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Perspectives on Feminism in Africa

Edited by
‘Lai Olurode

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Series Editor’s Preface

The Carolina Academic Press African World Series, inaugurated in 2010, offers significant new works in the field of African and Black World studies. The series provides scholarly and educational texts that can serve both as reference works and as readers in college classes.

Studies in the series are anchored in the existing humanistic and the social scientific traditions. Their goal, however, is the identification and elaboration of the strategic place of Africa and its Diaspora in a shifting global world. More specifically, the studies will address gaps and larger needs in the developing scholarship on Africa and the Black World.

The series intends to fill gaps in areas such as African politics, history, law, religion, culture, sociology, literature, philosophy, visual arts, art history, geography, language, health, and social welfare. Given the complex nature of Africa and its Diaspora, and the constantly shifting perspectives prompted by globalization, the series also meets a vital need for scholarship connecting knowledge with events and practices. Reflecting the fact that life in Africa continues to change, especially in the political arena, the series explores issues emanating from racial and ethnic identities, particularly those connected with the ongoing mobilization of ethnic minorities for inclusion and representation.

Toyin Falola
University of Texas at Austin
Acknowledgments

In many respects than one, an academic work is a collective endeavour. This is so for many obvious reasons. But two of the numerous reasons can be captured here. First, an academic work is a process which has several stages, each step dovetailing into another—there is the stage of contemplation and reflection over those hunches, yet to be crystallised. There is the period of writing of initial drafts, then the final draft, editing, proof-reading and the unending search for a publication outlet. There are people, sometimes these could be post-graduate students or research assistants or even spouses who assist in checking missing references or spelling mistakes and others who have to fill in all sorts of missing gaps.

Really, in the course of writing, there are opportunity costs—activities that have to be forgone in the course of writing. We need others cooperation for us to traverse the hurdles of academic writings. Our loved ones would be denied unrestricted access at their convenience whilst we cultivate scholarship. The ultimate satisfaction, though intangible, is that we are able to penetrate the mind of others and keep conversations alive. By this alone, we contribute to the burgeoning of civilizations and humanistic understanding.

I wish to thank all the contributors to this publication, the Carolina Academic Press and Suzanne for the coordination. Jessica did a good work as copy editor. Mr. I. O. Fakunle and Nurat Mustapha did the typing of the drafts. I remain grateful to all who contributed one or the other to the success of this publication.

‘Lai Olurode
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Perspectives on Feminism in Africa
Chapter One

Introduction

‘Lai Olurode

1.0 Introduction

This publication is meant to fulfill four inter-related purposes. First, it is to bring together diverse and scattered writings by scholars on feminism. Most of the authors did not start their academic writings with a patent feminist agenda in focus. But upon the conclusion of their professional training, I encouraged them to think through the feminism in their data and flesh this up, so as to be included in this reader. I have had the privilege to co-supervise some of the doctoral works of these scholars.

The second objective thereby became actualized. Quite a few scholars appear to be in a hurry to shelve their manuscripts upon obtaining their doctorate degrees. They quickly get on to other writings—partly in the sphere of bread and butter, i.e. consultancy. By encouraging the contributors to re-visit their theses, I had hoped to keep the debates contained in their diverse writings alive. This then leads me to the third objective of this publication, which was to integrate and make a whole of the diverse writings of the scholars. The writers were encouraged to further explore the salient gender empowerment messages contained in their writings. The authors’ favourable consideration of this suggestion brought about unity in the disparate and diverse writings of the authors. The contributors were requested to pay attention to the inter-connectedness of the subject matter of their writings, in spite of the obvious fact that they were constituted at different times, under different supervisors, and with clearly different focuses. This, in fact, is salutary, in that it reinforces and rekindles hope in the assumption that a common thread runs through progressive scholarship, their disparate nature notwithstanding. The quest for emancipation is a hallmark of progressive scholarship.

At the fourth level, these writings help to underscore the rise to prominence of women and gender studies in Nigeria and indeed in Africa. Generally, in
the humanities, a scholar who ignores the gender implications of a piece of research work would likely not travel far in academics nor be regarded as a thoroughbred academic. Of course, it is recognized that some of these writings about gender in Africa are Eurocentric. Early European writers upon their voyage into Africa were desperately searching for the European equivalent of patriarchy and were in a hurry to see nothing other than male domination. They displayed open bias and conveniently ignored data that contradicted their own versions of reality. This present project assists in highlighting Afrocentric perspectives, for there are many of these. Unfortunately, most African writers express a sense of frustration when their data fails to affirm the oftentimes prejudiced European theoretical perspectives. There cannot be anything further from the truth than when we say a theory is of universal application. This tradition upholds a unilineal perspective and a realist viewpoint that clearly ignores pluralism and the yearnings of the anti-realists.

In no other field is this complexity more profound than on the subject matter of women, gender, and feminist studies. The works by Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987); and *Re-inventing African Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (1997), have clearly charted a new and refreshing way of re-interpreting gender-related data. Amadiume clearly advocates for an Afrocentric view and a jettisoning of the European lenses in viewing Africa, if we are to avoid a most jaundiced perspective. She wrote clearly in support of the writings of a celebrated academic patriot, Anta (1987), who had long ago cautioned that African scholars and politicians should not accept, as the gospel truth, European writings on Africa, which in most cases portrayed Africa as backward, full of barbarians and savages. Anta instead clearly demonstrated that Africa was indeed ahead of Europe during the Middle Ages. These diverse writings that re-interpreted data from Africa clearly threw up the resourcefulness of African women, their diversity, and an overwhelming rejection of male’s oppression of women. African women generally prefer to have their own sphere of autonomy.

It was Okonjo (1976: 45) who employed the concept of dual-sex system to characterize the African System, which implies that “each sex manages its own affairs and women’s interests are represented at all levels.” However, under the European single-sex system, “political status-bearing roles are predominantly the preserve of men; women can achieve distinction and recognition only by taking on the roles of men in public life and performing them well.” The concept of dual-sex was therefore more acceptable in that each gender category has its own sphere of operation, as well as autonomy to own property. When the needs dictate, collaborative activities are the norm in the relationship be-
tween men and women. African women do not cheaply and naively submit to subjugation.

The seeming popularity of gender scholarship in Africa is to be understood within the context of a flourishing ethnographic climate (see for example Olurode 1999 and 2000). It cannot be denied that gender studies have become activated in Africa since the 1990s. Some of the factors that had fuelled this development will be alluded to below.

1.1 Gender Studies Regime in Africa

Unlike the 1970s and 1980s, we can now confidently speak of a gender studies regime in Africa. We can refer to a plethora of factors that have activated this upsurge in gender studies. Prominent among these are African women’s unrelenting struggle to regain their freedom from oppressive forces of colonial domination. Colonialism in a way re-wrote Africa’s gender history as it created an African version of European patriarchy and tried to keep women in check as was the case in Europe.

Secondly, at the global level, the efforts of international agencies in creating a favourable environment for women’s freedom to blossom cannot be denied. Some of these efforts include, the charter on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the women’s decade as declared by the U.N; the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies; and the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women. Apart from the activism of international NGOs, local NGOs in Africa have equally been inspired by these efforts and other internal developments.

Thirdly, radical African men and women who objected the Eurocentric writings of the early anthropologists started to question the false conclusions that emanated from such writings. They dug into and reinterpreted research data, creating new conclusions that African women had once competed favourably with their men and that they were in fact, ahead of their European counterparts in some respects, particularly in term of visibility in the public sphere. Thus, in their academic works in literature, history, law, sociology, politics, and the humanities generally, there was an unrelenting interrogation of the conventional wisdom that portrays African women as merely an appendage to successful men.

The fourth point is in regards to the rising academic profile of gender studies all over Africa. The initial resistance both at the level of institution and curriculum development has now largely been overcome. In the mid-1980s, when I introduced gender studies in the department of sociology at the University of Lagos, the then chair of sociology thought I could do something much bet-
ter than that. The final approval, through the curriculum review committee, was long drawn. I do not intend to rehearse what others had accomplished with regard to a review of African scholarship in gender and women's studies (see for example Mama, 1996 on women studies and studies of women in Africa during the 1990s). The point to emphasize is that our universities are more receptive and evidently more tolerant of gender studies today than was the case in the 1980s through the early 1990s. Theoretically, the more advanced the social forces of democratization, the more tolerant will be teaching faculty members of gender research. However, the situation is foggy. The prevailing conditions are still hostile for feminist research (see Pereira, 2004: 20). The university is yet to be regarded as a site to question and challenge orthodoxy. Paradoxically, the feminist project is about a rejection of conventional knowledge and assumptions. I am unaware of a Nigerian University that teaches feminism as a course, though feminism may be smuggled into women or gender studies. Feminist projects may readily be associated with subversive and revolutionary tendencies and may be looked at as an endorsement of single parenting and same sex relationship.

However, it is evident that some progress has been made. Gender studies, if not feminism, are now regarded as legitimate sphere of academic endeavour. Pereira (2004: 8–9) has given a graphic illustration of the accomplishments. The puzzle that remains is whether this intellectual output is meaningful or supportive of the cultivation of political activism. Put differently, what are the triumphs of gender and women's studies? Griffin (2005) had expressed the view of a positive relation between a high degree of institutionalization of gender/women studies' education in universities and equal opportunities. Robinson and Richardson (2008: xx) have equally maintained that “feminist and gendered academy can be seen as connected to both our understandings of the world and possibilities for changing it.” We cannot agree less with Robinson and Richardson (2008: xvii) as to the impact of over three decades of academic gender when they maintained that “… over the last 30 years, women’s/gender studies have changed the established canon of the social sciences and arts and humanities disciplines, as well as the teaching of research methods by becoming assimilated into traditional disciplines, often as a compulsory element. Gender studies are therefore, a key aspect of many undergraduates and postgraduates students’ education.”

1.2 About the Book

This publication provides a platform for academic researchers working on different aspects of women and gender studies to capture diverse expressions
of women’s inexorable thirst for empowerment and their struggles to overcome stereotypes and discrimination whether early in life, during adolescent years, or in the twilight of their existence. The sphere of reproductive rights and human trafficking were not left out, so also, was new internet technology. Of course, the tempo of change has forced women to re-strategize in responses to new challenges of social existence. Without exceptions, the chapters mobilized convincing empirical data in support of women’s relentless struggle for social inclusion and effective participation in all spheres of life on the African continent. There cannot be a better way of expressing women’s determination to alter the balance of power in their favor. The simultaneous operation of these forces of change through feminism is certainly good for balanced and sustainable human development. In all, this becomes a superior means of responding to the challenges of the millennium development goals.

There are eleven chapters in this book. The introduction is contained in Chapter One, which traces some of the challenges of feminist research in Africa and argues a case for the coming of age of what the author describes as a gender studies regime in Africa. Chapter Two contains a theoretical argument on what I refer to as fractured feminism. The focus of Chapter Three is gender and culture in old and new Africa, which was reproduced from Toyin Falola’s book, *The Power of African Cultures* (Chapter Ten of the book). It discusses such subjects as marriage practices and the changing role of women, as well as the paradox of change. In Chapter Four, Michael Kumijji discusses a feminist appraisal of the social context of adolescents internet use in Nigeria and outlines some of the implications for Africa.

The subject of trafficking in young women in the context of globalization is the focus of Franca Attoh’s argument in Chapter Five. Trafficking in woman has become a disturbing phenomenon and attempts to tackle it have been largely unsuccessful. Attoh employs empirical data and ethnographic sources to unravel the enduring nature of the problem and suggests what is to be done. How women deploy feminist strategies to negotiate reproductive health issues is the focus of Chapter Six by Chinyere C. P. Nnorom. Resistance to discrimination among people living with HIV/AIDS is gendered, of which the feminist aspects are explored by Chinwe R. Nwanna in Chapter Seven. Membership of women’s associations is believed to confer some leverage on members. Specifically, women who belong to associations enjoy political empowerment. Idongesit Eshiet discusses this issue in depth in Chapter Eight. Aging is a gendered experience, and elderly women more than elderly men suffer more social deprivations in retirement. This was the conclusion of Bola Amake in Chapter Nine. Though, women as household heads may not perceive themselves as such, Funmi Bammeke regards them as feminists in their own rights. In Chap-
ter Ten, Bammeko documents the diverse and rich experiences of women as heads of households. The conclusions are contained in Chapter Eleven.

References


Chapter Two

Fractured Feminism

‘Lai Olurode

2.0 Introduction

Both in theory and practice, feminism can be said to be almost dead, particularly as a unified system of thought. Feminism itself is concerned with women’s yearnings for freedom from oppression and from other forms of rights violations. As a theory, feminism may sound coherent, but in practice it is diverse. It is rarely able to muster a universal appeal to women of all nations and classes. Women’s struggle to leverage their positions vis-à-vis men is perhaps a universal phenomenon, but this leverage takes diverse forms. In almost all societies, distinctions are made between productive and reproductive activities. While one may agree that gender roles are culture-bound, almost everywhere reproductive activities fall exclusively within what are regarded as traditional female roles. The transformations from hunting and gathering to horticulture and agricultural and now to industrialization and to globalization notwithstanding, women continue to play these roles while simultaneously not being excused from the production of material things. Women’s visibility in economic activities cannot be ignored but, this has not rubbed off or leveraged their political relevance nor their life chances substantially, especially to the extent that this ought to be. The outcome has been a double work-load for women as they traverse the porous boundaries of the productive and reproductive terrain without adequate remuneration and recognition.

Indeed, feminist research and feminism do interrogate and challenge patriarchy globally, particularly in Africa. It is my intention to delineate the boundaries of these challenges. But let me reiterate the obvious point that feminists as writers and feminism as a body of diverse theories vary in their concerns. This diversity and pluralism erodes efforts to pool resources and galvanize energies to present a formidable opposition to varying manifestations of oppressions both at the level of theory and praxis. Women in the south spend
most time eking out a living through tiling the soil, hewing fire-wood, and fetching water, while their northern counterparts are less challenged with energy sapping activities. They are engrossed with seeking equal rights and equal pay and fighting other forms of gender-based discriminatory practices. Thus, as a field of academic research, feminism is fractured—it has so many schools with diverse preoccupations and challenges that have outcomes for theories, policy options, and strategies. Feminism does not therefore display a coherent theoretical appeal that can foster unity at the level of theory and practice. At this point, it will be helpful to discuss more robustly the concept of feminism and some its several expressions.

2.1 What Is Feminism?

Though feminism has now attracted a wide range of academic writings, which are certainly an indicator of its reception as a legitimate academic pursuit, the history of feminism is still recent. There cannot be a better expression of this recent beginning than in the failure of a 1968 new dictionary of sociology edited by G. Duncan Mitchell to have an entry on the word feminism. Even the 1979 edition recorded no entry on feminism. The first recorded use of the term ‘feminism’ in English was said to have been derived from French in 1894 as rendered by the 1933 supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary (see Braham and Janes, 2002: 102).

The 1991 Harper Collins Dictionary of sociology, however, has an extensive entry on feminism, which it defined as a holistic theory concerned with the nature of women’s global oppression and subordination to men. It also described it as a socio-political theory and practice that aims to free all women from male supremacy and exploitation, a social movement encompassing strategic confrontations with the sex-class system, and an ideology that stands in dialectical opposition to all misogynous ideologies and practices. According to the dictionary, the roots of modern feminist thought are conventionally traced back to the late 18th century and to the works of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Although there are no agreements on this, there has been said to be many waves of feminism. According to Lorber (2010:1) the first wave was from the 19th to the early 20th centuries. The dominant issue in the first wave was women’s quest for legal equality with men, including the right to vote or suffrage. The second was said to be in the late 1960s. This wave was concerned with increasing women legal rights, political representation, and entry into occupations and professions under men’s dominance. This epoch was concerned with the elimination of sexual violence, free contraception, prostitution, and pornog-
raphy. The second wave of feminism was believed to have been fueled by the 1949 publication of Sione de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. This publication presented men as the first sex who set the standards and values that women parrot in the western world. As Lorber puts it “men are the actors, women the reactors. Men thus are the first sex, women always the second sex” (2010: 3). However, de Beauvoir was kind enough to maintain that men’s dominance was not a biological phenomenon but rather a social creation.

The pre-occupations of the third wave of feminism that emerged in 1992 were different. This feminism was multiracial and multiethnic, and it challenges everything that was known about sex, sexuality, and gender. Lorber hinted that this wave challenged the duality and oppositeness of female and male homosexual and heterosexual relationships. The ideology of gender polarity has come under severe attack, or the belief being that sexuality takes diverse forms depending on sexual orientations. Among the circle of third wave feminisms, sexuality is regarded as being structured socially and not programmed by nature (for discussions on sexuality and sexual orientation, see Ault, 2009: 29).

The periodization of feminisms into different waves has come under severe criticism, but for different reasons. African feminist researchers continue to criticize western feminism for its ethno-centrism, i.e. drawing only on the experiences of western women and believing these to be of universal application. African women and minority women in the West have virtually no input into these categorizations. Western accounts of feminism could also be said to be ahistorical in that African women could identify instances where matriarchy and not patriarchy per se were dominant features and other instances of women’s visibility in the social, economic, and political arena (see Olurode’s edited work, 1991). African world views, the Yoruba of Nigeria, for example, subscribe more to the idea of complementarity in gender relations than domination (see Olurode, 1999 and Olurode, 2003, which highlighted women’s indispensable role in food production in Africa). Thirdly, western feminist writers have argued that the idea of three waves is also flawed because it is inaccurate in its failing to give accounts of events in between the waves (see Ault et al., 2009: 7).

Feminism is not yet as popular in Africa, especially if it connotes a rejection of men as heads of households, the downright rejection of the family as a social institution, or the abolition of marriage. If feminism means a rejection of gender polarity, it is yet to gain currency in most of Africa. Presently, a bill for an “Act to Prohibit Marriage Between Persons of same Gender, solemnizations of same and for other Matters Related Therewith” is pending before the House of Representatives in Nigeria. Homosexuals have protested moves to criminalize same-sex marriage (see *The Punch*, March 12, 2009). Some homosexual-
uals argue, “we are law-abiding citizens and have not fallen into any problems with the laws. None of us would want to be discriminated against because of our sexuality that we have no control over, nor have we chosen. It is already a trial to survive the hardship of our nation let alone the discrimination we face as sexual minorities.” The protesting groups included the Queer Alliance, Human Rights Watch, and Global Rights—with the last two based in America with membership in Nigeria.

On the other hand, the church of Nigeria (the Anglican Community) and the Muslim Umaa have strongly condemned homosexuality as being “ungodly, unscriptural, unnatural, unprofitable, un-healthy, uncultured un-African and un-Nigerian” (The Punch, March 12, 2009). Public opinion in Nigeria is generally anti-homosexual. This explains why most radical feminist writers would not openly identify themselves as feminists. Feminists are generally perceived as not only anti-establishment, but also as anti-family, anti-marriage, and thus anti-children, in that they are perceived as homosexuals. The State’s and people’s hostility to diverse or multiple sexual orientations is widespread in Africa. People who indulge in unconventional sexual practices are generally portrayed as abnormal, insane, and sub-human. For example, a proposed anti-gay bill in Uganda prescribes death sentence for homosexuals. This drew mass condemnation from the West, but the bill still now prescribes life imprisonment for offenders. (The Punch, December 24, 2009). Homosexual practice might have been with society for sometime but it is still globally regarded as an aberration, a sexual orientation to be discouraged. Thus, even in the U.S., apart from the Washington D.C that legalized gay marriages in 2009, only five states out of 50 have so far legalized gay marriages. Massachusetts was the first to legalize gay marriage in 2004; the second state was Connecticut in 2008; the third and fourth were Iowa and Vermont in 2009; and the fifth was New Hampshire in 2010 (see U.S.A. TODAY, April 8, 2009).

Under the current wave of cultural globalization, it is difficult to rule out the possibility of Africa following after Massachusetts and others in the U.S. to become more tolerant of same-sex marriage. In any case, that possibility is probably remote given the myriads of existential challenges that confront the continent of Africa. Theoretically, we may expect homosexual orientation to blossom under harsh economic conditions as family formation becomes expensive. However, popular culture (as contained in children’s literature, home videos, and other media) continues to reproduce and, thus, reinforce the binary view of sexuality. Not many African musicians or any other artists would be able to contain the backlash that would flow from an open embrace of gay or lesbian practices. It cannot be denied, however, that some forms of queer sexuality are secretly manifested on our university campuses.
2.2 Diverse Expressions of Feminisms

There are diverse expressions of feminisms. Feminisms rather than feminism is meant to convey the different tendencies in feminism. This idea came from the work of Sebestyen (1979), who identified over ten political tendencies in feminism. In the edited work of Lorber (2000), 13 different strands of feminism were identified; George (1991) identified four—liberal, radical, socialist, and Marxist. Since this project is not on strands of feminisms per se, I will only attempt a synopsis of expressions of feminisms that I consider to be common. These are liberal, socialist, radical, and psycho-analytic feminisms.

2.2.i Liberal Feminism

Gender-based discriminatory practices as reinforced by the notion that biology is destiny remain central to the writings of liberal feminism. The goal of liberal feminism is well captured by Lorber (2009: 26) when she argues, “Liberal feminism accepts and works within the gendered social order with the goal of purging it of its discriminatory effects on women. Today this goal is termed undoing gender-reversing and countering the effects of gender discrimination. A parallel current goal is gender mainstreaming—ensuring that government laws and organizational policies do not adversely affect women and do address women’s needs.” Liberal feminism advocates for shared parenting, shared domestic work, and liberal abortion policies, among other concerns. Most African feminists can be categorized under liberal feminism. Patriarchy is not only tolerated but it is regarded as inevitable.

It is difficult to deny that some progress has been made with regard to en-gendering the workplace and making it safer for women. A new legislation in Britain has created what is called “third party harassment,” which allows workers to be able to sue over jokes and banter they find offensive—even if the comments are aimed at someone else and they were not there at the time the comments were made (see Daily Mail, October 2, 2010). The new law allows women to sue once they feel the comments “violate their dignity” or creates an “intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.” As would be expected, the legislation has been criticized in Britain. In its reaction, the Daily Mail sees it as the death of the office joke.

In the field of education, female enrolment has not only increased in the past five decades, it has surpassed male’s in some cases. Women are also now enrolled in courses that were previously the exclusive preserve of men and with this has come more job opportunities being opened to women. Generally speaking, there has been a noticeable improvement in female enrolments
at the primary and secondary levels and particularly at the tertiary level in Africa. This remarkable progress in gender justice in school enrolment has not been accidental. It manifests the outcomes of years of struggle by progressive minded groups and individuals to ensure a more equitable access to society’s tangible and intangible resources regardless of gender. There cannot be a better means of and path to balanced development. Some African countries have given a legal backing to the principle of affirmative action; for example, Uganda reserves 30% of elective and appointive posts to women. Nigeria, under the democratization processes that commenced in 1999, has made impressive progress in its inclusive practices and women’s visibility in key positions of government.

This encouraging development by no means implies that the glass ceiling no longer exists. Of course, there are evident barriers to women’s aspirations in reaching the top in jobs that are predominantly men’s. Men rarely experience a similar barrier in women’s traditional occupations. Rather, men in women’s occupations experience the phenomenon of the glass escalator rather than glass ceiling (Lorber, 2009: 32; see also Aultee et al., 2010: 139 on the concept of the glass ceiling and glass escalator).

Unequal participation in parenting practices by men and women remain major obstacles to the effective utilization of women’s skills and a threat to career mobility. Though fatherhood or shared parenting are emergent phenomena (see Times Magazine, No. 26, 2007), the bulk of domestic work falls on women. This has negative effects on academic performance. In a study by Olaufe (2006) of graduates of the University of Lagos, Nigeria, which focused on 4,403 males and 3,473 females, more males than females had first class (86 or 0.43) and second class upper. There were also wider gaps in the traditional male disciplines of mathematics and engineering. Marriage and motherhood were implicated, as only 3.70% of males compared to 15.85% of females were married students. Motherhood and housework also fall disproportionately on women. However, a major critique of liberal feminism being that it has “an internal theoretical contradiction … that centre on the question of whether women and men have to be the same to be equal” (Lorber, 2009: 40).

2.2.ii Socialist Feminism

Socialism connotes the notion of state control of key resources for the benefit of humankind and the idea that wealth should be equally or fairly distributed. The belief in state control contradicts the idea of a self regulatory state where the invisible hand works to even out society’s tangible and intangible resources. Socialist feminism draws inspirations from Marxism. It recognizes
that gender aside, race/ethnicity and class are other sources through which women are disadvantaged. It thus argued that, apart from gender inequality, there are other broad injustices from the intertwined effects of gender and class, gender and racial ethnic status, and all three combined … Women in groups disadvantaged by race, ethnicity and immigrant status suffer double or triple discrimination, but the interests of the men of their groups are more likely to prevail in political conflicts. Women's interests, socialist feminism argues, are not represented in class, racial, ethnic or national politics (Lorber, 2009: 71).

A synopsis of socialist feminism has been given thus:

socialist feminists believe that classical Marxism and radical feminism each have both insights and deficiencies. The task of socialist feminism is to construct a theory that avoids the weaknesses of each but incorporates its (and other) insights.

Socialist feminists reject the basic radical feminist contention that liberation for women requires the abolition of childbirth … instead, socialist feminists accept the classical Marxist contention that socialism is the main precondition for women's liberation (Jaggar, 1983: 327).

However, while it recognizes that this transformation might be necessary, it does not create a sufficient condition. This theory is more academic than real, given the upsurge in racial and ethnic consciousness across the world. The expectation that these differences will be overcome under modernization, post-modernism, or globalization remains only a tall dream. There is yet to emerge a common ground and consciousness between black, Asian, and white feminists.

2.2.iii Radical Feminism

The notion of radical connotes a sharp departure from that which is conventional. It represents a vigorous interrogation of what was before and that which has been taken for granted. Initially, it was used “as a term for feminists who wanted to do away with the traditional family and motherhood,” but has now become “a perspective that makes motherhood into a valuable way of thinking and behaving” (Lorber, 2009: 122). Radical feminism applauds the increasing role of fathers in parenting as it advocates for balancing between work and parenting (see Times Magazine, No. 26, 2007).

Radical feminism takes a global perspective of feminism as a system that subordinates and oppresses women through the instrumentality of medicine,
religion, science, law, and other social institutions. Radical feminism is particularly critical of patriarchy, and is critical of the portrayal of men’s aggressiveness as inevitable. Popular culture, through the media, which reinforces this worldview, is unacceptable to radical feminism. In some countries of the world (e.g. China and India), the killing of a girl child is legitimized by custom. Radical feminists have, in fact, raised the demand charter of feminism beyond the tokenism of good jobs, career advancement, and equal pay, to include freedom from sexual violence. In India, what is called the right of suttee, or widow-burning, is common. Millions of women the world over continue to be socially deprived on account of their biology (see Richardson and Taylor, 1983: 187–189), whether within marriage or outside of it. Hence, the talk about date-rape or marital rape, which definitely vitiates women’s consent. Both at home and at work, women are vulnerable to sexual harassment by men who occupy superior positions of power and who see women simply as sex objects.

Radical feminism can be argued to be an off-shoot of Marxist feminism, except that the former does not see as inevitable a fundamental overthrow of the capitalism mode of production prior to instituting a more humane gender relationship. The primary argument of Marxist feminism is that gender oppression as well as race/ethnic discrimination is required and maintained by class divisions. An end to a divided society would only sound the death knell of sexual oppression.

The questioning of conventional perspectives of environment, medicine, and religion has grown from radical feminism. Thus, we now talk of eco-feminism, which links “the exploitation of women’s bodies to the exploitation of natural resources in strip-mining and deforestation. Some feminists link women’s nurturance to caring for nature, others see men’s exploitation of women’s bodies as analogous to their exploitation of natural resources” (Lorber, 2009: 131). Radical feminism should not be taken as homogenous. Embedded in the school are varying and sometimes conflicting tendencies. As a school, it has been accused of alienating heterosexual women for reason of its emphasis on unequal power in such a relationship. The eulogy that it pays to mothering is also capable of alienating childless women and women who opt to focus on their career. These criticisms notwithstanding, the school deserves much “credit for bringing rape, sexual abuse of children, battering, sexual harassment and global trafficking in women for prostitution to public attention” (Lorber, 2009: 134).

2.2.iv Psychoanalytic Feminism

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was widely believed to be the founding father of psychoanalysis. His focus was on the structure of personality, its develop-
ment, and its dynamics. According to the Harper Collins dictionary of sociology (1991), Freud divided personality into the ID, EGO, and SUPEREGO. Freud’s argument was that “the self comes into being through gender (sexed identity)—that is, the path to becoming a person is a gendered path. Selfhood is a gender identity. Gender is what makes one human rather than a creature outside of complex human social life. Gender is that which places one in culture, beyond a merely physical being. In short, for Freud, there is no such thing as a genderless Human being” (Beasley, 2005: 63). It was indeed a re-reading of Freud’s works in the 1970s by British, American, and French scholars that brought psychoanalysis and feminism so close.

Thus, “psychoanalytic feminism has built on Freud’s theories of gender and sexuality as intrinsically oppressive of women, relegating them to subordinate family roles” (Lorber, 2009: 160). Men’s domination of women was the result of men’s need for women’s emotionality and men’s rejection of women as potential castrators. However, girls continue to identify with their mothers and are thus believed to experience fluid ego boundaries that predispose them to being sensitive, empathic, and emotional. These features make them display more capabilities in playing nurturing roles.

Nancy Chodorow (as quoted in Lorber, 2009: 161–164) gives a synopsis of Freud’s contributions to feminism. Her summary of psychoanalysis is that women (and men) are made and not born. Freud’s theory was constructed “around what is necessary for the perpetuation of a male dominant social organization, for the restriction of women sexuality to be orientated to men’s, for the perpetuation of heterosexual dominance” (Lorber, 2000: 161). But beyond that, Freud suggests as well that

these processes do not happen so smoothly, that this reproduction of gender and sexuality is rife with contradictions and strains. People develop conflicting desires, discontents, neuroses … Psychoanalysis demonstrates against theories of over-socialization and total domination, a lack of total socialization. It demonstrates discontent, resistance and an undercutting of sexual modes and the institution of sexual inequality (Chodorow in Lorber, 2009: 164).

Psychoanalytic feminism could not, however, offer explanations for non-heterosexual relationships. Freud’s assumption that a female body must necessarily become feminine and if femininity is not achieved mal-adjustment and defective development would result is unacceptable. What is discernable from the different perspectives on theoretical feminism is that the differences between men and women are not as wide as that between day and night. Biological differences cannot thereby be a solid basis for discrimination between
the two gender groups. Culture is central to the ways in which both are treated by society. We now know that culture is open to change rather than being static. This openness to change has become a powerful weapon for those who clamour for fairness in gender relationships.

At this point, let me deal with what I consider as major challenges of feminist research in Africa.

### 2.3 Challenges of Feminist Research in Africa: Theoretical and Epistemological Reflections

Feminist research in Africa confronts several challenges that are simultaneously theoretical, empirical, and epistemological. The theoretical challenge revolves around whether or not feminist research can successfully by-pass dominant sociological theories and thereby construct a separate path from the male dominant discourse of traditional sociology. The mode of knowing about feminism, i.e. epistemology of feminism, is one other area of challenge. How are we to go about producing a reliable and dependable knowledge of feminism? Is feminist knowledge something that stands out of society, out of us and waiting to be discovered? Who should conduct feminist research—males or females? And who should be talked to in peeping into the feminist world? And if there are different disclosures, whose version is to be believed? Knowing, as we are aware, is problematic and context dependent. The process of knowing itself changes what is knowable. The gender and class of subject also rub off on what is knowable. The subject-object context is complex.

The challenge is even more overwhelming if it has to do with a construction of the past. This social reconstruction cannot but be done from a biased frame of mind. The human mind is a fertile ground for nursing biases and social prejudice. There are other problems which may be of conscious or unconscious nature. Genuine mistakes may be made because of unfamiliarity with cultural practices, including language barriers. There are, of course, other philosophical challenges as may be gleaned from the unending debates between the realists and the anti-realists. The issue of relativism of knowledge cannot be regarded as inconsequential. Knowledge is not necessarily universal or enduring. Feminist knowledge cannot be different.

A third challenge is how are we to measure the progress that had been made by feminism in theory and practice. Is the progress made, if any, the outcome of feminist research and struggle exclusively? How are we to establish the benchmarks of success and failure to enable us come to terms with outstanding issues? Indeed, where were we before the coming of western feminism in Africa?
Where are we now? Of course, in ways that were different, women of Africa have historically challenged oppressive forces whether gender-based or not. It cannot therefore be assumed for Africa that feminism was a recent phenomenon. Women’s visibility in the public eye has always been part of Africa’s experience in the social, political, and economic arenas. There are also numerous proverbs and fables that emphasized complementarity in male-female relations rather than domination and oppression. The colonial order, in several of its policies, removed the women of Africa from the public domain to the sphere of domesticity. One good example was the colonial preference for boys’ education.

The fourth challenge is that of conscientization. How are we to influence socialization in such a way that would begin to alter behaviour that can be more supportive of the feminist agenda of female popular empowerment? The role of indigenous knowledge is an issue here. There is a rich heritage in this that can foster an empowerment agenda. We also need to frame a process of translating and decoding findings in a way that could be accessed by end users. Feminist research findings must be smuggled into the policy domain. Toyin Falola in this volume has demonstrated the immense cultural opportunities that exist for this sort of re-socialization.

Documentation is the fifth challenge of feminist research in Africa. In most of Africa, there is apathy in record keeping. Research activities are not cumulative and often times repetitive. It is doubtful if libraries pay attention to or give preference to feminist documentation. Feminist scholars, in the absence of record, may have to reinvent the wheel each time a piece of research is contemplated. In 1994, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung made an attempt to provide typology of women’s organizations in Nigeria and the Women’s Research and Documentation Centre (WORDIC) was created at the University of Ibadan. A recent publication by Kathleen Sheldon, the Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Sahara Africa (2005), was a good guide in conducting an academic research on gender issues in Africa. This last publication clearly identified the problem: “the current knowledge on sub-Sahara Africa is, in general, inadequate and specifically, there is an abysmal lack of information about the female half of that region’s population. It is hard to find much data of note about significant women and female oriented events, institutions and organizations even in our African historical dictionaries, which are making a serious attempt to fill the gap” (Sheldon, 2005: vii).

A sixth challenge is that of funding. Feminism cannot be said to be a priority research area in Africa. If funding comes from the north for feminist research, research methodology and agendas will be set by the funding agencies. Research autonomy is not only compromised but findings may be guided as well, to fulfill a set agenda. Of course, there are cultural and institutional obstacles.
However, doing gender research in Africa today is much easier than in the 1970s through the early 1980s. Some universities still prefer to it as women’s studies, and most institutions of higher learning call it gender studies. I am unaware of any university where feminist study is an academic department or even a unit. Even in gender studies, feminism is a marginal field.

As material conditions improve in Africa, it is plausible to expect that when women and men become relieved of their material predicaments, feminist research can be elevated to a luxury that African scholars can indulge in, but the prospect of this being the case is far-fetched.

2.4 Conclusion

Feminist scholarship is not yet a popular field of academic study in most of Africa. While most elite women regard women’s marginalization as unacceptable, they are unwilling, for now at least, to be perceived as constructing or supportive of an agenda that would extol single parenting or radical feminism or an outright rejection of patriarchy as the way to promoting women’s popular empowerment. If anything at all, men’s collaboration is viewed as inevitable in charting such an emancipatory platform. The word feminism is regarded as capable of alienating women feminists from the general women’s associations and from men who may be sympathetic to the feminist’s agenda as well. Though women of the northern hemisphere have recorded modest successes, women in the south confront major existential challenges of accessing basic resources needed for survival. How elite women in the south can harness the potentials of the predominantly rural women is a major challenge in mobilizing women for development. In a global world that is preoccupied with fighting terrorism, climate change, and global warming in particular, no gender group can be left behind in the promotion of sustainable human development.

References


Chapter Three

Gender and Culture in Old and New Africa

Toyin Falola

3.0 Introduction

How does a man with six wives arrange love-making sessions? Can a woman, too, have six husbands? Why does female genital mutilation persist? If there is no welfare system, who takes care of widows? If societies expect all women to marry, what happens to single parents? Why do women in Islamic areas cover their faces in public? Why do African men dominate their wives? These are some of the questions that my American students are fond of posing when we address topics relating to kinship and gender. Perhaps because people want to improve their knowledge, or because they are simply amused by some of the practices, they have asked similar questions at public lectures, and I have had occasions to address the issue of polygamy at a major forum. The popular literature on African women generated by western writers reveals only the frightening aspects, painting women as savages who are exploited by men for their maximum reproductive forces as well as for their labor. Recent literature, especially that on female circumcision, presents women as powerless victims, human beings no better than the slaves of old. From the various depictions, one cannot help but ask: Are African men evil and the African women so docile as to tolerate evil?

In this chapter, I will try to answer some of these questions within a general framework of kinship and development. In both, elements of traditions and modern cultures are clearly manifested, and I will use a few issues as illustrations. Issues pertaining to women and culture have become central to discussions on democracy and governance in Africa, as well as the overall problem of underdevelopment. In other words, until women’s lives are transformed in a positive manner, the continent cannot move forward.
In many parts of Africa, a clear break has not been established with the past, while changes are yet to take any firm hold. In different parts of Africa, patriarchy has long been established, and its manifestations can be found in various aspects of gender relations. A number of contemporary conditions affect both men and women in ways that create both equality and competition. In a continent where poverty is widespread, one’s gender offers little or no protection against hunger, disease, and joblessness. Thus, class and elite positions may also affect the diversity of gender roles and access to opportunities. Women are not docile, not from the evidence of their autonomy and struggles. Patriarchy is not about ‘evil,’ but a hierarchy that makes men more powerful than women.

Culture definitely plays a role in many of the experiences of women, as well as the hardships they complain about. Gender inequality can be rationalized by culture. Gender roles and reward allocation may be based on old beliefs. Within households, even if gender roles are complementary, men are regarded as the heads of households while a woman has relevance as a mother and wife. She keeps traditions and kinship alive by bearing children and socializing them. As a bearer of children, she acquires respect within the household; as bearers of male children, she acquires prestige and ensures the stability of her marriage and the continuity of kinship and its traditions. Culture also affirms the power that is available to women. One area is in spirituality and religion. As ritual leaders in some cults, women have enormous power. In societies that believe in witchcraft, such power also becomes an avenue to attain respect.

The majority of African societies are patriarchal in nature. In this context, an ideology exists in support of gender inequalities and roles. Patriarchy is an affirmation of male domination, a way to stratify societies along gender lines, such that men receive more prestige and power than women. When a woman marries, she moves to the household of the man, where she is expected to behave in certain ways. This relocation may come with a loss in power, unless the husband is a king or chief, or he is wealthy, and the wife can benefit from the connection. Female circumcision and rules about virginity must have prepared her to play a subordinate role and to give the control of her sexuality to a man. She may have seen a widow who was compelled to marry a man in the household of the deceased; she could have seen her mother kneel, to show great respect, to serve food to her father; and she would have seen that a boy is regarded as more important than a girl. As part of the socialization process, her mother will insist that she retain her virginity, know how to cook food that will please her future husband, and show respect. The newly wed women will be judged by some of what her mother told (and warned) her about. She will be expected not only to respect her husband, but to respect those senior to her in age and
even men younger than her within the household. Her own respect will come with age and seniority. The longer she is married, the more senior she becomes, and the more respect she acquires.

The various ways to control female sexuality, sanctioned by culture, show male dominance. Women are expected to appear in certain physical ways, as in the fattening practice in southeastern Nigeria that attaches beauty to fatness. Among the Hausa in West Africa, girls are socialized to become modest and shy—they are expected to be obedient, accept the husbands chosen on their behalf, and cultivate the habit of silence. If Muslims, they can be kept in seclusion, justified by the need to prevent them from interacting with other men, mixing with ‘pagans.’ or having anything to do with people without the permission of their husbands.

Whether male or female, poor or rich, Africans belong to social groups defined by kinship, as in birth or marriage, or by non-kinship, such as occupational associations or social groups. Both old and new Africa cannot be understood without understanding kinship. Birth and marriage unite a large number of families who trace descent to one ancestor, commonly a male. In the past, laws of inheritance were governed by descent. A kinship identity was formed based on names, rituals, religion, taboos, and other markers.

The interlocking of people and the role of women are enacted within the various social groups. If women gain power, wealth, and prestige, its significance is measured within the network of the social groups. If class and other cleavages are still in the process of formation, Africa is still at the crossroads in terms of the connectivity between people—the established traditional pattern is a collectivist ethos, while the emerging capitalist-oriented one is individualistic. If women operate within the collectivist framework, certain elements of patriarchy have to be accepted. If they break loose and act independently as in a globalized world, the balance in the social group is threatened. Will they support emerging family forms of single parents, lesbianism, and others? Patriarchal-mined people prefer the consolidation of traditions to prevent the penetration of new family forms.

In precolonial Africa, the stress was on the group so that larger interests would supersede the ‘selfish’ ones of the individual. A group could be rewarded for the achievement of one person, and it could equally be punished for the transgression of its members. In this kind of ideology, women had to conform to a group’s interest. To be sure, not all individual accomplishments were discouraged—some groups, such as the Igbo of Nigeria and the Baganda of Uganda, actually celebrated individual achievement—but the premium was on meeting the challenges of group survival. Farm work, security, prevention of diseases, building houses, and other tasks in the pre-industrial past required
the cooperation of many people. The socialization process was deliberate in making the individual part of the group. Ceremonies of new babies and their eventual growth involved the entire community. A child was exposed to a large number of people beyond the nuclear family, all to affirm its membership in an extensive kinship network. The child was a product of a marriage that had connected extended families of about three or four generations, all operating, in cooperation and conflict, within the framework of communal ethos.

The child would discover that he or she was one of many children belonging to the same father. He or she might also realize that not everybody that was called “mama” was the biological one, but co-wives with the actual mother. As the child grew up, he or she might begin to wonder why resources had to be carefully managed among many siblings, when fewer children would have been the wiser option. That decision, however, was not based just on resource management, but on the necessity of children for sustaining kinship and the economy. In the perpetual desire to link various generations, the dead ones and the unborn, children constituted the strongest part of the chain. In popular thinking, without children the kinship as a biological and ideological entity would come to an inglorious end.

Part of the experiences of modern Africa is the erosion of collectivist interests, and the forceful emergence of the attitude of the individual to become a hero to the self and to the community. Men and women now seek the means to celebrate self, although the pressure of group interests has yet to go away. How can a married man actualize self-interest in a community? The erosion has resulted in new conditions that create independence for women and others in such a way that the group cannot sanction them. One result has been migration away from the group, to faraway places outside the continent or to cities within the continent. Cities offer opportunities for jobs, to live in small apartments, to develop new friendships, and to re-create group networks in a way that can fulfill utilitarian goals. In these distant settings, the individual can decide on those aspects of the collective they will pay attention.

Western education has been a powerful agency for change. It offers not only new skills for both men and women, but also new values and ideas about how to organize private and public lives. If children raised in traditional settings did not challenge the authority of the elders, western education leaves all ideas open to questioning. If traditional occupations were bound by specific locations, western education can lead one to different parts of the country or the world at large. If family elders were loved for their moonlight stories, radio and television have displaced them in many areas, especially in elite homes. Where western education has taken deep root, initiation ceremonies have been abandoned or modified.
There is also the force of new laws and regulations. The police, as the agent of the modern state, can arrest a person; the learned judge (rather than village elders) will try him; if the person is found guilty, the prison door is open, with brutal guards to keep an eye on him. A woman living a comfortable life on wage income has no relations to turn to, if the job is lost, in order to maintain the same standard of living. If the collective ethos is weakening, what can sustain such practices such as initiation ceremonies and female circumcision?

Female circumcision has become a contentious issue while male initiation has not, though some of the reasons for both are similar. In societies of old, as individuals witnessed a transition from one stage of life to another, the community celebrated and performed rituals. Initiation ceremonies were intended to introduce citizens to adulthood, and then to marriage. In some cultures, initiation could be marked with circumcision of teenagers, as in the case of the Kikuyu of Kenya and the Igbo of Nigeria. In some other cultures, circumcision could come much earlier, and marriage became the initiation to adulthood.

Male initiation rites and practices are not just about religion but about education, sports, leisure, endurance, and knowledge. In places where male initiation ceremonies are declining or dying, there is the need to create secular ideas to attain similar goals. Gathering its young men together, a community was able to turn a ceremony into the affirmation of collective identity. Young men grew to respect their people and traditions, and to be in a position to defend them. Community elders would impart lessons on history and morality. And there were many advantages for the initiates: they acquired respect as adults; they had evidence to prove they could endure pain; and they were now able to marry and practice sex in ways approved of by the community.

With respect to women, female circumcision was not as widespread a practice as the western media has portrayed it, and even where it has been more common, it is not as widely practiced as many people think. For women, initiation could take many forms, such as marriage, tattooing of parts of the body, cicatrization, and tooth removal. Where female circumcision (clitoridectomy, to use the clinical terminology for the removal of the clitoris—or genital mutilation, now the most common label, partly to attract attention to it) is practiced, the justification for it has mainly been based on tradition and the male perception of female behavior. Whether male or female, an uncircumcised individual in a number of African societies would not make the leap to adulthood, become married, and have children. In other words, the sanction was rather severe—not having children was like banishing the memory of the person’s existence. The practice of circumcision is attributable also to the ambiguity of gender: at birth, a boy with the foreskin is female, while the female with the
The clitoris is male. According to this belief among the Dogon (an ethnic group in Mali), for the child to claim its true gender, circumcision must take place. Where the practice has survived, the tendency is to explain female circumcision as nothing but another manifestation of male dominance. Male circumcision has no effect on sexual pleasures, unlike clitoridectomy, thus fueling the suggestion that the practice was enforced by men simply to deny women similar pleasure. The belief was that women had an excessive sexual drive that could be curtailed by removing the clitoris. Those who continue to defend the practice ignore the aspect of male domination and emphasize culture. Africans are presented not as stupid people but creative beings who know what is good for them. When people who are opposed to clitoridectomy present it as barbaric (as Christian missionaries and others have done), they enable the defenders of the practice to focus on the cultural factors, to argue, as Jomo Kenyatta does in his well-read classic, *Facing Mount Kenya*, that it is an aspect of indigenous religion and culture that must survive. To destroy culture, according to the argument by Kenyatta and others, is to destroy identity. Thus, clitoridectomy is not isolated as an aspect of culture that can be modified or abandoned without necessarily destroying other aspects of the culture. In what would seem ironic, Kenya became one of the very first countries to outlaw it, though there are no ways to arrest and punish those who violate the law.

Those opposed to clitoridectomy did not question tradition, but pointed to the diminished sexual pleasure for women and a host of medical woes that circumcised women could face. In the 1990s, clitoridectomy became one of the issues that Western feminists adopted to seek change in Africa. Indeed, their attacks on clitoridectomy became a media issue, even a justification for those seeking permanent residence in the United States. In one case, a woman successfully argued that if she was to return to her native country, her two daughters would be forced to undergo genital removal.

If Africans, including women, are uncomfortable talking about the pleasure of sex (the subject is still confined to the private domain in most countries), many are willing to talk about the medical woes. Everybody agrees that it is painful—even those who do the removal will say the same thing—and some women’s pain can remain for a long time. Measuring the degree and impact of pain is hard, but is the outcome worth it? Certainly not. There is also the issue of the scar that is left, a sort of permanent damage to the body. On this, opinions are divided. If that part of the body is private and always covered, who sees the scar? And in most conversations people pose the question: why look at that part of the body to see the scar?

Modern medicine has pointed to two issues that culture is unable to address. First, a link has been established between clitoridectomy and death dur-
ing or immediately after childbirth. Missionaries based in Kenya in the early
decades of the twentieth century had noted the high death rate during child-
birth, later discovered to be connected with clitoridectomy. This may, of course,
be associated with the nature and severity of the circumcision, but it is a pow-
erful reason to stop the practice, as the death rate was lower among those who
were not circumcised.

The second issue is the way the surgery is performed during the time of the
AIDS epidemics. The procedure is simple but unregulated. The ‘midwife’ lives
in the community, and can use the same instrument to perform the removal
for many girls, even in conditions that may be unsafe. In other words, unlike
male circumcision, which can be performed in a modern hospital, clitoridec-
tomy is more or less private. Those infected may have to find treatment in a
modern hospital, and there is no sanction imposed on the ‘midwife’ in case of
serious illness or death.

In calling for the abolition of any entrenched cultural practice, it may be
necessary to find acceptable substitutes. A new set of values have to evolve on
sexual practices and how to mark and celebrate the transition from childhood
to adulthood. Here, the key may be the formal school system and a variety of
social and cultural practices that will call on the creative energies and talents
of the community. Changes continue to occur, even in some objectionable
practices. In places where the community continues to value male initiation,
the ceremony has been reduced in duration from months to days. In places
where people insist on female circumcision, some modern clinics have come
up with the compromise of cutting just a small tip of the clitoris, a surgery
that is merely symbolic as it leaves no scar, does not affect sexual pleasure, and
does not create problems at childbirth. Compromises within culture can be
politically astute and desirable as a strategy of changing established beliefs and
practices.

3.1 Marriage Practices and Current
Controversies

Female circumcision is not the only issue that has generated crisis in mod-
ern culture. Aspects of marriage and family life are being debated, usually
framed as a contest between tradition and modernity. Even many of the fac-
tors that ensured marriage stability in the past are being challenged. Why do
people get married? Old Africa had a primary answer: To produce children
and thus ensure the survival of kinship. New Africa, like western societies, now
adds love. As many have discovered, love cannot sustain the relationship if
there are problems, especially those associated with the answer of Old Africa. Old Africa did not deny that there was love, as their stories and poems clearly show, but it was considered as merely part of the conditions to reproduce and socialize new kin members. The modern belief is that couples should love, but must have children if the love is not to fade away.

Bridewealth is common in many areas to legalize a marriage and for the man's kinship to have legitimate claim to the children arising from it. The bride and her family receive goods and/or services from the bridegroom and his family. The goods are local, such as cattle and goats. The payment can just be once, while in some places an installment exchange is allowed. In some extreme cases, a poor man can offer his labor in lieu of goods, although this practice is not widespread. These days, the bridewealth includes money, imported items, and expensive goods. When family members used to constitute the principal production units, bridewealth was a small compensation for the lost labor of the woman. But the bride carried with her some of the goods to the family of her husband, notably expensive attire, thus starting her marriage life with a good wardrobe. In more ways than one, bridewealth affirms the importance of women in the community, an assured agency to transfer wealth between families. The items are shared by members of the extended families and their friends, yet another way of announcing the legality of the marriage. Those who give the bridewealth and those who share in it are expected to ensure the stability of the marriage.

Some of the traditional practices that justified bridewealth are no longer applicable to modern-day society. The legal system has developed rules and sanctions to legitimize marriages. To those in non-farming occupations, daughters are not needed in farm work, and thus, they do not impose any loss and hardship on others if they decide to marry. And as the goods and services demanded in some areas have become excessive, some analysts have seen an element of greed in the contemporary practice of bridewealth, which has become a way to exploit people rather than to cement social relationships. Traditional marriages were stable, with a low divorce rate. The sanctions to prevent divorce were strong; the necessity of returning part of the bridewealth constituted a constraint, while the control of children by their fathers assured custody only to men.

In many parts of Africa, that a man could marry two or more wives, a practice known as polygyny, is another evidence of male domination and a marriage practice not based on love. Again, the practice has to be understood in its traditional context. In an agrarian society dependent on family labor, the best way to expand production (and thereby wealth) was to have access to additional labor. A most reliable source of labor was one's children. Women, with their reproductive power, became the key to family expansion, thus playing a
leading role in the creation of household wealth and overall prosperity. Therefore, polygyny can be interpreted as a clever device to use women to acquire wealth and status. Where wealth is counted in people, the polygynous man with numerous wives and children demonstrates success and prestige. Where pawnship was practiced—the use of people’s labor to serve in lieu of interest on loans—the man with many wives and children also had access to capital that could be invested or even consumed in a way to exaggerate his success within the community.4

Just as polygyny enabled men to derive maximum advantage from marriage, so too did the women turn it to a great advantage. With co-wives, each woman’s domestic task was reduced. In marriages where conflicts were minimal, polygyny ensured companionship within the household, as the wives could become great friends. Co-wives offered assistance to one another in need, such as pregnant women, and more importantly the sick and elderly who needed care and attention.

Since there is limited research on the population of Africa over a long historical period, we are still unable to confirm the assertion that there were more women than men in precolonial Africa. The assumption is that warfare and the Atlantic slave trade led to a higher male mortality. Thus, polygyny became a clever answer to address the excess of women.

Polygyny survived the twentieth century, in part as an established marriage practice, but also as an attempt to adapt western-style monogamy to a number of cultural practices. The number of monogamous marriages is on the rise, due in part to education, the spread of Christianity, the reduction in the average number of children a man expects to have, and the refusal of many women to enter polygynous relations. In Tunisia, polygyny has been prescribed by law. Moreover, in many countries today, the number of men in polygynous relationship is as high as one-third of the married population. Thus, the question arises: why has polygyny survived? To start with, even if European colonial officers were critical of polygyny, the economic system they promoted actually encouraged it. African economies remained agrarian, but in a way that promoted male power and changed the attitude toward land. The emphasis on the production of crops for export (such as cocoa, peanuts, cotton, and rubber) led to attempts to maximize the use of land and labor. The commercialization of land began in a way that benefited men rather than women. Where traditional inheritance practices had been more equitable, men in some areas reinterpreted customs to ensure their control of land. The production of cash crops also demanded the use of labor. As with traditional economies, marriage provided an avenue to obtain labor, with many ambitious farmers resorting to polygyny as an agency of labor recruitment.
Many of the customs and beliefs that sustained polygyny in the past are still very much alive. In the majority of African communities, women are expected to marry. While the number of single parents is growing, low status is accorded to unmarried women. The pressure to marry lends itself to polygyny, even to tolerating bad marriages. Preference for male children is widespread, with the result that a married man without a son would take a second wife. Where infant mortality rate is high, the wish to be survived by children means that a man can have more than one wife. No desire is greater than to have children, if only in order to be cared for in old age. In places where great prestige is associated with large families, polygyny becomes an avenue to acquire high social standing. In Islamic communities, religion is used as yet one more justification of polygyny—the widespread belief is that a man can marry up to four wives as long as he can provide resources to support them and love them equally.

Marriage forms such as polygyny fulfill various functions in society. In cases where a man inherits a widow, say, of a senior family member, the motive is not necessarily based on sex, but on welfare—the marriage enables the woman and her children to have support within their established households. While there are other forms of polygyny (although not among educated people) that were originally intended to cope with people’s welfare and maintain the survival of the kin group, widow inheritance is the most common, a form that is collectively described in the anthropological literature as levirate. Various customs prescribe various rules about who can inherit a widow, but in general the inheritor is junior in age to the deceased.

The desire for children is at the root of some other practices, ensuring that a man leaves a child behind. Impotency may be a problem, or even death at an early age, and the solution may be to have a woman produce children on behalf of another. Among the Zulu of South Africa, a man may marry his wife’s sister, in an arrangement that anthropologists have labeled sororate. If the married Zulu man found it difficult to have a child by his wife, the woman’s family could offer the wife’s sister to produce children on her behalf. It is not only the Zulu that employed surrogate women to bear children for others—the practice existed in various versions in different places. Additionally, a dead man could have a child: a living volunteer married on his behalf, entering a sort of ‘ghost marriage,’ and the products belonged to the dead whom they claim as a father.5

In some parts of Africa, as among some communities in northern Nigeria, young girls can be induced or forced to marry older men. This practice is, of course, different from the belief in some parts of Southern Africa that sex with a virgin could cure AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.6 Among the
Tiv, an old practice allowed a male member of the household to use his sister or other relation in exchange for a woman to marry. In this exchange marriage, the woman was not given a choice and could actually end up with someone that she did not like.

3.2 The Changing Role of Women

It is misleading to talk about issues of exploitation and empowerment of women as if their role has been static. Evidence is clear that women’s roles have changed over time, and that we now have women who are as well educated as men.\(^7\) The distribution of power within the household has also responded to changes in society over time. During the twentieth century, traditional practices were modified or strengthened by colonial changes, the penetration of European gender values, and new developments that gave more power to men.\(^8\)

While patriarchy was established in most of precolonial Africa, the nature of economy and politics gave women visible roles and privileges. They were part of the agrarian societies, where the mode of production was based on the family. Age and seniority were as important as sex in allocating responsibility and sharing rewards. An elderly woman was more respected than a younger man. Girls and boys shared tasks within the household. Women had established occupations, either complementing those of their husbands or operating independently. In places where women had direct access to land and other resources to establish their independent trade and occupations (as in the case of Yoruba traders of Nigeria), they were able to attain status and prestige. Even where they lacked direct access to land, the role of women in production was crucial to the survival of society—they controlled the domestic chores of cooking and cleaning; they were involved in building houses; they played an important role in rearing livestock; and they participated in a myriad of other duties vital to the functioning of the society. Reproduction is the key to the continuity of kinship and community, and women as childbearers, carry its burden and glory.

Women did all the jobs associated with men, although not in all African communities. Thus, there were women warriors in Dahomey; the Maasai women were house builders, and even served as guards to defend them; and Yoruba women were versatile traders, even in long-distance trade. In spite of these examples, it is clear that most occupations were gendered. Certain jobs were exclusive to men, such as hunting, blacksmithing, and carving. Women concentrated on domestic chores, assisted with harvesting, and
processed foodstuffs. Within the family, most of these tasks were transferred to the children through a socialization process that was dependent on observation. As peasants, women were exploited. Where relations of dependence existed, as in slavery and pawnship, women, too, were exploited for their labor and sexuality.

While the distribution of power in the community favored men, in many places, women were not totally excluded from power or political influence. Indeed, one study has suggested that there was a phase of matriarchy when gender equality existed among the Owan of West Africa, and that patriarchy actually evolved there over time. The study points to goddess traditions and festivals, and indicates how the distribution of power favored women in matrilocality communities. The lingering survival of matriarchy in some places has given women more privileges and influence than are reflected in some of the literature.

Elsewhere, formal and semi-formal women’s organizations existed in most societies to allow participation in politics, the management of affairs specific to women, and the exercise of influence. Notable among these organizations were those by traders and market women who established guilds, secret societies, and age-grade groups. Not only were women the leaders, but they were also able to take control of matters of interest to them. The officers of the organizations were regarded as chiefs, and some titles carried enormous prestige, as in the case of the *iyalode* among the Yoruba and the *aga ekwe* among the Igbo, both groups in Nigeria.

There were kingdoms and societies such as the Serbro of Sierra Leone and the Tonga of Zambia where women could be chiefs. In Dahomey, there were women warriors and chiefs. Cases of leaders such as Queen Amina of Hausaland (northern Nigeria) and Nzinga of Angola show how women could rise to positions of great influence. In a number of West African societies, the queen mother was so powerful that she could even select the king and serve as the power behind the throne. In the nineteenth-century Sokoto caliphate—the largest single political unit—Nana Asma’u, the sister of Uthman dan Fodio, the jihad leader, was a notable political and intellectual force. Some of her writings have survived, and they do attest to her strong intellect and personality. During the nineteenth century, there were other distinguished women leaders such as Efuseten Aniwura of Ibadan and Madam Tinubu of Lagos. In religion, women were members of a much powerful priesthood, as in those of a number of Yoruba gods such as Sango, Osun, and Obatala, where women were not just cult members but major leaders. Witches with ‘positive’ power were also respected for their contributions to society. H. Henderson (1969), in one case study, established three linkages between religion, economy, and power:
1. [There is] a strong correlation between women’s important economic functions and their roles in religious functions (thus where women have important economic functions of an autonomous nature such as trade, they will form associations which will have important political and religious functions).

2. Where women are economically independent, there will be an elaboration of their personal cults and an invitation to those of men.

3. [There is] a correlation between the relatively high social position for women, and their control over personal destiny shrines (thus the greater the control women possessed over these ritual and religious objects, the greater the degree of autonomy of action they possessed in society).

Status and influence represent evidence of autonomy. It is clear that there were other ways for women to gain and use their independence. The control of economic power within the household meant that successful women entrepreneurs had great voice. The stress on age and seniority brought prestige to many as they grew older. Ancestor veneration was extended to women, a confirmation of their power and prestige in the afterlife. Women were active in trade and markets, thus serving as valuable links between the farms and the households, that is, the producers and the consumers.

By the time we entered the twentieth century, much of the political and economic power enjoyed by women had been diminished. There are scholars who see a trend towards marginalization even earlier, blaming the trans-Atlantic slave trade for destroying family relationship and disturbing a more equitable gender balance. According to this argument, which awaits further research, the enslavement of millions of people and the violence and death associated with the wars and kidnapping reduced the male population, creating considerable pressure on women to have more children and pay more attention to domestic duties. In the process, they lost economic and political power.

The political arrangement since the European conquest at the turn of the twentieth century has favored men. Colonial officers were males who ruled in partnership with African men. African men served as tax collectors, policemen, and soldiers, and in “native authorities,” all agencies that ran the colonial system. The association of men with power and authority was consolidated at the expense of women. Male power was used to seize more land. As cities became important centers of new economic and social opportunities, moves were made in a number of places to limit access to unmarried women. Many were forced to cohabit with men to justify residence in cities, while rural single women were prevented from relocating to cities in some countries such as South Africa.
In colonial societies, all Africans were exploited, irrespective of gender, but men were more active because of the nature of the economy. Occupations that attracted wages, such as service in the army, police, and civil service, were mainly for men, thus providing them with more cash than women. As the school system prepared men for these marginal jobs, education and skills were provided to more men than women. Men concentrated on the production of cash crops for export, one of the primary motivations for the conquest of Africa. Either because cash crops were more lucrative than food crops or because some colonial authorities compelled Africans to grow what they needed, men took control of more land than before, pushing women to less fertile lands and crops with less market potential. Policies of land reforms favored men, as in the case of land private ownership regulations in Kenya in the 1950s. Where women had been dependent on cattle, as among the pastoral farmers, changing ideas about property in a number of areas denied them access to cattle and some occupations relating to it, as male cattle owners turned the women into labor to produce wealth for them.

Where minerals such as diamond, gold, tin, and coal existed, men were also recruited (or forced) to work as mine workers, even in situations where they had to leave their wives in their villages. Migration to the cities involved more men, and when their wives joined them, the wives were again pushed into less rewarding jobs. Thus, in many ways the colonial economy confined women’s activities to the domestic and the marginal informal sectors of the economy. The idea of men as ‘breadwinners’ and ‘wage earners’ spread, while women were relegated to positions of home keepers and custodians of ‘petty jobs.’ Many women became dependent on their wage-earning husbands, who gave them only the amounts needed for housekeeping. Men dependent on farming took more land at the expense of women, married many wives in order to expand their labor force, and accumulated property and money at the expense of their wives in order to build their status and prestige. Several case studies have pointed to the exploitation of women in the colonial situation. Studies on prostitution in urban centers have shown how the inability by women to obtain jobs and survive gave them limited options other than to sell sex. Many others took to homebrewing and small jobs. In villages in Cameroon, a number of men turned their wives into a cheap labor force to grow cash crops.

In part to change their conditions, and in part to rid Africa of European rule, African women contributed to nationalism in colonial Africa. A few were leaders and activists who challenged the colonial state and their local agents. Women leaders mobilized against the taxation of women, as well as against other aspects considered unjust to them. Some joined political parties, and
even acquired management power, as in the examples of Margaret Ekpo, Lady Oyinka Abayomi, Carlotte Olajumoke Obasa, Olaniwun Adunni Oluwole, and Constance Agatha Cummings-John.  

Gender relations that were formed during the colonial era were transferred to the postcolonial period. In spite of women’s contributions to anticolonial struggles, men took virtually all the most important positions in the formal sectors. Most African countries developed centralized power structures where what people got was largely dependent on whom they knew. As most men had received a western education, they also dominated the wage-earning sectors, thus consolidating many of their privileges. While an increasing number of girls began to go to school in the 1960s, a notable accomplishment indeed, the prevailing view was that only ‘gentle’ occupations awaited them, such as teaching and nursing, both of which did not translate into much political and economic power.  

At noted below, Africa has seen many changes, but a number of inequities persist. The perception that women are ‘secondary citizens’ remains. The best of everything is for men, and the crumbs for women. Resources are not equitably distributed; men take more than women, although women often contribute more to production and households. Men in power and development experts assume that they can plan for women, not as partners in progress, but as recipients of favors and objects of policies and programs. Cultural stereotypes present women as weak and incapable of leadership; the belief is that their main goals should be to manage the ‘home front.’ Discrimination and marginalization can be seen in many aspects of life, and the contradictions are all clear. If women’s reproductive and productive functions are so ecletic that they are actually manifest in all sectors, low rewards and hardships can be linked to gender. In laws made by men, women are denied many rights in inheritance and divorce settlements. In agriculture, where they contribute significantly, women have limited access to land, credits, and opportunity to cultivate leading cash crops. In education, women are still behind men—even where access is open to both sexes, the dropout rate of women is higher in part because of pregnancies and early marriage, preference of parents to meet the needs of boys rather than those of girls, and heavy involvement in household tasks. In health they do not have full control over their reproductive ability, and their nutritional needs are grossly inadequate. The statistics for many countries put the population of women at more than 50 percent, but they constitute less than a third of the labor force.  

In spite of all these inequities, women continue to struggle and to achieve considerable success in different areas. Changes have come, but contradictions remain. The status of women is not the same in all countries, and even within
each country changes are not uniform. A woman may receive a university degree (a great educational change), but may still be expected to do all the house chores (a traditional role). She may have power as a civil servant, but she is not able to influence the allocation of resources, such as a male politician or military general is able to do.

### 3.3 The Paradox of Change

The forces of change—colonialism, westernization, capitalism, Islam, and Christianity—do also create their obstacles, as Ifi Amadiume has brilliant shown. Take the modern economy, for instance: where capitalism is spreading, it is exploiting women similar to the way patriarchy exploited them in the past. Economies based on wages turned males into sole ‘breadwinners.’ Modernization has come with some negative baggage, as it originally invested men with more skills and power that were used in part to dominate women. Islam is not hostile to excluding women, thereby undermining their career goals, while Christianity regards men as heads of household who deserve the obedience of their wives. While urbanization is liberating, it may constrain autonomy if there are no jobs or if the jobs are menial or involve selling sex. Women continue to serve as poorly paid domestics and as prostitutes in cities where competition is intense. Female poverty can be endemic, especially in cities where the cost of living is high.

At present, it is clear that men control power in most countries, dominate the occupations and the households, and manage public and private institutions to their advantage. Some studies suggest that the dominant role of men is actually a global phenomenon. In the case of Africa, certain tendencies are clear. The attainment of economic stability rests on the acquisition of education and maintenance of extensive connections, both of which men have better access to than women. Without skills and education, the majority of women are still engaged in occupations relating to farming. The Data by the World Bank from 1989 puts the percentage of women in agriculture at more than 60 and the percentage of their responsibility for the production of basic foods at 70. The rewards are unimpressive, with the majority of women being totally unable to save or accumulate any significant wealth. Where men have control of land and its products, women suffer more hardships, as they are unable to control even what they earn.

The worldview and legal system continues to favor men—the assumption tends to be that women should occupy an inferior status. The typical husband desires an obedient wife, playing a subordinate role defined for her. The widespread opinion is that a woman’s role should be domestic in nature. Many
men, even in monogamous nuclear relationships, still expect many children, an average of five in some places. Thus, women still have to devote a preponderance of time to child rearing. Where women do work, the purpose is to add to the status of the husband. In matters of law, women can suffer when they lose their husbands, as their relations can take a heavy share of the inheritance. In cases of divorce, most women get little or nothing, and the custody of their children is never assured.

Modernization has been more beneficial to elite women. With diplomas from institutions of higher education in Africa and abroad, they are integrated into the formal sector. The more active among them establish cultural, social, and political organizations to support a variety of programs, spread literacy, and encourage many more women to go to school. Skills are being introduced to rural women to improve the techniques of farming, child rearing, and craft making. Wives of heads of governments at the national and regional levels are playing active roles in popularizing some issues on politics and development, lending support to their husbands, and promoting aspects of culture. Some of these prominent women have also demonstrated the abuses that can come with power and influence, as in the case of a number of Nigerian ‘first ladies’ whose preoccupation is to make fashion statements.

Educated young women and men are no longer bound by tradition in selecting partners to marry, and elders can no longer conduct arranged marriages for them. If in the past marriage was between two families in order to establish a large kinship, today it may just be between two people to establish a nuclear family. It is not that the extended families are ignored, but the interests of kin members are not considered of as prime an importance as before. Established traditional practices have been adapted to modern times and to the demands of other religions such as Islam and Christianity. Thus, the parents of the bride and bridegroom are still heavily involved, and their consent is crucial; bridewealth is still exchanged, even as tokens in some areas, and the celebration is community-oriented, involving a large crowd. Where the parents interfere too much, or in cases where the community is also insisting on the specific choice of partners or how to celebrate a wedding, the couple can elope and either become married or simply cohabitate and have children. Cities, again, provide the sanctuary to the couple in love.

However, the modern nuclear family cannot escape the role of extended families. It is common to have other kin members living with couples; married people have to take care of their aged parents, who usually spend their last days with their children. Moreover, celebrations involve many people; when a man dies, the wife may have to struggle with his brothers and relatives in sharing the inheritance.
The liberty of contracting relationships and talking about love and emotion does not free the modern African woman of problems. To women in search of absolute freedom, there are substantial issues. To start with, patriarchy is alive and well. Men continue to make more money than women, creating a financial imbalance that may undermine the power of many married women. Africans still see reproduction as the main purpose of marriage. A married man without children will be pressured by relatives and friends to have a mistress who can bear children for him. Even a man with children still can be influenced by peers to have mistresses. The general perception is that having mistresses does not suggest that men do not love their wives. Bigamy laws are rarely applied, even when a man has children by his mistresses. Thus, we have to understand the meanings attached to love and relationships. In general, love is defined as responsibility and duty, a situation whereby the man fulfills his obligations to his nuclear and extended families. The worldview about infidelity tends to be forgiving of men and, certainly, critical of women, who are expected to be monogamous and faithful. An observer, a woman journalist, noted that a number of women also keep men friends either for revenge against their cheating husbands, or just for money. Yet, the punishment meted to a woman who commits adultery is rather severe. Thus, while we can talk of women’s independence, we should also note that marriage relationships are not necessarily egalitarian or stable.

Some countries, such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Cote d’Ivoire, have passed laws giving women the right to inherit. As a result of the success of the pressure for changes, laws against polygyny and bridewealth have been passed in Cote d’Ivoire. In Tunisia, monogamy is sanctioned by the power of law. In Islamic Senegal, which allows polygyny, a man requires the consent of his wife before marrying a second one. Children of the elite and members of the upper class, whether they are boys or girls, receive equal access to education, and they can now be found as professionals in virtually all sectors of modern society. Elite women also tend to ‘marry well,’ thus further extending their influence and privileges.

Some conditions are in place to effect major changes in the future. Many women’s organizations have pressed for increased empowerment and greater gains from development projects. Various governments have been persuaded to recognize the need to involve women in the administrations, even at the most senior cabinet levels. Educational opportunities have expanded for women, and in some areas there are more girls than boys in schools. Many are moving to occupations traditionally associated with men, such as engineering and computer programming. Development agencies now understand that it creates a greater impact on society to channel grants and resources to women. Grassroots women’s organizations have risen to the challenge, pressuring the gov-
ernment and foreign donors to consider their plights. Their focus is not even to wait for assistance, but to mobilize their members to work for progress by forming cooperative clubs, childcare centers, and credit associations. In cities, women have struggled to control local trade, penetrate major informal economies, unite to save and build capital, organize social events, create opportunities for leisure, and use the ability to make a living to create better relationships with men.

Hundreds of non-governmental organizations have emerged across the continent, and they work tirelessly to effect changes. They are heavily represented in all the major international forums on Africa organized by the United Nations and other agencies. African women representatives have been insistent on what they want: the acquisition of skills to participate in all important economic and political affairs, an end to violence and wars that kill and injure millions of women, and solutions to the lingering problems of poverty and disease. They demand changes in these aspects of culture that constitute obstacles to them: changes in the training of children at home and schools to alter the perception of women as subordinate to men; an equitable distribution of resources in such a way that women will get their fair share; programs to improve the standard of living of women in rural areas; enlightenment programs about the rights of women in society; and an overall improvement in the areas of nutrition, hygiene, and family planning. Practical steps have been taken by many women’s organizations to ask young women to marry for love, divorce when things are not working well, pursue engineering and science courses, seek power, alter the legal system in their favor, play the leading role in making decisions that involve them, and control their sexuality and reproductive ability.

The struggles have to be collective, and they may even have to benefit from the age-old African ethos of group interests and consensus building. As Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch concludes, seeking emancipation in western feminist terms may be tough “in a society that specifically denies the individual in favor of the group and prefers consensus to freedom of individual choice.” As elite women now realize, self mobility and success does not help others. Women have to fight for power, not just legal changes that exist on paper, but the ability to use power itself in a direct manner. Dependence on men for power—as in the case of wives of governors and presidents—has limited value. African women have also been productive and active economically, and the struggle is about attaining adequate rewards and compensation.

Women have to change women, not leave things to men, who will think about themselves and the status quo. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted in 1995 to demand various changes is 132 pages long: if Africa can implement a page a year, the progress for women, although it may
take 132 years, will surely create a revolution through evolution. But eight years have already been lost!

Notes

2. For some examples of initiation rituals and ceremonies, see Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry, eds. Man in Africa (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967).
3. Bridewealth can be a troublesome term if it is used to conote a substantial amount of commodities of monetary value.
6. This strange belief has led to a high rate of rape, even group rape, by men in search of young women who could prevent them from dying. Some mothers have also resorted to virginity testing to prevent their girls from having early sex and thus contracting AIDS. See Sunday Tribune Perspectives (South Africa), November 11, 2001, 4.


Chapter Four

A Feminist Appraisal of the Social Context of Adolescent Internet Use in Nigeria

Micheal Kunnuji

4.0 Introduction

About half a century ago, nothing was known of the internet, “a decentralized global communications network mediated by the conjunction of computers and telecommunications” (Livingstone, 2005: 9). Men and women, boys and girls, lived their lives, accepting the gendered roles (with varying degrees of resistance) into which they were socialized. Today, feminism, a movement and/or theory/theories aimed at ending sexism, sexist exploitation, and sexist oppression (Boyle, 2005) has pointed out several ills in some of these traditional gender roles. While an appraisal of feminism’s success may be rather early, its short term dividends in some parts of the world cannot be ignored.

The rapidity of internet penetration globally has received great attention. Scholars have documented the nature of the spread of the technology (Livingstone, 2005) as well as its implications for micro social relations (Slevin, 2000; Cooper, 2002; Gross, 2004 inter alia) and transnational cultural exchange (Cohen and Kennedy, 2000; Curran and Gurevitch, 2005; Schaefer, 2005). This new technology has, in a sense, imposed itself on man in the mediation of relations and no aspect of life is left out. In Nigeria, internet penetration, which barely stood at one person per 1000 people in 2001, rose to 38 persons per 1000 people in the year 2005 (World Bank, 2008). From the spiritual to the hedonistic; from work life to leisure; from the most esoteric endeavours of man to his exciting sporting activities, this technology has come to play a central role—the role of mediation. To fail to recognize its role in present day relations is to fail to understand how we relate and may relate in the future.
As implied by Slevin (2000) the social context of the use of the internet requires attention in order to appraise its role in mediated social relations. In some parts of the world, studies have tried to interrogate the *a priori* proposition that real-life gendered roles are transferred to internet use (See Gross, 2004). Such studies are more necessary in settings where gender inequality is highly pronounced, as shown by male/female school enrolment and a host of other indices. To further show how internet use in some parts of the world differs sharply from its use in a peripheral state, one may consider the place of internet use. A cursory survey of cities in Nigeria reveals a plethora of cyber cafés where many get connected to the internet for some fees. The place of internet use, it can be argued, may influence the nature of use. Home access for instance makes parental guidance possible, just as café access may accentuate anonymity. Many cafés in Nigeria, for instance, have cubicles for users.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the level of internet use among adolescents with a view to providing a feminist appraisal of the social context of use in a Nigerian city. More specifically, it aims at considering the extent to which internet use among adolescents translates to an overthrow of traditional gender roles or a reinforcement of these roles. To adequately explore this objective, the study puts forward a central hypothesis that female adolescents are significantly less likely to be users of the internet than male adolescents when proximate predictors of internet use are controlled. The rationale for the study is that it adds to the body of knowledge on internet studies in a peripheral state where users of the internet are often plagued with the problem of cultural consumerism; since, as it shall be shown shortly, adolescent internet users in peripheral states hardly produce cultural goods. Rather, they consume them. In addition, the specific ways in which people of a particular sex are disadvantaged in the use of the internet are highlighted. This gives insight into the state of gender empowerment as it exists and is made manifest in the study population.

### 4.1 Earlier Studies

Internet studies are nascent (Livingstone, 2005) and many of the works done in the emerging field have focused on the global North. Cooper (1997) notes three major components/features of the internet that combine to turbocharge, that is, accelerate and intensify online sexual activities (OSA). These are Access, Affordability, and Anonymity, which are collectively referred to as the “Triple A Engine.” With Access, Cooper implies the right by all to use the internet. Unlike other offline activities that some (such as minors) may not have access to, online activities are often open to all, so long as the financial
requirements can be met. Furthermore, adolescents can access adult oriented sites by filling false dates of birth while signing in. The possibility of having one’s identity concealed predisposes adolescents to experimenting with identities, sometimes with this experience impacting their sexuality. In support of this position, Branwyn (1993) points out that the use of the internet increases the sense of freedom and willingness to experiment. In addition, it enhances a person’s ability to talk openly about sexuality-related questions, concerns, and fantasies. While this could be an advantage in the area of helping timid persons in solving problems related to sexuality, the likelihood for abuse (of the freedom) is high.

Most adolescents are preoccupied with self definition/identity, as implied earlier. Longo et al. (2002: 94) posit that “exploring personal identities is a critical developmental task of adolescents.” Hence, adolescent internet usage may result from the desire to explore their identities. Conflicts between adolescents and adult supervisors (parents/guardians/teachers) and overall poor bonding may lead adolescents to cut themselves off from family and get involved in the heavy use of the internet to fill this real life vacuum. This is also done in response to the feeling of being over-supervised and unloved. Longo et al. (2002) argue further that to adolescents, any attention is better than none. Freeman-Long (2000) in an earlier work, points out that their identity exploration could also take the form of preoccupation with creating fantasy personalities online that mask their feelings of inadequacy and provide a feeling of pseudo-intimacy to others. Further, Longo et al. (2002) assert that rather than taking the risks of connecting in real relationships where they could be hurt, they escape into a fantasy world, where they can portray themselves as anyone they want to be.

In a study by Gross (2004), expectations on gender differentials in intensity and nature of usage of the internet are refuted. According to Gross, the gender gap in overall usage of the internet has narrowed. This assertion is premised on a study of adolescent internet users in the U.S. Boys are more likely to be heavy gamers online than girls. Through detailed reports of adolescents home internet use, Gross concludes that adolescent boys’ and girls’ online activities are rather similar than different. Typically, adolescent online activities are with friends who are also part of their daily offline lives. This goes to show that for many adolescents in the study population, online activities merely complement offline activities. It should be noted, however, that the study was conducted on home users only and as Slevin (2000) has pointed out, the social context of internet use is key. Therefore, generalizations to populations where a good proportion of adolescents access the internet in cafés may not be advisable. Although pretending to be someone else online (a form of identity exploration) is not pervasive among adolescents as some may conjecture, many are still in-
volved sometimes just for the fun of it, to protect themselves and their privacy
and to evade age restrictions. It is, however, very unlikely that Gross’ study
captured pretending motivated by antisocial behaviours such as fraud.

Studies in selected African states show that there are more male users of the
internet and ICT in general than there are female users (International Devel-
opment Research Centre (IDRC), 2003). The IDRC argues further that facil-
ities provided by telecentres (telephone, facsimile, and internet access) are used
more by adults than youths in Mali. In Mozambique, however, there are more
adolescent and young users of the internet than adults. The situation in Nige-
ria, however, remains unexplored. While studies in the West are grappling with
issues of the nature of internet use across gender boundaries, the extent and
social context of use are yet to be viewed from a gender sensitive perspective.
This study seeks to fill these gaps in knowledge.

4.2 A Theoretical Substratum for the Cultural
Context of Internet Use

As argued by Slevin (2000), the net facilitates the reorganization of social
relations and is therefore involved in cultural transmission. The internet is also
giving rise to new forms of human associations and increasing the mediaza-
tion of culture. The conditions and apparatuses facilitating the exchange of
information and other symbolic contents between individuals and organiza-
tions located within specific contexts are referred to as modalities of cultural
transmission (Slevin, 2000). Much is benefited from treating the internet as a
modality of culture. Attention is drawn not only to the goings on on the in-
ternet, but also to the socially structured contexts and processes of the pro-
duction, transmission, and reception of information and symbolic contents
as well as the information and symbolic contents themselves.

From the foregoing, the internet is seen to be a social phenomenon to the
extent that it functions as a means for the transmission of cultural goods within
specific social contexts. The internet combines a number of aspects of cultural
transmission in a unique way. It functions as a technical medium of trans-
mission. A technical medium of transmission consists of the material compo-
nents by virtue of which information and other symbolic contents are produced,
transmitted, and received. The nature of a technical medium of transmission
has socio-cultural implications. The attribute of fixation — i.e. its capacity to
store information — makes it a power container or generator of power. “The
manner in which information can be stored,” argues Slevin (2000:63), “is in-
dicative of both a technical medium’s potential as a tool for surveillance, the
transmission of information, and the nature of the control which may be exercised over it.” Slevin further asks: Who may store information? What kind of information can be stored? Who may access such information and to what end may the storage and retrieval be used? It is instructive to underscore key requirements for the storage of information on the internet as this puts an actor in a position of power in online relations. Technical expertise for the creation of websites comes to play here, and this is largely lacking in Nigeria in general and among females in particular.

It is also important to note with Slevin that the degree of reproduction is almost limitless on the internet. This makes it possible for stored information to be disseminated at no extra cost. Another attribute of this technical medium of transmission that should be focused on is the degree of participation it allows and requires from those who use it. While the mass media gives very little capacity to users to be heard, the internet allows a relatively high degree of participation, the only major limitations being access, computeracy, and additional skills of internet use.

Another aspect of cultural transmission is the set of institutional arrangements within which the technical medium is deployed and the individuals involved in encoding and decoding symbolic forms are embedded. These institutional arrangements are relevant to the exchange of information that takes place. In each institution that has a website, for instance, there are arrangements governing the publication and transmission of information as well as the activities of individuals accessing such information. In other words, there are channels of selective diffusion, the institutional framework controlling access to a technical medium and the opportunity for using it. This involves the exercise of power. As Slevin (2000) has shown, institutions have mechanisms for restricted implementation through which the diffusion of information can be controlled and regulated, with varying levels of exclusion for different categories of users of websites. The technical medium of transmission also facilitates the extension of availability of symbolic forms in time-space.

When key features of traditional media of mass communication are considered, the radical departure of the internet from the ideal is made clear. This helps our understanding of how internet mediated social relations are fast changing relations between members of society. Typically, the mass media have features such as (i) the institutionalized production and diffusion of symbolic goods; (ii) the instituted break between production and reception; (iii) the extension of availability in time and space; and (iv) the public circulation of symbolic forms. Although big institutions are involved in the storage and transmission of information and symbolic goods on the internet, key participants—producers—of such goods do not have to be big institutions (Slevin,
Furthermore, the producer/receiver dichotomy in typical mass communication media is blurred when the internet is considered. There is a two-way flow of information and transmission that can be from many to many. In order to disseminate information using the television or radio, the moment of broadcasting must coincide with the everyday activities of potential receiver. The internet on the other hand makes it possible to achieve around-the-clock availability.

In addition to these areas of departure, according to Slevin (2000), “the internet is radically transforming the nature of the public circulation of symbolic forms” as it integrates all other media and counters the typical unidirectional flow of information that strengthens the efficacy of social controls. Society thus becomes less predictable with this technical medium of cultural transmission. In summary, structured social relations in real life have implications for internet usage just as the context within which information and other symbolic contents are produced and received must be considered in analysing the contents.

The cultural aspect of globalization involves the way in which we produce, store, and circulate information and symbolic materials. Slevin (2000: 180) argues that “the internet offers individuals many new ways of re-imposing new forms of control that are more appropriate to our global age.” In other words, the internet occupies a central position in transforming complex relationships between local activities and interaction across distance. The result is that nothing is distant in the real sense as ‘distant’ actions have local impact and vice versa.

Considering typical western societies, Murdock and Golding (2005) have shown that the disposable spending required for the consumption of cultural goods that require subscription tilts the consumption of cultural goods towards the affluent. By extension, it is shown that access to and use of the internet and the media in general places a measure of restriction on those with little access to wealth; the result being that cultural goods available online are accessible to them, only to a limited extent, or in a secondary sense (i.e. as persons interacting with primary users). Thus, material inequalities are of central concern in considering cultural consumption.

It is further argued that a full understanding of the consumption of information provided by the media requires an appraisal of access to some non-monetary resources such as time, space, and social networks. Access to time not accounted for, that is leisure time for oneself, for example, which is strongly stratified by gender (Murdock and Golding, 2005). Adolescent girls who are more likely than their male counterparts to be receiving training in handling household tasks are bound to have their leisure time constrained. The time available for the media, with particular emphasis on the television, is considerably reduced, and the pressure resulting from these tasks often makes them...
look for psychological support that they may get through social networks that are sustained through online and telephone contacts. In essence, while males seek to use the internet instrumentally, females do so expressively (Murdock and Golding, 2005). The scholars also infer that place of consumption of cultural goods—in private or public—has implications for the nature of use to which such information may be put.

4.3 Feminism and Internet Use

Feminist theory, a generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience, developed from a woman-centered perspective (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1996: 436), which has evolved and is evolving as a critical response to established models of viewing phenomena through the eyes of men, is instructive for the purpose of this discourse. Lengermann and Niebrugge (1996: 438) argue that the scholarly community has arisen to the fact that “what it had assumed to be the universe of experience was really a particularistic account of male actors and male experience.” Thus, it “deconstructs established systems of knowledge by showing their masculinist bias and the gender politics framing and informing them” (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1996: 439). The basic theoretical questions asked by feminists are, first, where are the women in any situation being investigated? In seeking answers to this question, feminists come to agree that women’s roles in most social situations are different from, less privileged than, and subordinate to those of men. This leads to a second question: Why is this so? Aware of differences among women, feminists further ask a third question: What about the differences among women? This third question gives accent to the role of social location in feminist theorizing. Feminism addresses gender difference, gender inequality, gender oppression, and differences among women resulting in differences in social location.

The contribution of feminism to our understanding of the subject matter is worthy of note. According to Lengermann and Niebrugge (1996), human society is characterized by a gendered division of labor; the separation of public and private spheres of social activity; the placement of men in the public sphere; and the socialization of children to accept the adult roles and spheres prepared for them, and ‘appropriate’ for their gender. As the scholars also point out, the true rewards of social life, which include, but are not limited to, money, status, power, freedom, and opportunities, are found in the public sector from which women are in some sense barred. This suggests that gender inequality rests on society’s relegation of women to the private sphere of life. The relationship between males and females in society is not simply that of inequality.
It is that of oppression of females by males (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1996). This is fostered through all agents of socialization. Patriarchy, to radical feminists, may be hidden in complex practices of exploitation and control that may include socially shared standards of fashion and beauty, ideals of motherhood, and heterosexuality (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1996). The scholars argue further that once patriarchy is put in place, sources of power, such as from economics and ideology, can be marshaled to sustain it. In an effective manner, a society’s technology is marshaled to sustain the ideology as observable in the use of the media.

Through the information to which adolescents are exposed, they may be learning western ideals of roles appropriate for them as women or men. Such information reinforces the gender roles they might have acquired over time. On the other hand, they may be exposed to information that is radically opposed to what they have come to learn as appropriate roles for gender in their own society. Where they are sufficiently persuaded, their orientations may change. All this should, however, be viewed against the background of the role of gendered scripts in deciding the rightness of going to cafés by people of a particular sex and the sites people of a particular sex may visit.

In explaining gender difference, feminists assailessentialism, which suggests that a thing/person possesses a particular quality (or essence) as a part of the very terms or nature of its/her/his being/existence, precludes the possibility of change—a central imperative of feminism (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1996). Through contact with institutions, female and male members of society are socialized into various life roles according to a gendered script (Grown and Gilligan, 1992 cited in Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1996). The gendered script, it should be noted, is ubiquitous and very compelling. The media in general and the internet in particular are common instruments for making gendered scripts accessible to members of society. On the role of the media in general on social realities, feminism decries the under-representation and misrepresentation of women and the depiction of male-female relationships in a manner that reinforces the traditional sex roles and normalizes violence against women (Wood, 1994 cited in Schaefer, 2005). Feminists decry the commodification and stereotyping of women as sex objects through pornography in general and the internet in particular (Schaefer, 2005). Feminists also show that the use of the internet differs between men and women. In the United States for instance, women are more likely to visit websites with information on health, religion, and career matters, while men are more likely to use the internet for news and business information (Fox and Rainee, 2001; Rainee and Kohut, 2000 quoted in Schaefer, 2005). The observed gender difference may extend to a list of numberless topics.
From the foregoing, feminism has shown that society is characterized by socially determined differences between women and men. In addition, it shows that early theorizing was notoriously patriarchal, thus placing accent on the need for viewing phenomena from the vantage point of women, who more often than not, are in a position of the subordinate gender. Feminism is not insensitive to vectors of oppression and privileges such as class, race, dimensions of social stratification, and global location (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1996) that make women's experiences not exactly the same. The explanation given by feminism helps us apprehend the differences in access to and nature of use of the internet by female and male adolescents and among female adolescents who are different in senses other than gender.

Social norms do not only prescribe some degree of withdrawal from public places such as cafés for female adolescents. They also prescribe the nature of use to which the internet may be put. The consequence is that the internet merely functions to reinforce traditional gender roles and in some social contexts, it creates additional ways of subordinating the female adolescent and the female gender in general.

4.4 Methods

A cross-sectional survey of 1120 adolescents within the age bracket of 10–24 years was done in the city of Lagos in 2007. The sample was done through a multistage sampling technique in which five of the 20 Local Government Areas in the state were randomly selected. With a list of streets in the city serving as a sampling frame, streets were selected randomly and households were selected using the systematic sampling technique. Only one eligible adolescent was drawn from each household and the research instrument—the interview schedule—was administered by trained Research Assistants. Informed consent was obtained from all selected respondents 18 years and above while parental consent was obtained from minors in addition to their willingness to be interviewed. The interviews elicited information on respondents’ socio-demographic profiles, computeracy, access and use of the internet, frequency of internet use, places of use, interests online, etc.

4.5 Measures

The dependent variables for this study are internet use and intensity of use. Internet use is measured in binary form according to subjects’ responses to the
question “Have you ever used the internet?” All interviews that failed to elicit a meaningful response to this question were exempted from the analysis due to the central nature of the variable. Intensity of use is also made dichotomous for the purpose of this study. Adolescent internet users who spent a minimum of one hour per week were categorized as frequent users while those who spent less than an average of one hour online weekly were categorized as occasional users of the internet.

4.6 Methods of Analysis

First, the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents are presented. The logistic regression is employed to test the predictive power of gender on internet use with the advantage that other predictor variables such as age, education, and access to financial resources etc may be kept under control.

Table 4.1 shows the background characteristics of the respondents. Respondents are categorized into three according to periods of adolescence—early adolescence (10–14); mid adolescence (15–19 years); and late adolescence (20–24 years). Over half (52 percent) of the respondents were in their late adolescence while about two in five of the respondents were in their mid adolescence. Preliminary bivariate tests show a significant relationship between age and sex (p < 0.001). This suggests that it is important to control for age since internet use may increase with age. For both sexes, the majority of the respondents are Christians. The table also shows a preponderance of adolescents of Yoruba origin followed by those of the Igbo stock.

As one would expect, the majority (60 percent) of the respondents were holders of Senior Secondary School Certificate. About 55 percent of the respondents were students at the time of the study. Also worthy of note is the issue of autonomous residency. Male adolescents were found to be more likely to be living alone than female adolescents (p < 0.001). Living alone may influence daily schedules and, as a result, influence time available for online activities. The majority of the respondents were single, although more male adolescents were single than female adolescents (p < 0.01).

4.7 Discussion of Findings

Key findings of this study are presented in simple tables of frequencies and percentages as well as charts.
### Table 4.1 Background Characteristics of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Characteristics</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 533</td>
<td>n = 587</td>
<td>N = 1120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Distribution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14 years</td>
<td>50 (9.4)</td>
<td>290 (4.9)</td>
<td>79 (7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19 years</td>
<td>243 (45.6)</td>
<td>214 (36.5)</td>
<td>457 (40.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24 years</td>
<td>240 (58.6)</td>
<td>344 (58.6)</td>
<td>584 (52.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>389 (73.0)</td>
<td>421 (71.7)</td>
<td>810 (72.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>139 (26.1)</td>
<td>161 (27.4)</td>
<td>300 (26.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Trad. Rel.</td>
<td>4 (0.8)</td>
<td>4 (0.7)</td>
<td>8 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1 (0.2)</td>
<td>1 (0.2)</td>
<td>2 (0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>9 (1.7)</td>
<td>10 (1.7)</td>
<td>19 (1.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibo</td>
<td>137 (25.7)</td>
<td>176 (30.0)</td>
<td>313 (27.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>312 (58.5)</td>
<td>332 (56.6)</td>
<td>644 (57.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern minority groups</td>
<td>57 (10.7)</td>
<td>43 (7.3)</td>
<td>100 (8.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern minority groups</td>
<td>6 (1.1)</td>
<td>20 (3.4)</td>
<td>26 (2.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners</td>
<td>1 (0.2)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (0.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>11 (2.1)</td>
<td>6 (2.1)</td>
<td>17 (1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Qualification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6 (1.1)</td>
<td>8 (1.4)</td>
<td>14 (1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>34 (6.4)</td>
<td>42 (7.2)</td>
<td>76 (6.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Junior</td>
<td>134 (25.1)</td>
<td>91 (15.5)</td>
<td>225 (20.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Senior</td>
<td>307 (57.6)</td>
<td>366(62.4)</td>
<td>673 (60.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OND/NCE</td>
<td>43 (8.1)</td>
<td>59 (10.1)</td>
<td>102 (9.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc/HND</td>
<td>9 (1.7)</td>
<td>18 (3.1)</td>
<td>27 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (0.2)</td>
<td>1 (0.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 (0.3)</td>
<td>2 (0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupational Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>324 (60.8)</td>
<td>290 (49.4)</td>
<td>614 (54.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticed</td>
<td>32 (6.0)</td>
<td>49 (8.3)</td>
<td>81 (7.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>54 (10.1)</td>
<td>114 (19.4)</td>
<td>168 (15.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>123 (23.1)</td>
<td>134 (22.8)</td>
<td>257 (22.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autonomous Residency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living alone</td>
<td>26 (4.9)</td>
<td>76 (12.9)</td>
<td>102 (9.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not living alone</td>
<td>507 (95.1)</td>
<td>511 (87.1)</td>
<td>511 (87.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>514 (96.4)</td>
<td>582 (99.1)</td>
<td>1096 (97.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>19 (3.6)</td>
<td>5 (0.9)</td>
<td>24 (2.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 4.2, male adolescents were found to have a higher level of computer literacy than female adolescents. While 63 percent computer literacy (i.e. being able to use at least one package on the computer) was recorded for male adolescents, 60 percent was recorded for female adolescents. This relationship was found to be significant at a 95 percent confidence interval. For use of the internet, female adolescents were found to be at a disadvantage. Only a little over half of the female respondents said they had ever used the internet. Among the male respondents, however, about 63 percent said they had used the internet. The relationship between sex and internet use was highly significant (p < 0.01).

The majority (84.3 percent) of the internet users said they accessed the internet in public cafés, while about one in five had accessed the internet at home. Categories are not mutually exclusive for place of access. It is important to draw attention to the observation that female internet users had greater home access while their male counterparts had greater access in cafés. This goes to further show that the home duties of women make them less likely to be café users of the internet, although this relationship was not significant. For intensity of internet use, there was also found to be no significant relationship with gender.
Key Factors in Internet Use by Sex

The primary interests of internet users by sex are quite revealing. The majority of internet users had relationships, friendships, dating, and sexuality as their primary interests. Other interests include searching for information (i.e. academic research and news), sports, and entertainment. The study shows a significant relationship (with a p value < 0.001) between sex and primary interests on the internet, with male adolescent internet users being more likely to have sports as their primary interest. Females were found to be more likely to be interested in entertainment and fashion. There appears to be very little difference in interest in research and relationships between male and female users of the internet. Males and females categorized under users are those whose interests cut across several subjects and could not be said to spend more time on any particular topic than on others were equally distributed.

From the logistic regression model in Table 4.3, computer literacy is found to be the most significant predictor of internet use (p < 0.001). The study shows that when other variables are controlled, computer literate adolescents are at least six times more likely to use the internet than those not literate. This is quite understandable as computer literacy is a precondition for internet use. A question that flows naturally from this observation is whether female adolescents are as capable as male adolescents in internet use. As Table 4.2 shows, computer literacy is higher...
Table 4.3 Logistic Regression Model for Internet Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (ref. cat.)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.827*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14 years (ref. cat.)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19 years</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>1.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24 years</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.186</td>
<td>1.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to Wealth (Monthly Income)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None (ref. cat.)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10,000.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.170</td>
<td>1.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N 10,000.00 and above</td>
<td>0.209</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Educational Qualification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal education</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pry/Junior secondary education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.364</td>
<td>0.545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior secondary education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>0.331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.116**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.337</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Computer Literacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer literate</td>
<td>1.415</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.162***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not computer literate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.358</td>
<td>0.708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.822</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P < 0.05; ** P < 0.01; *** P < 0.001; ref. cat.—Reference category.

among male adolescents than female adolescents. It is important to draw attention to how skills in the use of the computer are acquired by many adolescents in the study population. Although many schools are beginning to introduce the use of computer into their curricula, classroom experiences hardly impart skills in computer use in Nigeria since personal computers are often in short supply. Ironically, many adolescents pick up computer skills from friends at cyber cafés. Thus, the female adolescent who is often barred from cafés through subtle social proscriptions and household expectations is largely disadvantaged.
This is followed by level of education. Adolescents with tertiary education were found to be more than four times more likely to use the internet than those who were yet to obtain the primary school leaving certificate. This is also understandable since tertiary education sometimes requires searching for scholarly works online. It is, however, important to note that sex remains a key predictor of internet use. The study has shown that female internet users are less likely to have used the internet. This predictive power was found to be significant at 95 percent confidence interval. Contrary, therefore, to findings in other areas, internet use is significantly higher for male adolescents in Nigeria than female adolescents.

### 4.8 Conclusion

In contrast with the observed convergence in internet use by males and females in some parts of the world (Gross, 2004), internet use in Nigeria clearly reflects a sharp disparity. Life for females online is little different from real life relations. Females, who are often limited to the private sphere in this part of the world, are also less likely to use public cafés than male adolescents. Access at home is limited by the high cost of installing the facilities. This way, the study shows another way in which women’s access to information is limited. The life chances of members of society, it should be noted, are becoming largely dependent on the information at their disposal. With this technology giving greater access to information by men, the chasm between men and women in society may just become deeper and wider.

Furthermore, a close look at internet users shows that female users are more likely than male users to employ the internet in lubricating social networks through exchange of mail. This is in line with an earlier observation by Murdock and Golding (2005). Female internet use therefore serves the purpose of helping to cope with psychosocial needs, while for men it is somewhat instrumental since they are more likely to employ the technology to gain information that may be helpful in their careers and other aspects of life. This underscores a major disparity in gender differentials in male and female use of the internet.

### References


Chapter Five

Globalization, Gender Bias, and Trafficking in Young Women: A Feminist Interpretation

Franca Attoh

5.0 Introduction

Globalization is the process completed in the twentieth century by which the capitalist world system spreads across the world. It is not a new phenomenon; rather it has engendered interconnectedness so that processes in one region have a major impact in other regions. Globalization has brought in its wake rapid developments in communications, technology, and spatial mobility. However, globalization is not all positive. It comes with crises ranging from the collapse of commodity prices to an increase in unemployment; poverty; the restructuring of households and gender relations; the growth of crime and social deviance; and internal and external migrations (Ezeah, 2005).

Gender is the social dynamics that characterizes the way men and women relate to each other on a given historical time frame and through socially engineered identities, power, and production relations (Fall, 1999). Under capitalism, women suffer all forms of exploitation and oppression. They are dominated through various levels of intensity and through different ideological lenses and patriarchal hegemonies, whether in a group or individually within narrow domestic frontiers (Fall, 1999).

Human trafficking manifests in different forms in different societies. It is a phenomenon that predates the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which refers generally to the illicit transfer of persons from one milieu to another. It is akin to slavery in the sense that human persons are viewed and traded as commodities to
be sexually and economically exploited by their owners (*Madams*). It is multi-faceted in the sense that it consists of components such as trafficking for sexual and economic exploitation, labor exploitation, organ harvesting, and baby harvesting. Specifically, trafficking in young women involves the movement of young women from one country to another for the purpose of sexual and economic exploitation. Those trafficked are usually from developing countries or states with transition economies.

Trafficking in persons re-emerged as an issue during the mid 1980s on the back of concern over changing migration flows, HIV/AIDS, child prostitution and child sex tourism, and the revitalization of the feminist movements (Pharaoh, 2006). It became prominent in the 1990s with numerous advocacy efforts culminating in the signing of the Palermo Protocol in 2000. The Palermo Protocol represents the first international agreement on a broad based response to an issue that had tasked policy makers since the late 19th century (Pharaoh, 2006). The Palermo Protocol defines human trafficking as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud or deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation (United Nations, 2000).

This definition takes into account the three fundamental elements in human trafficking: recruitment, mode of transfer, and exploitation. It equally accounts for the activities of the various actors that make human trafficking possible. The Palermo Protocol brought to the fore the victimization and violence meted to those trafficked. These two elements were often over looked in other definitions of human trafficking.

The old Benin kingdom is analogous to present-day Benin City, which is the capital of Edo State, Nigeria. The Edos represent the core of the old Benin Empire and have owed allegiance to the Oba for over four hundred and fifty years. They are bordered by the Urhobos, Isokos, Itsekiris, and the Igbo speaking people on the eastern borders of the kingdom. Benin Kingdom reached the peak of its glory in the 15th and 16th centuries with Portuguese traders establishing a trading post in the kingdom and the exchange of ambassadors between the Oba of Benin and the King of Portugal. By the 16th century, there were Catholic missions and churches in Benin (Bradbury, 1957). This early contact with Europe explains the migratory pattern of modern Bini people.

Benin City is the capital of Edo State, which was carved out of the defunct Bendel State. Edo State has 18 local government areas with a population of
3,218,332 million people (2006 Census). Benin City comprises three local government areas, namely Oredo, Egor, and Ikpoba-okha. Benin City has a population of 1,085,676 persons (2006 census). Women account for 543,122 people, which is over 50 per cent of the population, while young (10–25 years) people account for 40 per cent of the population (Okonofua et al., 2004). The people are predominantly farmers with very few industries. Despite being the state with the highest of school enrollment in Nigeria, it has the highest rate of school drop-outs and youth unemployment (Okonofua et al., 2004).

The family structure is patrilineal with the father as the head of the family. He exercises absolute control over members of his family. He is revered and has the authority to apply physical sanction on family members except his adult sons and brothers. The rights and obligations consequent upon membership of family groups are conceived of in terms of a master/servant relationship (Bradbury, 1957). Both children and wives are regarded as servants of their father.

5.1 The Problematique

One major complication in conceptualizing trafficking is that it is an umbrella term that covers various outcomes such as forced sexual slavery, begging or street hawking, organ harvesting, baby harvesting, and even exploitative labour. For Anderson and Davidson (2004), trafficking falls within a continuum of experience. This ranges from “People transported at gun point, then forced into labour through the use of physical and sexual violence or death threats to people who are not deceived or coerced in any way are well paid and work in an environment that respects and upholds their human rights.”

Luda (2003) sees trafficking in persons as a problem of exploitation. It refers to all criminal activities having to do with the legal or illegal transfer of persons from one state to another. This definition covers two distinct elements—the transportation and illicit migration of others. Each author attempts to conceptualize it within the confines of its own discipline. Authors like Nagle (2007), take a legalistic approach to the problem. Nagle views it as a crime against the victim who is denied the freedom to choose in the hands of the trafficker. She argues that the victim does not consent to be transported or even where there is consent that it becomes irrelevant due to the use of coercion, force, or misrepresentation. This definition portrays the victim as completely innocent and oblivious of the outcome of the situation. However, this perspective fails to take cognizance of those situations where ‘victims’ ab initio consented to being trafficked and are even aware that they would prostitute for their employers. And in many instances they pay money to a third party to facilitate their travel.
In Nigeria, trafficking in young women is often viewed through the prism of prostitution. This definitional problem has given birth to policies that tend to criminalize prostitution without solving the problem of human trafficking. For instance, Edo State, which has been identified as a hub for trafficking in young women, legislated against human trafficking and the prostitution of women (UNESCO, 2004). Despite the enactment of this law, the incidences of trafficking in young women continue to increase. Benin City, the capital of Edo State, has been identified as the headquarters of trafficking in young women (UNICRI, 2004; Okonofua et al., 2004; Onyeonoru, 2004). Young women are lured by traffickers and a loose network of family members with promises of good jobs and better well being in Europe. Often they are trafficked to Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and France (Omorodion, 1999; Otoide, 2002).

It has been estimated that as many as 80% of Nigerian young women trafficked into Italy are indigenes of Edo State (Aghatise, 2002). This problem has engendered the signing into law by the National Assembly in 2003 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act. It also culminated in the setting up of an agency known as NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of the Traffick in Persons and other matters) to arrest and prosecute traffickers, as well as rehabilitate those trafficked but deported. In addition, other security agencies, such as the Nigerian Police Force and Nigeria Immigration Service, have human trafficking units with the mandate to arrest traffickers and their agents and transfer to NAPTIP for prosecution. There are also many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS) working in the area of assistance and rehabilitation of trafficked but deported persons. In spite of these initiatives, the phenomenon continues to increase. The question then is, how does globalization exacerbate the trafficking of young women? In what ways do gender dynamics heighten the commodification of young women? This chapter will provide insights into the above posers.

5.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

5.2.i World-System Theory

The modern world system originated around 1500. In parts of Western Europe, the contradictions of feudalism gave way to technological innovations and the rise of market institutions. Advances in production and the need for trade impelled Europeans to reach other parts of the globe to establish hegemonic control in order to appropriate their raw materials for its blossoming fac-
tories. Superior military strength and advances in transportation aided this conquest, which was termed colonization.

In the twentieth century, the world system reached its spatial limit with the establishment of capitalist markets and state systems to all regions. This was characterized by a single division of labor, the multiplicity of political systems, and multiple cultural systems. The basic linkage between the parts is economic. This has given capitalists a freedom of maneuver that is structurally based and has guaranteed its expansion (Wallerstein, 1974). Labor is defined among functionally defined and geographically distinct parts arranged in a hierarchy of occupations. The technologically advanced and militarily strong states, referred to as the core, concentrate on higher skills and appropriate much of the surplus of the global economy. The technologically and militarily weak states are known as the periphery. They focus on low skills, labor intensive production, and supply the core with raw materials. Their economies are weak and depend heavily on the core.

The modern world-system is at present obsessed with the ideology of liberalism. Peripheral states are cajoled and encouraged to democratize and liberalize their economies despite their weak production base, which makes their products uncompetitive. This liberalization has resulted in the dumping of cheap foreign goods further shrinking the manufacturing sector of such economies, thus creating unemployment for such states. This crisis of unemployment engenders a myriad of social problems, resulting in the migratory behavior in young people. It is from this army of the unemployed that traffickers recruit their 'victims.'

5.2.ii Radical Feminism

Gender theories are characterized by the following— (1) men and women are unequally situated in society; (2) women have little or no access to material resources, social status, power, and opportunity for self actualization; (3) this inequality is structural and not biological; and (4) every human person is desirous of freedom and self actualization and as such women could do with more egalitarian structures and situations to actualize themselves.

Radical feminism is anchored on two fundamental postulates. First, women are of absolute positive value, a belief asserted against the universal devaluing of women. Second, women are generally oppressed, though the level of oppression varies from one society to another. They are violently oppressed by the system of patriarchy (Atkinson, 1974; Bunch, 1987; Chesler, 1994). Radical feminists averred that of all the systems of domination and subordination, the most fundamental structure of oppression is gender, the system of patriarchy. Not only
is patriarchy historically the first structure of domination and submission, but it also continues as the most enduring and pervasive system of inequality (Lerner, 1986). Through patriarchy men learn how to hold other human beings in contempt, to see them as subhuman and control them. Central to this argument is the image of patriarchy as violence against women. Violence in this instance may not be physical but rather hidden in practices of exploitation and control, as well as in standards of fashion and beauty, in tyrannical ideals of motherhood, monogamy, chastity, unpaid household drudgery, and unpaid wage work (Mackinnon, 1979; Wolf, 1991; Thompson, 1994). Physically patriarchy foists violence on women through rape, incest, enforced prostitution, sexual molestation of children, abuse of widows, and, in the context of Benin City, the cultural practice of primogeniture, which ensures that women cannot inherit movable and immovable property both from their nuclear families and their families of orientation, inferiorizes them. In addition, it engenders the commodification of young women by impelling them into trafficking situations to better the life chances of other family members. The Benin situation is peculiar in the sense that family members cajole and coerce the female members into trafficking situations. Young women are encouraged by their fathers and other male members of the family to follow traffickers by entering into negotiations with them on their behalf. Patriarchy succeeds because men can muster the most basic power resource, physical force, to establish control. Once patriarchy is in place, economic, ideological, legal, and emotional resources are marshalled to sustain it. The Benin culture accords women inferior status and it is through this process that women are commodified and controlled with the sole purpose of enriching the family.

5.3 Method

Method is simply the research techniques used for data collection and analyses. These consist of the study area, sample size, sampling procedure, the instrument used for data collection, and the method of analysis.

5.3.1 The Study Area

The study from which this data was derived was conducted in Benin City, Nigeria. Benin City is the capital of Edo state, and is made up of three local governments, namely Egor, Oredo, and Ikpoba-Okha. Benin City has a population of 1,085,676 persons of which women constitute over 50 per cent, or 543,122 persons (2006, census). The Bini are mainly Edo speaking, patrilin-
The residence is virilocal. The father (erha) is the head of the family. He is honoured and revered and exercises absolute control over his household (UNICRI, 2004). The people are predominantly Christians. However, despite this professed belief in Christianity, they believe in the efficacy and omnipotence of their gods especially the goddess Ayelela. It is to the shrine of Ayelela that those to be trafficked are taken for oaths of secrecy to ensure that identities of traffickers remain hidden.

In spite of being the capital of the state, the Benin economy is basically subsistence farming with few light industries and government establishments.

The rule of descent in Benin City, is patrilineal: the first son inherits both land and title from his father upon death. The system of land tenure is such that kin groups do not lay claim to tracts of land. Each adult male is dependent upon the village community in general rather than upon his own kin group. Women occupy an inferior position in the social structure and are not entitled to any form of inheritance from their family of orientation due to the principle of primogeniture. They are equally precluded from such rights in their husband’s families. They can only have access to land for farming through the generosity of their husbands or male members of their families. However, those with male children do benefit indirectly through their sons. These discriminatory practices are forms of gender bias and they engender in women a feeling of inferiority and victimization. The result is that women are viewed by male members of their families as commodities to be traded at will. Pharaoh (2006) posited that a study of Nigerian women trafficked to Italy showed that repatriated victims were often derided by family members for not succeeding and told to find their way back to Europe. The study showed that parents were positively disposed towards trafficking as long as money was sent back to the families.

5.3.ii Sample Size/Research Procedure

The sample size for the study from which the data for this chapter was derived was 1,160 persons, categorized as follows: 915 randomly selected young women aged 15–25 years, 235 trafficked but deported young women who were purposively selected from two rehabilitation centers, and 10 key informants comprising officials of NGOs, community leaders, government officials, and religious leaders. The 235 trafficked but deported young women were purposively selected from the Committee for the Support of the Dignity of Women (COSUDOW) and Idia Renaissance (an NGO run by the wife of the former Governor of Edo State). The young women had been trafficked to Italy and Spain but were deported. The research procedure was eclectic comprising survey re-
search, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions.

5.3.iii Research Instrument

Data from the sample was obtained through the survey method. In addition, eight of those with a long sojourn abroad were identified and further interviewed using the in-depth interview method. Some key informants were equally interviewed. These respondents who had stayed in Europe for some years were probed for answers on their socio-demographic characteristics, employment history/status, family history, and income to ascertain their family status. Questions were also asked on their activities while they were in Europe and if they were into any form of relationship since their return. Finally, they were asked questions on their rehabilitation and whether they were happy staying in Benin City or they would prefer to return to Europe. To further enrich the data, four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with the parents of the respondents. Two FGDs each were held with the fathers’ groups and the mothers’ groups. One each for fathers of those not trafficked and those trafficked but deported. One each was also held for mothers of those not trafficked and those trafficked but deported. Each FGD had a total of 12 participants.

5.4 Results/Discussions

Table 5.1 below is the age distribution of those trafficked but deported. The figures show that the majority of the respondents, 56.6%, were aged 25 years and above. Those aged 20–24 years were 33.6% whereas 9.8% of the respondents were aged 15–19 years. Their median age was 22 years.

The large percentage of those found in the age category 25 years and above is not unconnected with the fact that most of the deported respondents had spent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Distribution in Years</th>
<th>Ever Trafficked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
<td>23 (9.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>79 (33.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+</td>
<td>133 (56.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>235 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>21.93 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>22 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
many years in their countries of destination before they were deported. Some of them had become madams but suffered deportation as a result of having some differences with the syndicate that offered them protection. This is buttressed by the narrative of CB who spent ten years in Italy before she was deported:

I was about 15 years old when I traveled to Italy with my auntie. I served her for four years and got my freedom. I started my own business and even recruited three girls that work for me. But I had problems with the syndicate. They were always demanding protection money. At a time I decided to call their bluff and they set me up with the police.

In terms of religious affiliation, 93.6% of the respondents professed Christianity while 4.7% were Moslems. Those categorized as practicing African traditional religion were 1.3% while 0.4% did not belong to any of the categorized religion.

As shown in Table 5.2, 82.6% of those ever trafficked were single while only 17.4% of the respondents were married. This finding is consistent with both empirical and theoretical evidence that global sex industry prefers young and agile women. The findings of Buteagwa (1996) and Nagle (2007) lend credence to this assertion that traffickers prefer young and single women.

The data distribution in Table 5.3 shows that the highest percentage of those ever trafficked (68.1%) had a secondary level education. The others were distributed as such: 13.6% of the respondents had post-secondary education; another 13.6% had just primary education; 2% of the respondents had no

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**Table 5.2 Marital status of Ever Trafficked Respondents Frequency (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>194 (82.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>41 (17.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>235 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.3 Educational Qualification of the Ever Trafficked (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5 (2.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>32 (13.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>160 (68.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary</td>
<td>32 (13.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6 (2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>235 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
education at all; and 2.6% fell into the group categorized as others. This information is consistent with the works of the UNICRI (2004) and Okonofua et al. (2003). They discovered that majority of those that were willing to be trafficked had a secondary school education. This high percentage of willingness is due to the fact that a secondary school education is incapable of fetching a well paying job. In addition, the curriculum fails to prepare students for self employment upon graduation. School leavers were often desirous of securing nonexistent white collar jobs in government and the private sector and the non availability of such jobs for this category exposes them to the guiles and deceit of traffickers.

It is interesting to note that over 50 per cent of the traffickees were sponsored by family members such as parents (46.4%) and self/husband (6.0%) as shown in Table 5.4. Traffickers sponsored 37.9% of the respondents while 9.8% said they were sponsored by friends. This information corroborates the findings of Pharaoh (2006) that, despite the existence of criminal syndicates, most traffickers were loose networks of family members. The finding of UNICRI (2004) on Benin City is imperative. The conclusion is that virtually every Bini family has a family member involved in trafficking either as a traffickee, sponsor, madam, or trafficker, and that many families pride themselves in having at least a daughter in Italy, Spain, or the Netherlands, pointing to houses, cars, boreholes, and other material things acquired through the remittances of their daughters. The data gives a graphic picture of the role played by the family in trafficking; buttressing the assertion in extant literature that migration in whatever guise is never an individual’s decision especially in Sub-Saharan-Africa (see Adepoju, 2000). The quotation from an FGD with one of the father’s groups brings to the fore the fact that family members, especially fathers, are involved in the decision as to who gets trafficked or not:

Why are you worried about this trafficking? How many companies are here in Benin City? This is our only way of surviving. When our children send us dollars we change the money and start a small proj-
ect such as transport business or grinding of grains and pepper. It is our own democracy dividend.

The above quotation corroborates the views of Oyekanmi (2004) that Nigerian women are an underdeveloped resource, constrained by factors inside and outside their shores. She opined that their fate is determined by culture and societal values. They are perceived as reproducers of society and providers of care and comfort and as a result are commodified. The above assertion is consistent with the views of UNESCO (2004) and Human Rights Watch (1995) that due to the inferior position accorded women within the social structure they become vulnerable to trafficking situations. Aladeselu (1999) concurred that the low social values given to women contribute to trafficking. She averred that, in some situations, these deep-rooted practices of gender discrimination, which engender a cultural climate, perceive trafficking as morally acceptable, and when in tandem with poverty-stricken living conditions tend to exacerbate trafficking. Similarly, attitudes that see women and girls as inferior commodify them and contribute to practices of recruiting them either by force, abduction, or deception (UNICEF, 2003). In cases where family members push young women into trafficking, this is not considered harmful, as they are considered chattels of their families (Asian Development Bank, 2002).

In the context of Benin City, globalization has helped to create awareness of the existence of better well-being in Europe and America. This was made possible by the rapid development in telecommunication, especially the global system of mobile telephony and the internet. In addition, the improvement in air transportation has reduced the world into a village by creating connections to various parts of the world in a matter of hours. This has engendered labor mobility, especially among young people in search of better well-being.

5.5 Conclusions

The commodification and marginalization of women have been a global phenomenon. It appears that every advance in technology heightens gender inequality rather than reducing it. In the case of Benin City, the twin factors of globalization and the family play a fundamental role in impelling young women into trafficking situations through deceit and in certain instances outright coercion. Globalization helps create the illusion of eldorado while family heads decide who gets trafficked and negotiate with traffickers and syndicates on behalf of those to be trafficked. This situation reinforces the marginalization of women that in patriarchal societies, women are not only commodified
but also become chattels of their families. This mindset not only exacerbates trafficking but equally encourages and supports the re-trafficking of those trafficked but deported through derision by family members. The cultural belief that the female gender is inferior to the male gender continues to reinforce and exacerbate gender inequality. It equally fosters an aggressive spirit in the female gender making them embark on risky ventures to improve the fortunes of their families.

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Chapter Six

Family Planning Services and the Quest for Women’s Empowerment in Nigeria: Revisiting the Notion of Fertility as Martyrdom

Chinyere C. P. Nnorom

6.0 Introduction

Before the introduction of family planning programs globally, nations all over the world are prenatal and an attempt to interfere with procreation is not only frowned upon but seen as immoral and unnatural. However, since the 1960s, fundamental changes emerged in attitudes favourable to contraception. In the early decades of the family planning movement, a fundamental rationalization revolved around the reduction of environmental, economic, and societal pressures as a result of rising population growth (Sedgh et al., 2007). This was a sort of Malthusian-driven concern. While the developed countries that had adopted contraception approached it from the point of view of human rights, the developing world was concerned with the damaging effect of swift population growth on economic development (Interdisciplinary Communications Program, 1974; Bulatao, 1998). Ehrlich’s (1968) writing and some others such as Harkavy (1995) inspired the call for action to deal with overpopulation. Unease about the impact of rapid population growth and high fertility were translated into what is popularly known as the “Demographic Rationale” for family planning (Seltzer, 1948). By helping to reduce high rates of fertility, family planning programs were intended to contribute to lower rates of population
growth, improved living standards and human welfare, and to lessen the impact on natural resources and the environment.

Since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, the motivation for supporting family planning programs shifted its focus towards helping individuals, both women and men, achieve their preferences for smaller families and have their children when they want them (Ashford, 1995). Desired fertility rates continue to be considerably lower than actual fertility. Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys (1990; 1999; 2003) reports consistently show that many couples would choose to space their next birth by at least two to three years but are not doing so. Research by Ross and Winfrey (2002) in 27 developing countries indicates that among women giving birth within the year preceding the survey, two-thirds have an unmet need for family planning. These women are therefore at risk of a closely spaced birth and are likely to have more births than they desire. This is what unmet need for contraception is all about. Therefore, addressing the unmet need will not only result in contraceptive prevalence rates that exceed many countries’ targets but will also help women achieve their own goals and thus relieve population pressures (Sinding et al., 1994). With reduced fertility, women’s quest for political participation would have better prospects of fulfillment.

The general concept of ‘unmet need’ was first introduced in the 1960s, when researchers began to demonstrate and measure the discordance between women’s desires to limit their births and their actual use of contraception in much of the developing world (Mauldin, 1965). The gaps between knowledge, attitudes, and practice—the ‘KAP-gap’—were measured in national surveys undertaken in developing countries from the 1960s through the early 1980s. In most of these studies, the KAP-gap was defined as the proportion of married women who wished to stop childbearing but were not using contraception (Sedgh et al., 2007).

Several factors, according to USAID (2005), prevent women from gaining access to family planning services. In particular, the most prevalent factors include prohibitive distances to family planning services, lack of transportation, and limited ability to travel to services. In addition, cultural factors contribute to unmet need. For example, some Muslim women may not travel to health facilities or receive care from a healthcare provider without a male escort. Other factors that contribute to women’s unmet need for family planning include health provider bias toward one contraceptive method over another, staffing shortages, lack of availability of preferred methods, product stockouts, unaffordable costs of products and services, and lack of client and provider awareness of services. Legislative and policy barriers and sociocultural and economic norms also adversely influence women’s ability to use reproductive health and
family planning services effectively, such as the perceived belief that Islam is against family planning (Raimi, 2000). The study by Sedgh et al. (2007) reveals that between 20%–38% of women in Chad, Niger, and Nigeria cited opposition to use family planning as a reason for non use. This opposition includes woman’s personal beliefs or the opposition of her partner or another person who holds sway on her contraceptive decision-making.

The benefits of helping women and couples access and effectively use family planning extend into many realms. These benefits include the prevention of health risks associated with unwanted and unsafe pregnancies. On a broader scale, increased access to family planning can improve women’s education and employment opportunities and their participation in social and political domains (Singh et al., 2003). Couples with the means to control their fertility are usually able to invest more resources in each child, which ultimately raises the standard of health, education, and wealth in a population. There are other opportunities for general empowerment that become available as a result. There is consensus that investments in family planning advance general social and economic growth and development through these and other channels (USAID, 2006).

Many governments in developing countries have come to a consensus that rapid population growth and high fertility are detrimental to development. They have developed policies aimed at lowering population growth rates and fertility. This, it was believed, was a result of the consequences they faced in terms of increasing demands for health and educational services, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, and stress on public infrastructure. It is in realization of this that the federal government of Nigeria formally inaugurated the Population Council of Nigeria in May 1975. The council identified several issues of concern, including the need to expand family planning programs throughout the country (Watson, 1977). In addition, the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (PPFN) aims at effecting changes in the value orientation of the people with regard to child bearing and the number of children they intend to have while the National Population Commission (NPC) helps to inform the masses of the importance of contraceptives in keeping away from unwanted pregnancies and children (Nnorom, 1989).

Despite these efforts by various Nigerian governments, the population of the country continues to grow at an unprecedented rate. The 2006 population and housing census put the total population of the country at 140 million (UN, 2006). It was also estimated at 144,400,000 by mid 2007 and to reach 204,900,000 by the year 2025 (Population Reference Bureau [PRB], 2007). This makes Nigeria the most populous country in Africa and the sixth largest in the world. It is estimated that by 2050 Nigeria will become the fourth largest country in the
world (UN, 2006). The average family size is estimated at 6.7 (FOS, 1992), 6.2 (NPC, 2000), and 5.7 (NPC, 2004) children per woman for 1990, 1999, and 2003 respectively. This shows that Nigeria’s population is growing at the rate of 3.2% per annum, with an increase of 63% in 15 years (www.africamaster-web.com). Considering the controversy surrounding the census, there is every likelihood of an undercount but the high fertility rate of the country is not in doubt, as well as its consequences. At the World Summit in 2005, the importance of reproductive health and family planning to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was affirmed (Bernstein and Hansen, 2006). The UN Secretary-General also recommended adding a target of universal access to reproductive health facility to the MDG monitoring framework (UN, 2006).

The 1990, 1999, and 2003 NDHS collected information on the state of family planning services in Nigeria. This paper analyses the report with a view to finding explanations as to why women are not patronizing the services as expected even with the desire to reduce their family size. This, for us, becomes imperative for two related reasons—women commit considerable time to childcare to the detriment of having no time for leisure and participation in public life. Furthermore, considering the current global economic meltdown, we must consider the attendant consequences on the populace if the current population growth rate is not stemmed. It is much easier for a household with few children to cope with the economic downturn than for one with six children under the same circumstance.

Table 6.1 Percentage of Women That Had Used, or Are Currently Using, Any Traditional or Modern Method of Contraception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Survey</th>
<th>Used Any Method</th>
<th>Currently Using</th>
<th>Used Any Modern Method</th>
<th>Currently Using</th>
<th>Used Any Traditional Method</th>
<th>Currently Using</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990**</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999***</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexually Active (Unmarried)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003****</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexually Active (Unmarried)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not Available; ** NDHS 1990; ***NDHS 1999; **** NDHS 2003
6.1 Theoretical Stance

As a general framework for the sociological study of fertility, the model developed by Davis and Blake (1956) has been very influential. Freedman (1975), based on this model, envisages environmental factors as well as social and economic structures impinging on fertility with a series of intermediate variables. Understanding the role of culture in fertility change has attracted the attention of population analysts for decades. Lorimer (1954) saw the importance of studying the influence of culture in the study of fertility long before family planning programs came onto the scene. For him, “any public policy directed towards lowering fertility, to be effective, must not only provide efficient and acceptable means of controlling fertility, but must also be concerned with the development of ‘background conditions’ favorable to such control” (1954: 251).

Caldwell’s (1982) wealth flow theory also brought social and cultural factors to the demographic analysis of population change. In this case, family production flows from the younger to the older generation making high fertility beneficial because children contribute to familial production. Or in the case of labor market production, wealth flows from the older to the younger generation as children become dependents and therefore lower fertility is desired. The Marxian Feminists approach sees women’s oppression from social arrangements inherent in the society that can be changed. For them, the family is the cause of women’s subordination since it is patterned along dominant and subordinate roles and society legitimizes it by recognizing it as fundamental institution in every society (Ritzer, 1996). Thus, with this system, came domestication and property acquisition, which brought about women’s roles as housewives and homemakers. Women are thus tied to the responsibility of child care and maintenance of the home front because her domestic role became translated as part of her ‘natural’ tasks. Any effort on the part of women to change the status quo is misinterpreted and sometimes misrepresented in various circles. As the world becomes more and more globalized, women are beginning to question the justification for the confinement at the private sphere—the home front. For women to compete favorably in this era of globalization and to contribute their own quota to development, the utilization of family planning services to adequately space and cater for the number of children they desire is necessary. However, Freedman (1987) also wrote on the profound effect culture—the system of beliefs that guide behaviour in each society—has on all aspects of fertility. A distinction was further made between the social and cultural factors that influenced reproductive behavior and other factors that influenced family planning programs such as political support (Freedman and Berelson, 1976). For Freedman (1987), understanding the specific elements
Table 6.2 Percentage Distribution of Women Who Are Not Using a Contraceptive Method and Who Do Not Intend to Use in the Future, by Main Reason for Not Using, According to Age, Nigeria 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Not Using Contraception</th>
<th>Age 15–29</th>
<th>Age 30–49</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wants Children</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Knowledge</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatalistic</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs too much</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side effects</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health concerns</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to get methods</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion Opposed to family planning</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner opposes family planning</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others oppose family planning</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequent sex</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to get pregnant</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menopausal/hysterectomy</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of women</td>
<td>2,092</td>
<td>2,315</td>
<td>4,408</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


of the culture and social settings that affect reproduction and family planning was deemed essential for the appropriate design and implementation of such programs. Freedman’s model is seen to be more appropriate in this discourse in the sense that what affects women’s adoption of family planning goes beyond access and availability.

6.2 Data and Methods

The data for this paper was extracted from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS) reports of 1990, 1999, and 2003. The three surveys, although similar in focus, varied slightly in scope. The 1990 survey aimed at gathering reliable information on fertility, family planning, infant and child mortality, maternal care, vaccination status, breastfeeding, and nutrition. It gathered information on the reproductive histories of 8,781 women age 15–49 years in the four regions and on the health of their 8,113 children under the age of five.
The main objectives of the 1999 NDHS survey were to collect and analyze information on reproductive health, including family planning and infant and child mortality, as well as to measure the nutritional status of mothers and children. This survey instrument was updated to solicit information on housing facilities as well as knowledge and awareness of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) epidemic (NPC, 2000: xiii). It also introduced the inclusion of men. Altogether, 8,199 women ages 15–49 years and 3,082 men ages 15–64 were interviewed (xvii). Unlike the 1990 survey, data was collected from all the states of the federation including the federal capital territory (FCT), Abuja.

The 2003 NDHS, which was a follow-up to the 1999 NDHS, obtained information on fertility; fertility preferences; use and knowledge of family planning methods; maternal and childhood health; maternal and childhood mortality; breastfeeding practices; nutrition; knowledge of HIV/AIDS; and other health issues (NPC, 2004: xix). A total of 7,620 women of reproductive age and 2,346 men ages 15–59 were interviewed, covering the six geo-political zones in the country. The paper analyzed the unmet need for family planning among women of child bearing ages interviewed in the three surveys to see the extent of patronage and whether there are successive improvements. It also analyzed the reasons advanced for non adoption in the three surveys (See appendix). The paper had wanted to discuss the differences by regions but this was jettisoned because of non availability of the reasons by regions. Therefore, it becomes difficult to undertake a comparative analysis. The 2008 NDHS is still ongoing and not available for public use, hence its non inclusion in this paper. The implications of the findings for women’s empowerment are spelt out in the discussion section.

6.3 Findings

The studies revealed some reasonable knowledge of family planning methods as approximately 46% of all women involved in the 1990 survey and 44% of the married women knew about any contraceptive method. This increased to 65% and 64% respectively in 1999, and 79% and 78% in 2003, showing a steady increase in knowledge of contraceptive methods. Knowledge of modern methods for all women and married women were respectively 44% and 41% in 1990; 63% and 62% in 1999; and 77% and 76% in 2003. Again, there was a steady increase for the three periods. Despite the high knowledge expressed, however, usage was very low when compared with percentage of knowledge.
Table 6.3 Percentage Distribution of Currently Married Women and Men Who Are Not Using a Contraceptive Method and Who Do Not Intend to Use in the Future, by Main Reason for Not Intending to Use, According to Age (Women), Nigeria 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Not Intending to Use Contraception</th>
<th>Age &lt; 30</th>
<th>Age 30–49</th>
<th>Total Women</th>
<th>Total Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequent sex</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menopausal, hysterectomy</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subfecund, infecund</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants more Children</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent opposed</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse opposed</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others opposed</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious prohibition</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows no method</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows no source</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health concerns</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of side effects</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs too much</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient to use</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interferes with body processes</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to woman to use</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of women</td>
<td>1,333</td>
<td>1,604</td>
<td>2,937</td>
<td>624</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Only 15% of all women in 1990 had used any method and 9% each had used any modern method or traditional method. The difference was negligible for the married women. In the 1999 study, 27% of all women had used any method compared with 18% use of a modern method. For married women, the respective percentages were 29% and 19%. The 1999 survey included unmarried sexually active women and the respective usage for this group was 66% and 49%.

Women who were not using any contraception at the time of various surveys were asked if they intended to use in the future. Their responses show that as of 1990, 9% intended to use within the succeeding 12 months, 7% would use later, 10% were unsure of their intention, while 66% did not in-
tend to use at all. In 1999, 14% would use in the subsequent 1 year, 8% would use later, 1% was unsure as to the timing, 15% was unsure of their intention, and 60% would not use. For 2003, the finding was similar as 27% signified intention to use, 8% were unsure, and 64% would not use.

Those not using, and who do not intend to use, advanced various explanations for their positions. The most significant reasons given in 1990 (see table 2) were: wants additional children (47%); lack of knowledge (12%); religion (12%); fatalistic (6%); and opposition—whether self; partner, or others (6%). In 1999 (table 3), desire for more children continued to dominate (28%), followed in descending order by opposition (23%), lack of knowledge (15%), and religious prohibition (11%). A similar pattern was discernible in the 2003 responses (see table 4). From the three surveys, the three most important reasons given by women for non adoption of contraception—apart from desiring additional children were—opposition, religious prohibition, and lack of knowledge. The next section is devoted to discussing the findings.

6.4 Discussion

The paper examines the knowledge and utilization of family planning methods by women of reproductive ages in the three DHS surveys conducted and available in the country. Although the surveys had given insight to the contraceptive situation in Nigeria, it is important to stress at the onset of this discussion that findings of these studies might not represent the true situation on grounds that respondents may have presented a different scenario from the real situation. However, that is not to say that the findings should be rejected. Rather, biases associated with this kind of survey, especially when the issue of sexuality—which is often seen as a taboo for discussion in Nigerian settings—should be acknowledged.

The findings show a considerable knowledge of methods by women. However, knowledge does not automatically translate into actual usage as patronage is very low. This is in consonance with Nnorom (1989; 2005) and Raimi’s (2000) studies that found a wide gap in knowledge and use of family planning methods. For those not using any method during the various surveys (16% in 1990; 22% in 1999; and 27% in 2003), they signified an intention to use. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion in the three surveys (over 60%) was not ready to use any form of contraception. Although many expressed additional children as their main reason for not intending to use any method, lack of knowledge, religious prohibition, and opposition (from self, partner, or significant others) continued to take the center stage in the three surveys as the three other significant factors hindering the acceptance of contraception.
Table 6.4 Percentage Distribution of Currently Married Women Who Are Not Using a Contraceptive Method and Who Do Not Intend to Use in the Future, by Main Reason for Not Intending to Use, According to Age, Nigeria 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Age 15–29</th>
<th>Age 30–49</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fertility-related reasons</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequent sex/no sex</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menopausal/had hysterectomy</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subfecund/infecund</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants as many Children as possible</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent opposed</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband/Partner opposed</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others opposed</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious prohibition</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows no method</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows no source</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health concerns</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of side effects</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access/too far</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs too much</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient to use</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interferes with body's normal processes</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of women</td>
<td>1,357</td>
<td>1,619</td>
<td>2,976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Similarly findings were reported in the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) report of 2003. Although “opposition to use” was the third most important reason (12.3%) mentioned after “fertility related reasons” (40.5%) and “method related reasons” (37.5%), the factor continues to play a very significant role in unmet need for contraception. The Kenya DHS (2003) survey also produced related result as “opposition to use” (31%) was the second most important reason after “fertility related reasons” (40%) for non use of family planning. Method related reasons accounted for 24% of the cases.
Egypt, despite its advancement in civilization, is not spared the problem as “opposition to use” accounted for 6% of the reason for women not intending to use contraception during the 2008 DHS survey in Egypt. Fertility-related and method-related reasons accounted for 74% and 20% respectively (El-Zanaty et al., 2009). This goes to prove that the factor is not only found in Nigeria but cuts across the African continent.

That most women seek family planning, have come to know of its existence, and would want to adopt it signifies that they are cognizance of the health benefits of contraception and want to take advantage of its availability. It is not surprising that their desire to have the number of children they can cater for might be responsible for this venture. However, the desire to adopt is a function of one or more of the three main factors listed above as hindering women’s acceptance of the methods. The three reasons are discussed further below.

Lack of knowledge would not be blamed on the respondents since they can only use what they know. In that regard, family planning centers should be held responsible for having not propagated the information widely to reach those complaining of ignorance. If family planning clinics are equipped to disseminate information about their services, then lack of knowledge should be seen from the point of view of official negligence and poor work ethics and be treated as such. However, if the resources needed to publicize the information are not made available to practitioners, the government who claims to be concerned about the effects of uncontrolled fertility on national development should be held responsible for the observed gaps. In that regard, ignorance expressed by women in the three surveys is valid and should be handled appropriately if appreciable improvement in contraceptive adoption is expected.

Nigeria has been described as the religious center of the world, where religious externalities hold the sway even if religions are far from being internalised. Proliferation of prayer houses became more pronounced with the coming of austerity measures that brought untold hardship to the citizenry from about 1986 until today. In all these religions, submission to husbands’ authority by wives is advocated for the devotees. Any woman seen to disobey or disrespect her husband is regarded as disrespecting the authority of God and attracts nothing less than eternal punishment or, in some cases, instant judgment by religious leaders as is deemed necessary. Ahonsi (2000) argues for the role of religion in promoting health and positive social change. At the individual level, religion can positively shape an individual’s, couple’s, and family’s understanding of reproductive choices if appropriately mobilized. It also plays a very important part in reproductive health matters in the sense that “values, norms and behaviours, and even policy debates around sexual and reproductive health issues tend to be framed in moral and religious terms”
Raimi (2000: 51) reiterates this by identifying some family planning methods acceptable by Islamic religion. With the exception of condoms, other acceptable methods have higher failure rates. The methods listed by him are also acceptable to the Catholic faith except that withdrawal and condom methods are also seen to prevent conception, which is considered sinful to God. This was confirmed by the literature (Sedgh et al., 2007; USAID, 2005; Nnorom, 2005), where oppositions of various kinds contribute to low patronage by women.

Generally, there is opposition to the adoption of family planning. Opposition was identified as either personal opposition, spousal opposition, or others’ opposition. The first two constitute the significant reasons for non adoption. A woman’s personal reason for not accepting family planning for either the spacing of births or prevention of unwanted births could hinge on a spouse’s position on the issue. The likelihood that a woman would adopt family planning when her husband objects is slim, because she will be under pressure from her relations and her husband’s not to go contrary to his wishes. A woman’s freedom to opt for the adoption of family planning may also be constrained by cultural factors such as an oath of secrecy to which a couple had deposed. This again reinforces Nnorom’s (2005) findings. There are also unfounded fears about family planning techniques such as the inability to conceive again when couples decide to resume childbearing.

The second part has to do with husbands’ disapproval/opposition. This is very vital in the adoption of family planning methods by women. A woman whose husband is not favorably disposed to the adoption may elicit not to go for it despite her own belief. This again confirms the studies by Nnorom (1989; 2005) where a husband’s disapproval was the major reason for non adoption by women. Interestingly, the study by Nnorom (2005: 55) shows that men are not favorably disposed to their wives’ use of contraception because of “the other uses which she might put her body given this opportunity.” Husbands’ fear adultery on the part of wives in the post adoption period. Therefore, a husband prefers to expose his wife to health risks because of unfounded suspicion. Of course, we have come across cases where wives adopt family planning techniques without the husbands’ knowledge but oftentimes this bold attempt backfires. An example by Nnorom (2005: 56–57) is a case to buttress this further. The paper presents the predicament of a woman who adopted family planning secretly because her husband was not favorably disposed to her adopting a method. Nnorom’s (2005: 58) study stressed this further in the words of one male respondent who was asked what his reaction would be if he found out that the wife was using family planning without his consent:
She dares not do that. Yes, she can’t, because she is leaving my house that day and it goes to prove one thing: I may not actually be the father of our children after all.

A woman faced with such a situation, not economically empowered and without the support of her family or her husband’s, have no other option than to comply. Where such authorization is denied, the woman may but submit to the wishes of her husband as that is seen to please God. Therefore, religious opposition and husbands’ disapproval are intertwined. This too is exacerbated by women’s lack of empowerment, which helps in liberating humankind. Some might argue that women are more vocal than in the past but we should not forget that these women are a very insignificant proportion when compared with the teeming population of Nigerian women, especially in the rural areas. The culture of patriarchy is so entrenched in Nigerian society that the struggle for gender equality will take a long time to materialize. The woman’s case mentioned above was worsened by her parents’ decision: to support her husband despite the health implications for their daughter. Even when her health is at stake, a woman must be seen to get her husbands’ consent before obtaining or seeking for treatment. To this end, most women would obtain permission from their spouses before taking any decision, be it health, personal, familial, or social, hence, the observed result.

The southwest zone is the only zone where the use of family planning is widespread and family size is small. This could be explained from the angle of the extent of women’s involvement in decision making especially as it affects their own health and well being. A woman could damn the consequences when her life is at stake and if by any chance she is threatened undesirably, she may decide to leave the union. She could be supported by her family of origin. The other zones seem to have a more stringent arrangement that makes it difficult for such freedom to strive, hence the observed low patronage. Although reasons for non adoption was not analyzed by zones, one could infer from the level of usage that personal opposition and husbands’ opposition may not have been a significant factor in the southwest zone. This could be translated as the extent to which cultural emancipation has been transformed positively in the zone and not necessarily absence of dowry or educational attainment.

6.5 Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that knowledge and awareness of family planning methods are widespread in Nigeria. The paper also shows that unmet
needs for family planning is very high. Most women in Nigeria want to space their births or even reduce the number of children they would want to have but they are not doing so. Three factors, apart from desiring additional children, stand out clearly as the reasons for the observed unmet need. These are lack of knowledge, religious beliefs and opposition, be it personal, spousal or others. If family planning is to produce the desired effects on women and on social and economic development, the paper suggests the following:

- Government agencies responsible for information dissemination on population related matters should re-strategize so as to reach the remotest parts of the country where family planning services may have a more meaningful impact. Significant proportions of the population (70%) reside in the rural areas, are non literate, and hardly have access to these services. Targeting this group in future programing will go a long way in reducing unmet needs in the area of family planning.
- Religion also contributes significantly to the non adoption of family planning techniques by women. It becomes imperative to involve religious leaders in programming so they can inform their followers adequately. Part of the reason for the rejection by religious bodies is the supposed use of the methods for adulterous acts (for married women) and promiscuity, on the part of unmarried ones, thereby promoting immorality. Involving religious leaders in family planning program designs will help to clarify uncertainties and they, in turn, will educate their members better.
- Finally, the patriarchal nature of a society that gives near absolute power to men has to be revisited by lawmakers, especially when matters concerning women’s health are concerned. If Nigeria is to compete globally with other nations, the rate of population growth has to be reduced and this can only be achieved when couples begin to actualize the number of children desired. To achieve this, husbands should exhibit some measure of trust in their relationships with their wives so as to allow them a free hand in matters concerning their health and well being. When women are in charge of their reproductive health, they are better able to participate actively in national development. They will be able to decide when to get involved in economic activities, plan the next child, and, most importantly, organize their lives to participate in political and social engagements. Times spent on raising children not planned for will be spared for positive contributions in political and economic activities. This will bring overall national development since, based on their cultural roles as home makers and care givers, they will provide more meaningful ways of moving the nation forward.
References


Chapter Seven

Gender and Discrimination among People Living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria

Chinwe R. Nwanna

7.0 Introduction

Ever since Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was discovered in the human body in 1981, it has directly affected more than 42 million people and depleted the global population by 23 million people (UNAIDS, 2003). While societal alienation of certain groups such as homosexuals, injecting drug users, and commercial sex workers predates the scourge of HIV/AIDS, the disease has provoked further discrimination towards these groups, as well as others. Discrimination may occur in different forms in different contexts. It has become a powerful tool of social control and an intractable problem associated with the AIDS epidemic throughout the world. It has been shown to delay HIV testing, restrict the utilization of preventative programs, and hinder the adoption of preventative behaviors like condom use and HIV status disclosure (FMOH, 2003; Brooks et al., 2005).

Discrimination usually builds upon and reinforces pre-existing fears and prejudices about poverty, gender, sex, and sexuality. In many places, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) are perceived as having had sex with sex workers or prostitutes (if they are men), or as having been ‘promiscuous’ (if they are women). Furthermore, in many parts of the world, HIV is seen as a ‘woman’s disease,’ like many other forms of sexually transmitted infections. HIV/AIDS-related discrimination therefore plays into, and reinforces, existing social stereotypes and inequalities, particularly those inequalities that make women seem inferior to men. Arachu and Farmer (2005) argue that discrimination is linked to power and domination in the community as a whole, playing a key role in
producing and reproducing relations of power and control. They also argue that in patriarchal societies gender inequality determines the extent to which sexism marks the course of HIV infection. In such societies, like Nigeria, a disclosure of HIV infection may provoke discrimination and domestic violence against female PLWHA than in environments where women enjoy gender equity. Gender and discrimination within health facilities have yet to be empirically assessed. This chapter hypothesizes that women are more vulnerable to discrimination in the healthcare facilities than men. Therefore, it explores the influence of gender on discrimination experienced by PLWHA in the health sector and subsequently assesses the socio-economic characteristics of those vulnerable to discrimination. The data for this chapter are generated from a study conducted from September 2005 to April 2006 among non-infected and infected people.

7.1 Background of the Study

HIV/AIDS has become one of the greatest challenges threatening the existence and survival of the global community. The disease has been ravaging the human population worldwide. More than 42 million people have been affected and 23 million people have died globally (UNAIDS, 2003). Nigeria has the second highest cases of HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa. The prevalence rate has increased exponentially from 1.8% in 1992 to 4.5% in 1996 and 5.8% in 2001 (Nigerian Institute of Medical Research, 2000; National AIDS & STD Control Programme, 2002). This development is alarming considering the fact that the first AIDS case was diagnosed in 1986. The figure dropped to 5% in 2003 and to 4.4% in 2005 (Federal Ministry of Health, 2006). Initially, more men were afflicted than women, 62% men to 38% women (Nwanna, 2003); but presently, there is a feminization of the infection. Between 1986 and 1995, women constituted 43.26% of HIV infected people, but in the 2003 National Sentinel Survey, women represented 54% of all cases (FMoH, 2004).

The cumulative death toll from AIDS is 1.45 million (MOH, 2006) while the number of AIDS orphans in 2002 was 847,000 (NASCP, 2002). Declining life expectancy figures have been attributed largely to the AIDS epidemic (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2003). In addition to these health consequences, PLWHA suffer discrimination. The explication of the fatal nature of the disease, especially where there is no known curative measure, as well as its association with homosexuality and promiscuous sexual relations, have occasioned the rejection of the people living with HIV/AIDS. Ignorance of the disease and the phobia it provokes in people have resulted in self-defence mechanisms
among the public, including health workers, through segregation, exclusion, or the denial of equal opportunities (Mann, 1987; Herek and Glunt, 1988).

The late 1990s witnessed a paradigm shift from health issues to social ones, which underscored the implications of social discrimination (Sylwander et al., 2002). Discrimination ravages the social fabric of society; it translates into human rights violations and is widely acknowledged as one of the major challenges facing the successful care and prevention of HIV infection (Parker and Aggleton, 2002). The fear of discrimination may constrain individuals living with HIV/AIDS from living normal lives or openly declaring their HIV status (FMOH, 2003). Furthermore, discrimination may bring about conditions of stress, low self-esteem, suicide, unemployment, and dislocation in PLWHA. However, Arachu and Farmer (2005) contend that every society is shaped by large-scale social inequalities that are rooted in historical and economic processes, which determine the distribution and outcome of HIV/AIDS. They argue that social inequalities determine, in large part, who suffers from HIV-related discrimination.

Understanding HIV-related discrimination, therefore, requires an understanding of how social inequalities foster discrimination. In view of the aforementioned, socio-economic status of the PLWHA is an important issue to study because of its power and influence in society. For example, it is argued that in patriarchal societies gender inequality determines the extent to which sexism marks the course of HIV infection (Arachu and Farmer, 2005). In such societies, like Nigeria, a disclosure of HIV infection may provoke more discrimination and domestic violence against female PLWHA than in environments where women enjoy gender equity.

In Nigeria, there are reports of discriminatory practices against PLWHA, such as mandatory HIV testing, particularly for pregnant women (Iwuagwu et al., 2003), and the termination of jobs (Iwuagwu et al., 2001 and 2003; Akparanta and Emenogu, 2002; Adirieje, 2003; Durojaiye, 2003). PLWHA have been excluded from social activities and rejected and abandoned by their families (Iwuagwu et al., 2003). Outright denial of any care in public as well as private health facilities has also been reported (Adebajo et al., 2003; Reis et al., 2005).

Despite the increasing awareness that the impact of discrimination must be addressed in policies and programs aimed at reducing HIV/AIDS, efforts are impeded by the dearth of information on the phenomenon. Literature related to HIV-discrimination focuses on policy and regulatory concerns. However, gender differentials in the experiences of discrimination against PLWHA have not been empirically studied. This has hindered the advancement of theoretical understanding of HIV-related discrimination. To improve our un-
standing, therefore, this study analyzes it along gender lines. The study was conducted in two local government areas of Lagos state, namely Epe (a rural area) and Lagos Mainland (a highly urbanized area).

The central argument that guides this research work is premised on the interface between the socio-economic status of the PLWHA and social discrimination. The perception of ill-health and the behavior that it provokes are not uniform for all categories of people. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, there are proverbs that illustrate the impact of the socio-economic position on the behavior that is directed at those afflicted. They, for example, say that, “bí òtòşí bá ŋ òjọjọ wọn á ní alákóri tún gbé iṣẹ rẹ dé. Bó bá ọlówó wọn á ní kó ṣọjú atá sọnul!” (“If a poor person takes ill, people will deride him/her as a good-for-nothing person coming up with one of his/her usual pranks, whereas if it is an affluent person, s/he will be persuaded to take some peppery stew!”) We argue, therefore, that women are more vulnerable to HIV-related discrimination than men. We also argue that highly educated PLWHA, those with rich social networks, unmarried PLWHA, those that are employed, and those living in urban areas are expected to be confronted with less discriminatory attitudes and behaviors from the non-infected people. The main objective of the study, therefore, is to explore how gender influences attitudes that are directed at PLWHA, including how women struggle to fight off discrimination directed at them in the health sector, and furthermore to assess the socio-economic characteristics of those vulnerable to discrimination in the health facilities.

7.2 Literature Review

7.2.1 Clarification of Key Terms

**Gender:** This connotes cultural, social, and psychological differences between males and females, while sex refers to physical differences of the body. In this study, gender denotes (1) male or (2) female.

**HIV-related discrimination:** Nnoli (1980) adopts the concept of ethnicity to describe discrimination in Africa and Nigeria in particular. He views ethnicity as being characterized by exclusiveness, which breeds interethnic rejection based on linguistic-cultural grounds. This culminates in discrimination in jobs, housing, admission into educational institutions, marriages, business transactions, or the distribution of social welfare services. Therefore, in the context of HIV/AIDS, some ethnic groups known to engage in promiscuous relationships or prostitution will be more vulnerable to discrimination. Gilmore and
Somerville (1994) define discrimination as any form of distinction, exclusion, or restriction affecting a person by virtue of his/her characteristic. UNAIDS developed a protocol for the identification of discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS. According to the protocol, HIV/AIDS-related discrimination is defined as any measure entailing any arbitrary distinction among persons depending on their confirmed or suspected HIV sero-status or state of health (UNAIDS, 1996). Aggleton and Parker (2002) assert that discrimination occurs when a distinction is made against a person that results in his or her being treated unfairly and unjustly on the basis of belonging, or being perceived to belong to a particular group. In this thesis, therefore, discrimination is presented as negative attitudes, beliefs, attributes, behaviors, activities, and experiences that occur in social interactions.

**Socio-economic status:** Socio-economic status (SES) is often conceptualized as a fundamental factor of inequalities. In theorizing socio-economic status, Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1958) conceptualizes inequality along three related tracks: class, status, and party. Status is an important concept in social stratification and Weber distinguishes it from social class. Whereas social class focuses on economic resources and partly refers to political clout, status is understood as honor and prestige attached to one’s position in society. Occupation is usually thought of as the main determinant of status, but other considerations such as ethnic group, religion, gender, and voluntary associations also have influences. One’s status can be achieved through education, occupation, and marriage.

Weber also developed the idea of status groups, which are hierarchically arrayed on the basis of distinctive lifestyles, consumption patterns, and modes of conduct or action. People in these groups are only supposed to associate with people of like status, and all other people are considered inferiors. Social status and class are combined to form socio-economic status (SES). SES, therefore, determines, power, prestige, and access to resources. It refers to a composite ranking that can be used to describe a person’s overall social position. It refers to prestige, honor, respect, and lifestyle associated with different positions or groups in society (Gerth and Mills, 1958). SES is not only correlated with wealth and income but can also be derived from achieved characteristics such as educational attainment and occupational prestige, and from ascribed characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and family pedigree. Hence, it is a multi-dimensional concept.

In his contribution to conceptualization of socio-economic status, Parsons (1970) sees status as a position in the social structure—a part of the social differentiation in society. Although he associates status with position, the concept carries with it a hierarchical referent as in Weber’s notion of honor and pres-
tige. Status is socially evaluated, and this evaluation is central to Parsons’s contribution to the idea of socioeconomic status. For him, social status is the core notion of social stratification or rank. This differential evaluation in terms of honor and prestige is central to inequality. In social relations with others, status distinctions affect how people interrelate with one another. For Parsons, income and wealth, though important, are secondary to social status or honor.

For this study, socio-economic status is premised on Weber’s conceptualization. SES is a characteristic of economic, social, and physical environments in which individuals live and work, as well as a demographic characteristic. It refers, therefore, to a composite social ranking.

7.2.ii Review of Earlier Studies

Empirical studies in this are non-existent in Nigeria; hence, a few studies from abroad were reviewed in this section. Studies have shown that HIV-related discrimination is pervasive (Anarfi, 1995; The Asia-Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, 2004). APN+ found that 14% of the sample revealed that they were excluded from common household activities such as cooking, sharing food or eating implements, and even sleeping in the same room with others. In addition, women (18%) were more likely than men (11%) to experience discrimination from their families, especially from in-laws. Discrimination is also common in most communities though to a lesser degree in urban areas. Women were twice as likely as men to have been threatened with physical violence or to have been physically assaulted because of their HIV status. One in ten people in the APN+ study was forced to relocate because their HIV status became known to their neighbors or landlords and many had to move residence more than once (in one instance up to nine times). Women are twice as likely to have changed their places of residence due to their HIV status. Many widows with HIV lived in very destitute conditions with no sustainable source of income even for food.

7.3 Theoretical underpinnings

7.3.i Theory of Spoilt Identity

Goffman (1963) advances that anyone who exhibits a gap between what he/she ought to be, “virtual social identity,” and what he/she actually is, “actual social identity” (Ritzer, 1996: 358), has spoilt his/her identity and therefore is vulnerable to discrimination. This socially constructed identification
lays the foundation for discrimination against PLWHA. PLWHA who manifest unconcealed signs of AIDS like extreme wasting (excessive emaciation), skin rashes, diarrhoea, periodic fever, persistent cough, and swelling of lymph nodes, all which Goffman (1963) collectively calls abominations of the body, are perceived to have spilt their identities. This theory was criticized by Foucault (1976) and Bourdieu (1979) for focusing solely on individual attributes rather than social processes, especially relations of power. As a way out, it has been proposed that stigma and discrimination be analyzed within the frameworks of power, dominance, hegemony, and oppression (Parker and Aggleton, 2003).

7.3.ii Power Theory

Foucault (Ritzer, 1996) uses the concept of “power” to explicate discrimination and defines it as a multiplicity of force relations that comes from everywhere and exists in a variety of micro settings. To him, power is linked to knowledge. He observes that through knowledge of sexuality, societies come to exercise more power over sex. He avers that sexuality is a dense transfer point for relations of power and masculinity a powerful “limit” that restricts the subjective experience of male identifying individuals (Foucault, 1978). He goes on to postulate that the construction of homosexuality as the very negation of masculinity, and equating it with an equally marginalized femininity such that gay men are often stereotyped as effeminate, passive, unstable, and ultimately unmanly (Altmann, 1972), leads to homophobia. When AIDS was discovered among the homosexuals in the United States in 1981, it was followed by another epidemic, social discrimination.

7.3.iii Radical Feminism

Radical feminism argues that women are violently oppressed by the system of patriarchy as practised by men and male-dominated organizations (Rich, 1980). Violence can be overt or subtle and exists whenever one group controls in its own interests the life chances, environments, actions, and perceptions of another group. Evidence shows that women experience harsher forms of discrimination. They are perceived as the ‘carriers’ or ‘vectors’ of HIV/AIDS because they are often the first to be diagnosed HIV positive, either through ante-natal screening or the birth of a sick child. They are held responsible for having brought AIDS into the family. As such, they are often subjected to emotional harassment, eviction from their homes, or are physically abused for their HIV status (http://www.aidslaw.ca/maincontent/issues/discrimination).
This study anchors on Radical Feminism and argues female PLWHA experience discrimination because of power relations between men and women and/or because of social inequalities in the society at large.

7.4 Methods of the Study

7.4.i Research Design

This is a cross sectional study that adopted a combination of correlational and comparative research designs. These two research designs were found useful since the study involved the assessment of relationship between socio-economic variables of PLWHA and discrimination against them in two local government areas (LGAs) of Lagos state. Correlational design was used to demonstrate co-variation between the dependent and independent variables through the application of bivariate, Chi square, and multivariate logistic regression analyses. The comparative method was applied to compare data between and within the two LGAs and the PLWHA.

7.4.ii Study Settings

The study was conducted in two local government areas (LGAs) of Lagos State, namely Epe and Lagos Mainland. Epe LGA, a riverine area, located on a slightly elevated land rising between 30 to 60 metres above sea level (FHI, 2001), had a population of 101,464 with 95 localities at the time of the 1991 census (NPC, 1997), which increased to 181,409 by the 2006 census (Federal Government Printer, 2007). It includes a number of isolated villages or settlements predominantly occupied by the Ijebus, a Yoruba sub-ethnic group. The people are predominantly farmers, polygynous, and Muslims. The LGA was chosen because of its high HIV prevalence rate (6.9%) in 1999 (NIMR, 2000) although 2003 estimate was 4.2% (FMOH, 2004). Factors identified as driving the HIV infection include poverty, promiscuity, low economic status of women, early marriages that lead to early separation, polygyny, changing spouses, skin scarification, and fishing (FHI, 2001). The LGA has 17 health facilities (COMPASS, 2005).

On the other hand, Lagos Mainland LGA had 17 localities with a population of 273,079 by the 1991 census (NPC, 1997), which rose to 317,720 as of March 2006 (FGP, 2007). Some parts of the LGA are densely populated (such as Makoko, Ebute Metta, Iwaya, Akoka, Ijora, and Otto), while others are of low density (e.g. Yaba, Jibowu, and Sabo). Lagos Mainland LGA was selected because of her urbanized status and the presence of Nigeria Institute of Med-
ical Research, Yaba, Lagos (one of the popular centers for the National Anti-retroviral Therapy Programme in Nigeria that would assist in accessing the PLWHA). The LGA stands out because of many features, such as the Nigerian Railway headquarters at Iddo, tertiary institutions, military bases and military referral hospitals, motor parks for luxurious buses that harbor long-distance drivers, travellers, students, urchins, area boys, alaye boys, drug users, female sex workers, and youths. Other predisposing activities to the risk of HIV/AIDS include ear, nose, and eyelid piercing, nail cutting, and circumcision with unsterilized instruments. Situated in the LGA are ten health facilities (COMPASS, 2005). Its HIV prevalence rate is not stated but it is estimated to fall within the range in Lagos metropolis, i.e. between 1.7% in Lagos Island LGA and 7.7% in Ikeja LGA, the state capital (FMOH, 2004).

7.4.iii Sample and Sampling Techniques

For the sample size, adequate data on the total number of PLWHA in Lagos state were not available. This informed the purposeful determination of the sample size (100). To facilitate the identification of the PLWHA, the researcher applied to Nigeria Institute of Medical Research (NIMR), Yaba, Lagos, for assistance. NIMR is one of the first centers for the National Antiretroviral Therapy Programme in Nigeria and therefore has a large number of PLWHA who visit it to collect drugs. The request was granted after assessing the research proposal and the instruments by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of NIMR for ethical appropriateness. With the approval letter, the assistance of NIMR staff, the network of PLWHA, NGOs, and other support groups, we were able to reach the PLWHA.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 80 PLWHA: 50 from Lagos Mainland LGA and 30 from Epe LGA (see Table 7.1 below). Twenty of the respondents from Epe LGA were identified in Epe General Hospital (nineteen women and one man). The remaining ten (four men and six women) who lived in Epe LGA at the time of the study were identified at NIMR, Yaba, when they came for treatment. The Medical Director of Epe General Hospital reported that when people tested positive to HIV and were referred to NIMR for confirmatory tests or advised to get back to join others in the support group, they absconded from the hospital. They lost track of them. A method of snowball was also utilised to identify PLWHA. An NGO, Health Matters Incorporation, based in Ebute Metta, assisted in identifying one PLWHA who was resident in Lagos Mainland LGA and who identified about two PLWHA who in turn invited others and so on. Eight of the Lagos Mainland LGA respondents were so identified and interviewed in the researcher’s office. Among the
Table 7.1 Distribution of Total Number of PLWHA by Gender and Place of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Epe</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Lagos Mainland</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

80 PLWHA surveyed, 30 (37.5%) were men while 50 (62.5%) were women (Table 7.1 below). The data show that more women than men acceded to the interviews. It was the intent of this study to investigate equal number of males and females but as a result of the problems stated above, 5 (16.7%) males and 25 (83.3%) females who lived in Epe LGA were investigated while 25 of each sex were studied in Lagos Mainland LGA (Table 7.1).

In addition to the assessment of the protocol by IRB, research ethics were fully observed. The purpose of research was explained to the respondents. Oral consent was obtained. There was no coercion of any kind.

7.5 Research Instruments for Data Collection

In addition to a desk review of secondary data, a validated semi-structured interview schedule and a FGD guide were developed by the researcher. The interview schedule had 92 items and consisted of seven sections. Section 1 consisted of socio-economic characteristics and Section 2 dealt with information about HIV status. Section 3 was on the conception and ethnic perception of HIV/AIDS, while Sections 4–7 interrogated discrimination in different settings: the health sector, workplace, educational sector, and within the family and community. The FGD guide contained key questions corresponding to those in the interview schedules. Only the items that concern questions in the health sector are explained briefly here.

The PLWHA were asked the following questions: whether they had ever been refused or denied treatment because of their HIV status in a public hospital/clinic or a private hospital/clinic; whether they had experienced mandatory HIV tests or HIV tests without knowledge and consent; whether they were treated like any other patient or treated with contempt; if their movement was restricted to certain areas in hospitals; if they were avoided by health workers; whether or not they were isolated from other patients; if health workers used special equipment/instruments to treat them; if they received treatment regu-
larly while on admission; and if they had ever been charged higher than other patients at a health facility because of HIV/AIDS status. In all the questions, response options were “Yes” and “No.”

7.6 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected between September 2005 and April 2006 with the help of eleven research assistants (RAs) who were trained in the art of interviewing. Due to the heterogeneous nature of Lagos, efforts were made to match linguistic and cultural diversity of the state with those of the RAs. The ability to speak and understand one of the three major Nigerian languages was a criterion for participating in the study. There were four teams consisting of both a Yoruba and an Igbo in Lagos Mainland LGA. One team in Lagos Mainland had three RAs (two Yorubas and one Igbo). Pidgin English was used in a situation where a respondent could not speak any of the languages. In Epe, a team of two Yoruba RAs conducted the interviews because Epe is predominantly inhabited by the Yorubas.

The researcher supervised the teams and also conducted some interviews.

Of the four proposed sessions of FGDS, three were achieved (two in Lagos Mainland LGA and one in Epe LGA). This is attributed to the absence of male PLWHA in Epe LGA. Each FGDS was homogeneous in terms of sex except in Epe where only one male PLWHA was identified. He joined the female PLWHA during the FGDS and was later interviewed separately. The main objective of ensuring homogeneity along gender lines was to prevent inhibitions that could affect the quality of discussions or lead to domination of one gender, which could compromise a clear picture of the different views of men and women about social discrimination. Six people participated in each FGDS session. Coordination of each session was assisted by two RAs who served as note takers. The discussions were also tape recorded with the knowledge and full consent of the participants. In both LGAs, the FGDS were conducted in English language. The discussions were later transcribed. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) versions 11 and 13. Analyses were run for qualitative, quantitative, and comparative data. Bivariate and Chi square analyses were also employed.

7.7 Fieldwork Challenges

Identifying PLWHA in Epe was problematic. There was not a non-govern-mental organization (NGO) based in Epe that could facilitate the identification
of the PLWHA. Apart from those identified by the Epe General Hospital, no one was willing to identify with the virus in the community or give any useful information about any PLWHA. Therefore, only 30 PLWHA respondents were studied as opposed to 50.

### 7.8 Results of the Study

#### 7.8.i Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Of the 78 people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) who obliged to provide their ages, more than two-fifths were found in the age group 30–39 years and the mean age was 36.26 years (Table 7.2 below). Among the females, 47.9% of the respondents were in the age 30–39 years category. About 36.78% of the male respondents were similarly classified. One half of the respondents were above 40 years old. The mean ages were 34.2 years for the females and 39.5 years for males. There is a statistically significant difference between the two sexes on the basis of age. The table shows that one-third (32.5%) of the respondents were never married at the time of the study. About 33.3% of the males and 32.0% of the female respondents constitute this percentage. About 56.7% of the male respondents and over 30.0% of females were married amounting to two-fifths of the total sample.

A significant proportion (27.5%) of the PLWHA was divorced, separated, or widowed. There was a higher percentage of the divorced, separated, and widowed PLWHA among women (38.0%) than men (10.0%). The difference between men and women is statistically significant. Around 43.8% of the PLWHA had secondary education while 36.3% had post secondary education and 20% had no formal education or stopped at the primary level. This indicates that the majority of the respondents were well educated. There is no significant difference between men and women. On employment status, Table 7.2 also shows that 34 of the total respondents, representing 42.4%, were unemployed. About 48.0% of women and 33.3% of men make up this group. About 57.6% of the respondents were employed. A greater proportion, 41.3% of the employed, was self-employed while those in the paid employment were less (16.3%). Disaggregating by sex shows that 46.7% of men were self-employed while 38.0% of women were so classified. The remaining one-fifth of the men and more than one-tenth of the women were in paid employment. The difference between the two on the basis of employment status is not statistically significant.
Table 7.2 Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents by Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Characteristics</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40+</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2 = 6.604, p &lt; 0.05$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>39.5yrs</td>
<td>34.2yrs</td>
<td>36.26yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/separated/widowed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2 = 8.689, p &lt; 0.05$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No education/primary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2 = 0.004, p &gt; 0.05$</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paid employment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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<td>Total</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2 = 1.706, p &gt; 0.05$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No income</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $₦10,000$</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$₦10,001$–$₦20,000$</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$₦20,001+$</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2 = 2.275, p &gt; 0.05$</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since over two-fifths of the PLWHA respondents were not working, a corresponding proportion did not also receive income as indicated in the table above. Moreover, a significant proportion (27.5%) earned less than $₦10,000$ a month. The average income of the PLWHA was $₦9,198.55$. This is just above the national minimum wage of $₦7,500$. Only 10.1% received between $₦10,001$
and ₦20,000 per month and 11.3% received ₦20,001 and above monthly. Most of the respondents therefore belong to the lower income group. About eleven of the employed did not divulge their incomes. Disaggregating the respondents into sexes shows that 54.5% of female respondents compared to 40.0% of the male respondents earned no income. There is no statistically significant difference between the men and women on the basis of income.

7.8.ii Forms of HIV-Related Discrimination Experienced by PLWHA in the Health Facilities

Previous studies have shown that social discrimination by health workers is pervasive in the health sector (Adebajo et al., 2003; Iwuagwu et al., 2001 and 2003; Reis et al., 2005), but experiences of PLWHA have not been empirically examined. The section highlights the diverse forms of discrimination experienced by PLWHA in the health facilities. A substantial proportion (21.5%) in Table 7.3 below was subjected to mandatory tests by health workers at one time or the other. This finding validates previous study by Iwuagwu et al (2003). About 32.0% of women and only about 3.4% of men suffered this form of discrimination. This difference is statistically significant. One-quarter of the PLWHA were not treated just like any other patient. Among these were 36.7% of the female respondents compared to 6.7% of male PLWHA. The difference between men and women in this respect was statistically significant. Out of the 80 PLWHA, 22.8% expressed dissatisfaction with health workers' attitudes and behaviors towards them. They reported that health workers restricted their movement to certain areas within the hospital premises. The ratio of men to women who had this experience was 1:3 and this is also statistically significant. Furthermore, 17.7% of the total respondents were avoided by health workers. Approximately 24.5% of the female respondents compared to 6.7% of male respondents had been shunned by health workers (Table 7.3 below). Therefore, there is an obvious statistically significant difference between men and women.

A male FGD participant narrated how he reported sick in his company's clinic and was referred to another hospital, which requested for various clinical tests, including an HIV test. He revealed that a nurse who used to be friendly with him tried to avoid him when she learnt that he was HIV positive. He succinctly narrated his ordeal:

As for me, I fainted when I was diagnosed HIV positive in 2001. I wasn't even sick. I just had itches and was referred to the clinic by my
Table 7.3 Forms of HIV-Related Discrimination by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIV-Related Discrimination</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever been mandated to have HIV tests</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>28</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>X² = 8.860, p &lt; 0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treated like any other patients</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>93.3</td>
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<td>74.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>79</td>
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<td>X² = 8.898, p &lt; 0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Movement ever been restricted?</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isolated from other patients?</td>
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<tr>
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<td>13</td>
<td>26.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>28</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>73.5</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>X² = 4.773, p &lt; 0.05</td>
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<td>Denied admission into public health facility?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>89.6</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>90.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td></td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>77</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

company’s doctor. It reoccurred after treatment and the doctor told me to go for tests including HIV/AIDS test. I went for the tests and I saw negative-negative until I got to the bottom of the paper where they wrote positive for HIV. I just fainted. I didn’t know how I got myself back. When I went back to the clinic to get my drugs, the nurse that used to be friendly with me recoiled from me on seeing the test result.
Besides reporting the negative attitude of the nurse, his evidence also revealed the shock people usually experienced when they received the results of HIV tests without counseling. Gerbert et al. (1991) and Weinberger et al. (1992) found that fears of contagion and of death have clear negative effects on health care providers’ attitudes towards HIV-positive patients and subsequently their treatment. Health care providers also fear discrimination themselves because of their work with HIV-positive patients (Durham, 1994). Apart from avoidance, health workers also physically isolated 19.0% of PLWHA respondents from other patients. This proportion represents 26.5% and 6.7% of women and men respectively. The difference between the two LGAs is statistically significant.

Seven PLWHA had been denied admission into public health facilities on the grounds of their HIV status before the time of the study. Out of these, 10.4% were women while 6.9% were men. Although the results show that more women than men were denied admission, the difference was not statistically significant. These findings validate the findings of Reis et al. (2005), which revealed that 10% of the health worker refused PLWHA admission into their hospitals. They are also corroborated by the findings of the FGDs. FGD participants from the two LGAs copiously reported direct and indirect experiences of discrimination from health workers. For example, a female FGD participant in Lagos Mainland LGA recalled her experience while admitted:

I had such an experience. Once the nurses see your file they know what’s going on. I remember they wanted to infuse a drip into me and they couldn’t find my vein in my arm easily so they put it in my foot and because of it I could not move and I wanted to urinate and I kept calling the nurses they did not answer me and if I tried to move the leg the fluid would go into the tissue and blood would start flowing into the drip. When I called them they didn’t answer me. One of them told me: “I don’t have time for all this rubbish.” Even when they wanted to give me drugs they would just enter and drop them without coming near me. It was my friend that came and went to meet them and told them that I was paying money so they had no choice but to take care of me.

This PLWHA was isolated, neglected, ridiculed, and did not receive her drugs as needed. This is a manifestation of unequal power, dominance, and oppression. Another female FGD participant gave an account of how she averted going to a public hospital in order to avoid discrimination and went to a private hospital to deliver her baby; yet she still suffered discrimination there. She reported that when she called for help the nurses ignored her. They were attending to other ‘non PLWHA’ patients. She said:
I decided to go to a Private hospital because I heard that at general hospital the nurses would be running away from you. Even in the private hospital the nurses collected N500 from me so that they could buy long gloves that would reach their shoulders (she demonstrated). They didn’t take care at all; they collected the money while I was on the wheel chair to their theatre. The nurses don’t take care at all. Some people that know about it would render help but the ignorant ones run away from you even amongst the nurses. Because of this nonsense I got a private room at the hospital. There was a nurse, I was in serious pain but this lady would not come to my room to help even when I called. She didn’t answer me meanwhile she answered another patient so you can imagine the way people behaved and the way I felt.

These two instances show the magnitude and the forms of social exclusion PLWHA go through in healthcare centers. They were isolated, neglected, ridiculed, and seldom received their drugs as needed. The findings also validate the findings of Iwuagwu et al. (2003).

All together, the findings reveal denial of treatment, mandatory HIV testing, segregation, isolation, and ridicule. From all indications, women are more vulnerable to HIV-related discrimination than men.

7.8.iii Association between Socio-Economic Status of PLWHA and Discrimination in the Health Sector

Having assessed the forms of discrimination experienced by PLWHA in health centers, the study further interrogated the categories of male and female PLWHA who suffered discrimination. Chi-square analysis was used to examine whether there was a significant association between the socio-economic characteristics of the PLWHA and discrimination. The results are presented in percentages in Tables 7.4 and 7.5 for men and women respectively. A critical examination of Table 7.4 below indicates that only one fifth of the men in Epe LGA were not treated just like any other patients. One-quarter of male PLWHA aged 18–29 were restricted and denied admission into public hospitals respectively. About 23.1% of male PLWHA with secondary education had their movements restricted to certain areas in the hospital premises. In addition, unemployed and low income men were more likely to be discriminated against by health workers (Table 7.4). All these findings were not statistically significant.
### Table 7.4 Distribution of Socio-Economic Status of Male PLWHA by Forms of Discrimination in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Status of PLWHA</th>
<th>Mandated to have HIV tests</th>
<th>Treated like any other patient?</th>
<th>Your movement restricted?</th>
<th>Avoided by health workers?</th>
<th>Isolated from other patients?</th>
<th>Denied admission into public hospitals?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes %</td>
<td>No %</td>
<td>Yes %</td>
<td>Yes %</td>
<td>Yes %</td>
<td>Yes %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epe (rural)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos Mainland (urban)</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–29</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40+</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/separated/widowed</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal education/primary education</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No income</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than ₦10,000</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>₦10,001–₦20,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>₦20,001 and above</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid employment</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.4 below shows that place of residence of female PLWHA has a significant association with having been mandated to have HIV test and not being treated as other patients as three in five of the female respondents from Epe LGA suffered the two forms of discrimination respectively. Women living with HIV who were aged 30–39 years old were most vulnerable to discrimination (Table 7.5). With respect to marital status, divorced, separated, and widowed female
Table 7.5 Distribution of Socio-Economic Status of Female PLWHA by Forms of Discrimination in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Status of PLWHA</th>
<th>Mandated to have HIV tests</th>
<th>Treated like any other patient?</th>
<th>Your movement restricted?</th>
<th>Avoided by health workers?</th>
<th>Isolated from other patients?</th>
<th>Denied admission into public hospitals?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes %</td>
<td>No %</td>
<td>Yes %</td>
<td>Yes %</td>
<td>Yes %</td>
<td>Yes %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Residence</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epe (rural)</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos Mainland (urban)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>$X^2 = 18.02; p &lt; 0.001$</td>
<td>$X^2 = 11.89; p &lt; 0.001$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–29</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40+</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>18.8</td>
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<td>26.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>26.7</td>
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<td>33.3</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/separated/widowed</td>
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<td>47.4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal education/primary</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Employment Status</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid employment</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No income</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than ₦10,000</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>₦10,001–₦20,000</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>₦20,001 and above</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

respondents experienced mandatory HIV tests and unfair treatment from health workers while married ones suffered movement restriction, avoidance, and isolation from other patients.
On the educational level, women with a low level of education were mostly affected by mandatory HIV tests and unjust treatment while those with tertiary education experienced movement restriction and those with secondary education segregation and isolation. This implies that both less educated and highly educated PLWHA suffer from discrimination. Female PLWHA who earned less than ₦10,000 and those in paid employment suffered most of the forms of discrimination in the healthcare facilities.

In summary, this section reveals that the socio-economic status of men does not have a statistically significant influence on their vulnerability to discrimination, whereas women's socio-economic status, particularly those in rural areas, had a statistically significant correlation with discrimination. In spite of a lack of statistically significant correlation with discrimination, the study found that rural men in Epe LGA, those aged 18–29, those with secondary education, and unemployed and low income men suffered more discrimination than others. For the women, those who lived in rural areas; aged 30–39 years old; divorced, separated, and widowed female PLWA; those who earned less than ₦10,000; and those in paid employment experienced different forms of discrimination in the health sector. Women, irrespective of their educational levels, were predisposed to discrimination.

7.9 Discussion of the Findings

In many developing countries, including Nigeria, women are economically, culturally, and socially disadvantaged and lack equal access to treatment, financial support, and education. Being outside the structures of power and decision-making, they are denied the opportunity to participate equally within the community and are subject to punitive laws, norms, and practices exercising control over their bodies and sexual relations. In a number of societies, women and men are not dealt with in the same way when they are infected by HIV/AIDS. Men are more likely to be accepted by family and community. Women are erroneously perceived as the main transmitters of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), even when they have been infected by their husbands in what for them have been monogamous relationships. This double standard exacts a terrible toll on women as mothers, daughters, care-givers, and as people living with HIV/AIDS. Together with traditional beliefs about sex, blood, and other kinds of disease transmission, these perceptions provide a fertile basis for the further discrimination of women within the context of HIV/AIDS, as has been demonstrated in the section above.

In the following sections, the major findings and their implications will be discussed.
7.9.i Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Among the 80 PLWHA, 30 were men and 50 women. Unlike Lagos Mainland LGA, Epe LGA had more female PLWHA than men. The majority of the total PLWHA were aged between 30–39 years (43.6%). The mean age was 36.26 years. The mean ages of the two sexes show that women were younger than the men. People aged 15–29 years have been shown to have the highest HIV prevalence rate in previous studies (NIMR, 2000; FMOH, 2006). On the contrary, this study found that this age group was the least investigated. This could be attributed to the minimum age (18 years) set for the respondents in this study, which excluded those aged 15 to 17 years. It could also be that those aged 18–20 years declined to participate in the study; or worse still, did not visit the treatment centers during the study period. It could also be that the enlightenment campaigns against HIV/AIDS of the past years are yielding fruits. It is possible that the youths are abstaining from sexual intercourse or effectively using condoms. This could explain the predominance of older respondents. This finding reflects that HIV/AIDS infects the most active and productive age groups and confirms the findings of the 1999 and 2001 Sentinel Surveys (NIMR, 2000a; NASCP, 2002).

Out of the 80 PLWHA, two fifths were married, one third were single, and a little over one quarter were divorced, separated, or widowed. There was a higher proportion of divorced, separated, and widowed persons among the women. This could be attributed to their HIV status, which had predisposed them to divorce, separation, or widowhood (if their spouses were also afflicted and had died of AIDS). The PLWHA were fairly well-educated, as majority of them had a secondary and post secondary education representing 43.8% and 36.3% of the total respondents respectively. The findings confirm that HIV/AIDS affects both educated and uneducated persons. The level of education of the PLWHA had a similar pattern among men and women.

More than one half of the PLWHA were employed (41.3% self employed and 16.3% in paid employment) while 42.4% were unemployed. The percentage of unemployed PLWHA was higher among women than men, while a greater proportion of men were self-employed either because of the level of unemployment in the general population (37.9%) or as a result of termination of employment on grounds of being HIV+. It was revealed in the study that 47.4% of the PLWHA whose status was disclosed to their organizations had stopped work (80.0% stopped work voluntarily because of self-imposed discrimination, discrimination by colleagues, and ill health, while 20.0% were dismissed because of their HIV status). PLWHA need employment to earn in-
come in order to cope with the financial exigencies of their condition. A higher proportion of gainfully employed respondents were men.

Most of the PLWHA were in the low income class as majority of them were unemployed. More female respondents than men belonged to this economic group. This could be attributed to a loss of livelihood on the grounds of HIV status. It could also be due to low socio-economic status of women. In addition, the study shows that 42.4% of the 80 PLWHA were not engaged in any job and therefore earned no income. Hence, most of them would not be economically empowered to cope with the vicissitudes of HIV infection. HIV/AIDS tends to impoverish those living with it due to its protracted nature and its high management cost. Poverty increases vulnerability to HIV infection and with what is known about the burden in terms of financial costs of living with HIV/AIDS, the findings demonstrate that HIV/AIDS increases the poverty situation in the country in general and of the individuals in particular.

7.9.ii Forms of Discrimination Experienced by PLWHA in the Health Sector

The study shows that the forms of social discrimination reported by the PLWHA were forced HIV testing (21.5%), restriction on movement of PLWHA (22.8%), isolation from other patients (19.0%), and professional negligence by the health workers. Other PLWHA (25.3%) were not treated just like any other patients, 17.7% were avoided by health workers and 9.1% were denied admission into public hospitals. All these forms of discrimination, except denial of admission into public hospitals, demonstrate that there were statistically significant differences between men’s and women’s experiences. Women were more vulnerable in all except one category. The findings are consistent with the findings of earlier studies. Women may be blamed for promiscuity because, culturally, gender norms frown at female promiscuity while encouraging men to engage in sexual adventures. The findings also show that some health workers are not knowledgeable about HIV infection. HIV infection is not transmitted by casual or direct contact and therefore does not warrant isolation except if the PLWHA also suffers from tuberculosis (TB). All these expose the high level of discrimination against PLWHA in the health sector.

7.9.iii Socio-Economic Status of PLWHA and Discrimination in the Health Sector

To know exactly what categories of females suffered from these types of discrimination, they were analyzed by socio-economic characteristics using Chi-
square analysis. Such characteristics included place of residence, age, marital status, education, employment status, and income.

With regards to place of residence, rural female PLWHA were more likely to experience discrimination in the health sector than urban female PLWHA. The results from the analysis of the female PLWHA show a very high significant association between place of residence and discrimination. Female PLWHA in rural Epe LGA are more vulnerable to discrimination than those in urban Lagos Mainland LGA.

Female PLWHA aged 30–39 years old were found to be more vulnerable to discrimination than others. These were probably married PLWHA as the study shows that married, divorced, separated, and widowed PLWHA are more susceptible to discrimination. Widows are generally more vulnerable than other women with other categories of marital status. Widows are also more susceptible to being accused of infecting their spouses or being responsible for the death of their husbands in whatever way caused. On the other hand, widowhood for men does not bear such deleterious consequences. Men are not required to acquit themselves of guilt when their wives die. Divorced or separated people, particularly women, are also vulnerable. They are a marginalized group in the society. However, discrimination against widowed, separated, or divorced PLWHA in this study may be attributed to a misperception of HIV/AIDS. The study found that the HIV infection was equated with sex and immorality, so these PLWHA might have been assumed to have contracted HIV/AIDS by promiscuous and immoral behaviors, such as indulging in extra-marital sex. For example, the belief by some non-infected respondents that only promiscuous people contract HIV/AIDS reinforces negative beliefs supportive of discrimination.

The study indicates that both the less educated and highly educated female PLWHA suffered from discrimination. This implies that educational level of the PLWHA does not influence their vulnerability to discrimination. Their educational level does not insulate them from discrimination. This may be premised on the myths and stereotypes of HIV/AIDS that made people perceive PLWHA as untouchables.

The results show that most female PLWHA who suffered different types of discrimination in health centers were in paid employment. This can be attributed to the fact that workers are more likely than others to be visiting health facilities frequently; hence they are more predisposed to discrimination than others.

The study further reveals that the female PLWHA who earned no income and those who received less than ₦10,000 per month were very vulnerable to discrimination in the health sector. Low income PLWHA, therefore, experienced
discrimination in the health care facilities more than the high income group. The study had earlier observed that more women than men were in low economic group. This is not surprising as women’s low socio-economic status affects them. They are the ones who have low paid jobs. Secondly, wealthier people have the capacity to better manage both the flow of information relating to affected family members and the care of affected persons—at least until AIDS-related sickness begins to impose hard financial burdens upon individuals and the household.

7.10 Conclusion and Recommendations

Our hypothesis, which states that women are more vulnerable to discrimination in the health facilities than men, was confirmed. The study found that the categories of women who suffer discrimination are the rural PLWHA; those aged 30–39 years; married, divorced, separated, and widowed PLWHA; those in paid employment; and low income PLWHA. The following are therefore recommended:

- The identification of the different forms of discrimination should inform the policy decisions on issues related to discrimination within the healthcare facilities. This information should help in designing programs that will elicit support for those caring for the PLWHA and for the health workers to better handle the PLWHA.
- This should be followed by a government’s anti-discrimination policy supported by a law that will ensure the protection of the rights of PLWHA. The right not to be subjected to discrimination is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Government of Nigeria and many international legal instruments. It is also contained in the 2003 HIV policy. Government should develop anti-discrimination legislation based on HIV status and monitor its implementation to protect PLWHA. It should also be able to challenge breaches to anti-discrimination legislation if and when they occur, with the help of supportive human rights lawyers.
- Women are found to be more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS-related discrimination than men. The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in July 2001 reiterated that discrimination against PLWHA, especially women, must be addressed to curb the spread of the HIV pandemic in the world. Addressing the gendered dimensions of discrimination against PLWHA requires concerted efforts to combat endemic gender inequalities using the provisions of Convention on Elimination of All
Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Constitution. Gender should be mainstreamed in all the policies and programs concerning HIV/AIDS.

• Health care providers should be educated, retrained, and re-orientated adequately so that they will not be reluctant to treat PLWHA. They should be adequately equipped and encouraged to observe the international standards in handling PLWHA and in protecting themselves without discriminating against the HIV/AIDS patients.
• The Government should also ensure that health workers are protected through the provision of adequate materials to carry out their duties without fear of contagion.

References


Chapter Eight

Impact of Rural Women’s Associations on Women’s Political Empowerment in Nigeria: A Study of Akwa Ibom State

Idongesit Eshiet

8.0 Introduction

Prior to colonialism, women in some communities that now constitute modern day Nigeria, exerted tremendous influence in the socio-political and economic spheres of their communities. Their ‘voice’ constituted an important political instrument that could not be ignored because they were actively involved in the decision-making and administration of their communities. This agency was extended to colonial Nigeria, as women consistently challenged and resisted the colonial authorities as typified by the Aba and Egba women’s protests of 1929 and 1947 respectively (Mba, 1982). However, in post-colonial Nigeria, women’s agency has been curtailed. Women’s voice no longer constitutes an important political tool. A part explanation for this could be traced to the colonial’s government ‘Victorian ideology,’ which excluded women from the public sphere. This led to the gradual erosion of women’s authority. As Gordon (1996, cited in Turcotte, 2002) has rightly observed, although African forms of patriarchy existed, where men formally controlled most of the land tenure systems and political institutions, women held considerable political, economic, and social influence and status in the society. However, colonialism led to the imposition of European forms of patriarchy that sought to silence women from decision-making within the community. Hence, women
were excluded from the public sphere in the colonial administration and at independence post-colonial states did not significantly reconstitute the inherited colonial patriarchal structures that limited women’s participation in the public sphere.

Thus, women still exist in an unequal gender order in most communities in Nigeria. Evidences of discrimination against women such as a gender based division of labor, unequal access to power and resources, and discrimination in rights and entitlements still abound (FMWA, 2006). For example, women still constitute the majority of the poor and the illiterate in both urban and rural areas (NPC, 2004); and although women’s share of seats in parliament has inched up in recent times, women still hold only three percent representation in national government (Afolabi-Akiyode and Arogundade, 2003).

### 8.1 Statement of Problem

The unequal status, freedoms, and opportunities accorded to women and girls exist to a greater or lesser degree in every society and nation of the world (UNFPA, 2008). However, in recent times, efforts have been made by both national and international bodies to narrow the gender gap; hence, empowerment of women has become a front burner issue (WEF, 2005; 2007). In fact, it has been realized that there can be no true and sustainable development without the active participation of women. Hence, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has as its third objective the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (UN, 2005).

Similarly, in Nigeria, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. Thus, in 1989, the National Commission for Women was established (and this later transformed into the Ministry of Women Affairs in 1996) to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The Ministry created a Gender Policy in 2006, which highlights the rights and privileges of women within the Nigerian State (FMWA, 2006). Nigeria has equally ratified the various international conventions such as the Convention for the Elimination of Harmful Practices Against Women (CEDAW) and other human rights’ instruments committed to secure equal rights for women. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) document (2004) also recognizes the need to integrate women in the development process by enhancing their capacity to participate in the economic, social, political, and cultural life of the country through measures such as mainstreaming women’s concerns and perspectives in all
policies and programs, as well as promoting women’s access to microfinance and other poverty alleviation strategies.

Despite these lofty actions, however, women in Nigeria continue to face enormous obstacles. The growing recognition of their contributions in recent times has not translated into significantly improved access to resources or increased decision-making powers. Neither has the dynamism that women display in the economic, cultural, and social lives of their communities, through their associations and informal networks, been channeled into creating new models of participation and leadership for women. Evidences of discrimination against women, such as unequal access to power and resources, as well as discrimination in rights and entitlements still abound (FMWA, 2006). According to the 2007 Global Gender Gap Report, ranking 128 countries, Nigeria’s poor performances on educational attainment (118th), political empowerment (106th), economic participation (72th), and health (100th) reveal a grim outlook for women in the nation, which is the most populous in the sub-Saharan region (WEF, 2007).

To overcome the obstacles militating against women’s empowerment, development thinkers have encouraged women to organize themselves into groups. Africans have always existed in groups. In fact, one of the tools used by women to exercise their political agency during pre-colonial and earlier colonial times was the vehicle of association, especially, amongst the non-centralised communities. Groups, it is believed, provide women with a forum to meet, analyze, inquire into, and understand their socio-economic and political conditions. It also serves as an instrument for pooling efforts and resources in support of common goals and collective action. Thus, by providing women with avenues to initiate and carry out independent actions that can change or improve their condition, groups serve as channels of empowerment for women (ECA, 1990a; ILO, 2000).

In Nigeria, women’s associations abound and are highly visible, both in the urban and rural areas. However, despite this visibility, women are still discriminated against and excluded from mainstream decision-making in the political arena. This study therefore aims at investigating the impact of these associations on women’s political empowerment in Nigeria using Akwa Ibom State as an area of study.

8.2 Literature Review:

The Concept of Empowerment

The concept of the empowerment of women emerged as the outcome of important critiques and debates generated by the women’s movement during
the 1980s, when feminists, particularly in the then ‘third world’ (now ‘global south’), became discontent with the then largely apolitical and economistic models of development interventions (Batliwala, 2007). According to Batliwala (1994), empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes control over resources (physical, human, and intellectual) and over ideology (beliefs, values, and attitudes). It means not only greater extrinsic control, but also a growing intrinsic capability, greater self confidence, and an inner transmission of a person’s consciousness that enables her/him to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology.

Empowerment involves the transformation of power relations between men and women at four distinct levels—the household/family, the community, the market, and the state. Such transformation, viewed in different contexts of power, includes access to and control over material and other resources (economic, social, legal, and institutional) as well as a possible and measurable change in self perception and confidence (England, 2000). Thus, empowerment is much more than simply facilitating an increase in women’s participation. It is a process that involves changing consciousness, identifying areas needing change, developing strategies and action to be taken, and monitoring these actions and their outcomes. It includes processes that lead women to perceive themselves as having rights and entitlements and the ability to voice their concerns on issues (Hannan, 2003).

Power lies at the heart of the empowerment approach. Achieving empowerment is intimately linked to addressing the causes of disempowerment and disadvantage caused by the way in which power relations shape choices, opportunities, and wellbeing (Luttrell et al., 2007). However, feminists have argued that the notion of power in the empowerment approach is not power in its singular form, as in one dominant power over people and resources, but rather power from a pluralistic perspective. Borrowing from Foucault’s model of power, which recognizes the existence of multiple power relations or “powers,” scholars, such as Rowland (1997) and the Commission on Women and Development (2007), have identified the various dimensions of power relations. In fact, arguing from this vein, the Commission on Women and Development (2007) acknowledges that while male domination expresses men’s power over women, women also exert power over men, although such power is oftentimes indirect and invisible.

Both scholars identify the four types of power relations involved in human interactions as follows (Rowland, 1997; Commission on Women and Development, 2007). “Power over” involves a mutually exclusive relationship of domination or subordination. It assumes that power exists only in lim-
imited quantity. This power is exerted over someone or, less negatively, allows “someone to be guided.” It triggers either passive or active resistance. “Power to” includes the ability to make decisions, have authority, and find solutions to problems, and can be creative and enabling. The notion therefore refers to intellectual abilities (knowledge and know-how) as well as economic means, that is the ability to access and control means of production and the benefits accruing from such. “Power with” has to do with social or political power, which highlights the notion of common purpose or understanding, as well as the ability to come together to negotiate and defend a common goal (individual and collective rights). Collectively, people feel they have power when they can get together and unite in search of a common objective, or when they share the same vision. Thus “power with” stresses the way in which gaining power actually strengthens the power of others rather than diminishing it, as occurs with “power over” and finally “power within.” This notion of power refers to self-awareness, self-esteem, identity, and assertiveness (knowing how to be). It refers to how individuals, through self-analysis and internal power, can influence their lives and make changes. Thus, the process of acquiring such power must start with the individual and requires a change in her/his own perceptions about her/his own rights, capacities, and potential.

On the other hand, Gaventa (2003), in his own analysis, views power from the perspective of a continuum. Using a power cube as the basis of his analysis, he demonstrates how power is used by the powerful across three continuums, thus illustrating a dynamic understanding of how power operates and how different interests can be marginalized in the process. The three continuums in which power is used by the powerful as identified by Gaventa are as follows. “Space” refers to the different arenas in which decision-making takes place and power operates, as well as how these spaces are created. Gaventa distinguishes between three types of space as follows: first, “Provided” or “Closed” spaces, which are spaces controlled by an elite group. These may exist within many government systems, international finance institutions, or institutions such as the World Trade Organization. Many civil society efforts focus on opening up such spaces, through greater public involvement, transparency, or accountability. Second, “Invited” spaces emerge as a result of external pressure, or in an attempt to increase legitimacy. Thus, some policymakers may create invited spaces for outsiders to share their opinions. This may offer some possibility for influence, but it is unlikely that these spaces will create real opportunities for long-term change. In extreme cases, it may act to legitimize the status quo or perpetuate the subordination of those who are delegated with ‘power.’ Thirdly, “Claimed” spaces provide the less powerful with a chance to
develop their agendas and create solidarity without control from power-holders.

The second continuum of power identified by Gaventa is “Place,” which refers to the levels and places of engagement of power. The Power Cube emphasizes the importance of understanding the interaction between “levels of power” and the “places of engagement,” and in particular distinguishes between the international, national, and local levels or ‘places.’ By these distinctions, the Power Cube helps to broaden our understanding of how global forces shape livelihoods and how they can be both enhancing and marginalizing of livelihoods, depending on the circumstances. Understanding this perspective is important, as some approaches to empowerment lay a heavy emphasis on only the local. For example, in recent times, globalization has led to increased opportunities for some marginalized groups, such as increased opportunities to engage in markets. However, shifts in trade have led not only to opportunity but also to the feminization of some labor sectors, which have also resulted in additional work burdens for women (Parpart et al., 2002).

The third continuum identified by Gaventa is power itself, which refers to the degree of “visibility” of power. He distinguished this as follows. “Visible Power” refers to the conventional understanding of power. Such power is often negotiated through formal rules and structures, institutions, and procedures. In this realm of power, strategies for empowerment focus on policies, the legislature and the courts, and tools such as lobbying, media, and litigation. The second type is the “Hidden Power,” which focuses on the actual controls over decision-making, and the way certain powerful people and institutions maintain their influence in the process and often exclude and devalue concerns and agendas of the less powerful. Strategies for empowerment under this realm of power might include leadership development, movement building, and the development of organizational strength and voice. Finally, “Invisible (internalized) Power” relates to how individuals think of their place in society and explains why some do not question the existing power relations. This is because the main effect of oppression and disempowerment is that they usually prevent people from even considering that there can be an alternative to their situation. For example, many women who are abused for holding certain opinions sooner than later start to suppress such opinions. The end result of this is that, as women internalize cultural subordination, their own perceptions become blurred, and so change can only occur through the help of some external influence. The strategies for empowerment within this realm are to focus on strengthening confidence and increasing a sense of rights.

Thus, empowerment can be described as the process to acquire ‘power’ both individually and collectively. It designates the ability to act independently and
the means required to take such an action as well as the process that enables the action to be taken. Thus, empowerment involves a dynamic two-pronged construction of identity, both at the individual and collective level, which necessitates shifts in political, social, and economic power between and across both individuals and social groups (Luttrell et al., 2007).

However, while the empowerment of women focuses on the need to increase women’s access to power, there is a nuanced definition of power. Women’s acquisition of power through empowerment is seen less in terms of domination over others. Women’s power should not reproduce social inequalities or restrict the rights of others (Kabeer, 2001), or, simply put, it does not involve the replacement of the dominance of men over women with that of women over men, but rather entails facilitating the increase of choice, voice, control, and autonomy of women. In fact, Batiwala (1995) aptly puts it that just as women can be empowered without disempowering men, men could also be freed from the image of being an ‘oppressor’. This is what women having more power is all about. Therefore, the processes of women’s empowerment tend to identify power in terms of the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength, as well as gain and use power in alternative, constructive ways. The next section of the review, therefore, assesses the extent to which rural women’s associations utilize power to increase their self-reliance, internal strength, and voice.

8.3 Rural Women’s Associations and Political Empowerment

Studies have shown that social attitudes towards women can and do change and that the most important catalysts for this change are women themselves. Through social groups and networks, both formal and informal, women can challenge and defy discriminatory attitudes against them and these can have a dramatic impact on their communities. By publicly denouncing discrimination and motivating other women to claim their social, economic, and political rights, women’s groups can set in motion a process of broad social change that promotes the rights of women. In other words, by challenging the status quo, women’s associations can serve as powerful agents of social change.

In some communities in pre-colonial Africa, the strength of women’s collective action through associations was so powerful that the consequences of any violation of women’s rights were agonisingly severe, resulting in a serious disruption of the social order within the community. In fact, in the face of any violation of women’s rights, collective sanctionary measures such as ‘sitting
on’ and nakedness (these took various forms such as besieging the compound of an ‘offending’ male, holding him ‘hostage,’ singing scurrilous songs that taunt his manhood, destroying his prized possessions, threatening their nakedness on him, roughing him up, or physically sitting on him with clothed or unclothed buttocks); singing of satirical songs and dance; boycotting the performance of domestic chores; denying spouses their conjugal (sexual) rights; and moving en masse out of their marital villages to their natal homes; among others, could be utilized to enforce their demands (Nzegwu, 1995; Turcotte, 2002). Women in colonial times successfully used these tactics to prevent women from paying taxes to the colonial government and to dethrone their local (rulers) collaborators (Mba, 1982; Noah, 1985; Nzegwu, 1995; Turcotte, 2002).

In recent times, studies have similarly shown the impact of women’s groups in challenging the status quo of male domination in some communities. In Bangladesh, BRAC, a non-governmental organization providing credit and employment opportunities for women, have helped to strengthen women’s bargaining power in their households and communities. These invariably have enabled women through collective action to successfully persuade community elders to refrain from criticizing and ridiculing women who work outside the home. Thus, women who wish to work outside the home are empowered to do so through this social sanctioning of women’s work (UNICEF, 2007). Similarly, in Mozambique, a campaign against child marriage by several local women’s groups contributed to the passage of a new family law in 2004 that raised the legal age of marriage without parental consent from 16 years to 18 years, and with parental consent from 14 years to 16 years (UNICEF, 2007). Similarly, Stein (1997) reported how a women’s group in the Andhra Pradesh locality in India, being tired of abuse from drunken husbands and loss of much of their meagre household income, organized to close down all the liquor shops in the locality through raiding, hijacking of delivery trucks, burning down the shops, and humiliating shop owners and drunken men. In addition, in the Bankura district of India, women’s associations fought and secured rights to lands for productive purposes, and this enhanced their financial status (ILO, 2000). However, the question, “How did women arrive at their disempowered position in the society such that they have to struggle for empowerment?” The next section of the paper assesses some theoretical explanations of women’s disempowerment.
8.4 Theoretical Issues

While sex, that is, being male or female, is biologically determined, gender on the other hand is the social conception of the expectations and behavior considered appropriate for those identified as male and female. Hence, there are male roles and female roles. However, most cultures tend to assign higher values to male roles, while female roles are undervalued (Giddens, 2001). Various explanations have been tendered for this gendered division of labor in society.

Sociobiologists claim that there are fundamental physical and psychological differences between males and females, which make male dominance inevitable. They argue that the biological predisposition of women to menstruate, gestate, and lactate serve as major hindrances to their active participation in the socio-economic and political spheres. Tiger and Fox (1970, cited in Haralambos, 1980), argue that the “human biogrammer” (or genetically based determinant of behavior) of males predisposes them to be more dominant and aggressive than females, while females’ reproductive ability enables them to bring forth children, making them predisposed to cater and provide for the children (George, 1990).

Arguing from these viewpoints, protagonists of the exclusion of women from public life and from politics in particular have often asked, when women are active in politics, holding political offices, who takes care of the home? What happens when they are pregnant, go on maternity leave, etc.? How do they cope with the long strenuous working hours, while at the same time raising children? Due to all these factors, they often erroneously presumed that women can not effectively participate in politics. However, empirical evidence has contradicted this biological explanation of a gender division of labor; and findings of studies have proven an overriding influence of social learning on gender differences.

Thus, culturalists argue that biological differences are a signal rather than the cause of differentiation in gender roles. They observe that sexual division of labor rather than being universal varies across ‘cultures’ dictated by cultural variability (Basow, 1992; Giddens, 2001). Sherry Ortner, a proponent of this perspective, argues that culture and the society, rather than biology, determine gender roles. Observing the universal secondary status of women, Ortner arrived at the conclusion that, although men and women are significantly different, culture and the society have accentuated these differences by assigning what constitutes superiority/inferiority. Of course women and all they stand for are often assigned the inferiority label (George, 1990).

On the other hand, the Socialist and Radical Feminists argue that women’s subjugation and exclusion from politics is a basic fact of every society, in all spheres...
of life, over all time, and in all places. This oppression, they explain, is tied to patriarchy, which they define as a system of male dominance over women in all spheres of life (Walby, 1990). However, socialist feminists emphasize a view of patriarchy, which integrates male power with the social structures in which it operates. Male dominance is therefore related to the operation of class, the state, and ideology. An end to that dominance and the oppression of women will only follow a transformation of those structures (Rowbotham, 1992). On the other hand, radical feminists in their analysis put greater emphasis on the biological, cultural, and psychological dimensions of the gender order. They declare the ‘personal as political’ and examine how human reproduction is controlled and socialized through the institutions of marriage, compulsory heterosexuality, and motherhood. Their analysis situates the general subordination of women under domestic relations (Morgan, 1975; Haralambos, 1980; Giddens, 2001).

From these analyses, it could, therefore, be argued that femininity and masculinity, though built on biology, are ultimately derived from the society, with femininity being created in specific historical contexts where the key elements of social structures such as the economy, ideology, class, ethnicity, and religion are actively constituted and are subject to change by individuals or groups. As the literature has earlier shown, the colonization of Africa by Europeans created an historical epoch where such a change occurred. Colonialism resulted in the reconstitution of pre-colonial Africa’s social structures; it led to the alteration of the socio-economic and political spheres. This invariably resulted in the alteration of gender relations and roles. Consequently, women were excluded from the public realm to the margins of society. Thus, as Mama (1997) has rightly observed, colonialism exploited Africa’s gendered social divisions of labor negatively to the disadvantaged of women. At independence, post-colonial states did not significantly reconstitute the inherited colonial patriarchal structures that limited women’s participation in public life. Hence, post-colonial Nigeria, as well as other African states, has witnessed a relatively politically passive female citizenry whose active corrective influence in governance is lacking. Of course, the result of this is the hegemony of men’s political agency.

It must, however, be stated that women’s participation in politics in post-colonial Nigeria has been quite dynamic. The extent of women’s visibility in politics is contingent on the disposition of a particular administration towards women, whether military or civilian. Thus, women have been more politically visible in some regimes than in others. For example, the Babangida (1985–1993) and Obasanjo (1999–2007) administrations accorded women more space (see Abdullah, 1995; Olurode, 2000). However, women’s visibility in these administrations should not be equated with women’s political empowerment.
This is because women only become politically empowered and so serve as political agents when they enter into negotiations with the relevant authorities; demand political, economic, and social rights; and protest against discrimination and injustice (Sered, 1994). These characteristics were lacking in women during these administrations, despite the deteriorating conditions that characterize the Nigerian state. Of course women’s visibility in these regimes were acts of tokenism (as it until today), rather than the result of collective struggles. Hence, they must remain grateful to their political ‘god fathers’ and never go against their wishes.

8.5 Methodology

The study adopted a combination of methods, including a cross-sectional survey and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Scheduled Interviews were used for the collection of the quantitative data, while the focus group discussion (FGD) was used to gather the qualitative data. The study location was Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, situated in South Eastern Nigeria. It covers a land area of 7,081 sq. km. and has a population of 3,920,208 (FGN, 2007) with 85% of its inhabitants residing in the rural areas. The inhabitants belong to three dominant ethnic groups, namely the Annang, Ibibio, and Oron. The study surveyed 800 adult females aged eighteen years and above who were members of various associations. The women were chosen using the multi-stage random sampling technique from three of the 31 local government areas (Ikot Ekpene, Ikono, and Okobo) for the study.

8.6 Findings and Discussion

A total of 800 respondents were interviewed; however, only 788 instruments were duly completed and form the basis of analysis.

8.7 Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents were middle aged women (40–54 years) constituting 37.7% of the sample. The mean age of respondents is 48 years. Similarly, 60.5% of respondents were married, while 34.5% were widowed and 2.4% were divorced. About 51.8% of the respondents had no formal education, while 25.9% had primary education and 14.0% and 8.4% had secondary and tertiary education, respectively. Similarly, 80.1% of the respondents were self-employed, while 9.9% were housewives and 7.6% and 2.0% were public and
Table 8.1 Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Members of Association (N = 788)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young (Less than 40 yrs)</td>
<td>231 (29.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Age (40–54 yrs)</td>
<td>297 (37.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old (55–69 yrs)</td>
<td>200 (25.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Old (70 yrs &amp; above)</td>
<td>60 (7.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>13 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>477 (60.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>7 (0.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>19 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>272 (34.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>408 (51.8%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>204 (25.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>110 (13.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>66 (8.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Occupation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>78 (9.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>631 (80.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>60 (7.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>16 (2.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner</td>
<td>30 (0.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monthly Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than ₦5,000</td>
<td>569 (72.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>₦5,000–₦9,999</td>
<td>61 (7.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>₦10,000–₦14,999</td>
<td>25 (3.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>₦15,000–₦19,999</td>
<td>5 (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>₦20,000–₦24,999</td>
<td>13 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>₦25,000 &amp; above</td>
<td>37 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>78 (9.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

private sector workers, respectively. About 72.2% of the respondents earned monthly incomes of less than ₦5,000, while 9.9% earned no income at all. The mean income was ₦5,045.42.

The distribution of membership in Table 8.2 shows that respondents belonged to four different types of associations, namely lineage wives/daughters, religious, trade, convivial, and cooperative. However, the religious association
Table 8.2 Types of Associations and Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Types of Associations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 788</td>
<td>Lineage Wives/ Daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>531</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

has the highest membership of 89.8%, followed by the lineage wives/daughters (67.4%). Trade/craft and cooperative associations do not seem popular as they have only 5.5% and 2.5% membership, respectively. No respondent belonged to an exclusively women’s political association or wing.

Table 8.3 shows that respondents had multiple memberships of associations, with 53.0% being members of at least two types of associations. The median number of a respondent’s association is 2 and the maximum is 5.

Table 8.4 shows that majority of the respondents (71.8%) joined association(s) because of social empowerment benefits, while only 12.6% joined because of economic empowerment benefits. None gave political empowerment as the reason for identifying with an association(s).

Table 8.5 shows that 65.1% of the respondents claimed that their associations encouraged members to participate in politics, while 34.9% claimed they did not. However, amongst the various types of associations, the lineage wives/daughters had the highest number (81.0%) of respondents that claimed that their associations encouraged them to participate in politics. Reason for this could be attributed to the fact that the lineage wives/daughters’ associations usually serve as the point of contact/entry to politicians, local chiefs, or anyone who intends to have audience with women or acquaint them with information on events or issues within the community. Although the table shows that associations encourage women to participate in politics, this should not, however, be equated with women having political consciousness and trying to enforce their agency.

Table 8.3 Number of Associations of Respondents’ Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership N = 788</th>
<th>Number of Associations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count %</td>
<td>Count %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>269</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8.4 Reason(s) for Joining an Association(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you join an association(s)?</th>
<th>Members of Association(s) N = 788</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Empowerment</td>
<td>566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Empowerment</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Empowerment</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Empowerment</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The content analysis of the FGD reveals that there is a general apathy towards politics and happenings in the political scene by the women. A typical response by a 55 year old respondent illustrates this: “our village chief usually asked our leaders to tell us to vote for some people whom the collect money from. We simply go out to vote to please him as often times; we don’t usually know the candidate or what they stand for.” Another respondent, a 48 year old woman, simply reiterated, “when some politicians give us bags of rice and salt, our leaders will pretentiously ask us to join them. Which responsible woman can identify in politics except a loose woman? Politics is dirty, they kill, maim, destroy and sleep with the women in their midst.”

Table 8.5 Associations and Political Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associations</th>
<th>Does Your Association Encourage Members to Participate in Politics?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lineage Wives/Daughters</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade/Craft</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convivial</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.6 reveals that 60.1% of members of lineage wives/daughters associations admitted that the association encouraged them to participate in politics through voting during elections, while 59.1% claimed that it encouraged them to join political parties. However, none admitted that the association encouraged them to vie for elective positions. For the religious association members, 82.6% of the respondents claimed that the association encouraged them to vote during elections, while 24.8% said that the association encouraged them...
Table 8.6  Ways Associations Encourage Members to Participate in Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways Associations Encourage Members to Participate in Politics</th>
<th>Associations (N = 513)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lineage Wives/Daughters</td>
<td>Religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count n = 213</td>
<td>Count n = 242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote during elections</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Join political parties</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vie for elective posts</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.7 shows that associations were active in conflict resolution as 75.5% of members claimed that their association did mediate in conflicts in members’ households. However, associations mediated in conflicts that involved women with other women and conflicts between women and children. Conflicts involving husbands and adult males of households were not within the domain of associations to settle. Such conflicts were settled either by the male family heads or village or church councils. According to a 60-year-old respondent, “how can women invite a man to their committee to settle a quarrel between him and his wife? That is not within the domain of the women.”

Such exclusion of women from mediating in conflicts that involved men has hindered associations’ ability to tackle peculiar women’s problems within the communities such as widows’ disinheritance, infringement on women’s rights, maltreatment from husbands, etc. Thus, these results show the powerlessness
Table 8.7 Associations and Conflict Resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associations</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total N = 788</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lineage Wives/Daughters</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade/Craft</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convivial</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of women on issues that men are involved in, as well as demonstrate how women themselves tend to accept the status quo, as illustrated by the response of the 60 year old woman.

Table 8.8 shows that associations are actively involved in conflict resolution. Amongst members of the lineage wives/daughters associations, for example, 100.0% of their members admitted that the association resolved conflict by inviting disputants to the association’s committee, while only 1.6% claimed

Table 8.8 Ways of Settling Quarrels in Disputants Household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of Settling Quarrels in Disputant Households</th>
<th>Most Valuable Association (N= 788)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lineage Wives/Daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count n = 185 %</td>
<td>Count n = 364 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite disputants to committee</td>
<td>185 100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee visits disputants household</td>
<td>7 3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer Case to other higher local authorities</td>
<td>3 1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that such cases were referred to other higher authorities (such as family heads and village/church councils).

8.8 Discussion

Women in their attempt to alter socio-economic and political processes in their favor have utilized, as one of their strategies, the vehicle of association. Findings reveal the dynamism and visibility of rural women’s associations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Respondents have multiple memberships of associations with most respondents being members of at least two associations. Similarly, findings also reveal that there is no exclusive women’s political association. It also shows that while associations are engaged in diverse social, economic, political, and religious empowerment activities, social activities tend to dominate the others. This observation is further buttressed by the respondents’ reason(s) for joining an association(s), as the majority of them gave social empowerment as their main motivation. Respondents admitted to the exclusion of women from inheritance rights and most of the village councils. However, this exclusion was not perceived by them as a problem. In fact, they argued, “why should women inherit lands when they will eventually be married out?” Similarly, their exclusion from the village councils was not a big deal since according to them, “they have their own exclusive women’s meetings.” Findings further reveal that, although associations do mediate in conflict among members’ households, quarrels between husbands/wives, as well as between other adult male relatives, were usually referred to the men (via village and church councils) for settlement. This further shows the powerlessness of women on issues where men are involved.

Assessing the associations studied from the perspectives of formal and informal political activism, as earlier espoused by the literature, reveals a general apathy towards political activism by the women. Apart from the absence of exclusive women’s political associations, the prevailing notion among the women was that women who “are involved in politics are loose, useless and irresponsible.” They did believe that politics is not meant for women.

8.9 Conclusion

Empowerment has been described as the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes control over resources (physical, human, and intellectual) and over ideology (beliefs, val-
ues, and attitudes). Thus, women’s empowerment includes processes that lead women to perceive themselves as having rights and entitlements and the ability to voice their concerns on issues. It also includes the provision of an improved access to decision-making opportunities. The study has shown that associations’ activities have not significantly challenged nor altered the patriarchal nature of the communities, hence the persistence of the exclusion of women from inheritance rights and from majority of the village councils. Based on these revelations, this study deduces that rural women’s associations in Akwa Ibom State have merely provided women with limited outlets of expression, which conform to the cultural definition of ‘womanhood.’ Therefore, the study postulates that this scenario may pose a danger to women’s empowerment through group experience in Akwa Ibom State.

References


Chapter Nine

Feminization of Poverty in Old Age: Lessons from Lagos State, Nigeria

Bola Amaike

9.0 Introduction

Gender is a contentious issue in many parts of the world because of the possibility of being misunderstood and misconstrued by both its advocates and the non-initiated. Nevertheless, gender is an important concept in human society because it affects the lived experiences of all persons throughout the life course. There is no other stage in the life course when gender plays a more important role than old age, when vulnerability increases and vitality decreases significantly. The importance of gender differentials in old age is further buttressed by the United Nations’ Population Ageing chart (2006). It is expected that by 2050, 20 percent of older population will be aged 80 years and older. Ageing is therefore an important issue because one out of every nine people is aged 60 years and above and it is expected that by 2050, according to the United Nations projection that one person out of every five older people and by 2150, one out of every 3 person will be aged 60 years and above. Although, the proportion of older people is much higher in more advanced countries but the pace of ageing in developing countries such as Nigeria is more rapid and the transition from a relatively young population to an ageing population will occur over a short period (UN, 2006). More importantly, ageing is becoming a critical issue in most countries in Africa. For example, about 5% of Nigerians are aged 60 years and above while in South Africa, out of a National population of 40,584,000 people; 1,114,693 men (5.7%) and 1,745,322 women (8.3%) were aged 60 years and above in 1996. The above statistics underscore the need to study
Ageing issues and more importantly, examine gender differentials in living of retired men and women in old age.

Atchley (1982) defines retirement as a formal status in life that involves reduction in roles or withdrawal of employment accompanied by income from a retirement benefit scheme (pension). The latter is usually based on the number of years of service in the formal sector. In most cases, older people are likely to meet either of these two conditions but rarely meet both. Therefore, most definitions and discussions of retirement tend to dwell more on specific experiences of male retirees in industrialized societies than their female counterparts and that of workers in the formal sector in developing countries (Cowgill, 1974; Richardson, 1999; Price, 2002). In broad terms, retirement represents "the status of a worker who has stopped working usually upon reaching a pre-determined age, when physical conditions do not allow the person to work anymore or due to illness or accident or even a personal choice in the presence of an adequate pension."

Nevertheless, retirement decisions are often influenced by gender and is an important factor in studying the 'lived' experiences of retired older people in the formal sector of Nigerian economy. This is because gender is a key determinant of the life chances of men and women. Generally, research on retirement tends to focus on the retirement experiences, behaviors, and life course events of men because it is believed that retirement in the strictest sense of leaving paid employment permanently, especially after pursuing a chosen career for some years, is relatively a new phenomenon among women. Goldin (1990) opined that as far back as 1940, only a small minority of young working and career women in the United States of America who exited the labor force upon marriage ever returned to continue their jobs or pursue their careers. But this is changing with more women entering paid employment and remaining there to pursue life long careers all over the world, especially in developed countries.

In a study by Gendell (1998), it was found that men and women in advanced countries are beginning to have similar work history patterns and this is further buttressed by the fact that the average retirement age from the labor force for men and women in the United States was virtually identical between 1965 and 1995. However, despite giant strides made by women in the workplace, it has been documented that women tend to occupy lower paying jobs and have restricted access to independent sources of livelihood compared to men. Women have heavy domestic responsibilities and care giving roles or demands that often disrupt their work histories (Arber and Ginn, 1999; Szinovacz, 1983). Women are also likely to depend on a state pension and meager material resources in retirement; hence their standard of living is often compromised. Men, on the other hand, tend to have more opportunities and material re-
sources than women, which translate into adequate livelihood and better standard of living in retirement.

Since the end of World War II, the participation of both married and single women in the labor force has increased considerably. In economically advanced countries, the ratios of men and women in the labor force appear to be negligible. Nevertheless, gender remains an important factor in understanding the experiences of men and women in terms of their livelihood, socio-economic status, employment opportunities, and living conditions in retirement. Gender can be defined as “socially constructed relations between men and women, and to changeable and culturally variable rules and norms that shape people's behaviours and cultural expectations”, whereas sex refers to “the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women” (Kalabamu, Matseliso, and Schlyter, 2005: 3). A gendered perspective also prescribe the values and behavior expected of individuals at different stages with the recognition that men and women have distinct social roles, statuses, and life chances that are continually being negotiated and redefined throughout their life course (Kalabamu, et al., 2005). The above definitions clearly differentiate between what it is meant to be a ‘male’ or a ‘female’, which are sex categories, and to be ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, which refer to gender specific categories, with social and cultural expectations that can either make or mar individuals’ life chances.

Essentially, sex categories are similar in all societies while gender roles and expectations vary significantly from one society to the other. It is against this backdrop that we argue that factors that influence the retirement of men are quite different from those that determine the retirement experiences of women (Whiting, 1998; Arber and Ginn, 1991; Lawton, 1983; Seccombe, 1986). This is because the life experiences and work history of men and women are significantly different, hence the need to treat each gender category as having distinct life course experiences, with unique features. The next section briefly clarifies certain concepts used in the paper.

### 9.1 Clarification of Concepts

- **Gender:** This is the socially constructed meaning attached to being a male or a female in any society and it is an important determinant of the life chances and opportunities available to individuals throughout their life course. It is used to capture how men and women differ in terms of access to opportunities, roles, and statuses as well as work trajectories, which also affect their post-retirement experiences, livelihood, and living conditions.
Retired older people: These are otherwise called pensioners in the public sector because workers become ‘pensionable’ or eligible for pensions after ten years of service and after reaching 45 years under the old pension scheme. Under the Pension Act of 2004, 50 years is the minimum age for eligibility for pension, except in the case of unemployment for more than six months. In this paper, we define pensioners as former employees, usually older, at least 60 years old who retired from either the public sector or private sector and who are less likely to engage in full-time paid employment, although many are actively involved in income-generating activities or social roles to supplement their pensions or support family members respectively.

Retirement: This is otherwise called disengagement. This study defines retirement as a condition in which an individual ceases to engage in full-time paid employment, either voluntarily or statutorily, usually after working for a period of time, at least ten years in the public sector and after reaching a minimum retirement age. It also defines retirement as a process in the life course, with unique challenges and sometimes opportunities to engage in meaningful activities. Retirement can be in three main forms namely: voluntary, statutory, or mandatory and compulsory retirement. Voluntary retirement means that the decision to retire before the statutory retirement age comes from the workers, usually due to search for greener pasture, health reasons, or family demands. Statutory or mandatory retirement on the other hand, stipulates that workers disengage (retire) at the age of 60 or 65 or 70 years (in the civil service, academia, and judiciary respectively) or after 35 years of service in the public service.

Feminism: This involves a general belief in women’s rights and protection of women’s social, political, and economic rights, among others. It is premised against the background that women are presently suffering from multiple disadvantages, deprivation, exploitation, oppression, domination, and subjugation in various spheres in the society incomparable to men. Hence, a movement evolved to create awareness about women’s rights as well as defend and secure equal rights, opportunities, and privileges for men and women in society.

9.2 Literature Review

Gender is a factor that influences the incidence and duration of employment, which is also relevant in establishing the link between occupational status and living conditions of older people in retirement. Women in paid employment are likely to make the decision to retire early in order to take care
of ailing husbands or sick children and relations (Moore and Hayward, 1990). Most studies on the link between occupational position and retirement have focused on men. The retirement experiences of women, which are seldom studied, are likely to be a different altogether based on their different historical experiences in the life course. Generally, women’s work histories are characterized by engagement in low paying jobs, part-time employment, and greater disruption because of family and domestic demands. Women are also likely to be without retirement benefits in old age and those covered have pensions that are far below that of men in meeting basic needs at the most critical stage in their lives.

For instance, gender differences in health status and socio-economic well-being only reflect the historical gender-based inequities that dot the life cycle of men and women. Specifically, they reflect the gender-based roles, statuses, and relationships that men and women play in the society. Secondly, the living conditions of older people also show the historical gendered contexts within which social roles and relationships are experienced with concomitant effect on available resources and life satisfaction retirement (Moen, 2001). Men and women also differ in terms of their health care options and the health providers they use. Women are more likely than men to use cheaper sources of health treatment when sick, such as self-treatment, traditional methods, and local herbs, rather than use the orthodox methods or modern medicine considered expensive and less ‘effective.’

It is pertinent to state that retirement is not synonymous with only health deterioration and frailty because some retired people are also healthy and actively engaged in meaningful activities. As indicated earlier, there is a general notion that retirement is generally harmful to the health of retirees because the process is often associated with loss of roles and statuses, stress, and adjustment problems. In reality, poor health is more likely to force older people to retire earlier than the statutory retirement age, which indicates a one-way relationship. Some studies have shown that retirement is not directly related to health decline or untimely death (Bound, 1991; Moen, 1996; Ekerdt, 1987). Poor health in retirement can be a result of people’s general poor state of health or age long disability that becomes exacerbated in retirement. Some other studies, on the other hand, established the fact that some retirees are more satisfied and even reported improved health status in retirement (Atchley, 1976; Moen, 1996).

Generally, retirement is found to be less stressful when retirees have alternative activities or greater roles to substitute for work roles that help to maintain their identity and sense of social relevance. Therefore, retirees that have other roles to compensate for ones lost upon retirement tend to enjoy better
health status and living conditions in retirement. The absence of social security in many developing countries coupled with the weakening of traditional social support systems has deleterious effects on the living conditions of older people. South Africa and Botswana are among few countries in Africa with a government sponsored old age social security or financial support to supplement the income of older people. For example, in South Africa, the social old age pension scheme that has the widest coverage provides a means-tested pension of Rand 470 (about US$120 in 1996) to men aged 65 and above and women aged 60 years and above. These primary sources of retirement benefits in South Africa definitely improve the living conditions and well-being of older people who sometimes have to cater for younger generations (including grandchildren orphaned by HIV/AIDS).

Nevertheless, households are key sources of social support in developing countries even where formal social supports exist. For example, in Ghana, the definition of poverty transcends a lack of material resources. Local terminology in some communities differentiates between material poverty and 'family less' poverty, so that someone who has money but no relations, usually caring adult children, is also taken to be poor. Among the Yoruba ethnic group a similar belief exists, “eniyan lasha eniyan, or eniyan lasha mi ti mo fi nbora” (literally, significant others, are seen as the materials that cover people’s nakedness). There is no stage in the life course when this is more necessary than in old age. Old age support also comes from communities, especially in the rural areas where less privileged members of the society are catered for by all and sundry in the spirit of communal living (Gemeinschaft a’la Tonnies, 1887). In Tanzania, village groups such as women’s groups and burial societies are the most effective sources of support in old age, which often exclude non-members. Unfortunately, more than half of the most vulnerable older people are often excluded and have nowhere else to turn to in crisis (HelpAge International, 1999).

9.3 Gender, Livelihood, and Living Conditions in Retirement

Although being a male or a female is a biological fact, the gender based distinctions and differentials experienced by men and women are socially constructed. Gender has a direct impact on the allocation of roles, statuses, and resources, with great consequences for life situations of both men and women. There are at least two key status characteristics that affect life course events: they are gender and the occupational status of individuals. Gender is an important factor that shapes the nature, timing, and duration of people’s en-
gender in the labor force. Gender and occupation interact in such a way that they determine the barriers, constraints, and opportunities that shape the standard of living of people throughout their life course.

Generally, men are more likely to engage in income-generating activities in retirement, which gives them financial independence, while women are more likely to care for sick spouses, children, or relations, with a greater likelihood of depending on irregular public pensions or informal support. This explains why men and women in the same jobs and with access to similar social relationships have distinct retirement experiences in later life (O’Rand and Henretta, 1999). Subsequently, since retirement benefits are calculated based on the number of years of continuous service and occupational status, men are more likely to be better off than women in terms of retirement benefits and, invariably, living conditions. In addition, post-retirement opportunities, which can improve the living conditions of older people, often depend on the years of experience and previous employment status as workers. Men are more likely to benefit from such post-retirement employment than women (Moen, 2001). In fact, in the 1990s, 16.5% of men aged 65 years and above and 8.6% of women in the same age group were in the labor force in the United States of America (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999).

In other words, occupational positions and career pathways shape the opportunities and constraints that men and women face in the social structure, which also affect the range of retirement resources that are available to them in retirement (Moen, Kim, and Hofmeister, 2001). Given the changes associated with work histories, men and women are likely to experience greater differences in retirement as an age group. There are also gender differentials in terms of access to occupation, career opportunities, and resources that lead to greater variations in the life situations of retired men and women in later years. This gender disparity in life experiences means that the transition to retirement will likely have a different impact on the living conditions of both genders (Atchley, 1976, Cumming and Henry, 1961; Amaike, 2005). For instance, older women are more likely to experience a reduction in social relationships (often leading to loneliness) in retirement, especially when their children leave home (empty nest syndrome), when widowed, (because women tend to marry men that are older), or when divorced. Therefore, the impact of these events on the living conditions of women has more far-reaching effects than that of men.

Atchley (1982b: 159) suggested that there are differentials in patterns of retirement for men and women and that men more often than women plan to retire at a specific age, while women were more likely than men to plan to retire before the statutory retirement age of 60 years or after age 70 years (Novak 1988: 198). In a study by Health and Welfare Canada (1979), 38% of retired men and 41% of retired women indicated their preference for a part-time tran-
transition to retirement, whereas 35% of working men and 47% of working women said they preferred the same option. This part-time arrangement gives workers the opportunity of ‘casing’ out into retirement, affording them a better chance to make a successful shift to full retirement. In most cases, a women’s decision to retire is never solely their decision, as women tend to retire in response to spousal demands or family needs. This option creates two problems: first, it is expensive for governments to foot the bills of post-retirement employment and pensions. Secondly, there are marked differences in the retirement experiences and opportunities of older people based on their gender, occupational status, and level of education.

The gender dimension of retirement can be seen in the fact that women who tend to work in the peripheral sector of the economy, marked with low wages and few, if any, fringe benefits, are more likely to be without retirement benefits. In other words, women are likely to be disadvantaged or denied access to substantial pensions (due to domestic and social responsibilities), greatly undermining their standard of living in retirement (Robinson, Coberly, and Paul, 1985, cited in Novak, 1988: 210). With lower incomes and poorer pensions, women are often forced to stay in the labor force or keep working until death or ill-health forces them to disengage. A study by Statistics Canada (1986: 104) shows that high income families worked “well beyond the normal age of retirement” in their career jobs. These people worked primarily for leisure rather than survival or financial considerations. Even at ages 75 years and above, about 50 percent of high income men and more than 10 percent of high income women still worked. The emerging trend is that with the continued employment of older people, they maintain their high income status, and the types of work they do are such that allow them to ease out of work at their own pace. Some of them work as independent consultants or professionals or they own their own businesses or companies. Often times, good income encourages retirement. For independent professionals, however, good income does not discourage them from continuing to work (Novak, 1988: 210). Specifically, Connidis (1982) found that women follow career paths different from that of men. For instance, some women take up careers after raising a family, others work during their childrearing years, and some never enter the labor force, while many single women show unbroken work records (Keating and Jeffrey, 1983, cited in Novak, 1988). These various paths that women take to retirement are important determinants of their resources and living conditions compared to their male counterparts. This also makes it hard to describe a typical pattern of retirement for women.

This partly explains why few studies have looked at how women adjust to retirement or what retirement means to them. Atchley (1982) opines that dif-
Different factors shape male and female attitudes to retirement, and different factors lead to life-satisfaction for each group. He concludes by saying that “women’s retirement is indeed a separate issue compared to men’s (retirement)” (1982: 165). This probably explains the lack of a research focus on the retirement experiences, retirement livelihood, and quality of life of female workers. In an attempt to shift the focus, this study examines gender differentials in living conditions of retired men and women in Lagos State. The paper situates its discussion within certain theoretical orientations, which we will turn in the next section.

9.4 Theoretical Orientations

There are several theoretical perspectives that establish relationships between retirement livelihood and socio-economic well-being of male and female retirees. This section only discusses three most relevant theories.

9.4.i Activity Theory of Ageing

Activity theory is one of the earliest sociological theories that attempts to explain factors responsible for successful adaptation in later life. The development of the theory has been associated with the writings of American sociologist E.W. Burgess (1960). His proposition followed on the heel of his argument that old age should be viewed as a “role less” role and the individuals should be challenged or encouraged to replace lost roles with new ones in order to adapt to the transition (Matras, 1990). The theory proposes that active retired persons, especially those that are engaged in meaningful social and economic activities, will be more satisfied in life and have better living conditions. Studies have also shown that active older people or those successful at substituting lost roles with new roles or activities are more satisfied with life in retirement than those that are fully disengaged (Lemon, Bengtson, and Peterson, 1972).

The theory submits that a high level of activity leads to a favorable self-concept and high satisfaction in later years (Matras, 1990), with postulation that continued activity (engagement) is a prerequisite for satisfaction in retirement. For instance, retirees’ roles as fathers/mothers, grandmothers/grandfathers, wives/husbands, neighbors, and friends are still relevant to them despite old age. The only exception when a decrease in social interaction is expected and seen to be functional for the individual is in case of ill-health or disability (Havighurst, Neugarten, and Tobin, 1968). From literature, engagement in income-earning activities, co-residence, social integration, and continued exercise

On the other hand, Longino and Kart (1982, cited in Szinovacz, 1996) observed that informal activities, positive attitudes, and expectation surrounding activities are more important determinants of socio-economic well-being in retirement rather than mere engagement in activities. Activity theory helps to explain the importance of older women’s involvement in social or religious activities in reducing the incidence and prevalence of old age poverty on one hand and enhancing their living conditions on the other. The theory fails to explain the motivating factors behind the engagement of older women in social or religious roles. Is it a function of socialization? What are the activities that constitute relevant activities to retired older people? This depends on people’s perception and their interpretation of their everyday life situations (Moody, 2002). There are also criticisms about the benefits inherent in continued activities for older worker bearing in mind declining ability and productivity in old age.

9.4.ii Social Exchange Theory

Closely linked to Activity theory is the social exchange theory, which applies a rational and economic model to study human actions and behaviors. It proposes that individuals engage in social interactions and that people make rational calculations of costs and benefits they derive from those interactions (Homans, 1961; Blau, 1964). Individuals will only continue social interactions as long as the benefits they derive far outweigh the costs of engaging in such interactions. In other words, individuals engage in interactions that are rewarding while withdrawing from interactions that are costly. Social interactions are therefore influenced by rational decision making and profit-maximizing individuals.

According to exchange theory of ageing, as adopted by Dowd (1975), older people tend to withdraw from social interaction with the younger generation because they have less power and fewer resources (lower income, fewer material resources, etc.) that can ensure continued social interaction. Nevertheless, only a few older people with valued resources to sustain a relationship with younger generations can remain actively engaged in social interactions. This is instructive because older people discharging social roles in an African family still remain actively involved in daily activities and relevant in old age. This theory’s purely rational and economic submission results in certain limitations. Firstly, although most ongoing social interactions are based on give and take, exchange theory sees all interactions purely from a rational and economic perspective. Secondly, the theory stresses the importance of quantum of social
interactions rather than quality of social relations. Lastly, the subjective meanings attached to social exchange is also overlooked because individuals variously define and redefine the meanings of rewards and costs in social interactions.

### 9.4.iii Modernization Theory

The quest to understand and explain the contradictory images of old age in modern society contributed to the emergence of modernization theory of ageing. For example, the status of older people was low in hunting and gathering societies because of high mobility of band societies, but it improved drastically in stable agricultural societies where land ownership was vested in family heads usually the oldest members of the family. With the advent of industrialization in the 18th century, modern societies have consistently and continuously devalued traditional roles and skills of older people (Cowgill, 1974).

Some tenets of modernization theory have been confirmed in societies where elders experienced a drastic drop in their social status and power as the society industrialized (Palmore and Manton, 1974; Burgess, 1960; Riley and Riley, 1986; Cowgill, 1974; Cowgill and Holmes, 1972).

The transition of the Nigerian society from an agrarian society to an industrializing society means that the traditional roles and relevance of older people will be streamlined, whereas those with valued social resources will still maintain a relatively high level of social interaction and enjoy improved living conditions. This partly explains the relatively better quality of life of female retirees in Lagos State that lived with more affluent relations, especially adult children. In terms of criticisms, modernization theory fails to demonstrate convincingly the aspects of pre-industrial societies that are considered as the ‘golden age’ for old age that has been lost as a result of modernization. It also fails to explain the specific meanings attached to old age in different societies and epochs. Modernization theory has also been accused of being Eurocentric in its orientation because it uses the experiences of Western Europe as a yardstick for other countries. A society may modernize and still incorporate older people, as we have in many industrializing societies such as Nigeria. Older people in Africa and Asia still enjoy relative degree of respect and relevance in their communities.

### 9.5 Theoretical Framework

This paper takes cue from the three theories discussed to explain gender differentials in living conditions of retired older people in Lagos State, Nige-
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9.6 Research Methods

This section discusses the process used in selecting the sample and gathering data for the study. The respondents were selected from three tiers of government (Federal, State, and Local Government levels) and the organized private sector. The technique used was a multi-stage systematic sampling method that involved a cross-sectional survey of 1,321 respondents (retired older people) through the use of questionnaires. Qualitative research included twenty (20) in-depth interviews and eight (8) focus group discussion sessions with six (6) participants in each session. The non-probability sampling method, (purposive sampling method) was used to select respondents for in-depth interviews and FGD sessions. Members of FGD groups were fairly homogeneous in terms of sex, marital status, age, social class, and educational statuses, among others. In-depth interview sessions were conducted for executive members of Nigeria Union of Pensioners at the Federal, State, and Local Government levels and pension managers or staff.

9.7 Discussion of Major Findings

The findings of the study revealed that majority of retired older people in Lagos State were men. The data also show gender differentials in terms of socio-economic and demographic factors as well as living conditions of older peo-
ple in retirement. The socio-economic and demographic characteristics of respondents indicate that majority of the respondents were married and aged at least 60 years old. This paper discusses percentage distribution of respondents by sex by specific socio-economic and demographic characteristics in terms of age, last monthly salary, monthly pension, and educational attainment, among others. From the sample, 274 persons were aged between 60 and 64 years, accounting for 20.7% of the total sample. Disaggregating by sex, there were 159 male (18.8%) and 115 female retirees (24.3%), meaning that a higher proportion among female retirees was found in this age category. Similarly, a slightly higher proportion (1.5%) among female retirees was in the highest age category (80 years and above) compared to men (0.9%). This is in line with earlier findings that women generally live longer than men in most societies (Heslop, 1999).

The majority of the respondents (87.6%) had one form of formal education or the other. The minimum educational qualification in this category was basic primary education (23.5%), and retirees with secondary education had the highest percentage (30.7%). Only 134 retirees (10.1%) had no formal education and these retirees were likely cleaners or security staff, whose jobs required less education. A higher proportion among female retirees was without education (10.8%) compared to a close proportion among male retirees (9.8%). About a quarter of the respondents, that is 311 (23.5%), had only a primary education. Disaggregating by sex, 23.5% men and 23.9% women were found in this educational category. A higher proportion among female retirees (16.9%) compared to 12.4% among male retirees had NCE/OND as their highest educational qualifications.

The reason for higher proportion among female retirees with National Certificate of Education or Ordinary National Diploma is that teaching profession is generally believed to be a feminine profession. Only 14.2% of respondents had university degrees, with 125 men (14.7%) and 63 women (13.3%). This shows that the educational gap between men and women is closing, although efforts are needed to close up this gender disparity. With an increased enrollment of women in schools and colleges especially in urban centers like Lagos State, the age long differentials in educational attainment between men and women will be overcome (Henslin, 2005). In terms of marital status, a higher proportion among males 763 (90%) was married compared to females 380 (80.4%), with 1,143 respondents (86.5%) married at time of the study. The reason for higher proportion of married respondents can be linked to the fact that Nigerians generally love and celebrate marriage as one of their lifetime achievements.

The study also considered respondents’ monthly pensions. The study discovered that a significant minority 401 (30.4%) earned less than N 10,000 as
their monthly income. This is definitely meager to meet their basic needs bearing in mind the high cost of living in Lagos State. Disaggregating by sex, a higher proportion among male retirees (31.6%) compared to female retirees (28.1%) was in this poorest income group. In the highest pension category, N40,001 and above, 89 retirees (6.7%) were in the category with a higher proportion among female retirees (7.2%) compared to males (6.5%).

Apart from socio-economic characteristics, characteristics of the household of retired men and women in Lagos State were also examined. The study noticed similar patterns. In terms of home ownership, a significant minority of 32.7% of the sample claimed ownership with 34.0% among male retirees and 30.0% among female retirees. This buttresses earlier studies that urban-based workers engage in return migration (relocation) after retirement to their rural villages and states of origin (Peil, 1987; Akereolu-Ale and Aribiah, 2001). The study also covered the occupancy status in order to ascertain the effects of type of residence on the living conditions of retirees. As indicated earlier, retirees are often faced with financial challenges especially in terms of meeting their basic needs. A large proportion of retirees (46.9%) lived in rented apartments, which increases the strain on their meager resources in retirement. The findings also indicate that slightly a higher proportion among males (47.3%) compared to females (46.1%) was in this situation. The reason for this can be linked to the fact that women are more likely to marry older men with more material resources, cushioning the effects of retirement challenges and providing supplementary income in old age. A higher proportion among male retirees, or 68 men (8.0%), also lived in inherited or family houses compared to female retirees (6.1%). This is partly due to the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society where male dominance and the right to inheritance are culturally entrenched and socially accepted.

The living conditions of retirees were also measured in terms of their access to basic household facilities that can improve their quality of life. Sizeable proportions among respondents indicated that they had pipe-borne water (28.6%) and well-water piped into the house (30.4%). A slightly higher proportion among female retirees had access to pipe-borne water (30.4%) and well-water (31.5%). For the male retirees, 27.6% and 29.7% had access to pipe-borne water and well-water respectively. This means that female retirees’ households had access to better sources of water than male retirees’ households. When we consider the characteristics of retirees’ households in terms of toilet facilities, earlier patterns in household facilities also persist. The majority of respondents (63.8%) had access to modern toilet facility (i.e. water closet system). Disaggregating by sex, we found out a higher proportion among female households (67.9%) compared to male households (61.6%) had water closet toilets.
It is worth noting that people may have water closet toilet facility that is seldom used or never used. This can be due to plumbing faults or lack of water. Therefore, there is the need to treat the responses of people in areas like this with caution. There are other differences in the household facilities of retired men and women as indicated in literature (Heslop, 1999, Akedolu-Ale and Aribiah, 2001). The households of two thirds of male retirees (75%) used kerosene to cook compared to female households (67.5%). An overwhelming majority (92.8%) depended solely on an epileptic public source of power supply. This is instructive because it portrays retired older people as a group that has little or no choice because of their meager material resources, which are definitely inadequate to improve their living conditions.

9.8 Living Conditions of Retired Older People in Nigeria: Evidence from Lagos State

Living conditions are defined as how people live and capture a compendium of basic necessities, comforts, or luxuries considered essential to maintaining a person or group of persons in customary or proper social status or circumstances. It is also the level of material comfort measured by the quality and quantity of goods, services, and luxuries available to an individual, group, or nation that make life meaningful. This study, therefore, adopts the definition of living conditions as a relative term that captures the material comfort, material resources, health status, social relevance, life satisfaction, and adequacy of material resources and household facilities as relevant indicators of the socio-economic well-being of formal sector retirees in Lagos State, Nigeria. This study used two hypotheses to examine the living conditions of formal sector in Lagos State, Nigeria.

9.8.i Test of Hypothesis One: Gender and Access to Multiple Sources of Livelihood

H₁: Retired men are likely to have access to multiple (more) sources of livelihood than retired women.

H₀: Retired men are not likely to have access to multiple (more) sources of livelihood than retired women.

In SPSS, 0.05 is the least level of significance allowed to accept research hypothesis. However, the results of the test of hypotheses one and two in this paper show that the levels of significance were far above 0.05. Hence, we reject the research hypotheses and accept the null hypotheses instead. In Table
9.1 above, there is no statistically significant relationship between gender and access to multiple sources of retirement livelihood with $X^2 = 1.272$, df = 3, $P < 0.05$. Based on SPSS results, we accept the null hypothesis ($H_0$) that states “retired men are not likely to have access to multiple (more) sources of retirement livelihood than retired women” and reject the alternative hypothesis ($H_1$) that “retired men are likely to have access to multiple (more) sources of retirement livelihood than retired women.” The essence of these findings is that gender was found not to be a critical factor in determining access to livelihood among formal sector retirees in Lagos State. A significant proportion among retired men (90.3%) had a maximum of two sources of retirement livelihood compared to 88.7% among retired women.

The findings did not confirm earlier studies that retired women are more likely to depend on one source, usually social security, in retirement and that retired men often have alternative sources of income (Moen, 2001; Moody, 2002). The possible reason for this finding can be linked to the fact that some of these earlier studies were conducted in advanced countries coupled with the fact that the economic status of most women has improved significantly in many African societies. More importantly, women often benefit from informal supports such as income remittance and in kind supports. Apart from statistical findings, qualitative data from both focus group discussions and in-depth interviews also buttresses the fact that there is no significant difference between retired men and women in terms of access to livelihood in Lagos State. It is believed that individual qualities and previous assets in life are more important factors that determine access to multiple strings of livelihood (resources) than just the biological trait of being a male or female.

The point was further buttressed by a fairly older executive member of Nigeria Union of Pensioners (NUP) when he said,

I may not be able to compare easily (between male and female retirees) because there are some factors that determine the living con-
ditions (comfort) of women different from men. The level of education, the level of employment, all these count a lot. For the educated persons, who are not in government employment, I think they should be in good living conditions. But, you find that most of our women were employed in menial labour (jobs) and as such, such people, I don’t think, can be comfortable in retirement.

Obviously, the only exception was that women tend to have support from either their husbands or other sources such as adult children or relations. In a similar view, a respondent opined, “Women have many sources of income than men. Women collect money from their husbands and their children more than men.” As argued earlier, despite perceived multiple sources of social supports available to women, these sources are grossly inadequate and too irregular to significantly transform the living conditions of women. Hence, the living conditions of both men and women in Nigeria are basically similar and equally precarious in retirement.

9.8.ii Test of Hypothesis Two-Gender and Living Conditions

a. Gender and Living Conditions
   (Adequacy of Livelihood to Basic Needs)

H₁: Retired men are more likely to have an adequate retirement livelihood to meet basic needs than retired women.

H₀: Retired men are not more likely to have an adequate retirement livelihood to meet basic needs than retired women.

The relationship between gender of respondents and living conditions was measured in terms of retirees’ perceived adequacy of their retirement livelihood in meeting their basic needs. This is to ascertain if gender affects retirees’ perceived access to adequate retirement livelihood to meet basic needs. It is also because it is believed that the adequacy of retirement livelihood in meeting basic needs will likely impact positively on the living conditions of older people in retirement.

Table 9.2 below shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between the gender of retirees and their living conditions in terms of adequacy of retirement livelihood in meeting their needs with X² = 5.805, df = 5, p < 0.05. From Table 9.2, a slightly higher proportion among retired women (15.6%) claimed that their source of retirement livelihood was very adequate or adequate in meeting their basic needs compared to 13.5% among retired men. So, we accept the null hypothesis (H₀) that states “retired men are not more likely to
have an adequate retirement livelihood to meet basic needs than retired women” and reject the alternative hypothesis \((H_6)\) that “retired men are more likely to have an adequate retirement livelihood to meet basic needs than retired women.”

These basic necessities included food, accommodation, health care services, clothing, and other household facilities that were considered important determinants of living conditions in retirement. About half of retired men (49.4%) considered their retirement livelihood to be partially adequate to meet their basic needs compared to 52.9% of retired women. Invariably, gender is not a significant factor influencing retirees’ assessment of adequacy of their retirement livelihood with a slightly higher proportion among women claiming they had better living conditions in retirement because their sources of livelihood were considered adequate to meet their basic needs. The reason for this can be linked to the fact that women often benefit substantially from informal social supports than their male counterparts, which also complement their pensions and improve their living conditions in retirement. Information from qualitative data slightly defers from the statistical findings in terms of relationship between gender of retirees and access to retirement livelihood. As one male respondent opined,

female pensioners have two-edged lives, because they have pensions and they are very close to the children we both trained together, they take from the children, they add to their pensions, so they are better off than we men. Although the children usually patronize us like they patronize their mothers, our own is quite less to that of their mothers.

Although other informants agreed with the above gender differences, one stated,

majority of female pensioners enjoy better living conditions while we still have poor women pensioners, fingers are not equal. We still have
some who are less privileged in terms of enjoyment, depending on their status before they retired or on the grade level they retired upon.

b. Gender and Living Conditions

(Life Satisfaction in Retirement)

H1: Retired men are more likely to be more satisfied with life in retirement than retired women.

H0: Retired men are not more likely to be more satisfied with life in retirement than retired women.

Table 9.3 above shows that the gender of retirees does not influence the level of satisfaction in retirement. The Chi-square test also did not establish a statistically significant relationship between gender of retirees and life satisfaction in retirement with $X^2 = 8.395$, df = 5, $P < 0.05$. So, we accept the null hypothesis that states that “retired men are not more likely to be more satisfied with life in retirement than retired women” and we reject the alternative hypothesis that “retired men are more likely to be more satisfied with life in retirement than retired women.” Despite a slightly higher proportion among retired women reporting higher satisfaction in retirement compared to men, generally both groups complained of poverty and deplorable living conditions. A consideration of the data indicates that men (35%) were more dissatisfied compared to retired women (33.4%). A higher proportion among retired women (18.8%) was satisfied with life in retirement compared to retired men (17.4%). The table also shows that retired men had slightly higher percentages in the categories with dissatisfied and partially satisfied with life in retirement.

The qualitative reports also reveal that the level of life satisfaction in retirement is relatively the same for men and women in Lagos State. The main submission is that individual differences and socio-economic status played major
roles in determining the level of people’s contentment and life satisfaction in retirement. The consensus opinion among focus group participants was that female retirees were likely to be more satisfied in retirement than men because of their involvement in the private sphere, especially their performance of social roles such as care-givers and grandmothers as they grow older. Secondly, men are expected to assume more responsibilities to provide for family needs while women are more likely to be supported by their spouses and adult children.

9.9 Conclusion

Old age is a continuous process and retirement is seen as a critical life course event with concomitant effects on life chances and living conditions of workers. So many factors affect the living conditions of retired workers, but this study in particular examined gender differentials in livelihood and living conditions. Interestingly, the study established the relative importance of informal social supports in ameliorating retirement challenges and improving the living conditions of retired women who benefited significantly from informal supports such as income remittance and co-residence. Since retirement benefits sometimes remain unpaid months after disengagement, the living conditions and well-being of both retired men and women in Lagos State, Nigeria were found to be below average and precarious. The implication is that current workers are less likely to be motivated or encouraged to eschew corrupt practices in order to ‘insure’ themselves against poverty in retirement. The relative enhanced quality of life of older women underscores the importance of traditional support system in Nigeria despite modernization.

9.10 Recommendations

9.10.i The State and the Society

- There is need to revisit and revive African traditional heritage and values to address some challenges of old age care and support. This becomes compelling in the face of failure of modern institutions to guarantee succor in old age largely due to the global economic recession. The economic meltdown has also undermined the leverage hitherto provided by social security all over the world.
- Government should embark on extensive review and update of its database on retired workers, in particular older pensioners without alterna-
tive source of income, so that the actual number of retirees (pensioners) and the financial implications can be determined without the usual resort to dehumanizing verification exercises.

- Caregivers within families should be encouraged by relevant agents and assisted through incentives such as tax rebates or allowances to reduce the burden and abuse of care giving.
- Government should subsidize the provision of social welfare services (housing, health care services, and other basic necessities) to workers in order to reduce the strains on their meager resources (salary and wages). This can also be extended to retired older people at highly subsided rates.

9.10.ii Individual Worker and Retiree

Education is strategic to many aspects of an individual's life, including occupational status, social status, and socio-economic well-being. This study discovered that a low level of education is closely linked to poorly paid jobs, poor socio-economic status, and deplorable living conditions throughout the life course. This calls for individual worker to ensure that he or she is empowered economically to avoid sole dependence on inadequate public pensions. Generally, differentials in terms of living conditions show the impact of previous life course events on availability, access and adequacy of retirement livelihood and living conditions. Workers should be encouraged to ensure that their life course events are mediated in such a way to reduce the incidence and prevalence of cumulative disadvantages that can stifle opportunities to have desired quality of life and ensure well-being in retirement.

References


Chapter Ten

Feminists in Their Own Right: Self-Appraisal by Women Heading Households in Lagos, Nigeria

Funmi Bammeke

10.0 Introduction

Feminism as a movement and feminists as a group have experienced different forms of labeling in Africa. This is not surprising because, as a radical movement, feminism interrogates patriarchy and the male hegemonic order that it entails. The western origin of feminism and its links with the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s also provides the bedrock for the argument of critics that feminism is ‘alien’ to African culture and that it was merely a platform to attack age-old values. These age-old values incidentally are those that emphasize the lower status of women in relation to men and seek to legitimize and perpetuate female subordination and male supremacy in different social institutions. To preserve these ‘age-old values,’ African culture is projected as if it were static.

Really, to think of Feminism, especially if it connotes women’s visibility in the public sphere, as un-African is to be a-historical. Both in the economic and political spheres, African women have not consistently been subservient. Yoruba women, for example, had always been economically independent and politically vibrant. The role of Egba women is a relevant example here. The women protested against price control, which hurt market women. Under the leadership of Funlayo Ransome-Kuti, they protested against native authorities in 1949; an event that eventually led to the deposition of the then Alake of Egbaland, Oba Ademola II (Strobel, 2001).
In traditional Igbo society, there was also a flexible gender system that opened male roles to certain categories of women through such practices as nhanye, or “male daughters,” and igba ohu, or “female husbands,” and “these institutions placed women in a more favorable position for the acquisition of wealth and formal political power and authority” (Amadiume, 1987: 123). Colonialism, however, led to the abandonment or reinterpretation of these indigenous institutions to the detriment of women. The Aba Women’s Riot of 1929 also showed that African women were not subservient. Ekejiuba (1995) recalled her childhood experience of women in her community as initiators of development and active participants of social and economic processes in their communities. She had problems as a graduate student at Harvard in terms of reconciling her childhood experiences with the western image of the woman portrayed in literature as “marginalized,” “downtrodden,” and “exploited” by patriarchy and motherhood. She recalled that women who had attained a certain status punished men who repeatedly battered their wives or made disparaging comments about women and their reproductive anatomy.

There is therefore no doubt that in terms of the visibility of women and the actualization of their rights, feminism had existed in Africa (without the use of the word) prior to contact with the West. However, formalized knowledge on feminism (especially of western origin) traces feminism to the abolition movement, especially the activities of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Susan Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and other notable women who sought to improve the conditions of women’s lives. This is referred to as the first wave of activities leading to the emergence of feminism and it is traced to the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 (Shaw and Lee, 2001: 7). The second wave of activities was the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

The criticism that the different forms of western feminism are inadequate to explain the lived realities of African women in Africa led to the concept of African Feminism. There have, however, been questions as to what really is African feminism (Akatsa-Bukachi, 2005). Answers to these have varied with the dominant argument being that African feminism differs radically from the western forms of feminism that emerged in the 1960s. One of such arguments in reference to Mikell’s (1997) work on African feminism is that argues, “African feminists are not, by and large, concerned with issues such as female control over reproduction or variation and choice within human sexuality, nor with debates about essentialism, the female body, or the discourse of patriarchy. The feminism that is slowly emerging in Africa is distinctly heterosexual, pronatal, and concerned with ‘bread, butter, and power’ issues.” This argument is only partially true. Although issues of economic survival are important to African women, not surprisingly because of gender inequity as well as poverty
and social deprivations in the continent, issues surrounding female reproduction, sexuality, and the human body are also important being interwoven into survival issues.

Motherhood is central to the image of the ideal African woman but the primacy of motherhood can in reality be a constraint in terms of economic independence. This is because the responsibilities of motherhood are often prioritized above income earning responsibilities even where the effective performance of the latter would have enhanced the performance of the former. The figure of the African woman as mother, Lewis (2003) observes, has been a particularly prominent and confining one in patriarchal nationalism. This trope extols the ostensibly unique qualities of nurturance, protectiveness, and altruism of African women; qualities that are often believed to make them morally and culturally superior to ‘western’ women (Lewis, 2003: 3). In spite of the challenges of motherhood, most African women believe in family ties and family values and would prefer to construct the ideals within this structure. Motherhood is also not necessarily incompatible with feminism.

This article examines what women heading households in Lagos, Nigeria think of themselves. These women who are not even aware of feminist values actually display feminists’ traits to the extent that they defy all odds and ensure the survival of their households. Female household headship is not new. It has existed in various forms in some cultures and it has been the focus of development studies for sometime. In the light of more positive attitude towards social and economic empowerment of women, it could be expected that female-headed households would no longer be considered an ‘aberration.’ Could women be heading households because of their relative independence? It has been said that “compared with males, females are more likely to be heads due to unavoidable circumstances of life, rather than a decisive choice they make” (Ono-Osaki, 1991). This article attempts to establish the accuracy of this statement after more than two decades.

10.1 Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine what women heading households in Lagos, Nigeria think of themselves. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- appraise the views of women heading households on household headship; establish circumstances provoking female headship; and examine the inherence of gender in the reality of women heading households.
10.2 Women Heading Households

In many societies, women’s participation in education, politics, work, and other spheres of human endeavor is no longer considered unusual or met with open resistance or resentment. Attitude towards the image of women as co-players in various fields tends to be more positive than it was in the past. Women seldom experience overt institutionalized sexual discrimination now, and, when they do, public opinion largely condemns such acts. However, in spite of the gains of the women’s movement, the development of feminism and global awareness on gender issues, real changes in the status of women have been marginal and they vary across cultures. There are still many societies where the status of women is low and the value of women is related to the extent to which they conform to traditional expectations, especially with regards to gender roles. A gender division of labor manifests more rigidly in the family or household than it does elsewhere. In spite of the fact that marriage is becoming deinstitutionalized in industrialized nations and the assigned roles for husband and wife are endlessly negotiated (Popenoe, 2000), and in spite of emerging diversity in sexual orientation and social organization, some things have not changed. “The family is still the basic unit of society and women still tend to take most responsibility for childcare” (Bristow 2004).

Household headship is associated with men (Chant 1996; Schlyter, 1989; Smith, 1992). The patriarchal nature of most human societies, traditional or modern, means that headship is socially and culturally expected of men and they receive support from people and institutions in this respect. Even in research, projects, and in policy-measures, households headed by men have been regarded as the norm. Headship implies (albeit sometimes symbolically) authority, power, responsibility, control, and economic provision—traits that are stereotypically male. Society’s expectations in the area of headship and the attendant sanctions for deviating (though unwritten) are so clear that women are often unwilling to claim headship even when they satisfy measures of headship including major decision-making, the performance of major economic responsibilities, and the exercise of authority within the household. The women’s refusal to answer to the title of head could appear to be a self-effacing act but the latent reason could be that the women, being diplomatic, want to avoid being seen as challenging cultural norms. This is more so because in societies where marriage accords a higher status on women who are expected to show more inhibition towards pre-marital conception, separation, and divorce, women heading households for reasons other than spousal death are regarded as deviation from the cultural expectation.

Notwithstanding, the assumption that household headship is a male preserve, female headship is a reality that many societies have to accept. This as-
sumption, however, means that female-headed households were assumed to be non-existent and therefore under-reported. Even with the awareness of their existence, women heading households were not initially considered a category in need of special attention. Later, the literature on gender, development, and planning gave prominence to woman-headed households as households in need of special attention because of the observed relationship between female headship and poverty (Buvinic and Gupta, 1993: 24). However, identifying woman-headed households is problematic. A major problem is the fact that respondents giving information in census or survey questionnaires almost always mention the eldest male as head. This is a methodological issue that must be considered by researchers in the light of the socio-cultural context of their study.

The Yoruba (south-west Nigeria) worldview for instance is that the ‘bâlé’ (master of a house) or ‘bâlé-ilé’ (householder/landlord) is a man. Therefore, unless the researcher uses multiple indicators of headship, respondents would almost always identify a man as household head. Also, in many cases, the woman who, in fact, heads a household may not be recognized as such and may not name herself as such because of cultural prescription identifying men with household authority. The result of this is that most census data reflect the conventional assumption that a woman will be recognized as head only if she had no resident male partner. The absence of a male partner is not sufficient evidence of female headship, as many absent men still contribute to the economic sustenance of their households through remittance. In the same vein, the presence of a male partner does not always translate into male headship as reasons of health or economic incapability may hinder the man from performing the role of a breadwinner or prevent him from exercising authority.

The relatively small proportion of households headed by women (NPC, 2004; Bongaarts, 2001; Federal Office of Statistics, 1996; Oyekanmi, 1993) is not in doubt, but their characteristics are more important than their number. Female-headed households are as different as the circumstances surrounding their emergence. Many scholars have observed the heterogeneous nature of female-headed households (e.g. Barros et al., 1997; Kennedy and Peters, 1992; and the Federal Office of Statistics, 1996), and this heterogeneity may contribute to the problem of identification. In woman-maintained household, an absent male contributes so much to the maintenance of the household that the woman cannot be described as its economic mainstay. The woman in this case is described as a de facto head. She has only as much authority as the man delegates. She does not have the autonomy of the unacknowledged woman head whose male partner is only a symbolic head. However, in the latter, an appropriate picture may not be given as the symbolic head may be identified.
as head. In the last category of woman-headed households, no male partner is present and the household is not dependent on the economic support of a man. Included in this category are widows, divorcées, and never-married, but economically independent women, and other *de jure* heads.

Households headed by women tend to be overrepresented among the poor (Barros et al., 1997). They also tend to be smaller because women heading households rarely co-reside with a spouse, whereas the majority of male heads live with their wives (Bongaarts, 2001). Women heading households tend to have lower education (Massiah, 1983) and also lack free time and leisure (OAU, 1992). Although differences exist between, and within, households headed by men and women, the larger context of gender disadvantages and inequality provide answers for the overwhelming vulnerability of women headed households to unwholesome conditions.

### 10.3 Data and Methods

Data presented here has been sifted from a larger data gathered for my doctoral work on gender, household headship, and children’s educational performance. The qualitative data from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews of women heading households, in respect of their perception of their headship, is the focus of our examination here. There were ten focus groups (four in Badagry and six in Surulere local government areas of Lagos state). Each group, made up of six participants, was homogeneous on the basis of sex, marital status, and religion. The data examined here are those of *de jure* female heads of households in urban Surulere.

### 10.4 Selection of Focus Group Discussants

Participants in the focus group were identified during the survey, which also took place in the same location. Using the purposive sampling technique, the women were selected and invited for the group discussion. To qualify for selection, the women had to be living without a male partner and have children in their households (the children could be biological, adopted, or fostered) who were attending secondary school. Two-thirds of the women had higher education while others had secondary education. The women were predominantly between 40 and 49 years of age. Only one third of the women fell within the extremes, which were 30–39 years and 50–59 years. All but two of the women had been married before. The two who had never been married had
previous relationships with men. Two-thirds of the women belonged to the Yoruba ethnic group (south-west Nigeria) while the others were from various groups in the south-east and south-south. The focus group discussions were meant to elicit group consensus on issues surrounding gender and household headship. The research instrument was a moderator/focus group discussion guide suggesting issues to be initiated for discussion at various points. The content of the guide included questions on the women’s understanding of headship, headship responsibility, children’s education, and problems encountered as women heading households without spouses and with children in secondary schools.

10.5 Selection of Interviewees

Twenty-five (25) female household heads were selected for in-depth interviews in Badagry and Surulere on the basis of 8 and 17 respectively. The interviewees were selected purposively following contact established during the survey. The characteristics of the interviewees showed that they assumed that status due to circumstances rather than as a matter of choice. Widows constituted the single largest group (13) followed by divorced women (4). Women in polygynous relationships and those who were separated from their spouses numbered three in each group while the never married women were only two. Five of the widows were in their 60s, three in their early 50s, and four in their late 30s and early 40s. Only one widow was in her early 30s. For the divorced women, two were in their 60s and two in their 50s, whereas the separated women were all in their early 50s. The polygynously married women were in their late 40s and early 50s, while the never married women were in their early 40s. The women were also predominantly Yoruba. The objective of the in-depth interview was to provide an insight into the experiences of female heads of households. The study instrument was an unstructured interview guide, which had questions on the structure and organization of the respondents’ household, the welfare of the household, and respondents’ time usage, as well as the educational performance of their children and their general experience. The in-depth interview enabled each female head to tell her story.

10.6 Gender and Household Headship

The consensus from the focus groups was that household headship is a male preserve. The predominant group feeling expressed through both verbal and
non verbal cues was that the position of household head in an ideal situation is unarguably that of men. “There is no question about this,” one of the groups observed. Notwithstanding their religious inclination (either Christians or Moslems), discussants were unanimous in their expectation that the primary qualification for being a household head is to be a man. Justification for this position was anchored on the biological differences between males and females, cultural prescription, and religious injunction. These factors are not considered to be mutually exclusive; rather, each one is believed to reinforce or validate the other. Common refrains among the groups on why headship is a male preserve is that “it is natural,” “it is our culture,” and “our religion (God) says so.”

The focus group discussion reveals that household headship is perceived as being synonymous with breadwinning, a responsibility that all the categories of groups believe should ideally be for men. Apart from the ‘provider’ role of the household head, household discipline and authority are also associated with the head. The definition of household headship is, however, not strictly related to material provision in the sense that as perceived by the groups, although a man is expected to provide for his family, his inability to do so does not rob him of headship, ostensibly. The position of the female Moslem group captures that of others. Expressed in Yoruba the group’s position is that “boya won se ojuse won abi won o se o, awon (okunrin) ni olori,” that is, “whether or not they live up to their responsibilities, they (men) remain heads.” In other words, headship as a male prerogative is incontestable.

The focus groups openly recognize that certain factors may lead to the breakdown of marriage and, according to them, marriage can breakdown if the parties cannot find a solution to their problems. Discussants did not mince words about the fact that they did not think that their own situation (being out of marriage for various reasons) was the ideal. Participants acknowledged that they never set out deliberately to be heads of household. They affirmed that no woman wanted to “live on her own and do the work of two people.” There was a consensus that it was better to be married and that they worked hard to keep their marriages. Rather than regret, what was discernible in the group discussion was courage. Apparently, getting out of their marriages or relationships was not an easy decision for the women. Such a decision was preceded by intervention by relatives and efforts by the concerned women; especially in order to avoid stigmatization. A participant’s view sums up their thoughts:

You want to be married as a woman. You try your best to stay in the marriage but if you’re not happy and the situation may lead to death, it is better to leave and let people talk.
Reasons for dissolution of marriage or separation ranged from uncaring attitude of partner, brutality, and irresponsible behavior (drunkenness, indiscreet extra-marital affairs, sexual relations with house help, dishonesty about the existence of other children outside marriage, etc.). Fear of “what people would say,” “how they would look at my children,” and “what would happen to my children,” the groups agree, keep women in unhappy marriages longer than necessary.

10.7 Experience of Women Heading Households

The views of the 25 women interviewed show that they shared the opinion of those in the focus groups. They perceived headship as a male responsibility but opined that circumstances could thrust household headship on a woman. These circumstances include spousal death, divorce, separation, or, in the words of one interviewee, “when a woman has no husband but has children and has to provide for them.” Another middle-aged interviewee in clear reference to what she sees as a consequence of polygyny said, “when a man has many wives, nobody tells a woman that she has to work hard to provide for her own children. The man is for everybody but the children are for her.”

Economic sustenance of their households was a priority issue for the interviewees. A common submission of all of them is the need for them to work hard to be able to provide for their children. The economic problem was most severe among de jure heads (widowed, divorced, and separated women) who did not enjoy spousal support. Though, de facto heads (women who lived apart from their spouses because of polygyny or economic migration) admitted that they received financial support from their absent spouses, this was generally considered inadequate, hence the need for them to augment.

The economic situation of female heads was particularly difficult if they had many children or had children in school. It was least difficult if they had adult children who supported them financially. It was the opinion of widows in particular that their economic situation would have been better with their husbands alive. Other categories of interviewees, especially those who had one problem or the other with their spouses, did not think so. Although they conceded that it was better for spouses to run a household together, they noted that a man’s presence does not always guarantee economic support for the woman and her children. A woman who had been married for close to 20 years before her separation said, “If a woman has no husband, at least she knows she does not have. It is better than living with a man and struggling as if you live alone.”
If the women thought it was better for a man and woman to raise children in a household, why did they not remarry? A common reason the women gave was the welfare of their children. The women realized that their children's upbringing would require their undivided attention, which they may not be able to give if they remarried. In the words of a respondent, “a husband will need my time and I don’t have that time. My children are my husband.” Another respondent said, “A husband? What do I want with a husband again? I don’t have the time for the requirements of a husband. What will he even give me now?” One can deduce from the opinion of these women that though they value marriage, once their marriages had ended for whatever reasons, they would rather focus on how to fend for their households than consider remarry.

It is possible that this view could have been influenced by the ages and status of the women. It had been explained earlier that to be qualified for selection for the study, the women must have children in secondary schools. The education of children was considered very important by the women such that in discussing their children none failed to mention the issue. In spite of the primacy of the economic sustenance of members of the household, it was a common submission that women needed to create time to supervise their children’s studies or get others to do so. They believed financial constraints may hinder children’s education and they all try to prevent this in particular because of the assumption that they will be held responsible for their children’s achievement/successes. An interviewee put it succinctly when she said, “I don’t want my children to fail in life because they will say it is because their father and I did not stay together.” This resolve that children should excel in life in spite of the absence of a male spouse fuels the women’s commitment to their children. This is not surprising as the women (except widows who enjoy some sympathy) contend with negative social beliefs that portray them as non-conformists for not being married or remaining in their marriages.

The women's commitment to their children’s education is deliberate and there is evidence that it achieves their intention. In a test administered to children selected from male and female headed households as part of the larger study from which the data under consideration was extracted, the results show that children from households headed by women had a higher performance than those in households headed by men, although the difference in their scores was not statistically significant.

10.8 Conclusion

The pervasiveness of gender resonates in the opinions of women heading households. Their conditioning that headship is synonymous with being a man in-
fluences their evaluation of their own position. They openly uphold society’s image of the ideal family where the ‘altruistic’ male head provides for his dependent wife and children. In doing this, they label their own situation as an aberration or deviation. These economically independent women, who are responsible for taking decisions on their lives and those of their children, are reluctant to acknowledge their contribution. What they do are the same activities for which men are respected and recognized as ‘breadwinners’ or household heads in the same society. Gender as a system of stratification ensures that these activities are valued differently when done by women.

Society does not just impose gender expectations on men and women; rather, people are active players in the process of gendering. Women heading households know that the cultural scripts jointly written by men and women expect a woman to be a ‘wife’ and to be wife is to be under the authority of a man. Among the Yoruba of south-west Nigeria, the ethnic group to which the majority of the respondents belonged, economic independence of women is accepted but it does not translate into headship. In spite of a woman’s economic status, she is expected to be “under a man,” meaning being in a marital situation. It is believed that this has some security implications and also bestows some measure of ‘respect’ on the woman.

The primacy of marriage for women and even men is a gendered expectation to which many seek to conform. In spite of the universality of marriage, however, it is evident that women experience more pressure to get married earlier than men for biological reasons as well as for social reasons already highlighted. They also experience more pressure to stay in a marital relationship, whereas polygyny provides a man with an escape route from an unfulfilling union. In a society where the status of women is low and whatever achievement they have is secondary to being wife and mother, the tendency is for women to seek to conform to this expectation even if only for appearance sake.

Women heading households see themselves as not conforming to the perceived norm. Rather than recognize their contribution to their households and the quality of life of their children (for which men would have taken credit), they collaborate with society to label themselves. They believe they must offer an explanation for ‘deviating’ from what they have been brought up to see as the norm. But are women heading households really villains even in a developing society where traditional values are cherished? The analysis of the views of women in this study shows that they are women who discovered the asymmetrical nature of power relations in marriage and their no-win situation. They are women who find the courage to survive against the odds of hostility, negative attitude, economic constraints, and social prejudice. Clearly, they are
women swimming against the tide of social expectation. They may not acknowledge it, but they are feminists in their own rights.

References


Chapter 11

Conclusion

‘Lai Olurode

Feminist scholarship in Africa has been a mixed blessing of a kind, a two-sided coin somehow. It is, however, not a mixed blessing in the sense of its wholesale adaptation in its unrefined and uncritical form. In any case, its presence in this pure form was hardly disclosed anywhere in Africa. The African reality often finds some space in any piece of academic work prior to its domestication. Indeed, feminism as a critique of conventional and particularly conservative frame of thought about gender relations and about the taken-for-granted ideas of patriarchy has had a demystifying power. This has manifested in two ways—first, it enabled African scholars to interrogate the colonial notion of reality foisted on Africa, a viewpoint that was essentially tainted and patently Eurocentric but was nevertheless portrayed as the universal truth. Feminism has emerged as a theoretical weapon to keep this evolutionary thought at bay. Indeed, for historical and geographical reasons, the same set of gender relations cannot be said to hold for all historical epochs. Gender relations tend to be space and time-bound. It may turn out to be a hazardous guess to predetermine gender relations apriori.

Secondly, feminism facilitated a robust re-interpretation of pre-existing data on Africa as documented by European travelers. A rigorous re-examination of this data led Afrocentric and African scholars to different conclusions on the discourse of gender in Africa. Feminist scholarship has thus been an eye opener. It somehow forced a re-examination of the African worldview foreign scholars had previously taken as settled and unproblematic. Feminism has aided the questioning of early anthropological and sociological evidence and scholars’ conclusions. We can safely insist that feminism has not only germinated but flourished on the African soil for some reasons. First, Africa is a plural society; its ethnography is immensely diverse. Likewise, the central message embedded in feminism is tolerance of pluralism. Feminism is indeed compatible with the worldviews of Africa as can be discerned from their proverbs and fables. Reality, to an African is not cast in iron. It is negotiable. We cannot all appreciate the same beauty or goodness. This underscores the importance of
tolerance of the diverse ways in which humanity discloses itself. Secondly, Africans subscribe to the view that the sky is wide enough to contain even conflicting tendencies of ideas and values. Thus the realists’ philosophical frame of thought cannot simply hold the sway all of the time. As a matter of fact, global security has come under perennial threat because of the realists’ insistence that their own way of seeing is sacrosanct, inexorable, and faultless and that others must share and buy into their own perspectives. Diversity, from this position, has to be traded at all cost, even if it results in an unproductive war on terror. Thirdly, feminism has afforded an immense opportunity for the mainstreaming of gender issues into the development discourse. Unwarranted discriminatory practices rooted in gender bias and stereotype are generally unwelcome and may sometimes simultaneously invite not only national but global condemnation. Finally, the modern state under the increasing tempo of liberal democracy has become more receptive to development issues that now have gender components at the front burner. Representations at most international forums are expected to be gender friendly. No country or scholar can thus hold back the hand of the gender clock and expect to be respected in the comity of nations.

With feminism as a rejection of oppression generally and patriarchy in particular—including male chauvinism as well as other forms of unfair treatment that derive from gender stereotype—scholars in all fields have become more sensitive to issues of freedom, discrimination, and human emancipation. This publication has been driven by this core message of the inevitability of human freedom and the imperative of common humanity (regardless of gender categories) that feminism advocates.
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