

Transformative Narratives Towards Psycho-Cultural Sustainability and Positive Gender Socialisation for Women in West and Central Africa



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Abstract

Aim: This paper examines how traditional gender roles are understood through rites of passage, illuminating their significance in cultural contexts in West and Central Africa. In this light, we present narratives that compare traditional and modern views of women's gender roles, encouraging a thoughtful dialogue on the evolution of these perceptions. Within African cultures, transformative narratives have been used to maintain a sustainable balance between the individual mindset and cultural norms that influence gender identity. The specific objectives of the paper are to: 1) examine rites of passage as the foundation for understanding gender roles in Africa; 2) highlight the changing perception of women's gender roles and socialization in Africa from traditional to modern perceptions 3) discuss the implications of change in gender role perception for psycho-cultural sustainability and positive socialization of women.

Methods: The paper employs an ethnographic approach through analysis of cultural narratives, both oral and written.

Results: The major findings of the paper are that there are birth and puberty rites of passage that clearly define gender roles within African cultures. The study also found that despite the dominance of patriarchal systems in many traditional African societies, there existed gender role complementarity where women and men performed complementary roles and women were considered to be the custodians and sustenance of African traditional values and virtues. Nonetheless, the advent of modernism and colonialism women have been placed on the lower rungs of society by the dominant forces of capitalism and globalization posing tensions between both genders.

Conclusion: Cultural perspectives significantly shape how decisions are made, reinforcing the idea that advancing gender equality and valuing women's voices is crucial for psycho-cultural sustainability and positive socialization of women.

Recommendation: Psycho-cultural sustainable development in Africa requires understanding traditional African perspectives on gender. By giving equal value and importance to the roles played by both males and females, the balance and harmony that once existed can be re-established.

Keywords: *Transformative narratives; gender socialization; psycho-cultural sustainability*

INTRODUCTION

This paper highlights the valuable aspects of gender role perceptions in traditional African societies that can be enhanced to foster positive socialization for women for agency and empowerment. It begins by examining how traditional gender roles are understood through rites of passage, illuminating their significance in cultural contexts. The paper then presents narratives that compare traditional with modern views of women's gender roles in Africa, encouraging a thoughtful dialogue on the evolution of these perceptions. Finally, it discusses the potential benefits of adapting gender roles for the sake of psycho-cultural sustainability and the constructive socialization of women, emphasizing the importance of building on traditional strengths while adapting to contemporary needs. This paper, therefore, aims to explore how rites of passage and conventional gender narratives in African societies can be reinterpreted to support women's agency and empowerment within a psycho-culturally sustainable framework.

Gender norms designate specific roles, responsibilities, duties, and privileges to individuals based on gender (Akanle, 2012). Each gender is assigned specific roles based on cultural contexts. Gender roles aim at setting boundaries between what is perceived as appropriate for women and men in society about both in the public and private domains. Such roles are accepted as 'natural' and internalized by girls and boys from a very early age, through the gender models they learn through their social environment. In most societies, individuals are strongly pressured to abide by such models, not only directly by the family or the community, but also indirectly by the role models underlying the social fabric – the labour market, public policy, the taxation system, etc., which often act as deterrents to social change. Both women and men perform multiple roles in their lives, in the productive domain – which includes activities related to the production of goods for consumption or trade and income-generating activities – and in the reproductive domain – which entails tasks and activities relating to the creation and sustaining of the family and the household (ILO, 2023). Cooking can be undervalued in some cultures while highly esteemed in others, where the cook is seen as a hero and is well-respected. Therefore, when men and women perform their gender roles adequately, there is a tendency towards sustainable psychological and cultural well-being. According to scholars such as Olufemi and VerEecke (1992), recognizing the equal value and importance of the gender roles carried out by men and women is essential for fostering stability and harmony in Africa.

Each society has narratives about how the members of the society understand phenomena and others (Findlay, 2014). Oral literature is a powerful tool (Kobla, 2017), and the narratives help us better understand ourselves and others. Further, narratives unite us by shaping connections and conveying shared values, culture, and history of confidence-building. In other words, they provide meaning to our collective life and performance of gender roles. From childhood, tales about how to build confidence as a man or woman are embedded within our cultures (Waddell, 2024). Many cultures have used transformative narratives as a means of enhancing gender roles and fostering psycho-cultural sustainability (Tamunomiegbam & Arinze, 2024). These transformative narratives are embedded in proverbs, folktales, songs, and rites of passage. Rites of passage form the basis on which gender roles are understood and socialized in most African cultures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Considerations

Transformative Narratives

Narratives can be understood to be the ever-renewable cultural resources from which we co-create our social worlds, and co-create our 'selves', our subjectivities, or identities (Findlay, 2014). This confidence-building in gender identity emanates from the sustainability of psycho-cultural dimensions of human life, which are contingent upon the transformative narratives we are exposed to in our environments, and the stories we participate in through our gender relationships, within the vastly complex narrative amalgams we call cultures. Cognitive scientists, narrative psychologists, philosophers, linguists, and narrative theorists agree, in general, that 'We become who we are through telling stories about our lives and living the stories we tell'. Our sense of who we are can thus be understood as 'a dynamic state of always-becoming (Findlay, 2014). Narratives help us understand others and ourselves. They unite us by forging connections and conveying shared values, culture, and history of confidence-building. In other words, they provide meaning to our collective life and performance of gender roles. Childhood tales about how to build confidence as a man or woman are embedded within our cultures (Waddell, 2024).

Narratives can capture the lived experience of women and men from different races, socio-economic groupings, sexuality, disability and place their diverse voices, visions and trajectories at the centre of development planning, rather than public policy scripts which tend to homogenise the experiences of women and men or frame them in stereotypical ways. Narratives are a way of communicating subjective experiences of selves, one's life history, or meaning-making accounts of transition conjunctures and trajectories. Narratives also enable the teller to maintain continuity of the self in the contexts of disruptive transition conjunctures (Bennett and Vidal-Hall, 2000). They give an insight into the person's past, present and future trajectories as people reconstruct their stories, weaving past, present and the future together. Instead of freezing lives in only present temporal frames, narratives can give a better and deeper understanding of the narrator's realities, social relations, aspirations, and opportunities over an expanded temporal span of a lived life course. To analyze how structure is enmeshed with agency, narratives have played an important part in feminist research (Ilmonen, 2020; Roof, 2018; Polkinghorne, 1995; Nyman *et al.*, 2014). Narratives are active ways through which discourse about social identities is produced by people narrating them. Cole (2009) argues that 'undoing gender' is about breaking a culture of silence through better intersectional narratives and contends: 'let our stories be heard by our own, our daughters' and our granddaughters' (Cole, 2009, p. 574). Transformative narratives have been used by many cultures as a means of enhancing gender roles and fostering psycho-cultural sustainability.

Gender Socialisation

Henslin (2010) described gender socialisation as a master status or a universal culture, thus affirming the existence of gender roles and functions in many societies. In explaining gender socialisation, the nature/biological and nurture/social philosophies are widespread. These are referred to as biological determinism and social constructionism by Oyěwùmí (1997). Biological determinism explains that the male gender was naturally created and developed to control society

(Martin, 1991; Dogo, 2014). Social constructionism holds that society (re)produces patriarchy and, therefore, is changeable.

In most societies, men's roles in the productive domain are prominent, whereas their reproductive or domestic role is just subsidiary. Men's productive work usually takes place outside the home, allowing them to perform their roles sequentially rather than simultaneously. In most countries, men are more involved in decision-making processes within political activities: they sit in assemblies and councils and direct more government agencies than women, therefore holding a greater political power and able to exert stronger influence on their communities. Also, they usually have greater economic power: they run more medium- and large-sized companies and business activities, and proportionally earn more income at all occupational levels compared to women. Men's contribution to domestic activities is often limited to tasks involving some financial decisions, like children's education, house purchases (ILO, 2023).

Women, on the other hand, usually have to juggle various tasks simultaneously, because they tend to perform multiple roles within the reproductive and productive spheres (this is often called 'multi-tasking'). In a multicultural study conducted by the ILO (2023), it was found that women have been described as having a 'triple role':

A productive role: Although women worldwide engage in paid work or income-generation activities, they tend to lose out in terms of access to, control over, and benefits from productive resources.

A reproductive role (or domestic role): Reproduction refers to all activities necessary for the maintenance and survival of human life. Examples include bearing, looking after and educating children, cooking food, washing clothes, growing or foraging for food for home use. A distinction can also be made between mothers and non-mothers.

A community management role: This term is used to describe activities usually carried out by women, as an extension of their reproductive role, for the benefit of the community, for example, the provision and maintenance of scarce resources of collective consumption, such as water, health care and education. This work is mostly unpaid and voluntary. Community management activities performed by men tend to be more visible and of higher social value (administration of local justice).

Women's reproductive role and community management role are often perceived to be 'natural': as they do not generate income, they are often invisible at the national economic level, even though the same tasks do constitute a professional profile. For example, if a mother or other female relatives take care of children during 'working hours', they are not financially rewarded; however, professional 'carers' receive remuneration for the same tasks and are considered in economic statistics. The professionalisation of domestic tasks, in its turn, partially contributes to the concentration of women in certain categories (nurse, domestic help, etc), which reinforces the stereotype according to which women have a 'natural' quality for domestic work.

Psycho-cultural sustainability

Psycho-cultural sustainability is the idea that a transition to sustainability requires a change in individual psychological mindset and cultural values, worldviews, and identities. In this paper, the concept of "psycho-cultural sustainability" is intricately linked to the evolving psychological

mindsets and cultural values of women. Psychology offers numerous frameworks from which we can understand gender roles, as much of the theoretical work on gender has been drawn from both psychology and sociology (Wharton 2005).

In this paper, we draw insights from an interaction between psychological, biological and societal components to gain a better understanding of how gender roles are constructed. From a gender schema theory, psychologists understand gender roles as being socially constructed and maintained through cognitive organisation and interpretation (Abrams, Maxwell & Belgrave, 2018; O'Neil *et al.*, 2017). A gender schema is a mental system of associations that categorises and guides gendered beliefs, expectations and behaviours. This system is acquired from the cultural environment, such as observational learning and parental teachings. Gender schemas provide culturally specific behavioural guidelines for responding and adapting to mental and environmental stimuli, resulting in associating certain roles only with women and others with men (Abrams *et al.* 2018). Similarly, the social role theory presupposes that men and women behave differently because of societal expectations. These expectations and their associated behaviours originate in the home, the workplace and other social situations. Individuals thus modify their behaviour to blend in with culturally acceptable gender norms and expectations (Abrams *et al.* 2018:152).

The psycho-cultural approach to gender socialisation involves the triangulation of the psyche (mindset), the soma (physical body) and the society/environment (Mamba, 2020). This psyche-soma-society/environment trilogy places the human organism in a situation of well-being when it is in harmony with this trilogy, when this harmony is broken in any way, the balance is tainted and both mental and physical health is thus threatened. An individual's adherence to gender roles and functions, is therefore impacted by the psycho-cultural factors that encompass the mindset of the individual, the physical development of the individual as either a man or woman and the society/environment which the individual finds himself or herself (Feldman, 2003).

The basic trilogy places the society-environment at the top of our conception because the human finds its meaning in this paradigm. It is the foundation of all interaction and the field of behavioural exploration. It is here that culture plays a major role in behavior. The psyche embodies the mindset. This psyche stores all memories, overflows individual's past and present and thus dictates conscious and unconscious conduct through impulses. The soma is the physical body, the organism that incarnates and develops as either a man or woman based on biological labels of each sex.

Effective gender socialisation occurs when there is harmony between the mindset, the body and society/environmental beliefs about gender roles and functions (Mamba, 2020). The concept of 'gender roles,' refers to the activities ascribed to women and men on the basis of their perceived differences. Gender roles are socially determined, change over time and space and are influenced by social, cultural and environmental factors characterizing a certain society, community or historical period. Gender roles aim at setting boundaries between what is perceived as appropriate for women and for men in the society with regards both to the public and private domains. Such roles are accepted as 'natural' and internalized by girls and boys from a very early age, through the gender models they learn through their social environment. In most societies, individuals are strongly pressured to abide by such models, not only directly by the family or the community, but also indirectly by the role models underlying the social fabric – the labour market, public policy, the taxation system etc., which often act as deterrents to social change. Both women and men

perform multiple roles in their lives, in the productive domain – which includes activities related to the production of goods for consumption or trade and income-generating activities – and in the reproductive domain – which includes tasks and activities relating to the creation and sustaining of the family and the household (ILO, 2023).

Theoretical Perspectives

Bostock (2009) emphasizes that the psychological dimension of cultural sustainability involves a deep reflection on an individual's mental state, encompassing their sense of identity, personal memories, and relationships with others. This insight sheds light on how women navigate their roles in society, and how these roles are perceived over time. Antonovsky (1984) introduced a compelling model that suggests psychological well-being is fundamentally shaped by a person's sense of coherence. This model is particularly relevant not only to those grappling with conditions like dementia but also to women who are negotiating their identities and roles within a rapidly changing cultural landscape. Antonovsky (1984) posits that culture is a primary source of an individual's sense of coherence, serving as bedrock for personal identity and self-understanding, that is, the ability to make meaning of oneself.

As societal perceptions of women continue to evolve, and as women actively reshape their self-images, they are increasingly empowered to tackle the challenges of daily life with resilience and confidence. Moreover, Maiteny's (2003) psychodynamic framework further enriches this discussion by underscoring the intricate interplay between psychological and cultural dynamics. It highlights that the meanings we derive from our experiences are grounded in the values and beliefs that govern our behaviors. Recognizing these factors is crucial, as they often underpin the threats faced by ecological systems—a domain where women play a pivotal role as guardians of cultural values and traditions that define the identity of their communities.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This paper adopted an ethnographic approach in collecting information concerning the various objectives of the paper. A realist ethnographic method was used with the focus of interpreting cultural texts and narratives to provide an objective of gender roles in West and Central African cultures.

FINDINGS

There are Birth and Puberty Rites of Passage That Clearly Define Gender Roles Within African Cultures

Textual analysis reviewed from cultures in Nigeria revealed that in Nigerian societies, gender and sex are intertwined from the moment a child is born. The first question Nigerian parents with newborns are often asked is, "Is it a boy or a girl?" (Omorieg & Ihensekhien, 2009, p. 1). The boy is destined to carry on the family name and will be the rightful heir to his father's property (Omadjohwoefe, 2011; Akintan, 2013). Furthermore, as Omadjohwoefe (2011) explains, boys and girls are treated differently from childhood to adolescence. A child's gender determines which household chores they will be assigned and what privileges they will receive (Omadjohwoefe, 2011). "The male child can wander farther and get involved in rough-and-tumble play, while the girl is highly restricted and closely monitored" (Omadjohwoefe, 2011, p. 69). In many households, female children must remain at home, assisting their mothers with chores and caring for younger

siblings. In contrast, male children are socialized into traditional notions of masculinity and often accompany their fathers to work on the farm or in another profession (Akintan, 2013). As individuals develop, their comprehension of societal roles becomes firmly established, fostering a natural alignment with these roles.

Rites of passage are critical narratives and dimensions of traditional socialization of gender roles in Africa (Kobla, 2017). These rituals signify transitions between life stages and reflect cultural expectations of gender roles. At this conception, some rites are performed (Turner, 1985). For instance, amongst the Nso of the Northwest Region of Cameroon, a new birth, a youth's maturation through puberty, and the funeral of a respected community member all mark the change of an individual's status within respected binary gender functions (Nsamenang, 1992). According to Turner (1985), most African societies have different age-linked rituals and mark the passage from one to another, but not all have the same rituals, either in number or in kind. Kobla (2017) explains that in Igembe society, these rituals include circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls. In this discussion, we will explore two essential rites that play a significant role in human growth, development, and the socialization of gender roles: birth rites and adult rites. Understanding these rites can provide valuable insights into our cultural practices and their impact on individuals throughout their life journey.

In African cultures, birth rites serve as an introduction to societal norms, shaping an infant's identity through rituals, naming ceremonies, and the assignment of gender roles that align with cultural expectations. Birth rites often begin with the prenatal stage, with rituals to confirm pregnancy, fetal growth, and safe delivery. At the time of conception, some rites are performed to plead to God via the ancestors for the birth of either a boy or girl child as deemed necessary by the family (Manu, 2003). The birth rite introduces the infant into the world with a naming ceremony, reflecting the belief that newborns bring unique gifts and a divine mission from the spiritual realm. Nsamenang (1992) states that amongst the Nso people of the Northwest Region of Cameroon, the naming ceremony at birth is always sensitive to gender, as both men and women participate in naming the child.

The child is often considered a reincarnation of a significant man or woman who lived a virtuous life in the family (Nsamenang, 1992). Girls are named after women, and boys are named after men. From birth, children are expected to recognize and grow within the gender boundaries defined by their culture (Nsamenang, 1992). This is substantiated by Dogo (2014), who attests that from the time a child is born in Nigerian society, they are cast in the role ascribed to the sexes by society. The children are, therefore, brought up with an awareness of societal gender roles and grow up to fulfill them. These roles confine the sexes to supposedly appropriate behavior and areas of endeavor based on their biological identification as men or women (Dogo, 2014). Nonetheless, it should equally be noted that birth rites prescribed different roles and functions for male and female children.

Puberty rites are the most gender-sensitive of all rites. These rites typically begin at ages 11 and focus on the socialization of boys and girls into their future adult roles. They also include initiations into various traditional associations specific to each gender. African societies systematically guide boys and girls to assume their responsibilities and functions. Within the course of these rites, boys and girls are separated and taken out of the community and away from the concerns of everyday life to perform gender-sensitive tasks that will make them responsible male and female adults.

They often learn the rules and taboos of society, moral instruction, ethical responsibility, and further explore their life's mission.

Puberty rites often culminate in emerging adults joining different traditional associations based on gender. Mzeka (1980) reports that there are traditional associations comprised of only men and those of women only. For instance, there is the *Nfu* association among the Nso of the Northwest Region of Cameroon. The group consists of only men, and their primary function is to serve as soldiers and protectors of the clan. In this case, men are socialized to take up the task of protecting the family and the entire tribe. For women, there is the *Chong* association, whose primary duty is nurturing and feeding the clan. There, women are socialized on how to nurture the family and entire clan (Mzeka, 1980).

Once adolescents have emerged into adults, betrothal and rituals elevating individuals to high office or to priestly functions could be performed. Among the Kom tribe of the Northwest region of Cameroon, the objective of these newly socialized adults' rites is to have daughters get married and bear children (Tchombe & Lo-oh, 2012). Within these rites of passage, men and women are expected to be oriented to perform their different gender roles and functions.

There Existed Complementary Gender Roles in Traditional African Societies, Though These Perceptions are Changing with the Advent of Colonialism, Capitalism and Globalisation

In some African countries, for example, the Akan people of Ghana, women were endowed with a great deal of responsibility for the moral and ethical upbringing of children and considered wise enough to detect their families' spiritual, moral, and material needs (Opara & Matthew, 2024). Besides reproductive roles, women could equally perform productive and community management roles concerning spiritual and political responsibilities (Opara & Matthew, 2024; Adio, 2022). For instance, as priestesses conducted prayer and sacrifices of different types and rituals (Idowu, 1973). Women performed ritual dancing, singing, beating drums, and clapping hands. Women priestesses in African Traditional Religion were allowed to play a prominent role in performing rituals in domestic and ancestral shrines (Mbiti, 1975; Quarcoopome, 1987; Opara & Matthew, 2024).

It was equally found out that amongst the Bamilike of the Western Region of Cameroon, there is a proverb about the pride of women: *Yáá ten lah njī lōhfu, tamíéwǎ', mbe' múnzhwīē. Ndū í ngwā' nā í mbú í ma nthū nshu', ta ǎ lanā'ncēē bā.* *Á lapāh maa, nkú'ní ndū ī ta yi mimie míē. Māncāk mbě' ndaa píá ndhī ndáh māmba' ǒ ntām ndhī.* This means that a good woman is hard to find, and worth far more than diamonds. Her husband trusts her without reserve and never has reason to regret it. Never spiteful, she treats him generously all her life long. She shops around for the best yarns and cottons and enjoys knitting and sewing. Furthermore, *Múnzhwīē yi pó ghǔ mbúá ghua'si ǒ njāmsī lá má yi kǎ mbōh Sīē lá* equally means that the woman to be admired and praised is the woman who lives in the Fear-of-God.

The perception of women's roles in reproduction, production, and community management has evolved from traditional to modern-day Africa (ILO, 2023). Reproductive roles refer to all activities necessary for the maintenance and survival of human life. Examples include bearing, looking after, and educating children, cooking food, washing clothes, and growing or foraging for food for home use. Productive roles entail the ability to engage in paid work or income-generation activities, including access to, control over, and benefits from productive resources. Community

management roles describe activities usually carried as an extension of their reproductive role – for the benefit of the community, for example, the provision and maintenance of scarce resources of collective consumption, such as water, health care, and education (ILO, 2023). In the following sections, we shall contrast the traditional perception of women’s gender roles with the emergence of gender role conflict and modern societal trends.

Concerning reproductive roles, the bulk of nurturing a home was in the hands of women in traditional African societies (Tchombe, 2017, 2020). Once a woman is married to a family and community, she learns the traditional culture of the new family and quickly adjusts to her new home. She becomes the mother of the children and the wife of the husband. In numerous African cultures, proverbs serve as profound narratives that emphasize and celebrate the vital reproductive role of women, highlighting their importance in society and the continuity of life. As noted by Olatunji, those proverbs serve as social tools that commend virtues esteemed by society, including tolerance, responsibility, dedication, love, discipline, and justice (Olatunji, 1984). In the same way, proverbs are used to condemn what society considers injustice, intolerance, destruction, jealousy, envy, hatred, and sexual immorality, among others (Ajibola, 1947).

An ethnographic study (Dele, 2012) of women in traditional settings indicated that women in traditional African societies held high positions of political power by assisting in the governance of the kingdoms (Adio, 2022). For instance, Dele (2012) found that amongst the Igbo of Nigeria, the woman official, Umuada, regulates the moral conduct of other women in the community. She sanctions offenders and reprimands wrongdoings in society, especially among the female folk. Although women are usually engaged in roles distinct from those of men, it is crucial to note that those roles are mutually reinforcing and interdependent. In the context of the pre-colonial Kanem Bornu Empire, women were actively engaged in the administration of their respective states. Women held prominent positions within the royal lineages, such as Megara's position as the Queen's mother and Gumsu's prestigious position as the king's first wife (Dele, 2012).

There are transformative narratives that emphasize the role of women within African cultures. Afisi (2010) notes that, despite the dominance of patriarchal systems in many African societies, women are recognized for wielding considerable power that helps to unite the community. Ogbomo (2005) argues that contemporary gender relations in Africa do not accurately reflect women's power and influence in Indigenous societies in which women were considered to be the custodians and sustenance of African traditional values and virtues. Currently, the marginalized status of women often leads to the perception that African women have always been oppressed by men (Akinpelu, 2021; Ogbomo & Ogbomo, 1993). Nevertheless, it can be inferred that gender hierarchy was not the norm in pre-colonial Africa. For example, Johnson (1982) suggests that in Yorùbá society, gender was not the primary determinant of social relations; rather, it played a secondary role. Oyewunmi (1997) observes different names for male and female; *obirin*, denotes female, while *okurin* denotes male. It should be noted that *obirin* does not derive from *okurin*, the way a woman derives from a man (p. 33). According to her, *Obirin* is not inferior to *Okurin*, as one is not derived from the other. This indicates that each gender is unique and equally important. The same holds for the Nso of the North West Region of Cameroon. There is one name that is generic for a human being. *Lumin* is used for male and *wiy* is used for female.

Unlike in traditional African societies, where children were socialized in a communal spirit of living together and working together, we are now in a post-colonial age where there are changes

from communal to individualistic ways of life. One of the consequences of the advent of colonialism is the erosion of gender role complementarity, which characterized traditional African society. Traditionally, both men and women had different and distinct roles they played in families and society at large. However, those traditions changed after the contact of Africa with colonialism. Hunter (1973) narrates this ordeal as he states that since the era of colonialism, women have been placed on the lower rungs of the proverbial ladder by the dominant forces of capitalism, and now globalization. Those emphasize power, superiority, and compartmentalization of roles and responsibilities with different values attached to them (Hunter, 1973).

Commenting on the experience in Nigeria, Dogo (2014) states that with the advent of colonialism, the nature of gender relations changed in Nigerian society. The introduction of cash crop farming was a way of meeting the demand for raw materials being shipped abroad by the colonialists causing a change in the economic structure. Men dominated the farming of cash crops needed for the international market and were therefore of more importance and focus than other crops; women were confined to the growing of food crops which attracted few returns (Dogo, 2014). Furthermore, the introduction of Western education and Christianity further changed the role of women in society. Okome (2002) believes that colonial education emphasized preparing women for domestic rather than leadership roles within society. Christian missionaries and colonial administrators introduced the assumptions of European patriarchy into Nigerian society through their form of education and beliefs.

Key Factors Contributing to Changes in Gender Roles in Africa

Women's Involvement in More Productive Functions and Inequality in the Distribution of Domestic Tasks

While women are increasingly taking on the economic responsibilities of the household, there has been limited distribution of domestic responsibilities resulting in women bearing the load for both financial and domestic tasks and care work (Oláh *et al.* 2018). In emphasizing the inequitable distribution of duties in the home, Peacock and Barker (2014) argue that women and girls still have two to ten times more responsibilities than men for household activities. This lack of equity in the distribution of domestic responsibilities has increased tension between work and family life as women are involved in more productive functions. Therefore, scholars call for a redefinition of men's roles within a family to provide for more equitable family roles (Minguez 2012; Oláh *et al.* 2018; Peacock & Barker 2014). This also points to the observation made by Brooks (2017) that some men have successfully adapted to the cultural shift in understanding gender roles within the household while many have failed to make the necessary transition. Traditional norms of masculinity require men to be the breadwinners, the head of the household, and the ultimate decision-makers.

Nonetheless, women's increased participation in paid work requires men to engage in domestic tasks. As suggested by Minguez (2012), this is a necessary endeavor, as men's limited participation in care work in the home is not only a major barrier to gender equality but also carries negative consequences for men, women, and society.

Conflict and Health Emergencies

Conflict and health emergencies have affected gender roles in Africa. Although conflict affects an entire population, because of their gender roles, men and women experience and respond to

conflict differently. UNESCO (2019) has posited that the Anglophone conflict in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon has led to changes in the traditional perception of gender roles. For instance, when men leave to fight (and at times are killed), women must take over the tasks previously done by men in addition to their tasks. Displacements within the ongoing conflict have led to men and women assuming different gender roles that are different from those they previously had. Sometimes after a crisis, old attitudes to gender roles may return, and a gender role accepted during the crisis (e.g., women being active in armed struggles) is no longer accepted, as many women combatants found after liberation struggles in Africa (ILO, 2023).

Implications of Change in Gender Role Perception for Psycho-Cultural Sustainability and Positive Socialization of Women

Psycho-cultural sustainability is the idea that transitioning to sustainability requires changing people's values, worldviews, and identities. It's based on the idea that the next phase of human evolution will be cultural, rather than biological, and that this will be reflected in people's behaviors, practices, and values. Hence, there is a need for a change in people's values, worldviews, and identities concerning gender discrimination. It is therefore important to highlight the potential benefits of equality in gender roles because gender equality is an explicit goal under the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. The empowerment of all women is also a catalyst for sustainable development, from ending global poverty and hunger to building more fair and inclusive societies, which protect the earth's natural resources (UN Women, 2018).

Positive socialization of women entails a new dimension that incorporates feminist policies to integrate them into society's mainstream. The new movements towards women's and girls' empowerment promote women's participation in politics, leadership, and economic development (Tchombe, 2008, 2012, 2017, 2020). Women are supported in voting and attaining public office. Women are also supported in accumulating assets, securing decent employment, and influencing institutions and government policies. The importance of women's contributions is becoming increasingly clear, with a growing recognition that their roles are vital for sustainable development. Cultural perspectives significantly shape how decisions are made, reinforcing the idea that advancing gender equality and valuing women's voices is crucial for holistic and sustainable progress. This requires gender equality and empowering all women and girls (UN Women, 2018). Positive gender socialization in traditional Africa is based on the norm that there is a division of labor and distinction of the sexes. It allows both men and women to know their sexes, respect their sexes, and carry out their functions according to their gender (Isife, 2023).

While gender equality in sub-Saharan Africa shows progress overall, the degree of equality varies significantly by region. The Africa Gender Index measures equality across social, economic, and public domains; according to the 2023 report, women in Africa have achieved an overall equality score of 50.3%. This score reflects a most improvement from the 2019 score of 48% equality. Significant strides have been made in social areas, where women nearly reach parity with a score of 98.3%, particularly in education and healthcare. There has been a 1.5% increase in women's public representation, reaching 24.4%, their presence in ministerial roles, parliaments, and private leadership. In the economic domain, women's parity stands at 58.2% (Economic Commission for Africa [ECA], 2023).

While these current trends in women involvement in productive functions are not bad and should be encouraged, there is a need for a constant reminder that no sustainable development can be

achieved if these functions are over emphasized to the detriment of women's traditional roles as primary caregivers of the family. Clair (1994) postulated that sustainable societal development relies on a stable family system. The family is the most crucial part of life and societal survival. This, therefore, means that it is undisputed that sustainable societal development rests on a stable family system. The family is the most vital part of life and society's survival.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve psycho-cultural sustainability and positive socialization of women, it should be noted that women and girls are half of the world's population and hold half of the world's human potential. When their lives are improved, the benefits reverberate across society. Access to decent work and regular income in the hands of women, for example, contributes not only to poverty reduction (SDG 1) but also supports better education, health, and nutrition outcomes for women and girls and those who depend on them (SDGs 2, 3 and 4). We propose that sustainable development in Africa requires understanding traditional African perspectives on gender. By giving equal value and importance to the roles played by males and females, the balance and harmony that once existed can be re-established (Olufemi and VerEecke, 1992: 226). The misery of our society today has its genesis in the oppression, inequality, and discrimination against women. Our society must not lose sight of the fact that cooperation between men and women, and interdependence on one another, is quintessentially fundamental to achieving a well-ordered society (Afisi, 2010)

CONCLUSION

Traditional African rites, proverbs, and socialization practices promoted complementary but equally valued roles for women and men. Colonialism introduced patriarchal ideas and behaviors that led to women's oppression. Modernization, with more women entering the workplace, has led to a need to reinforce some traditional ideas while engaging in ways to empower women and equally value both men's and women's contributions. Hence, positive gender socialization in traditional Africa is based on the norm of a division of labour and distinction of the sexes. As Isife (2023) puts it, the principle of matriarchy in traditional Africa allows both men and women to know their sexes, respect their sexes, and carry out their functions according to their gender. The woman is a mother or professional, who was once a girl whose competencies, attitudes, and beliefs for the future required quality preparation using strategies in interactions, sending positive elements of growth and transformation. Held narratives today should change the negative ideological imperatives controlling positive gender socialization of the African woman gender affecting how she perceives herself, is perceived, and how she ought to function (Tchombe, 2008).

This paper, appreciates gender equality advocacy with a blend of both traditional and positive modern gender roles. It concludes that each gender role, especially women's roles both at home and in the industry, is as essential as men's roles in the corporate and formal organization. In the light of Olawaye et al (2021), this paper advocates for the fact that men and women see their roles as essential in a non-hierarchical fashion. Institutions and public organization should afford to recognize each actor's roles and accord appropriate rewards and benefits. While attaining positions outside the home, women should not neglect their primary roles in the family, but see their primary roles as also a vital key to achieving psycho-cultural sustainability because women build lives that will make nations and this building begins with the family. For gender equity to be realized, public

institutions must institutionalize gender-responsive policies that support both men and women in balancing professional and familial responsibilities.

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