

COMPLEMENTARY PERSONHOOD AND GENDER: AN INTERROGATION WITHIN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHYDOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajct.v3i1.6>**Submission: 6 July, 2023 Accepted: 27 July, 2023**

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Email: dianaofana21@gmail.com**Abstract**

In this paper, I argue for an Afro-communitarian account of personhood that considers the value of complementarity as a necessary part of human existence. The reason for conceptualizing personhood as a complementary enterprise is to dispel the understanding of gender that sustains gender inequality. I aim to explore the logic that characterizes complementary personhood as a specific kind of Afro-communitarian personhood that can account for gender complementarity. I argue that the universalized idea of patriarchy and gender, as construed within Western feminist theorizing, cannot account for every society as these concepts differ from culture to culture. In this paper, I use complementary personhood as a lens through which a fluid understanding of gender and gender relations can be drawn against the backdrop of the hierarchy and binary opposition that undergird most Western interrogations of the concepts of gender and patriarchy. To do so, I present an overview of what complementary personhood entails. The preceding elucidation would become the basis for understanding the Afro-centric notion of gender relation. I then tease out an Afro-centric triangle of gender relations using the Ezumezu logical system as its background logic.

Keywords: African Philosophy, Complementary Personhood, Gender Relations, Ezumezu logic.

Introduction

The issue of gender relations and its construction can become dynamic and controversial. The problem of gender inequality is one that has remained almost unresolved in understanding gender relations in both Western and African feminists' theorizing. The logic of Western supremacy is what has continued to color people's understanding of gender relations as gender opposition. The dynamism of the issue of gender relations has gotten the attention of both African and Western feminists. The bulk of the literature from a Western feminist perspective problematizes gender and patriarchy as the cause of women's subordination and the continued problem of gender inequality experienced by women (see SESANTI 2016; SULTANA 2011; LUGONES 2010; BRYSON 1999). African feminists believe that the problems of African women are quite different from that of Western women and that the concerns of women of African descent are largely ignored (see MOON & HOLLING 2020).

This paper grapples with the problem of gender inequality as a piece of colonial baggage that has continued to plague the African sense of gender relations. The preceding is due to the infiltration of Western patterns of thought in African societies wherein social relations are governed by Western lopsided logic. However, while this paper is not merely concerned with analyzing or discussing the debate between Western and African feminists with regard to the concerns of women of African descent, it goes beyond such debate to propose the novel idea of onyagrarchy as a particularly African way of understanding gender relations, as opposed to patriarchy or Matriarchy. The notion of onyagrarchy is an understanding of gender relations that is drawn from the *Yala* system of thought using Ezumezu system of logic. The concept onyagrarchy would be discussed further as the paper progresses.

Onyagrarchy rejects the lopsided understanding of binary gender relations, which characterizes colonial notions of gender and patriarchy, undergirded by Western colonial two-value logic. On the contrary, onyagrarchy re-interprets gender relations as a conjunctive motion towards complementation (but not synthesis) and a disjunctive motion toward gender-specific contexts (onyarchy and ongrarchy).

To achieve my goal, I use complementary personhood as a lens through which the logic of relations is emphasized through the system of Ezumezu logic one that is different from most Western interrogations of the concepts of gender and patriarchy. I, then, tease out the nature of the Ezumezu system of logic as the background logic of my understanding of gender. Finally, I provide a brief overview of the notion of onyarghrarchy as a new model for understanding gender relations within the African context.

What is Complementary Personhood?

Personhood in African philosophy is hinged on the value of the interconnectivity of persons. Simply put, the idea of interconnectedness-towards-wholeness (KROG 2008) is an apt rendition of Afro-communitarian personhood that best captures and explains the intrinsic relationship and interconnectedness that comes from African communal and relational understanding of personhood. The preceding claim can also be interpreted as one that speaks to personal identity and the socialization process that makes one a person in an African community. However, due to a lack of space, I will not go into detailed discussions of the different notions of Afro-communitarian personhood in African philosophy (see MENKITI 1984; GYEKYE 1992; KAPHAGWANI 2005; MASOLO 2010; MOLEFE 2019). My discussion in this section will focus on complementary personhood.

To understand what complementary personhood entails, I draw on Innocent Asouzu's theory of complementary reflection/Ibuanyidanda philosophy, specifically his principle of integration, which states that "anything that exists serves a missing link of reality" (ASOUZU 2004, 438). This principle can be interpreted as one that speaks to the core of human existence, bearing in mind the necessity of complementarity and mutual interdependence as the basis for human existence. This means that in complementary reflection, features like mutual dependence, complementary relationship, and mutual co-existence are core features of complementary reflection. These features would guide our understanding of gender relations and will be directly relevant in deconstructing the dichotomous logic that undergirds Western gender construction.

Further, to understand what Asouzu's complementary reflection/Ibuanyidanda philosophy entails, we have to first make sense of its four principles, namely integration, progressive transformation, Ibuanyidanda imperative, and truth and authenticity criterion (see ASOUZU 2004, 273-316). Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2021) gave some useful explanations for Asouzu's principles. According to Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2021): the principle of integration, which states that "anything that exists serves a missing link of reality" (2004, 438), implies the existence of individual entities, which necessarily exist in relation to others. The principle of progressive transformation, which states that "[a]ll human actions are geared towards the joy of being" (2004, 438); is an indication that individual human entities are dynamic and fully functional. These dynamic and functional attributes of human beings are exhibited through goal-oriented actions. These actions are most times geared towards making life meaningful. So, "all actions that are meaningful and right are the ones that lead to the joy of all who are affected by the actions" (CHIMAKONAM & OGBONNAYA 2021, 97).

The Ibuanyidanda imperative that states "allow the limitations of being to be the cause of your joy" (2011, 44) speaks to human self-insufficiencies. However; human insufficiency should not limit the joyfulness of being (CHIMAKONAM & OGBONNAYA 2021). Another useful deduction one can draw from the Ibuanyidanda imperative is that human happiness is derived when you recognized and appreciate that human limitations are a call for human mutual dependence. The truth and authenticity criterion states that one must "never elevate any world immanent missing link to an absolute instance" (ASOUZU 2004, 69). The preceding implies that there is a possibility that humans may absolutize their self-interest over and above that of others. The possibility for absolutism is what calls for the attitude of complementary reflection. The mindset of complementarity would guide against absolutizing a missing link instead of placing them on the same pedestal with other missing links.

Thus, the interpretation and application of the above-mentioned principles for gender relations would show that (1) every gender-conforming and non-gender-conforming individuals are important missing links without which gender relations would be

incomplete. The preceding interpretation of the principle of integration shows the importance of recognizing varied human identities in an attempt to make sense of complementary personhood. (2) The failure to co-exist harmoniously with others ultimately implies the negation of self; because mutual co-existence is a call towards pursuing the common good, which is gender complementarity. The second interpretation is derived from the principle of progressive transformation. (3) The burden of dichotomous hierarchies is overcome through understanding the value of mutual dependence, self-insufficiency and the process of mutual complementation. The preceding interpretation is derived from Ibunya'idanda imperative (4) A progressive gender relation is such that no superior/inferior dichotomy exists. In other words, equal treatment of all should be practised as a core principle. The fourth interpretation is derived from the truth and authenticity criterion. I argue that the conscious application of these principles to the problem of gender inequality is what makes complementarity relevant to gender issues.

Complementary reflection/Ibunya'idanda philosophy recognizes individual limitations and promotes an open-mindedness to the study of reality that can engender a holistic and comprehensive understanding of human differences and encounters (ASOUZU 2004). With this understanding, the mutual awareness of the self-insufficiency of all genders should become what necessitates complementarity rather than an opposed notion of gender relations. Thus, without a formal generalization, the idea of complementarity that I employ is one that is intended as a convenient tool that defies gender opposition in understanding human existence or personhood. Nevertheless, I will show as the paper progresses how the idea of complementary reflection is further strengthened in the logical system of Ezumezu.

It is important to point out that Asouzu's complementary reflection/Ibunya'idanda philosophy was not originally formulated as an account of personhood. However, I argue that the idea of complementary human relations that undergird the idea of complementary reflection can be likened to the values that constitute communitarian personhood in African thought. For example, in Asouzu's theory of complementary reflection, one can deduce the fundamental components of human relatedness that necessarily stem

from it. The ontological constitutiveness of human beings is what undergirds the discussion of complementary personhood. Ibuanyidanda philosophy also draws our attention to the devastating consequences of binary formation in human relations and how it can impact human relationships of any kind. It goes further to show the complexity of human diversities and how best to harness human differences in a complementary manner.

Complementary personhood thus defies binary formation in the sense that the focus of personhood is on the identification of a person's humanity, and existence as a missing link, as the basis for personhood rather than the lopsided gender hierarchies to human relationships, which eventually results in gender inequalities¹.

Earlier in the section, I mentioned that every individual's subjectivity, limitation, and insufficiency are necessary facets that can best be understood through the lens of complementary reflection. The process of harnessing individual subjectivities in complementary personhood guides the mind to dispel all forms of exclusive mindset born out of the tendency toward self-absolutizing. Complementary personhood teaches the individual to consciously recognize others as complements and the self as insufficient to overcome the limitation of self-absolutizing. Through recognizing human insufficiency, the human mind is oriented towards being receptive to others, being open to sincerity, and being empathetic to the interest of others aside from one's self.

This thinking pattern undergirds the notion of complementary personhood, as stated earlier. When individuals engage consciously in complementary reflection, they are better able to understand the importance of mutual co-existence. Most African societies have a fluid understanding of gender,² and there is no

¹ Recall that I mentioned that Asouzu's account conceives of human diversities not as a limitation but as a reason to pursue mutual collaboration in understanding our personhood. Basically, Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda philosophy seeks to harness individual differences in a way that encourages human flourishing (ASOUZU 2011). So, the refusal to recognize the value of complementarity will invariably negate human flourishing.

² Gender fluidity in most African context of social relations is conceived as complementary. So, the idea of gender fluidity was used by Oyewumi to capture the complementary understanding of the logic of relations that governs African

dichotomous gender opposition that exists between genders (see ACHOLONU 1995; OYEWUMI 1997). This is why core features like mutual dependence, interaction, relationship, and mutual co-existence, as outlined in complementary personhood, can be utilized to overcome the oppositional logic that undergirds contemporary gender relations. One can easily suspect that the exclusivity we find in our understanding of gender and gender relations stems from the baggage of colonialism that has impacted the African sense of socio-cultural relations.

Within Western (Euro-American) feminist literature, the discussion on gender necessarily comes with that of patriarchy. This is because patriarchy is said to be what sustains gender constructions as well as gender inequality. On the contrary, the understanding of gender that I explore in this paper resists the Western linguistic interpretation that most Western feminists engage with. This is not to say that the interrogation of Western feminists on the concepts of gender and patriarchy, as it pertains to the reality of gender inequality, is wrong. What is wrong, however, is the fact that the concepts of patriarchy and gender are universalized in such a way that it closes the door to further interrogation of these concepts within different socio-cultural contexts.

If the concepts of gender and patriarchy are analyzed using the principles of complementary personhood, one would see that an African understanding of gender relations is not conceived in the same sense as the Western socio-cultural context. Some scholars have questioned the static monotonic pattern of thought that characterizes Western metaphysics and ontology, even in Western philosophical discourse. Jacques Derrida, for instance, does this through the lens of deconstruction. Derrida's idea of deconstruction consists of "two phases:" positions and dissemination (DERRIDA 1997, 41–42, 4–6). Derrida's notion of deconstruction is a critique of Platonism, which is defined by the belief that existence is structured in terms of oppositions (forms vs copies) and that these oppositions are hierarchical, with the former being more valuable than the latter (DERRIDA 1997). This led Derrida to overturn this hierarchy by reversing the structure on which oppositional understanding and

society from the Yoruba context. Also, it is necessary to note that Oyewumi's claims are not without criticism. However, that is not the goal of this paper.

meaning are built by emphasizing the importance of appearance as more valuable than essence.

Similarly, Maria Lugones believes that the Eurocentric notion of modernity is what organizes the world ontologically in terms of atomic, homogeneous, and separable categories (2010, 742). She argues that the Western bifurcation of reality is what constitutes the critique against Western feminist universalism by contemporary women of African descent (LUGONES 2010). According to Lugones, “if woman and black are terms for homogeneous, atomic, separable categories, then their intersection shows us the absence of African women rather than their presence” (2010, 742). One can see how Derrida’s metaphysics inspires Lugones’ argument as it draws our attention to the same issue Derrida identified in Western Metaphysics. The preceding claim also draws our attention to the question of logic. If the underlying logic of Western thought seeks more to separate, rather than complement, differing missing links (by virtue of the true/false binary), then such a logical system would inherently negate differing philosophical traditions (by virtue of self-absolutization). More importantly, such logic cannot undergird or properly explain African notions of gender relations, which can be construed as complementary.

Lugones further informs us of the coloniality of gender as the central dichotomy of colonial modernity wherein “a hierarchical dichotomous distinction between human and non-human were imposed on the colonized in the service of the Western man” (2010, 173). This imposition was also accompanied by the hierarchical distinctions between men and women. This gender distinction became the praxis for European civilization (LUGONES 2010). So, the civilized became Western men and women. Within the categories of humans and civilization, indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as non-human (LUGONES 2010). This classification is what marked the reign of the European, bourgeois, colonial, modern man as the subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life, civilized, heterosexual, Christian, and a being with reasoning capacity. The European bourgeois woman was not understood as one who complements him but as someone who reproduces race and capital through her sexual purity, passivity, and being homebound, in the service of the European, bourgeois man. Dichotomous hierarchies became woven into the historicity of

relations, including intimate relations by the colonial modern man (LUGONES, 2010). All the while, the African woman settled at the bottom of the hierarchy, as she continued to be considered non-human, inferior to the African man, white woman and white man – in that order. This hierarchical structure held together by a binary opposition (African man vs African woman) within a binary opposition (colonized vs colonizer) that is characteristic of Aristotelean two-valued logic.

It is important to note that the idea of male supremacy is what forms the basis on which gender and gender roles are construed and understood within the Western purview. The preceding claim is evident in the ways gender has been distorted in contemporary African societies that have adopted the two-value logic. Likewise, what accounts for the inseparability of sex and gender characteristic of Western feminist analysis is also based on the colonial interpretations and understanding of gender (LUGONES 2010). However, more contemporary analyses have introduced arguments for the claim that gender constructs sex. But in the earlier version, it was said that sex grounded gender. Often, the two concepts become conflated: where you see sex, you will see gender and vice versa (MARECEK et al 2004; LUGONES 2010; MIKKOLA 2019). But, if Lugones is right about the coloniality of gender, in the distinction between the human and non-human, then we can say that sex has been subsumed in gender, so it would not stand alone. This means that gender is used as a placeholder for the abuse of biological differences.

Unlike colonization, the coloniality of gender is still with us; it is what lies at the understanding and intersection of patriarchy, gender and gender roles in contemporary African societies. The coloniality of gender is what undergirds the logic of gender relations, one that is based on binary opposition, which bifurcate reality into hierarchies. The preceding is what sustains the systems of gender inequality and violence against women in most African societies.

An Afro-centric Deconstruction and Reinterpretation of the Concept of Gender: towards the Demise of Patriarchy

Much of the literature that grapples with the question of gender and gender inequality has identified gender inequality as a problem in Africa (BALOGUN 2010; CHIMAKONAM 2018; MOSIMA 2018).

For this reason, the experiences of women's subordination have caught the attention of some African scholars (see BALOGUN 2010; CHIMAKONAM 2018; MOSIMA 2018). Some scholars have, however, argued that the issue of gender inequality is not applicable to women alone, as men can also be mistreated (IBEKWE 1990). The preceding claim simply shows the complexities in analyzing the issues of gender inequality. That said, it is important to note that the reality of gender inequality presupposes the existence of gender opposition (see BALOGUN 2010; CHIMAKONAM 2018; MOSIMA 2018). If it is true that gender opposition (within the context of Africa) is a product of the internalization of Western logic and gender categories, as Ifi Amadiume (1987) notes, then discussions about gender in Africa ought to be focused on unveiling, deconstructing and/or exorcising Western logic and discourses from African thoughts about gender (ACHOLONU 1995; BESONG 2021). In doing so, I propose Ezumezu as the logic that would ground the African notion of gender relations. I would proceed to explain what Ezumezu logic entails for clarity.

What is Ezumezu Logic?

The Ezumezu system of logic is one that is drawn from the African system of thought or ontology. The system of Ezumezu logic transcends the Western System of two-valued logic that bifurcates reality into two unequal parts. Ezumezu system of logic is laden with certain principles, pillars of thought, methods and philosophy that, when applied, reveal the lopsidedness of the Western logical system that overlooks other aspects of being. That said, Ezumezu is drawn from the *Igbo* language and it could be translated to mean "the collective, the aggregate of all or the totality of all that is most viable, most potent and most powerful" (ORIZU 1994, 14; CHIMAKONAM 2019, 94). This means that Ezumezu speaks to the notion of collectivism that is neither fragmented nor bifurcated even though fragments are what make up the collective.

According to Chimakonam:

[T]he ontological thesis of Ezumezu logic states that realities exist only as independent units at the periphery of the circle of existence but also as entities capable of coming together to

the center of the circle of existence, in a network for an interdependent relationship. (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 141)

The above claim embodies three perspectives of reality that could be translated as relations. In understanding African ontology, reality is not viewed from a lopsided angle; but from multi-perspectival angles. Chimakonam's explanation unveils three perspectives: the physical, the nonphysical, and a combination of the two, wherein the third perspective points to the existential complementarity that could or would take place. So, it is in the phrase Ezumezu that complementarity can be understood. To make sense of the idea of complementarity, the opposition of truth and falsity, is not understood as the end of the conversation but as the move towards complementation. One can say that this is one of the features that differentiate Ezumezu logic from Western categorical logic.

Unlike Western two-valued logic, the Ezumezu three-valued logic is built on three other supplementary laws: *njikọka*, *nmekọka* and *onona-etiti* (see CHIMAKONAM 2019). These supplementary laws of Ezumezu logic yield two inferential methods: *arumaristics* and *ohakaristics*. The *Arumaristic* method is an approach to reasoning that moves from the periphery to the center. It promotes logical relation of inclusion or complementary relations. *Ohakaristics* is context-dependent in that it focuses on affirming various individual identities. It is a reasoning procedure that moves from the center to the periphery. So, in understanding what *Arumaristics* embodies, one must note that the truth of the peripheries is what accounts for the truth of the center (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 102).

These two methods are driven by two types of motion: conjunctive motion and disjunctive motion. A movement from the center to the periphery is a disjunctive movement, which signals a collapse of the complementation and a movement towards contexts, where variables fully assume their individual identities (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 99). Thus, what accounts for the truth of the whole is embedded in the parts (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 103). What is implied here is that the truth of individual identities can inform the truth of the whole, that is, the center of complementation. Conjunctive, on the other hand, motion signals a movement from the

periphery to the center – a movement towards complementation – even though variables at the periphery may be opposed to each other.

The ways in which the Ezumezu logic would account for all genders, as well as gender non-conforming persons, would be to see the different gender identities as human differences without losing sight of their humanity (the minimum point at which they complement). It is for this reason that the discussion on gender relations here is one that is open to a broad spectrum of genders. The idea of gender equality that would work is to recognize the different gender identities as representing unique contexts. In the system of Ezumezu logic, gender differences are necessary for us to make sense of the contextual and complementary modes without elevating one gender over others. The argument is that the humanity of individuals has graced them with all human attributes, and as such, they are equally different. So, I propose a fluid understanding of gender relations wherein *nwa-nsa* and *nwa-nju* can be used to identify any gender as far as complementarity is concerned.

The complementary relations of all genders would then lie in *nwa-izugbe*, which is the center of complementation. This understanding of complementarity would be impossible to conceive when viewed through the lens of a lopsided two-value logic. This means that it would be impossible to account for any form of gender relations that are not hierarchical or one that is inclusive of the LGBTQI+ community that neither fit into the dichotomy of true or false logical value in Western logic. In two-valued logic, the laws of contradiction and excluded-middle ensure that the values and any other gender interpretation that may fall outside the schema of either male or female are conceived as contradictions, in which there is no possibility of an intermediate value.

Onyaghrarchy: Towards a New Concept of Gender Complementarity

Following the Western two-valued logic, gender relations presuppose gender hierarchy and inequality. Whereas in other cultural contexts, gender relations are understood as complementary (see ACHOLONU 1995). One can also infer that the Western notion of patriarchy and gender relations were not a part of pre-colonial African societies before the colonial encounter. This claim is premised on the fact that the conception of patriarchy and gender in

Western feminist literature mirrors the reality of Western logic that thrives on opposition and hierarchy, where the understanding of patriarchy and gender is lopsided, with one gender assuming a superior position and reducing the other as inferior (BESONG, 2021). Some scholars like Rosemary Uchem (2001), Oladele Balogun (2010), Jonathan Chimakonam (2018), Pius Mosima (2018), Rianna Oelofsen (2018), Olajumoke Akiode (2018), Renate Schepen (2018), Elvis Imafidon (2018), Louise du Toit (2018), Bernard Matolino (2018), Mesembe Edet (2018); Egbai Uti (2018), have shown in their work the influence of Western interpretation of gender and gender roles on the issue of gender inequality. The argument is that if the structure of gender inequality is not deconstructed or reinterpreted, women are likely to be marginalized irrespective of where they find themselves.

In understanding the African view on gender relations, the socio-religious contexts of the African people cannot be detached from their relationality. This claim resonates with John Mbiti's argument on the religiosity of the African people and how it constitutes the African sense of being, cosmology, social structure and relations (MBITI 1967). Hence, he posits that "Africans are notoriously religious" (1967, 2). This means that African religion and traditional practices permeate all other aspects of the African community and the ethics and norms that guide their understanding of human relationships.

In Mbiti's work, God as the Supreme Being is understood as fluid. What this means is that it can either be understood as a mother or a father but not necessarily linked to a static framing (MBITI 1967). One can speculate that Africans also structure their societies as matrilineal or patrilineal, based on their understanding of God as either mother or father. Hence, societies that are identified as patrilineal or matrilineal are both influenced by African ontology and the ancestral belief that the god of a particular society is either a male or female. We see this then play out in familial and societal relationships. In most patrilineal societies, members are identified by their father's lineage through his ancestors, down to God. In such societies, deities and their diviners are often male, and there is some emphasis on male-oriented rituals, rites, groups and leadership. The same applies to matrilineal societies in African culture. The birth symbolism of the umbilical cord that connects the child to the

mother is emphasized and also speaks to the society's connection to its female ancestors, down to the mother God. Here, emphasis is often on goddesses, priestesses, female-oriented rituals, rites, groups and leadership (see AMADIUME 1987). But there are also cases, which might be in most African societies, where both males and females fill the same roles (see AMADIUME 1987, 89-91). In such societies, there are gods and goddesses. In *Igbo* society, for example, the three deities that are closest to Chukwu are Ala (earth goddess), Igwe (sky god) and Ekwensu (the deity of expedience, whose gender fluctuates). This deity answers the prayers of anyone who prays to it and helps people get whatever it is they want, whether good or bad. For having many faces, most people dislike it and use its name for verbal abuse (see AMADIUME 1987, 89-91).

So, whether the emphasis is matrilineal or patrilineal, relationships among genders are still viewed along horizontal lines. For in the hierarchy of beings, there is nothing to suggest a vertical relationship between males and females in the same way that one would view the vertical relationship between human beings and ancestors or between human beings and animals. Thus, belonging to a patrilineal society does not imply male superiority in the same way that belonging to a matrilineal society does not inform female dominance. One can further argue that the encounter with patrilineality informed Western missionaries, colonialists and scholars to misinterpret this patrilineality with the patriarchy that they were used to. This patriarchy has survived as the mainstream narrative for gender relationships in Africa. This narrative has survived and has also informed the meaning and interpretation that accrued to gender relationships. This Western colonial bias has also informed the repressed intellectual work on matrilineal societies in Africa and the portrayal of African societies as only male-power-oriented. Indeed, in most African societies like the Akan, Efik, Igbo and even Yala, the socio-cultural understanding and identification of the society is only a matter of what best captures their understanding of the deities, whether as males or females. The use, or rather misuse, of the term "patriarchy" or "matriarchy" to capture ontologically male or female African societies arises from colonialism and the fact that no English term perfectly captures what traditional Africans mean when they say that a society is

ontologically patrilineal or matrilineal. If we must move forward, this semantic and conceptual gap must be filled.

To do this, I tap into my traditional heritage to fashion out new concepts that capture the societal femininity and masculinity in Africa, and the complementary relationship that exists in both instances. Thus, I introduce into the literature the terms that I believe best capture ontologically patrilineal or matrilineal societies. The concepts are: ‘Onghrarchy’ and ‘Onyarchy’. Both Onghrarchy and Onyarchy are anglicized versions of the Yala words ‘onghro’ and ‘onya’. Etymologically, the term onghro refers roughly to masculinity, while onya translates roughly to femininity. I say roughly because, unlike the static conception of masculinity as the male sex and femininity as the female sex, the usage of the terms refers to much more fluid and interchangeable concepts. By this, I mean that while females are typically onya, a man who assumes the persona of onya, would be called an onya (not onghro), and vice versa. Furthermore, I introduce a third concept representing the complementarity between Onya and Onghro. This new term is Onyaghrarchy, which is an anglicized combination of the terms Onyarchy and Onghrarchy. Thus, while it makes sense to reject the Western idea of patriarchy that is understood to encourage gender inequality, Onyarchy, Onghrarchy and Onyaghrarchy, all fit together as the proper explanation of the type of gender relationships that used to exist in most African societies, which value complementarity amongst genders³.

³ I believe that it is Onyarchy that scholars like Ogunyemi was referring to, when she was talking about “African Womanism. This same argument is found in motherism, femalism and Nego-feminism. However, the difference lies in the fact that the logic on which the notion of Onyarchy is formulated defies the Western interpretation of gender relation. It is also important to note that Onyarchy is not another interpretation of feminism but an Afro-centric reinterpretation of specific contextual gender modes as well as gender identity that is not built on Western hierarchical logic one that abhors complementarity. The argument of Motherism, femalism, and nego-feminism, are interpretations of an African understanding of feminism. These varied interpretations stem from the misinterpretation of feminism in Western feminists theorizing. The varied theories that are formulated by African writers and activists are meant to explain their dissatisfaction with the condition of African women and how best to address gender inequality without being misinterpreted as seeking detachment or a reversal of gender roles. Nevertheless, I argue that the problem is not just about the misinterpretation or the

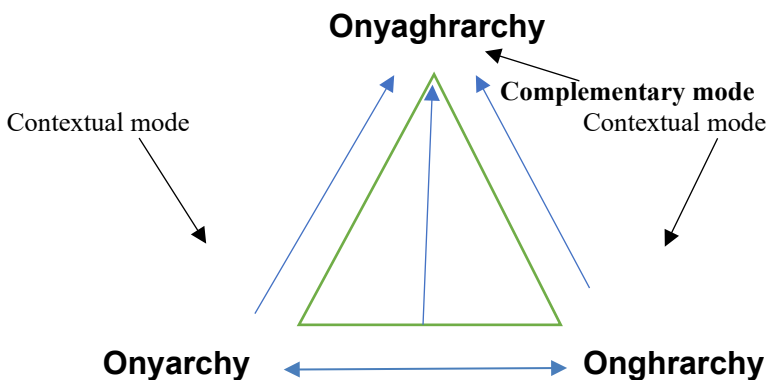
Thus, instead of the problematic patriarchy/patriarchal, I propose onyaghrarchy/onyaghrarchal as a better characterization of African societies. Unlike the Western understanding of patriarchy and gender that are interpreted in line with its colonial logic that thrives on bifurcation and exclusivity, the concepts of Onyarchy, Onghrarchy and Onyaghrarchy reflect the African notion of reality, as all three concepts are necessary in my African account of gender, and necessarily complementary. This tripartite (or triangular) notion is best captured and understood within the context of African three-value logic that can ground thinking in most African societies – Ezumezu logic. In this way, ontologically, what accounts for the uniqueness of femininity or masculinity is captured within the context of Onghrarchy and Onyarchy. This contextual separation only reflects an incompleteness that is tamed only through the drive towards complementarity. I consider these contexts both internal and external because they reflect an internal personality context, where any person can reflect aspects of Onyarchy and Onghrarchy, and the external contexts where individuals from both these contexts must co-exist. Ifi Amadiume's (1987) argument on *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* best substantiates this claim. With this, we can understand the fluid relationship that exists or ought to exist between persons in traditional African societies.

So, when a society is identified either as Onyarchy or Onghrarchy it does not imply that one is opposed to the other or that there is any form of gender opposition assumed from the difference in gender personas. Gender context, in this sense, reflects the ontological mode of society, especially in relation to their understanding of the Supreme Being and other deities. Furthermore, there cannot be a conflict between Onyarchy and Onghrarchy because, logically and ontologically speaking, such a conflict reflects incompleteness. What this means is that gender binary opposition can only exist in the absence of 'Onyaghrarchy,' which speaks to the fluid gender interaction and complementarity between genders represented in the Ezumezu and complementary paradigm. Onyarchy and Onghrarchy reflect the contextual modes, while Onyaghrarchy reflects Onyarchy and Onghrarchy in their complementary mode.

misrepresentation of African feminism, but a misrepresentation of the system of logic that undergirds the African thought in terms of gender and gender relations.

Society can only function or achieve its common good/objectives in this complementary mode of Onyagrarchy. Even when a society is ontologically Onyarchal or Onghrarchal, such a communal identity is only religious or metaphysical, and it does not imply that efforts towards Onyagrarchy are rejected or that one context is superior to the other context. As I have argued, all three are necessary. The gender triangle below is a presentation of what I believe to be a triangular conception of gender. As it is in African society, the triangle is an important symbol of relationality, and it is in ancient forms of writing like Nok arts and the Nsibidi scripts of some Eastern Nigerian ethnic nationalities. This triangle of gender relationships captures what I present as the Afro-centric conception of gender, which is inspired by the traditional socio-cultural values of the *Yala* system of thought.

Figure 1: The Triangle of Gender Relationship



From the above, we see what I have been trying to explain so far, captured in graphic form. The contextual mode is a mode of difference and uniqueness, and when we dwell upon the differences, we may sometimes end up with conflicts or a lack of complementation. This is why I said that all three modes are necessary for a complete understanding of gender relationships in Africa. Beyond the contextual mode, both Onyarchy and Onghrarchy can come together only in a complementary mode to arrive at Onyagrarchy. The nature of these contextual and complementary modes lies in the understanding of gender relationships and in the kind of roles an individual takes on in typical African society. These

roles are not interpreted in terms of opposition but as existing in the mode of complementation. For example, the female gender has the ability to become pregnant, and the male gender has the ability to impregnate. Neither the female nor male can impregnate or get impregnated without the other if one were to take the natural route. When we look at the difference between a male and a female, we would understand why the complementary mode is important to recontextualize human differences within the complementary mode of gender relationships.

Conclusion

In analyzing the problem of gender relations in African society the Afro-centric understanding of gender relations was explored using the African context. I showed why we needed- to reinterpret the concept of gender. In interrogating the concept of gender, I discussed some Western scholars who believe the deconstruction of Western gender epistemology is necessary to better understand the concept of gender relations from other perspectives. In the course of interrogating the concept of gender within Western discourse, I showed that there exists a thinking pattern that undergirds the contemporary understanding of both patriarchy and gender in Africa. Hence, I showed the logical implication of applying Ezumezu system of logic to make sense of gender relations and patriarchy within the context of Africa. In light of the preceding, the demise of the colonial understanding of patriarchy and gender is what is required to make sense of the Afro-centric conception of gender that thrives on the complementary logic of which the Ezumezu system is a viable variant.

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