are aunt and nephew or uncle and niece, or, frequently they are cousins" (Stoeltje 2003: 4). The colonial forces ignored the queen mother and other female leaders in Akan, ignoring their relevance and concentrating on men leaders . and not giving the *Asantehemmaa* any official recognition. Despite these rights enjoyed by women in the pre-colonial period, they did not make women equal partners with men. In the new state structures brought about by colonialism, women's representation in government bodies was limited compared to the number of men as

a result of their privileged opportunity in wealth accumulation and access to Western education. Citing Reh and Ludwar-Ene (1995), the author noted that in traditional African society, "women in matrilineal and matrilocal societies enjoy a degree of stability in their life because they do not have to give up their status and/or identity and begin anew in a strange environment when they marry" (Stoeltje 2003: 8). Thus, the advent of colonialism in Africa brought about changes in African societies—political, economic, religious spaces and so on. All these brought about new sets of values, norms, and a wide range of social and cultural institutions that have continued to shape African experiences.

Identifying the Source of Women's Marginal Positioning in Society: Feminism and African Realities

The concept 'feminism' has no universally acceptable definition. What exist are definitions based on different perspectives authors view the concept. The important thing, however, is that all the definitions have a common goal. What is intended here therefore is a basic explanation of what most of these definitions intend to achieve. Feminism is an advocacy of women's rights based on the belief in the equality of the sexes. As an advocacy for women liberation, it seeks for equality with men in terms of opportunities, actualisation of women's rights and rejects discrimination meted against women based on sex difference. It is, therefore, founded on a rejection of unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women in society. Feminism provokes different reactions throughout the world. In Africa, it is dismissed by some people as a Western concept imposed on the world as a new form of Western imperialism. However, the concern of feminism, in most cases, is a call for a new kind of knowledge and attitude in human society; the creation of more space for women, the practice of inclusivity.

Feminism is logically, then, a set of ideas, which are also a political practice. The fundamental source of disagreement amongst the feminists is the basis of gender oppression or the unequal access to power and resources between men and women. This has given rise to different types of feminism. There are disagreements about the source of the problem and how to address

the problem. For instance, among feminists in the United States, there was a huge debate about whether to promote equality or to promote protective legislation. That class-based debate divided the women's movement. Those working in the unions and working class women were interested in protective legislation, pointing out that women are different from men and, therefore, needed to be supported in order to cope better in male-dominated organisations, and so on.

Types of Feminisms

There are four main types of feminism. These are Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism and Socialist feminism. The basic difference between these groups is the source or the origin of women marginalisation in the society. Let us look at each of these more closely.

Liberal Feminism

This is the earliest type of feminism. The main focus of liberal feminism is equal rights for women. This is the type adopted by the UN in its programmes on women. The liberal feminists are interested in promoting change within the existing framework of the society. They do not want to change their society – they want women to have more rights within the society as it is. All the world conferences on women have Liberal Feminism as their basis. So, they are interested in laws governing work, for example, equal pay for equal work, equality before the law, etc. In the final analysis, the main concern of liberal feminism is equal rights for the sexes – the extension of liberty, equality and justice to women through legal and social reforms. They work within the political system to get better opportunities for women. They are also known as mainstream feminists.

Radical Feminism

This is most closely identified with the women's liberation movement, which took shape in the late 1960s. According to the radical feminists, women's oppression is a basic fact of every society and patriarchy is responsible for this situation.

A patriarchal culture may be described as a culture in which male values and privileges have become dominant and societal values are highly influenced by the male point of view. Radical feminists declare that the 'personal is political' as a rallying point slogan, and examine the ways human reproduction is controlled, and one is socialised through such institutions as family and religious institutions, and compulsory heterosexuality. They seek to create a new social framework as feminist alternatives in every area of life: family, religion, reproduction, marriage, etc. To them, women's relationship to men is politically problematic. They brought reproduction into political arena by questioning women's reproductive role, that is, biological role and insist that it must be by choice. They support lesbianism, gay marriage, abortion and the choice to have children or not. Radical feminism is associated with militancy.

Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism brought class analysis to feminism. It uses Marxist method of social analysis to produce knowledge of the wider context of women's oppression through history. They posit that the bourgeois capitalists are the men while the women are the proletariats, and the oppressed. This group sees gender inequality as a consequence of capitalism. The lack of economic power on the part of the women and the possession of this power by the men, the radical feminist argue, is fundamental to women subjugation. In other words, capitalism excludes women and is, therefore, the source of women's marginalisation. They, therefore, argue for the empowerment of women economically.

Socialist Feminism

This type of feminism combines the insights of the Marxist and Radical feminism and insists that gender-based divisions were a set of social relations, which have historically, and in all known societies, been based on male domination and female subordination. They are not distinct from class relations, in capitalist, non-capitalist, centralised and non-centralised societies but are, however, embedded in those social relations of

reproduction such that they, therefore, serve capitalism, feudalism or any other social system. To the socialist feminists, therefore, women marginalisation and subordination is a question of problematic gender relations.

Challenges of the Post-colonial Realities and the Imperatives of Change

Western stereotypical perception of women and associating them with domesticity affected the white administrators' perception of women in Africa. Secondly, with the importation of capitalism, the female former power bases started to wane. As men took up wage-paid employment in the cities and male elders appointed as chiefs to assist the European administrators, women's potentials were left unrecognised (see Okonjo 1976, Uzuegbunam 1988, Van Allen 1972). Rather than uplifting the status of women, colonialism undermined women's former power bases without providing modern forms of autonomy and power in exchange. In Yorubaland, Kikuyu, Akan, Igboland, and in other African societies, the narrative is similar. Women in post-colonial Africa encounter challenges that hinder their effective participation in society. Gender and income disparity has indicated women at a disadvantaged position. In a study carried out on gender pay gap in Ethiopia, Nordman et al. (2010) note that among other issues, women's monthly wages represented only 55 percent of men's wages, with large variations across subgroups. Thus, Backiny-Yetna and Wodon (2010) conclude that "labour income tends to be controlled by men" in the Sub-Saharan Africa (Backiny-Yetna and Wodon 2010: 377). In the academe, women academics face diverse challenges that hinder their participation. In a study on career paths of women academics in a Nigeria university, Ukpokolo (2016c) contends that gender disparity in the academe is reflected in the gendered practices imported into the university, combined with household labour, hinder women's intellectual productivity and career progression. Coupled with other issues like lack of access to finance or loans and maternal mortality, African women in the post-colonial have become the face of poverty in the region, hence, the 'feminization' of poverty. These constitute parts

of the fundamental issues African women emancipation activists are agitating against. It should be noted that women as the second half of the human society need to be taken into account in the quest for solutions to the developmental challenges of the continent. Their emancipation is the emancipation of the society generally.

Suffice it to say here that African scholars have rejected Western-oriented feminism as another form of Western imperialism. Western-oriented approaches in addressing women marginality in Africa have not succeeded. It has often been argued that women in most traditional African societies play complementary roles with men rather than the subordination and subjugation of women that are popular in Western literature on Africa. Thus, Oyewumi (1997) notes that the fundamental category 'woman' which is foundational in Western gender discourses did not exist in Oyo-Yorubaland prior to Western contact through colonialism and the sustained contact and dominance in the production of knowledge. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to note that, as in all societies, there are also some cultural practices in traditional African society that are detrimental to the survival of the African woman. One of such is widowhood practice, which varies among cultures. Widowhood is associated with many rituals some of which are harmful and devastating to women. Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria for example, the ritual starts immediately the woman discovers or is informed of the death of her husband. What follows depends on the peculiarity of each society. In some places, she is expected to shave her hair and must no longer be allowed to see the corpse of her husband from this point. If the woman is suspected of having a hand in the death of the man, she could be made to prove her innocence by going through devastating rituals. Among the Idoma of Benue State, Nigeria, the woman is kept outside the house or in an uncompleted building for a number of days while the mourning period lasts. What obtains in some parts of Esan in Edo State is that the widow sits on a mat, eats with her left hand, which she must not wash for some days. Also, she is not expected to bathe or wash her clothes during this period. Widowhood practice in Africa has become a source of concern to African feminists and gender activists. Yet, it is not common for widowers to undergo such rituals on account of

the death of their spouses. It is gladdening that some of these cultural practices are changing.

Inheritance practices in many societies in Africa are not women-friendly. Traditionally, the writing of Will is non-existent as the society is characterised by orality. After the burial of the deceased, elders of the extended family meet for the sharing of the property (e.g wives, offices and materials). These elders, in most cultures, are only males. Sharing of offices is male-centered as women cannot be made the head of the family. No matter how young a male child is, in some cultures, he is superior to female children in this regard, no matter how old they may be. However, it is not impossible for female children to inherit property in some cultures, especially when they are single, but this is not always the case for married women because of the belief that they, in their entirety, belong to their husbands. What is operational in traditional Igboland is more hostile to women as they do not have any right to inherit anything from their fathers by tradition (Oke 2001:52). If a man dies without having a son, his belongings go to his brother or uncle, and his name is believed to have been lost. For this reason, having a male child is crucial among the Igbo; thus, the relevance of the name *'Ahamefula'*, meaning, 'Let my name not be lost'. It is important to note that while a woman may not inherit property, she could be inherited. Traditionally, wives of the deceased were part of his property. In such a situation, she could be inherited by somebody too old for her or somebody who may be younger than her own son. However, it is not in all cases that such a woman is expected to have sexual relationship with the man that inherited her. In most cases in Igbo land, she and her children simply come under the protective hands of such a man.

Another issue that needs to be pointed out is that certain challenges women encounter in society are intra-gender based. Experience has shown that in some cases women contribute to the oppression of their fellow women. According to Atere (2001), the roles some women play are obstacles to the fulfillment of women's cultural rights in Yorubaland as they are instigators of polygyny and custodians of harmful widowhood rites. Women are often used to perpetuate patriarchal culture, thereby reducing the dignity of fellow women. The mother-in-law may see her daughter-in-law as an intruder, who has come to reap the fruit of her child-bearing,

hence perpetual hostility between them (Atere 2001:58). Thus, conflict between wives and mothers-in-law are common in many marriages. There is the need for men and women to change negative attitudes learnt through socialisation in order to harness the potentials in both sexes for the development of Africa. Each must be recognised as indispensable entity, and the question of inferiority needs not arise in our interactions.

Increasingly, gender activists in many countries are challenging ideologies and practices that work against women. Issues such as sexual violence, domestic violence, and women's lack of participation in politics as leaders and under-representation in appointive positions are often criticised by such activists. Nevertheless, African women feminist scholars disagree with their Western counterpart on the issues of gay marriage, transgender, homosexuality, among others. Experiences across different regions of Africa indicate that we cannot, simply, import terms and concepts that have been developed elsewhere, under different socio-political conditions and use them unquestionably. Imported ideologies and values more often than not have proved to be detrimental to the African sub-region, especially in the areas relating to women issues. For instance, the idea of 'woman-as-housewife' was imported from Victorian Europe to Africa. This has undermined the African realities to the detriment of women, and the continent at large. In Africa, prior to colonial contact, the division into private and public domains were non-existent as men and women laboured in all areas of production, industries and commerce. Men and women, for instance, were farmers, craft workers such as basket makers, carvers, sculptors and so on. Under the colonial administration, however, women were denied employment in the emerging cash economy, and their productive work in agriculture, trade and industry was sidelined, with the deployment of technology. Men gained employment in the new capitalist and political systems, while women were left out, and eventually their productive activities undervalued. Ever since, women have remained a marginalised group in Africa.

Relevance of Gender Studies to the Advancement of Humanity
As a research strategy, gender theory and knowledge within social science research is relevant and necessary on five levels:

(i)   Handrahan notes that the addition of gender as a research strategy within the frameworks of the traditional social science methods enables the researcher to overcome, to some degree, the flaws (shortcomings) of modern social sciences which neglected half the population of humanity. Gender strategy, therefore, renders methodology more solid and theory more adequate in describing the sociological question and, therefore, aids in producing less-flawed social science.

(ii)   The author further observes that gender strategy, by providing an authentic examination of the entire population in question, provides for more valid research findings. This is because men and women are put into account. Therefore, gender research increases the validity and reliability of social science research.

(iii) Again, Handrahan points out that gender as a research strategy allows for more accurate prescriptive outcome. In other words, gender studies and the outcome ensure that prescriptions could be more accurate and reliable in policy formulation and programmes.

(iv)   In scholarship, Imam (1990) rightly observes that gender knowledge and analysis will enrich immensely the scope and depth of knowledge, and clarify the nature of the social relations in a more accurate manner.

(v)   Ultimately, gender studies create knowledge, which could help to bring about positive socio-political and economic changes, and influence better gender relations and address imbalances.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted an examination of the place of women in Africa, using select societies in the continent as case studies. We have demonstrated that gender studies is a viable way of understanding the place of men and women in society. We have also pointed out some concepts that are recurrent in gender scholarship. We have argued in the chapter that gender roles are culturally constructed and therefore should be understood as different from sex roles. This work also traced the root of women's

second class positionality in post-colonial Africa to colonial experience, which began with the introduction of Victorian notion of women in society and the intitutionalisation of public/private dichotomy in Africa, while restricting women to domesticity. The Western administrative structures emanating from colonial encounter created spaces for men's inclusion while women became marginalised. This disproportionate situation that privileges men's positionality has remained even in the post-colonial era. Suffice it to say that there are some aspects of African culture that are detrimental to women's health. Examples include widowhood practices, female genital mutilation, domestic and sexual violence, and preference for male children that has endangered the lives of many women through multiple births in an attempt to have male children in order to secure their positions in their husbands' homes. Feminism as an advocacy for women inclusion seeks to identify the source of women's marginalisation in society and advocates for its eradication. However, in this search, it has become obvious that African realities cannot be captured using Western-oriented concepts, approaches or methodology. The need for home-grown approaches has therefore become imperative. Important also, is the need for gender mainstreaming as a viable option that can enable inclusive practices in addressing the developmental challenges in post-colonial Africa.

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