

## THE SOCIAL AND ETHNO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY IN AFRICAN PROVERBS

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**ABSTRACT** Africa is a continent known for its rich oral arts. Proverbs are the most widely and commonly used in the continent's long-standing tradition of oral arts. Among such oral arts, the African proverbs have been facilitating the transmission of knowledge and conventions from generation to generation. This paper analyzes the role of African proverbs in creating and perpetuating gendered culture. The author analyzed the African sexist proverbs within the post-modern theory of power relationships between social groups, and the role of language to mediate this relationship, to explore the implications of gender stereotypes.

**Key Words:** African folk-proverbs; Masculinity; Femininity; Gender ideology; Language; Power.

### GENERAL BACKGROUND ABOUT THE SOCIAL BASE OF GENDER

Women are oppressed throughout the world. Even in parts of the world where race and gender differences in educational and other social achievements are said to have nearly disappeared, gender equity has not yet been attained. There are complex social, political, and legal bases for "the exploitation, denigration and exclusion of women" (Cohen, 1993: 6) in a society. In a gendered culture (James & Saville-Smith, 1989), the religious, legal, political, educational and material institutions both create and reinforce expectations about how men and women should behave (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1995; Holmes, 1995; Narayan *et al.*, 2000). Expectations about how men and women should behave in their society are the most fundamental distinctions made between people rooted in patriarchy.<sup>(1)</sup>

Without understanding this complexity, it is difficult to address the real needs of women. Disch (1997: 10) metaphorically revealed this with greater precision: "...when someone is caged, or oppressed, it is crucial to examine all the bars of the cage to get a full understanding of the inability to escape; close, myopic examination of just one bar will not give a full understanding of why the person is trapped."

Women have been victims of gender ideology. Gender ideology is a systematic set of cultural beliefs through which a society constructs and wields its gender relations and practices. Gender ideology contains legends, narratives and myths about what it means to be a man or a woman and suggests how each should behave in the society. A society's gender ideology is grounded largely in religious and social principles, which are then used as grounds to justify dif-

ferent rights, responsibilities and rewards to each gender. A society strengthens its gender ideology as a form of everyday social practice. Every society has a set of systems to censure and control the normative concepts of masculine and feminine behaviors. For example, “some occasions are organized to routinely display and celebrate behaviors that are conventionally linked to one or the other sex category” (West & Zimmerman, 1987: 139).

The African gender ideology is a system of shaping different lives for men and women by placing them in different social positions and patterns of expectations. In Africa, rituals, legends, name-giving ceremonies, oral narratives, proverbs, aphorisms and usages have been in the vanguard of mobilizing gender ideology (CGSPS, 2001; Oha, 1998; Oluwole, 1997). The African oral traditions portray women in general as foolish, weak, jealous, evil, unfaithful, dependent, frivolous and seductive. The other image of women in African oral traditions is a symbol of warmth and all-nourishing goodness. The oral traditions cultivate also men’s prerogatives to the allegiance and subservience of women, and legitimize men to exercise their power over women to sustain the latter’s subordination and marginality (Hussein, 2004; Oha, 1998). The following stereotypes of female characteristics and capacities among the Nandi of Kenya show this reality. As reported by Oboler about two decades ago, among the Nandi,

...men are believed to be more intelligent than women. Women are thought particularly to be incapable of foresight and to lack the ability to make and carry through sensible and realistic plans. For this reason, it is generally agreed that husbands should administer the family estate and wives for the most part concur with their husbands’ plans. It is commonly claimed that if a woman tried to manage property, she would very likely make a mess of it (Oboler, 1985: 60, cited in von Bülow, 1993: 539).

In Africa, gender ideology figures large in proverbs. In order to better understand the gender ideology loaded in proverbs (and for that matter language in general), it is imperative to ground it within the post-modern view of language as bearer of the matrix of privilege and domination.

Post-modern thinkers strongly challenge a commonly-held and overtly simplistic view of language as a means of communication (Giroux, 1997). It is “constitutive as well as reflective of our place in the political, socioeconomic, racial and sexual configurations of our existence” (Cohen, 1993: 1). In a gendered society, language is used to express how groups should behave, and relate to the external world and to each other. Once they have entered into relationship of dominance and subordination, the social groups make distinctions among themselves “through forms of signification” (McLaren, 1997: 528). Language offers them the opportunity to construct stereotypes of self and others. The dominant groups use their languages to facilitate their oppression of and aggression or prejudice against those they dominate (Goke-Pariola, 1993; Nwagbara, 2000).

## AFRICAN PROVERBS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

In Africa, the transmission of the overwhelming complexity of experience has been largely rooted in the continent's culture of oral artistry (Hussein, 2004; Zewde, 2000). Proverbs are among the most widely used pieces of oral artistry. In Africa, proverbs are repositories of social and cultural wisdom (Finnegan, 1970; Mbiti, 1988; Ssetuba 2002; Sumner, 1995). According to Ssetuba (2002: 1), in Africa "The proverb is regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of a people's wisdom and philosophy of life." As some Africans put it, "proverbs are the analytic tools of thought, when thought is lost, it is proverbs that are used to search for it" (Oluwole, 1997: 100). According to Finnegan (1970: 390), "In many African cultures a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs."

Finnegan's idea is succinctly apparent in the following Igbo proverb about proverbs: "*Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten*" (Oha, 1998: 87). Its Oromo equivalent is, "*A speech without proverb is like a stew without salt.*" The proverbs reveal that in Africa proverbial expressions are a mode of speech in their own right. That is why the Zulu of South Africa also say, "*Without them [proverbs], the language would be but a skeleton without flesh, a body without soul*" (Finnegan, 1970: 415). People use proverbs to increase the clarity as well as semantic effect of what they want to say. It is possible to state through proverbs what otherwise is difficult to communicate through formation of words. Instead of saying, "silent people have many troubles going through their mind," one uses the following Swahili proverb with more force and effect: "*Much silence has a mighty noise*" (Finnegan, 1970: 391).

The problem is that while one thinks highly of the colorful imagery of proverbs and their value-carrying roles, one usually ignores their sexist tone (Oha, 1998). In Africa, proverbs about men and women have long been reproduced irrespective of the potential psychological and political battering which their utterances cause to the recipients. My own study of the cultural representation of women in the Oromo society (Hussein, 2004) indicated the harmful effects of the meaning of some proverbs about womanhood.

Little attention was given to this aspect of the function of proverbs in Africa. Previous works on African proverbs tended to interpret even proverbs about womanhood within their generalized import than within their sexist and thus ideological import. A case in point is Finnegan's (1970: 419) interpretation of the proverb, "*If you marry a beautiful woman, you marry trouble,*" as "comment, among other things, on the dangers attending prosperity." When I examine this proverb psychoanalytically I find that "Groups who occupy a subordinate or oppressed position in society invariably suffer from linguistic disparagement" (Leith, 1987: 147).

To state that proverbs are value-carrying instruments is to understand cultural practices uncritically, but to look into the ideological tones they carry is, in the

words of Donald Morton (1996: 94), to intervene in cultural practices in order to "...produce socially transformative cultural understandings."

Language is a symbolic act of both representing and valuing things. As we cannot separate a dance from its dancer, we cannot separate what we say about something from our attitude towards that thing. As Hahn (1998: 149) stated, "...what we call something summarizes our attitude towards it." Similarly, what a society says through proverbs about women and men is the society's view of women and men. However, the extent to which an African sexist proverb serves as an instrument of repression is to be determined by the wider context of use. If we try to understand proverbs outside the social and cultural circumstances that govern their production and perception, we have lost a large part of their meaning.

In this paper, I grouped the Oromo proverb, "*A maidservant, who found some help, hid the millstone*" (Sumner, 1995: 449) with proverbs that subtly encourage men to control women. Put in different contexts, the same proverb may give different semantics. For example, it may connote a society's view that women indulge in irrational (idiotic) things. Any study that is interested in African proverbs and their communicativeness should thus start from the pervasiveness of the context in which they are used.<sup>(2)</sup>

## THE STUDY

The relationship between language and gender has been analyzed from different perspectives.<sup>(3)</sup> From around the mid 1970s, scholars have been preoccupied with gender-related patterns of communicational differences. It has been suggested that women, when compared to men, lack the necessary air of competence, seriousness, directness, assertiveness, etc. (Cameron, 1994a; Kramer & Freed, 1991; Wahlstrom, 1992: 147-148).<sup>(4)</sup> For me, what is important is the socio-cultural and ideological raw material of proverbs that allows men to be assertive and women to speak with a sustained grace that reflects their femininity. There is an obvious difference in social needs in men's and women's patterns of communication (Rapoport *et al.*, 1995). Men tend to communicate with confidence and air of independence to preserve their social and political status in the social hierarchy. Women, on the other hand, prefer to be cooperative and less harsh to maintain high modesty which the patriarchy requires of them. In a rigidly stereotyped society, women may count the maintenance of modesty as a self-fulfilling prophesy. When they do this, are women then not judging "themselves according to internalized standards of what is pleasing to men" (Devereaux, 1990: 337)?

The second type of language and gender analysis is related to overt social discrimination against women in institutional discourse. It has been pointed out that sex role stereotypes not only influence the way one perceives the world (Kelly, 1998), but also the positions in discourse one is allowed to assume (Dobie, 1990: 390). In her study among the Menze of Ethiopia, Pankhurst

(1992) found that women gossiped and whispered while their male counterparts were engaged in matters of greater importance. Her observation implies that gossiping, whispering and other aspects of women's "trivial domestic discourse" (Kaplan, 1986: 70) show, to a certain extent, that women's language is uncertain or powerless (O'Barr, 1999; O'Barr & Atkins, 1987).<sup>(5)</sup>

The third serious, but often neglected issue of gender and language is the manner in which the society uses language to communicate about the personality of women. Oha's (1998) study of the semantics of the Igbo proverbs and my own study of the Oromo proverbs (Hussein, 2004) revealed the representational roles of proverbs. I feel that a gender study based on proverbs of a single society does not provide a fuller understanding of the ethnocultural construction of masculinity and femininity in Africa. The current study was thus designed to fill the gap.

## I. Materials and Procedures

The African proverbs considered in this study were collected from various published and unpublished sources. In the past, there was a tendency to examine African proverbs that talk exclusively about womanhood to understand the role and position of women in Africa (Mbiti, 1988). The major pitfall of such an approach is that it does not give one a fuller understanding of gender relationships between men and women. It would be difficult for one "to understand the social construction of either masculinity or femininity without reference to the others" (Kimmel, 1987: 12) as the two are relational constructs (Jackson, 1993: 66). In Africa even proverbs that principally point out men's and women's occupation of distinct physical and psychological dimensions of existence basically communicate the contested relationship between them. In this study, proverbs about manhood were included for a better analysis of the relationship between the sexes.

## II. Method of Data Analysis

Any study on African proverbs should start from the complex cultural, social and psychological factors that influence the production and consumption of the proverbs. For example, the Oromo proverb, "*The lady, whose husband spoils her, slips from the tanned hide,*" may be used to warn or inform a husband who tends to be liberal towards his wife. This is an instantial meaning of the proverb. The same proverb could be used to socialize males in general so that they would know how to "properly" handle their future wives. This means that the domain of discourse affects the meaning of a proverb.

The kind of a sexist proverb a person uses and the degree of explicitness in which the proverb and the situation that triggered its utterance relate to each other are partially determined by the kind of assumption(s) the speaker of the proverb makes about the knowledge the receiver shares with him/her.<sup>(6)</sup> In turn, the way a listener perceives a proverb may be affected by the kind of hypoth-

esis or proposition he/she constructs about the speaker's plans and intentions upon hearing the proverb. Just as in the reading process (Kramsch, 1997), the listener of a proverb may adjust, revise or discard his/her schemata as the transparency of the rhetorical situation of the proverb increases.

As other researchers (Paltridge, 1994; Tyler, 1994) stressed, the structural simplicity of a text (proverb) may not guarantee increased comprehensibility. A reasonable understanding of the proverb should take into account the historical and cultural contexts within which they were structured. For example, to comprehend the meaning of the Maasai proverb, "*It is with five that man succeeds,*" a listener needs to have adequate background knowledge of Maasai cultural idioms about the meaning of possession alluded to in the proverb. The Maasai view that a successful life needs five things: *a wife, a cow, a sheep, a goat, and a donkey* (Mbiti, 1988). Without such information, one can hardly make out the meaning of the proverb. In general, a listener is required to look for interlocking relationships between language (lexis and syntax) and what is not language (Bell, 1991; Paltridge, 1994). These extra textual factors may include context of situation (e.g., sociological variables and the physical and temporal occurrence of the proverb), discourse features (e.g., the tenor of discourse and the domain of discourse), and the semiotic occurrence of the proverb.<sup>(7)</sup>

Since a single proverb can have divergent meanings used under varied circumstances, it is difficult to sharply distribute individual proverbs across distinct themes. For example, there is a situation where a proverb chiefly used to indirectly denigrate femininity suggests how the ideal of masculinity potentially leads men to pronounced risk. This fact required me to combine two methods of analyzing qualitative data: content analysis and hermeneutics (Frey *et al.*, 1991; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). After I collected the proverbs, I categorized them according to their general propositional content. The categorizations were made by looking at the most obvious superficial meanings of the proverbs. There is no fixity in the categorization made. It is obvious that if I work again and again over the proverbs, I may find intra-textual synonymity between them.

## DISCUSSION OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY IN THE SAMPLE PROVERBS

Here, I discuss the meaning of the proverbs and their social and psychological implications on women as well as men. Due to space limitation and to avoid unnecessary repetition of similar ideas, I avoided discussing the meaning of each proverb separately. Whenever necessary, readers, therefore, are referred to the appendix to find out examples of proverbs whose themes are discussed in the paper.



## I. Proverbs that Reveal Society's Denial of Women's Possession of Separate Psychological, Material and Social Existence outside Men

The African proverbs about womanhood express the society's denial of female psychological and social existence without men, usually their husbands. As an Igbo proverb (Appendix: Proverb I<sub>B</sub>) shows, a woman's decision to relinquish her husband is taken as a foolish and devastating decision. According to this proverb, a woman who unwisely drops her husband will have no one to marry her.

Once married, a woman should exist in harmony with her husband, and what she does or thinks should not collide against her husband. To point out that a wife's identity or personality is subsumed into that of her husband, the Oromo say, "*The face of water is the earth; likewise the face of wife is the husband.*" Claude Sumner (1995: 157) interpreted this proverb saying that one is progressively and fatally influenced by the milieu in which he/she lives. In the same token, the wife assumes her husband's demeanor as the river flow takes on the soil color of the riverbed. The reason for this is because the flow carries the soil particles. Similarly, the wife assumes her husband's demeanor because that is imposed on her through the patriarchal power relationship. This argument extends Devereaux's (1990: 337) argument that in a male-dominated society, women "judge themselves according to internalized standards of what is pleasing to men."

## II. Proverbs that Explicitly or Implicitly Convey Objectification of Women

The other mechanism through which men control positions of social and economic influence in their society is by objectifying women and limiting their participations to domestic spheres (Collins, 1996). The ways women are objectified differ from one culture to the other.

I want to draw the readers' attention to the type of female objectification which, if not unique, is widespread in Africa. In Africa, women have long been used as a conduit via which men formed and solidified their relation with other men. Families enhance their wealth and alliance through giving away their female children. For example, among the Somali, women served as a commodity to seal peace between feuding groups in inter-tribal warfare (Lewis, 1985). The Somali also imposed other customary practices on their females, as part of rites of passage or for reasons of religion and tradition. To protect the chastity of their unmarried females, the Somalis long practiced infibulations. This was to provide "visual proof that an unmarried female is virgin" and to increase her value in the marriage transaction. "The smaller the entrance to a bride's vagina, the greater her reputation, *the higher her value in the marriage market, and the more honorable her family*" (Hicks & Gwynne, 1995: 387, emphasis mine). In northwestern Sierra Leone, women were passed along through marriage arrangement to facilitate the formation of alliances and networks (Howard & Skinner, 1984).<sup>(8)</sup>

African proverbs communicate the existence of these and other modes of objectifying women within the panoply of the patriarchal structure. Most of the proverbs grouped under the current theme directly or indirectly represent the objectification of women. The proverbs clearly depict how African patriarchy objectifies women by placing different demands on their body and reproduction (Proverbs II<sub>D</sub>, II<sub>E</sub> & II<sub>F</sub>), and through inculcating different rituals of conformity to patriarchal demands (Proverbs II<sub>B</sub> & II<sub>G</sub>). Proverbs II<sub>D</sub>, II<sub>E</sub>, & II<sub>F</sub> reveal the patriarchal view that women could find fulfillment when they give birth to children and ensure the perpetuation of the lineage (Ankrah *et al.*, 1994). When they say, “*The satiety of a pregnant woman is their off-spring,*” it appears that the Lugbara of Uganda admire women.<sup>(9)</sup> But what one has to ask is: What happens to a woman if she does not bear children?

Proverbs that convey women’s tolerance of physical and mental humiliation subtly echo the society’s view that women lack subjectivity. For example, the Oromo proverb “*Women and donkey do not complain about burden,*” communicates this. Proverbs II<sub>A</sub>, II<sub>C</sub> & II<sub>H</sub>, show that the objectification of women can sometimes be stated patronizingly. According to these proverbs, the women’s subjugated personality is misunderstood. According to the Oromo proverb, “*When a maidservant works through necessity, the neighbor thinks: ‘She is not work-shy.’*” This stereotype is rooted in the Oromo word, *gabrittii* (maidservant), whose meaning denotes toughness, determination, tenacity and physical patience in combination.

### III. Proverbs that Portray Women as Sexual Objects

One aspect of the suppression of women is their being considered as degraded sexual objects to satisfy the pleasure of men. African proverbs that portray women as sexual objects show the complex relationship between power and sexuality, and hegemonic masculinity as a source for the imposition and practice of unwanted sexual assault on women. They also point out the society’s belief that female sexuality is determined by male sexual virility. The Igbo proverb, “*A woman carrying a vagina would ask to be sexed, that the vagina is her own, but when it causes trouble, the real owner (of the vagina) would be looked for,*” depicts the society’s view that women’s sexuality is inactive in the absence of masculine involvement. Similarly, the proverb, “*One cannot be afraid of the wide vagina because it cannot sex itself,*” pronounces the passivity of women’s sexuality and by inference, the determinacy of masculinity.

African proverbs about sexuality reveal that women are losers in the battle of sexuality whereas men are spoilers. The following narrative proverb from the Igbo shows this: “*An Ugwuta (Oguta) girl told her mother that as she was going on her way, a man came and threw her down and sexed (raped) her. Her mother told her to go and retaliate. She went, and was sexed (raped) again.*”<sup>(10)</sup> Proverbs III<sub>D</sub> and III<sub>E</sub> similarly depict women’s sexual vulnerability to men in the interpersonal encounters. All of the proverbs grouped under this theme point out that in a sexist society, sexual violence is an encounter in



which “the female prerogative (sex) is infringed upon by force, i.e., the male prerogative” (Hahn, 1998: 150). They also demonstrate that the sexual humiliation of women is the manifestation as well as the reinforcement of women’s gender-based oppression and men’s collective and individual assumption of power over women (Disch, 1997: 564-565). One aspect of the traditional socialization of males into dominance in Africa is the male demonstration of their sexual prowess on females (Tlou, 2002).

#### IV. Proverbs that Convey the Social, Biological and Psychological Inferiority of Women

One aspect of constructing and perpetuating gender ideology through language is the statement of women’s biological and psychological inferiority. This emerges from the view that men are the normative model of humanity and women are an afterthought (Eveline, 1994: 159).

All of the African proverbs grouped under this theme articulate women’s unfitness to assume important places in the society and, by implication, emphasize the necessity of their social and emotional dependence on men. For instance, Proverb IV<sub>A</sub> clearly points this out. The stereotypical inferiority of women is used as a reason to limit their access to crucial positions in the society. According to an Oromo proverb, “*The management of a woman leaves the corral door closed for the whole day.*” The synonymy between the Oromo proverb “*One butter does not excel another butter, and women do not inherit from one another,*” and the Acholi proverb that “*Women have no chief,*” is the patriarchal view that women by nature are a weak group and no woman thus is better than the other.<sup>(11)</sup> The conspiracy in the proverb, “*Women make good dishes, but not good speech,*” is the patriarchal ideology that males alone are entitled to substantial speech culture.

#### V. Proverbs that Directly or Indirectly Emphasize Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is the material and social representation of the psychological, social and physical potency of men in a sexist society. The stereotypes about what constitutes the masculine ideal have long been emphasized through both religious and secular literature. In Africa, proverbs play an important role in reinforcing the cultural ideal of masculinity such as competitiveness, dominance, forcefulness, endurance, confrontation, self-reliance, and willingness to take risks. For example, the Ghanaian proverb, “*Like hens, women wait for cocks to crow announcing the arrival of daylight,*” and its Oromo equivalents (Proverbs V<sub>D</sub> & V<sub>E</sub>) depict the ideology of male chauvinism in the household.

The society encourages men to maintain their masculinity by avoiding practices that connote inferiority. The Oromo proverbs, “*Farting once is masculine and farting repeatedly is feminine,*” and, “*He is a big man outside, but a small man at home,*” serve this function. Men are not only inculcated with masculine ideals, they are also encouraged to exercise those ideals in heroic deeds. The

Oromo proverb, "*A male person is dead from his birth,*" inculcates fearlessness as a masculine self-fulfillment. According to this proverb, whether it is for good (Sumner, 1995) or for trivial cause, a male person should not fear death.<sup>(12)</sup>

#### VI. Proverbs that Convey Society's View of Women's Frustration, Low Self-worth and Inadequacy

All of the proverbs grouped under this theme convey the society's prejudice against women's thought and practice: the prejudice that women have low self-esteem and devise compensatory defense mechanisms to hide their inferiority. By doing this, the proverbs indicate the society's belief that women have psychopathological problems. For example, the Igbo proverb, "*When a woman prepares a bad meal, she starts eating as if the meal is tasty,*" points to the assumed psychopathological trouble of women. According to another Igbo proverb, "*When a woman is a bad cook, she says she has not got enough melon paste.*" The Igbo, thus, ridicule women for the compensatory defense mechanism or projection of their own obvious weaknesses on something else.

#### VII. Proverbs that Express the Society's Doubt about the Integrity and Wholeness of Women

All of the proverbs grouped under this theme denigrate women as thankless (Proverb VII<sub>A</sub>), treacherous, inconsistent and unreliable (Proverbs VII<sub>B</sub>, VII<sub>C</sub>, VII<sub>E</sub>, VII<sub>F</sub>, VII<sub>G</sub> and VII<sub>H</sub>), gossipy (Proverb VII<sub>D</sub>), and sightless (Proverb VII<sub>H</sub>). The groundless patriarchal prejudice against women clearly shows in Proverb VII<sub>A</sub>, which attributes the absence of beards in adult women as a degrading punishment from God due to their habitual denial of men's act of kindness towards them. This means that men consider their beard as a constituent of complete humanhood.

#### VIII. Proverbs that Convey the Society's View of Women as Indulging in Idiotic (Irrational) Affairs.

All of the proverbs grouped under this theme represent women as lacking objectivity in how they think and what they do. For example, the Igbo proverb, "*One would be doing a good to a woman and she would be doing good to whoever she (truly) loves*" ridicules women for making themselves the "public property for any man" (Cohen, 1993: 88). According to one of the Oromo proverbs (Proverb VIII<sub>F</sub>), a girl's counseling of her mother about childbirth is taken as an irrational action. Proverb VIII<sub>G</sub> portrays women as a group of people who do not know the occurrence of differential circumstances in their life.<sup>(13)</sup>

#### IX. Proverbs that Portray Women as an Evil Sub-species of Humanity

Among the multiple imageries of women in patriarchy is the representation of

women as a symbol of “the disorderly world of vice in which Satan attempts to rule” (Walker, 1996: 124). In this representation, women possess sinful and horrible nature, needing man’s control or civilizing (Cohen, 1993: 219). This aspect of the Western and Christian devaluation of women is communicated in many African proverbs. The Tsonga-Shangana portray women as leading man into trouble in the proverb, “*To marry is to put a snake in one’s handbag.*” To go to women or to live with them is equated with committing suicide in the Oromo proverb, “*He who goes to woman has already sold himself.*” Although it is situated within a narrow contextual framework, the proverb, “*The child of a stepmother is like the meat from the back part of the neck,*” emphasizes the bad side of women. The Igbo proverb, “*A dog trained by a woman (always) bites people to death,*” is the patriarchy’s pronouncement of the dangers that follows women’s agency in the society.

Here, I like to place special focus on the overlapping gendered meaning in the Amharic proverb, “*One sent by a woman does not fear death.*” The most obvious meaning of the proverb is the view that women are masterminds of wicked instigation and provocation. According to W. H. Armstrong & F. D. Gebre-egzi (1969: 55), a man will do what a woman asks, regardless of danger, out of fear of being called a “*set (woman).*” A man who imprudently exposes himself to a dangerous state of affairs may receive the comment, *set yelakeciw y’meslal* (he must have been sent by a woman). In addition to this, there is one more subtle tone in this proverb. This is a Kantian view that women demand from men the virtues (in this case courage) that they inherently lack (Mattick, 1990: 302). The proverb suggests one more meaning, that hegemonic masculinity causes men to lose sight of prudence, one important component of true humanity, and to take a measure that ultimately destroys them (Carrigan *et al.*, 1987). While they attempt to live up to the standard of socially constructed masculinity (boldness, for example), men rush into both psychological and physical risks (Harrison *et al.*, 1992).

#### X. Proverbs that Show Society’s View that Men and Women Belong to Separate Spatial Dimensions of Existence

In a gendered culture, men and women are stratified along differential patterns of space. This spatial division of the sexes usually brings about difference in the structure of male and female power, access to property, and participation in social activities.<sup>(14)</sup>

In Africa, a spatial differentiation of the sexual sphere is widespread (Carstens, 1983; Kevane & Gray, 1995; Oboler, 1994; Sørensen, 1992). This is usually reflected in the kind of access the sexes have to the socio-economic resources of their society. For example, among the Boran of southern Ethiopia (Legesse, 1973) and the Nama society of Southern Africa (Carstens, 1983), women and men have clear cut roles that seldom overlap.<sup>(15)</sup> Among the Boran, hut-building is exclusively a prerogative of women, while men’s duty is to build kraals and to defend camps, wells, herds and shrines. In a similar way,

the Nama men are preoccupied with the management of resources outside the home and with political life and responsibilities while domestic activities are under the *de facto* control of women.

African proverbs communicate these gender-based divisions of labor in rural African societies. The Lugbara of Uganda say, "*The man dies in his field, the woman in the house,*" more likely to show that men undertake the duty of controlling heavy and mobile economic resources outside their homes while women assume control over reproductive duties in the domestic sphere.<sup>(16)</sup> The spatial stratification more often than not excludes women from having access to prestigious public spheres. This tendency is clearly pictured in the Oromo proverb, "*Regardless of her position, a woman is not allowed to enter a mosque (with men).*"

African proverbs that emphasize men's and women's separate spatial dimensions of existence reveal differential socialization of their female and male children. The Oromo say, "*Males are the iron pole of a house, while females are the outside gate that belongs to others.*" In the first place, the proverb states that in the Oromo gender ideology, femininity is associated with liminality (Legesse, 1973). Secondly, it is an aspect of dichotomous thinking in which differences are set between men and women in oppositional terms (Collins, 1998).

As in other African societies, the Oromo female children leave their family upon marriage. Implied in the proverb, thus, is the patriarchal view that upon marriage, females are passed along to "*the possession of their real owners,*" the husband and his relatives. Unlike female children, male children remain in the family and inherit the estate. A male child is called the "iron pole of a house" to symbolize his potential in bearing the family name as well as in extending the father's masculinity. The proverb thus indoctrinates boys into masculinity and girls into femininity. The same is true with the Yoruba proverb, "*A male child is the pillar of the family, a female one is a seasonal stream.*"

## XI. Proverbs that Encourage Men to Control Women

In Africa, proverbs are used to instigate men to power and control. It is viewed that becoming lax towards women and allowing them some sort of freedom is disadvantageous. Hence the proverb, "*The lady, whose husband spoils her, slips from the tanned hide.*" According to Proverb XI<sub>B</sub>, a woman who has assumed an upper hand in her home may disturb the peace of the neighbor. Moreover, proverbs instruct husbands not to fear their wives, for if they do, they may not get full services from them (Proverbs XI<sub>C</sub> & XI<sub>D</sub>).

Above are the proverbs that directly or indirectly denigrate women and emphasize the worth of men in the patriarchal ideology. In the following two sections, I look at proverbs that portray roles played by women in the society and the impossibility of life without their participation.

## XII. Proverbs that Convey Women's Expressive and Supportive Roles

Some proverbs point out the essentiality of the mother in nurturing children and maintaining their sustenance, and all proverbs categorized under this theme stress the role of mother and wife as a dignified and fulfilling career. That is why the Igbo say, "*If a child starts learning to climb (trees), his/her mother starts learning to cry.*"

One theme is the existence of strong emotional connection between mother and her children. The other theme is that a woman is the source of humankind without which life is impossible (Egejuru, 1997). To point out the life-enhancing quality of mothers, the Gikuyu of Kenya say, "*The baby that refuses its mother's breast will never be full.*" Thirdly, the proverbs indicate the existence of the unique capability, in which each sex has to contribute in a better way than the other sex within a family or in the society (Kipnis & Herron, 1995).<sup>(17)</sup>

## XIII. Proverbs that Show Complimentarity Between Men and Women in Africa

In Africa, gender may well be both asymmetrical and complimentary (Caplan, 1989: 207). Steady (1987: 20) pointed out that a separate life is hard to live for men as well as women. She stressed the necessity of "male-female complimentarity in ensuring the totality of human existence within a balanced ecosystem." The proverb, "*The woman is a banana tree (which multiplies); the man however is a cornstalk (which stands alone),*" clearly shows the African view that a man is meaningless without a woman. To state the preciousness of women, the Ghanaians say, "*Woman is a flower in a garden; her husband, the fence around it.*"

In Africa, marriage is one of the social accomplishments. It is a must for females to marry as early as possible. Remaining unmarried is not normal even for males, as the following Swahili proverb pinpoints, "*It is better to be married to an old lady than to remain unmarried.*" To reveal the abnormality of being unmarried, the Kamba of Kenya say, "*He who eats alone dies alone.*" The Oromo of Ethiopia also say, "*To be a man is good thing [provided] the [dink'a] coughs*" to underscore the meaninglessness of manhood without wife. The word "*dink'a*" denotes the section of a hut reserved for the lady of the house to perform her daily chores. To "cough" should not "be taken in the sense of expelling the air from the lungs, but in the sense of making oneself heard" (Sumner, 1995). This proverb reveals the gendered nature of wife-husband relationship in a family. It points out the cult of femininity in the Oromo society and is used to implicate the importance of women in creating a receptive environment around home. It establishes social sub-structures and patterns of expectations for the sexes: it glorifies women for the comfortable services they provide men and endorses men's entitlement to the services.

To state that men and women make different contributions to make life possible, the Ugandans say, "*The Woman plans the income and the man plans the expenditure.*" The Oromo subtly emphasize the same, "*Males do not milk goats,*

*but still are not ignorant of how much milk the goats afford.*" This is to indicate that although they are spatially categorized to carry out culturally different roles deemed suitable for each sex, men and women are in a condition to compliment each other's undertakings. The Igbo say, "The *husband is the beauty of a woman,*" to pinpoint that a woman is incomplete without a husband.<sup>(18)</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, I attempted to examine the role of African proverbs in constructing masculinity and femininity. I emphasized the social base of masculinity and femininity. I pointed out that in a gendered culture, human language is a binary discourse behaviour (Hahn, 1998), and reflects "the classifying and proprietary tendencies of patriarchy" (Cohen, 1993: 84). This means all types of relationships between men and women, and their relative access to social, political, legal and economic privileges are negotiated through linguistic manifestations.<sup>(19)</sup> Based on the analysis I argue that African proverbs perpetuate gender legacies and ideology; they associate maleness with respect, firmness, or strength, while associating femaleness with meekness, indignity, inconsistency, and powerlessness.

It is not, however, what individual proverbs say that is important. The important thing is the clusters of stereotypic suggestions and the hidden implications. The proverbs point out at least two dominant stereotypic clusters about male-female differences and one social implication. One cluster is the instrumental-expressive dichotomy (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983) between male and female roles. The other is the belief that men are the model of humanity and the women are an after-thought (Eveline, 1994). The implication is that men usually use these stereotypes as grounds to legitimize their authority over women (Hahn, 1998; Kelly, 1998). Thus, the denigration of femininity as well as its positive constructions in the patriarchal society reveals different, but overlapping relations of men to women. It is not surprising then that even at the heart of the proverbs which on the surface convey a society's admiration of women, one may find men's vested interest and conspiracy to limit women to certain secondary social positions.

The proverbs that express the inferiority of women, of course, differ in the acuteness of the message loaded in them. Some are extremely intense and seem to convey the most excessive disparagement of women in the traditional African society. For example, the metaphor of woman as a trainer of a dog that bites or attacks with great savagery (Proverb IX<sub>G</sub>) and that of woman as an evil with infernal power that causes disorder and destruction (Proverbs IX<sub>D</sub>, IX<sub>F</sub> and IX<sub>H</sub>) are the most severe verbal assaults on women. Any such sexist proverb is a form of bondage that both reflects and limits the position of women. Even proverbs that seem structurally neutral or less acute subtly communicate the society's belief in the inferiority of women. For example, there is what Hodge & Kress (1988) called the "ideological complex" in the proverb of the Lug-



bara of Uganda: “*The satiety of a pregnant woman is off-spring.*” This proverb points out the patriarchy’s celebration of the fertility of women and its essentiality to ensure the continuity of the lineage. In this regard, it reveals the inseparability of sexuality and fertility in African worldview. Masked beneath, however, is the intolerability toward a woman’s failure to bear child, since child-bearing “occupies a central role in the security and prosperity of the lineage, and thus is highly valued in the African family system” (Ankrah *et al.*, 1994: 534).<sup>(20)</sup> The Zulu say, “*To have children is to strengthen your bones.*” Tlou (2002: 656) pointed out that infertile African women are usually blamed for their past sexual behaviors, scorned by relatives or in-laws and become subject to forms of deprivation. Although a woman may not want to have a child she could not afford to raise, the strong meaning attached to children in her society may cause her to change her decision.

Cameron (1994b: 27) also stated that sexism “pervades social relations and institutions, affecting everything from people’s domestic arrangements to their career expectations.” To be insensitive towards the gendered system of discourse about the purported strength of men and passivity of women is “to accept the continuation and reinforcement of inequalities and sexual violence” (Hahn, 1998: 138).

I share Deborah Cameron’s (1994b: 27) fear that language may be organized into sexist principles: “...a language organized on sexist principles insidiously primes its users to take gender inequality for granted in every sphere, in which case language should be seen as actively reproducing sexism rather than merely reflecting it.” The dominant relationship of men towards women may then continue to be unquestioned. The political implication of this for African women is that they should not give silent approval when they are denigrated through language. If they do, women may easily become co-opted into the continued use of language that perpetuates their oppression.

Having long been practiced, oppression may lead to the submersion of consciousness (Freire, 2000: 81) and to “a lingering feeling that the oppression may have been created by some deficiency in the oppressed” (Hahn, 1998: 64). Here I call attention to the notion of power relationship. The dominant group not only assumes power, but also the means to legitimate its right to wield and maintain the power in the eyes of the subordinate group. One of the mechanisms through which the dominant group increases the legitimacy and perpetuity of its power is through the control and dissemination of ideas (Lips, 1997; Giroux, 1997). As far as gender-power relationships are concerned, male supremacy has language and other cultural traditions on its side (Lips, 1997). Strict gender stratification, as Kelly (1998: 132) views, creates “an imbalance of status power between women and men, and then those who hold the greater status and power may have a personal and political stake in perpetuating an equitable system.”

The sample proverbs discussed in this paper are, according to Cohen’s (1993) expression, “less one of essentialism by women than of essentialism imposed on” them by the suppressing patriarchy. The proverbs do not reflect the reality

of women in Africa. Instead, they are deliberate and repressive representations of women, to continue their subordination.

Superficially in favor of men, the binary discourse system in proverbs that echo the male strength over inherent female weakness and lack of subjectivity limit freedom and prosperity of both men and women as social groups (Hahn, 1998). "While the major effect of the binary discourse system on women is to keep them dependent, the major effect on men is to keep them cast in the warrior role" (Hahn, 1998: 135). Proverbs on the masculine ego such as, "*When he was allowed to whip whomever he can, the husband returned home and whipped his wife,*" easily permeate and provoke rigidly stereotyped men to cause physical and psychological harm to their female partners. Such men may rowdily subscribe to "a false sense of manhood by lording over women" (Disch, 1997: 394). The sub-conscious gender stereotypes influence thoughts as well as behaviors to a great extent (Kelly, 1998). Since they are gradually self-fulfilling, stereotypical male gender roles and expectations can be devastating and provoke men to dare hazards. Tlou (2002: 656) makes this clear in the context of vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in Africa. According to the writer, "the dominant ideologies of masculinity encourages men to be aggressive and to demonstrate their sexual prowess or virility by having multiple partners," and to take part in other ill-conducts that "predispose them to violent behaviour and sexual risk taking."

In a rigidly gender-stereotyped society, the task of transforming women would be tough (Narayan *et al.*, 2000). In keeping with the changing reality of the world, stereotypes about gender should thus continuously be redefined and reinterpreted (von Bülow, 1992: 354) to unfetter the imprisoned gender psyche. Doing this benefits both men and women as social groups.

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#### NOTES

- (1) Views and expectations about the differences between females and males are the basis for setting standards around which much of social life is organized (Hicks & Gwynne, 1995; Kelly, 1998). Gender stereotypes interact with other stereotypes to shape social perceptions of persons of various racial/ethnic groups, ages, abilities and appearances (Lips, 1997). It is this fact that makes the study of gender crucial.
- (2) Two of the various components of the factors that affect a proverb are why the speaker produces them (intentionality) and how the hearer takes the message (acceptability). As I shall show below, there are many more factors that affect the production as well as perception of a proverb.
- (3) While the general view that women are linguistically disadvantaged in a male-dominated society is reasonably acceptable, the social conditions of women in their societies

may differ. Nichols (1987: 116) has captured what I am trying to say in the following lines: "Language can operate as a door - one which either opens to new experience or which closes off a wide range of human interaction. What kind of door language is for women will depend upon *the unique experience available to them within particular speech communities*" (emphasis mine).

- (4) Feminists in communication studies have concluded that in a male dominated society, women are rendered inarticulate (Kramarae, 1981). To what extent this was true in pre-colonial Africa is controversial. As Mugo (1994: 57-58) stated, in the context of the African continent, women from the past have dominated, for example, "the African orature tradition as cultural workers, storytellers, singers, dancers, riddle posers, dramatists, and so on." This shows that they were in command of their language. It should, however, be known that the participation of African women in the orature tradition is largely (if not wholly) a celebration of patriarchy, and to help socialization of children around household spheres. Sarhrouny (2001) pointed out the instrumentality of Moroccan wonder tales told by women to indoctrinate qualities of good and honest wife.
- (5) Scholars are too divided in interpreting gender-based differential patterns of communication (Cameron, 1994a). Some argue women's cooperative language as sign of their subordinate position relative to men. Others see it as a cultural model based in socialization (Tannen, 1990). Still others hold the view that female style of self-expression is attractive and more successful than men's competitive and aggressive communication (Wareing, 1994). No wonder then that the contradictory gender views are evident also in African proverbs as there are proverbs that admire women's procreativity, intelligence, hard work and unflinching will (Hussein, 2004).
- (6) In Oromo, there is a proverb about a proverb used when the listener does not have the assumed shared knowledge or experience of the message intended in the proverb. In such a circumstance it is said that, "*An intelligent man knows when it (a set of thoughts and feelings) is hinted to him (through a proverb), but the unintelligent one knows not even when part of his body is patted (with a hand).*"
- (7) A proverb occurs on two planes (Oha, 1998): the allusive plane that correlates with a remote situation (e.g., historical events and popular cultural idioms) and the interpretative plane that correlates with factual situations or scenarios (e.g., instantial meaning of a proverb, which may include historically and culturally situated sociological events).
- (8) I like to argue that the role of women in forming kin affiliation and their social reproductive functions (Howard & Skinner, 1984), and the patriarchal celebration of this is less meaningful for women if it is conducted in the name and interest of the masculine (Davis, 1996).
- (9) Women's rights activists have long challenged the notions that women could find fulfillment only as wives and mothers. According to Craig *et al.* (1997), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was the most rigorous challenger of the cult of domesticity. She held the view that the cult of domesticity narrows women's vision and keeps a tight rein on their experience. In the recent American political feminism, Betty Friedan (1963) is widely known for the same view. Friedan (1963) coined the phrase, "feminine mystique" to refer to the patriarchy's adulation of female traditional roles. According to her, the cult of femininity is a deliberate system to relegate the social and economic position of women to the secondary levels, and to limit their chance of competing in the outside world with men. Friedan (1970: 268) argued that the American "feminine mystique" "glorifies woman's only purpose as the fulfillment of her 'femininity' through sexual passivity, loving service of husband and children, and dependence on man for all decisions in the world outside the home: 'man's world.'" As some put forward, patriarchy's celebration of conventional femininity, for example, female reproduction as a positive facet of life

- (hooks, 1996; Hadd, 1996) would keep women “in a position of subservience” (Bartky, 1996: 271).
- (10) The first sexual assault pointed out in the proverb shows that rape is an effort to achieve sexual fulfillment. But the second assault clearly shows that it is above all a weapon of male aggression and domination. The proverb is a binary discourse system (Hahn, 1998) in which males are framed “as warriors and sexual aggressors” and women “as passive, acted upon rather than acting.” The proverb thus says that although both men and women engage in sexual practice, the practice has different meanings for them. As a general practice, I see sex as “a male-dominated act in which men win and women lose” (Hahn, 1998: 134).
  - (11) The stereotypical inferiority of women has always been the ideological groundwork for their mistreatment and exploitation, and for limiting their skills to domestic skills. This paves the way for men to control all influential positions in their society. As Freire (2000) and Harris (1995) pointed out, the inferiorization of the subordinate group by the dominant one is usually associated with significant deprivation and disadvantages.
  - (12) In Oromo, the word *dhiira* (male) is used to refer to a male person in a gender-neutral sense. In its hegemonic sense, the word emphasizes male independence, self-reliance, physical strength, fearlessness and determination in the face of adverse situations, virility, etc. Irrespective of their social and economic positions, all gendered males are assumed to exhibit these collective ideals of masculinity, and are ridiculed in various modes if they fall short of the expectations.
  - (13) The situations of women as stated in these and other proverbs may not show the senselessness of women’s thought and actions. It could simply be the patriarchy’s misreading of the life of women. As Eveline (1994) argued, in a patriarchal society the absence or presence of objectivity emerges from and is mapped upon male subjectivity.
  - (14) It is important to point out here that the dominance of men over women (especially in non-industrialized societies) is apparently the consequence of the arrangement of duties and responsibilities along domestic-public dimensions. According to this cultural-materialist explanation, the sex that controls the means of production and distribution of material goods in the society assumes an influential position (Hicks & Gwynne, 1995: 199).
  - (15) The overall effect of the asymmetrical or gendered arrangement of men and women is their organization into boundaries (Disch, 1997).
  - (16) Ethnographic works in Africa (for example, Oboler, 1994) show that although it seems that women are structurally closer to household property complex, they may not have significant prerogative or control over the allocation of the resources.
  - (17) In Africa, particularly in the pre-colonial times, women found empowerment in their children, or used their child-bearing power to make demands and to gain substantial dispensation for themselves from their husbands (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 24).
  - (18) This proverb may be used under different circumstances: (a) to encourage a daughter to get married, (b) to reorient a woman who said no to a married life after some experiences, or (c) to encourage a widow to remarry.
  - (19) This means that human language not only reflects experiences, but also mediates relationships between individuals and groups who constitute part(s) in those experiences.
  - (20) In Africa, impregnating a woman is the proof of masculinity (virility) for a man while “motherhood is the passport to womanhood and the only way a woman can prove that she is fertile” (Tlou, 2002: 656).

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**APPENDIX****SAMPLE AFRICAN PROVERBS ABOUT THE CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS OF FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY IN DIFFERENT SOCIETIES OF AFRICA**

No.	PROVERBS AND THEMES	ETHNIC GROUPS USING THE PROVERBS	SOURCE
<b>I. SOCIETY'S DENIAL OF WOMEN'S POSSESSION OF SEPARATE PSYCHOLOGICAL, MATERIAL AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE OUTSIDE MEN</b>			
A	The face of water is the earth, likewise the face of wife is the husband.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
B	A woman that says to hell with husband, who would marry her?	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
C	A woman whose husband has decided to hate cannot solve the problem by mere cooking of delicious soup.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
D	A woman who has had two husbands should (be able to) choose which of the husbands is preferable.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
E	A woman whose husband has (just) died says that it is true that she is crying (for the loss), but she is crying for the person that would marry her.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
F	Being so caring for a barren woman is to find for her a husband.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
G	Just as donkeys do not have their own kraal and thus sleep in that of cattle, women do not have their own abode and thus dwell in that of men.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
H	What my husband says is what I say.	The Lusoga	MGSD (1999)
<b>II. EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN</b>			
A	When a woman is getting old, it would seem as if money (bride price) was not paid to marry her.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
B	A woman says (that) instead of her co-wife defeating her in the art of cooking soup, she would sieve both flesh and bone (in the meat).	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
C	If an old woman falls twice, the number of items in her basket would be known.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)

D	To beget a woman is to beget a man.	The Tsonga-Shangana	Mbiti (1988)
E	A serviceable wife is often blessed with the birth of the tenth child.	Ghana	Mbiti (1988)
F	The satiety of a pregnant woman is her offsprings.	The Lugbara of Uganda	Mbiti (1988)
G	Women and donkey do not complain about burden.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
H	When a maidservant works through necessity, the neighbor thinks: "She is not work-shy."	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)

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### III. PORTRAYING WOMEN AS SEXUAL OBJECTS

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A	An Ugwuta (Oguta) girl told her mother that as she was going on her way, a man came and threw her down and sexed (raped) her. Her mother told her to go and retaliate. She went, and was sexed (raped) again.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
B	A woman carrying a vagina would ask to be sexed, that the vagina is her own, but when it causes trouble, the (real owner (of the vagina) would be looked for.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
C	One cannot be afraid of the wide vagina because it cannot sex itself.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
D	A kind-hearted daughter does not marry without a fetus.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)

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### IV. CONVEYING THE SOCIAL, BIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INFERIORITY OF WOMEN

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A	Women are bulky, but not great.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
B	Women (as a group) are child-bearers, but are not possessors of wisdom.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	From Oromo informant in Borana
C	The management of a woman leaves the corral door closed for the whole day.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
D	One butter does excel another butter, and women do not inherit from one another.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
E	With a woman's rule, the gate remains unopened the whole day.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
F	Women make good dish, but not good speech.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)

G	Women know grinding, but not when to stop it.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
H	Women have no chiefs.	The Acholi of Uganda	Mbiti (1988)

#### V. DIRECT OR INDIRECT EMPHASIS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

A	Like hens, women wait for cocks to crow announcing the arrival of daylight.	Ghana	Narayan <i>et al.</i> , (2000)
B	Farting once is masculine and farting repeatedly is feminine.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
C	The first saint is the father.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
D	It is a husband's job to take care of the household, not woman's.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
E	A male person is dead from his birth.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
F	He is a big man outside, but a small man at home.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
G	The brave man is the spice of life.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
H	Men are Mivule tree; they shed and blossom.	The Ganda of Uganda	Ssetuba (2002)
I	The male (being) grows up wrestling.	The Ganda of Uganda	Ssetuba (2002)

#### VI. SOCIETY'S VIEW OF WOMEN'S FRUSTRATION, LOW SELF-WORTH AND INADEQUACY

A	When a woman prepares a bad meal, she starts eating as if the meal is tasty.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
B	What the sound of the mortar of a woman whose husband has taken a second wife says is "come and see what I see, come and see what I see."	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
C	When a woman is bad cook, she says she has not got enough melon paste.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
D	No woman ever finishes cooking soup and says that the soup is so very bad.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)

#### VII. THE SOCIETY'S DOUBT ABOUT THE INTEGRITY AND WHOLENESS OF WOMEN

A	Due to the habitual denial of favours they receive, women do not grow beards.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
B	Any person who uses a woman as a pad in carrying a luggage is carrying a luggage without a pad.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)

C	A testimony given by a woman against her husband resembles the truth.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
D	When a woman is hungry for gossiping, she starts asking questions about what she already knows.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
E	Women, like the weather, are unpredictable.	The Gikuyu of Kenya	Mbiti (1988)
F	Women have no secure guards, but only leaking upside-down ones.	The Gikuyu of Kenya	Mbiti (1988)
G	Women, their heart swings just like their breasts.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
H	A woman cannot see her palm.	The Maasai of Kenya	Mbiti (1988)
I	Women have no court.	The Tsonga-Shangana	Mbiti (1988)

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### VIII. THE SOCIETY'S VIEW OF WOMEN AS INDULGING IN IDIOTIC (IRRATIONAL) AFFAIRS

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A	One would be doing a good to a woman and she would be doing good to whoever she (truly) loves.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
B	One would be thinking of a woman's good but she would be thinking of her make-up platter (kit).	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
C	That a woman is running and holding her breasts is because the race is not yet very serious for her.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
D	An old woman that is told to carry a newly born baby and she says that she has no teeth, is she being told to bite the baby to death?	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
E	A lazy wife does not miss going to her parents frequently.	Tanzania	Mbiti (1988)
F	A girl counsels her mother about childbirth.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
G	The woman servant who was brought into the house on a holiday thinks that it is always a holiday.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
H	A wife whose husband is not at home goes to condole the death of horse.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
I	When one fills a woman's basket with purchases, laughter would rend the air.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)



J	When a beautiful dress is bought for a woman, she would pay condolence visit in respect of somebody who is alive.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
K	A prostitute (assumed to be female) will cry for a baby in her old age.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
L	In a town where there are no men, even women praise a hunch-back for being the fastest runner.	Ghana	Mbiti (1988)
M	Don't take a widow to a funeral for she cries her own (past) grief.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	From Oromo speaking informant in eastern Oromia
N	The foolish woman, ignoring her mother-in-law, greets the mother of the one who keeps her as mistress.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)

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#### IX. WOMEN AS EVIL SUB-SPECIES OF HUMANITY

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A	To marry is to put a snake in one's handbag.	The Tsonga-Shangana	Mbiti (1988)
B	A bad housewife attempts to advise other housewives.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
C	A man who has a bad wife grows old early.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
D	He who goes to woman has already sold himself.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
E	The child of a stepmother is like the meat from the back part of the neck.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
F	One sent by a woman does not fear death.	The Amhara of Ethiopia	Armstrong & Gebre-egzi (1969)
G	A dog trained by a woman bites to death.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
H	Two bosom friends that vie one and the same lady have chosen to be each other's enemy.	Ghana	Mbiti (1988)
I	She that intended to divorce always finds a (weak) reason to do so.	The Ganda of Uganda	Ssetuba (2002)
J	A home where a woman can speak out freely will have the foul smelling <i>arere</i> tree growing in the house.	The Yoruba	CGSPS (2001)

K	The man who dances to the flute played by a woman generally goes to the spirit world prematurely.	The Igbo of Nigeria	CGSPS (2001)
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**X. SOCIETY'S VIEW THAT MEN AND WOMEN BELONG TO SEPARATE SPATIAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF EXISTENCE**

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A	The man dies in his field, the woman in the house.	The Lugbara of Uganda	Mbiti (1988)
B	Regardless of her position, a woman is not allowed to enter a mosque [with men].	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
C	Males are the iron pole of a house, while females are the outside gate that belongs to others.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
D	A male child is the pillar of the family, a female one is a seasonal stream.	The Yoruba	Oluwole (1997)

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**XI. ENCOURAGING MEN TO CONTROL WOMEN**

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A	The lady, whose husband spoils her, slips from the tanned hid.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
B	A woman that dominates her husband will not at all value her neighbors.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
C	A husband who fears his wife cannot father a child.	The Oromo of Ethiopia <sup>86</sup>	Hussein (2004)
D	One who has spoiled his wife eats roasted barley for his supper, (because she does not serve him fine and fancy food,) as one who has spoiled his horse carries saddle at night, (because the unruly horse would throw the saddle as well as the ride off itself and run wild.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
E	As <i>kindicho</i> , the shortest shrub can't be a pole for a hut and as a donkey can't have horns, woman can't be a leader.	The Wolayta of Southern Ethiopia	From a Wolayta speaking informant
F	When he was allowed to whip whom-ever he can, the husband returned home and whipped his wife.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
G	A maidservant, who found some help, hid the millstone.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
H	A woman's place is in the kitchen.	The Igala of Nigeria	CGSPS (2001)

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**XII. CONVEYING WOMEN'S EXPRESSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE ROLES**


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A	If a child starts learning to climb (trees), his/her mother starts learning to cry.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
B	When a child's mother returns from the market, it looks as if another child's mother will not.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
C	The woman who has children does not desert her home.	The Tsonga-Shangana	Mbiti (1988)
D	The baby that refuses its mother's breast will never be full.	The Gikuyu of Kenya	Mbiti (1988)
E	He whose mother is dead and he whose mother has gone out to draw water are not in the same situation.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)
F	There is no deity like mother, she is the only one worthy of adoration.	The Yoruba	Oluwole (1997)

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**XIII. SHOWING COMPLIMENTARITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN AFRICAN LIFE SITUATION**


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A	The woman is a banana tree (which multiplies); the man however is a cornstalk (which stands alone).	Ghana	Mbiti (1988)
B	The woman is a flower in a garden; her husband, the fence around it.	Ghana	Mbiti (1988)
C	The woman is the rib of man.	The Lugbara of Uganda	Mbiti (1988)
D	It is better to be married to an old lady than to remain unmarried.	A Swahili Proverb	Mbiti (1988)
E	He who eats alone dies alone.	The Kamba of Kenya	Mbiti (1988)
F	The woman plans the income and the man plans the expenditure.	Uganda	Narayan <i>et al.</i> (2000)
G	The husband is the beauty of a woman.	The Igbo of Nigeria	Oha (1998)
H	Males do not milk goats, but still are not ignorant of how much milk the goats afford.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Hussein (2004)
I	To be a man is good thing provided the <i>dink'a</i> coughs.	The Oromo of Ethiopia	Sumner (1995)

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