'Miss Independent': gender and independence on the African continent

Elvis Imafidon[1]

Department of Philosophy, Ambrose Alli University, Faculty of Arts, Ekpoma, Nigeria
elvismafi@yahoo.com

Modern African societies have emerged from rich cultural heritages and traditions tangled with an ambivalent colonial experience. One aspect of the rich African cultural heritage that has however persisted in post-colonial Africa is the perception of independent social living as a male dominated prerogative in which the female is seen as a submissive subject. My intention with this paper is to show that, over the past two decades, a growing new trend towards a rejection of this male dominated concept has emerged in African traditional society and is fast growing in social life on the continent; a trend aptly captured by the pop music of the R&B superstar Ne-Yo in his single 'Miss Independent'. This trend strongly illustrates the growing rejection by women of the traditionally held stereotypical masculine role of independence. Women are increasingly rejecting the submissiveness and dependence on the male as contained in the 'old order'. This paper illustrates that there are fast emerging consequences for this new trend with particular reference to family life, courtship and marriage. The research method used in the study is both descriptive and analytical.

Keywords: Gender, independent living, African, Ne-Yo, masculine, feminine, marriage, Africa-gender

Introduction

The African experience of modernity in the post-colonial era is supported by a large and growing list of scholarly literature devoted to this area of discourse. According to Abiola Irele (2001: ix):

> African literatures may be said to derive an immediate interest from the testimony it offers of the preoccupation of our writers with the conflicts and dilemmas involved in the tradition/modernity dialectic. This observation is based on the simple premise that, as with many other societies and cultures in the so-called Third World, the impact of Western civilization on Africa has occasioned a discontinuity in forms of life throughout the continent. It points to the observation that the African experience of modernity associated with a Western paradigm is fraught with tensions at every level of the communal existence and individual apprehension.

Thus, the aim of these numerous literary sources on the African experience of colonialism and the resulting post-colonial experience has basically been twofold: (a) to determine the extent to which damage or good has been done to the African cultural heritage and (b) to understand the tension between tradition and modernity that results from the post-colonial experience (Gyekye 1997; Lauer 2003).

This tension between tradition and modernity is often held by many involved in this discourse on the African experience to be responsible for the many social problems faced by the African continent today. As Moses Oke (2006: 333-334) says:

> "One of the general points to be drawn from discussions of the African predicament is that the root cause of the postcolonial continental failure is the erosion of basic African values that have helped to promote stable social existence over the ages. The erosion is then traced to the advent of colonialism and the consequent introduction of European socio-political systems, values and structures of capitalist economy. The net effect of all these cultural incursions, it is suggested, is that while emphasis was placed on political and economic development to the detriment of social development, Africans' basic human values were suppressed or totally obliterated by the largely 'inhuman' Western values. Ironically, Africa, as things have turned out, has lost out on all fronts of development – political, economic, social, psychological and moral – presumably because the indigenous social culture was superimposed upon by the alien colonialist social cultures."

Since the collapse of colonialism more than five decades ago, one aspect of the African cultural heritage that persevered in the face of modernity is the gender stereotypical role of independent social living associated with masculinity and dependent social living associated with feminity. This perception has however been increasingly challenged over the last two decades by global (largely Liberal Western) norms and values propagated through the Internet. Many African women, particularly those living in the larger African cities today, are challenging the male stereotypical roles cherished in African traditional society. This trend is strongly supported by younger women who do not yet possess independent

---

1. Elvis Imafidon, is a Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria.

social status. The aim of this paper is not to establish whether the new trend is having a positive or negative impact on gender issues in the African cultural heritage but simply to illuminate/highlight the existence and rapid development of this trend and its social consequences. Thus, the discussions we are engaged in right now can be located within a delimited segment of the discourse on the African post-colonial experience: the issue of gender as it presents itself in tradition and modernity. We may then begin our discussion proper by pinpointing what contemporary discourse on gender *really* involves in today's scholarship.

Gender: is it about sex or about women? Re-reading the gender issue

Sex refers to the biological difference between men and women and such difference is genetically determined. Thus, it is out of our hands to determine the sex category we belong to. Gender, on the other hand, refers not to the genetically or biologically determined differences between sex categories, but to the socio-culturally determined differences between sexes concerning their roles, attitudes, behaviours, and values (ADF VI 2008: v). Such socially determined differences between men and women are often held stereotypically and are often defended as tallying with the biological or genetic differences. However, the hope of human-kind is that since gender is socio-culturally determined, it isn't out of our hands; that is, it can be modified and revised every now and then when necessary to meet the humanistic goal of human wellbeing.

On the basis of this understanding, an active gender discourse has developed over the last two decades. The present century has experienced and continues to experience such development on an unprecedented scale and one can pinpoint the reason for this unprecedented development in the disenchantment of metaphysico-religious worldviews or traditions in the wake of modernity or the age of Enlightenment (Habermas 1984: 186-216). In the wake of modernity, the challenging of traditions that held beliefs beyond the reach of humans, including those concerning gender stereotypical roles, led to the flourishing of critical discourse in all spheres of our being, gender discourse inclusive.

Gender discourse thus occupies a prominent place in scholarship, policy-making, and everyday social life today. It is often centred around such issues as gender equality, which is now considered a basic human right (Feinstein, Feinstein & Sabrow 2010: 98), gender and development, commonly called GAD (Baden & Goetz 1997: 3), gender analysis, gender discrimination (Sidanius & Veniegas 2000: 47-69), sexist stereotypes, and gender empowerment measure commonly called GEM (Feinstein, Feinstein & Sabrow 2010: 98) which is often centred around women empowerment as a means of breaching the gap between male and female empowerment (See Lopez-Claros & Zahidi 2006), as well as gender and culture.

The significance of these issues in gender discourse has led to the development of the concept of gender mainstreaming. In the words of the United Nations Economic and Social Council,

> Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. *The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality* (UNDP 2006: 2).

However, what is the gender discourse *really* about? Is it about revising and improving the gender stereotypical roles in society as they affect men and women, or is it simply about revising the gender stereotypical roles in favour of women without any concern for the male counterpart? There are indications that the gender discourse proceeds on the assumption that social stereotypical roles about sexes do not favour women as such and that it is women who are neglected and victimized. On this basis, women need to be empowered to overcome their subjective roles in a predominately African male dominated society. Thus, the accusation has often been laid that we have mainstreamed gender already, which means that there is really no further need for gender mainstreaming. As Baden and Goetz (1997: 3) say, "Gender" has become a synonym for "women" such that all talk about gender is actually about women.

The local and international organizations that pursue the gender agenda vigorously are aware of this accusation. Some deny it as a mere myth (UNDP 2002: 9), while others appreciate the evidence that necessitates such a conclusion and make an effort to bridge the seeming gap. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2002: 9) disagrees with this position, insisting that gender issues are actually about both genders and not about women only:

> It is true that a lot of the work on gender in humanitarian assistance focuses on women. This is primarily because it is women's needs and interests that tend to be neglected. However, it is important that the analysis and discussion look at both sides of the gender equation. More attention is needed to understand how men's

roles, strategies, responsibilities and options are shaped by gender expectations during conflicts and emergencies.

But isn't this painting of the gender discourse over-shaded with the women's agenda? Is gender equality, for example, not simply seen as promoting women's empowerment and ending violence against women? Some are aware of the bias in the gender agenda and have suggested ways on how to limit the bias by making gender-based discourse more male-friendly. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC 2005: 2) say, for example, that

> We need to develop approaches and strategies for male inclusion in the gender equality process. We need to deepen our understanding of the resistance encountered, document what works and develop tools for field-based use. We need to bring men and boys front and centre, in line and in place with women and girls, in the promotion of gender mainstreaming and in the march for gender equality. We need to stress that promoting gender equality is not about granting privileges to women while disempowering men. It is about creating integrated approaches that benefit all. It is about creating a more socially just world.

The aim here is not about the gender discourse-focus controversy or which of the disputing parties – those who feel the gender discourse is really about women or those who feel it is truly about gender – is right. The author simply wishes to point to the existence of such a controversy and the implication that this has for the gender agenda. It can be implied from such disagreements that the gender agenda, at least often if not always, strongly promotes women's assertiveness. The glaring evidence for this is the feminist trend, which is a by-product of the gender discourse. Women's assertiveness, we can say, is now paying off (whether for good or for ill) and it is one of such pay-offs concerning independent living that I seek to unfold in this paper.

Independent living and women liberation in Africa

Independent living is commonly defined as having a choice and control over the things needed to go about one's daily life in a successful and fulfilling manner (Johnson and Kossykh 2008: 32). It is the ability for one to live his/her daily life without undue dependence on others (say family members) for one's livelihood and subsistence. Living independently is therefore seen as a manifestation of self-empowerment, self-determination and self-fulfilment. However, this does not mean that the one who lives independently does not need any kind of support. In fact, living independently may involve substantial support from public and private sectors, only that personal choice and control remains solely for the independent individual (Elder-Woodward Hurst & Manwaring 2005: 9). In other words, independent living implies *being head over one's affairs*.

Independent living as a concept first came into being in the 1960s at the University of California, Berkeley, when a group of 12 students at the University came to recognise their own 'right to living'. These students, who despite their severe physical disabilities attended university lectures and seminars alongside their non-disabled friends, were housed apart from other students in a wing of the Student Health Service, at Cowell Hospital. Most of their time was spent confined to the University campus, partly because their electric wheelchairs did not have the range to take them out into the community, but largely because the surrounding area was not set up to accommodate people with such disabilities. Essentially, they were thus basically isolated and in close contact only with each other (Gillinson, Green & Miller 2005: 17)

Thus, the concept of independent living became associated with the quest to empower the disabled or physically challenged, to give them the kind of life the non-disabled adults often take for granted. However, the concept has evolved with time and can now be used in connection with any human activity that impedes self-fulfilment and subsistence for any individual or group of people. Thus, the quest for freedom from colonial rule by colonized countries in African some decades back is surely the quest for independent living. When Nelson Mandela, for example, fought against racial apartheid in South Africa, he was fighting against barriers to the independent living of blacks who had been discriminated against by whites for long. Black people faced barriers to independent living in South Africa as a result of a very conscious, large-scale social and political movement, which discriminated against them on the grounds of their skin colour. This necessitated Nelson Mandela's fight against the apartheid regime (Gillinson, Green & Miller 2005: 19).

But what role did such quests for independent living in the United States, colonial Africa, and apartheid South Africa play in women liberation? What bearing, direct or indirect, did they have on women's self determination as against male dominance, a pivotal issue in feminist agenda? History shows that these events which were aimed at attaining independent living happened primarily for the following reasons: in the United States, it was a struggle for equal rights such as the right to vote and to participate in American society as equal citizens. Women's rights were only included within such rights rather than being the primary aim. In Africa, it was primarily the rejection of political, economic and social colonialism in favour of total political independence and self-determination. One can claim as well that very little

mention is made of women's rights as part of the primary aim of the anti-colonial struggle. Also, the struggle against apartheid in South Africa was against political social and economic separation based primarily on race not gender issues. Although women played an active and important role in the anti-apartheid struggle, gender issues as seen in independent living above were not at the forefront of the struggle as such at the time.[1] Then, how do they relate to the achievement of the feminist agenda of womens liberation as against male dominance?

The struggle for independent living in the instances cited above had, if nothing else, an indirect but strong implication for gender discourse in general and the feminist agenda in particular. In the United States, the struggle for independent living and, by implication, equal rights was thought by the women folk to be impossible to achieve if gender stereotypical roles of male dominance over women were not completely overhauled. This line of thought served as the fuel for the advancement of the feminist movement in the United States in the twentieth/twenty-first centuries. In colonial Africa, although the primary aim was political, economic and social independence, women's emancipation was intrinsically interwoven with the post-colonial agenda. Aniekwu (2006: 144-145) explains the relevance of the feminist agenda for post-colonial African experience:

> After colonisation, hierarchical gender roles and discriminatory relationships in politics, economics, religion and culture have tended to be continual. African women's struggle against gender asymmetry and inequality is often described in terms of the relationship between public and private spheres, or the 'domestic versus public' distinction in gender roles. In colonial Africa, female subordination took intricate forms 'grounded' in traditional culture and implemented through this domestic-public dichotomy. In many historical African societies, male and female roles were peculiar to the original social patterns and ideologies of those societies, but these became reconfigured around the edges as the society changed and evolved ... Feminist research has disproved the pervasive stereotype that African gender roles are mired in an 'archaic' past, and demonstrated that these roles have changed as culture is reshaped by experience and development.

As an effect of the colonial and post-colonial experience, African women have become more aware of their rights not only as human beings but as women, and of the need for addressing their subordinate position in public and private life. There is a strong and growing willingness among African women to strategise for change and be more specific in their goals and modes of operation for achieving a new gender compact. African women are striving to understand the 'patrimonial autocracy' that African states have experienced and why and how these conditions have affected women more negatively than men. Women are questioning men's ideological perceptions of women as nurturing, acquiescent, subordinate and familial and not as people with equal capabilities and rights. More than ever, African women are challenging the inequitable relationships that exist in their societies, the cultural models or compacts that continue to influence their lives, and the deep social issues that are affected by ethnic, political, religious and economic crises (Aniekwu 2006: 145). Thus, women's emancipation becomes an essential ingredient in the quest for independence in post-colonial Africa

During the struggle for liberation from apartheid in South Africa, the feminist agenda was also a pivotal issue for the political/liberation parties and movements such as the African National Congress (ANC). This is made clear in the Statement on the Emancipation of Women in South Africa, issued by the ANC National Executive Committee on May 02, 1990 which states: "Gender oppression is everywhere rooted in a material base and is expressed in socio-cultural traditions and attitudes all of which are supported and perpetuated by an ideology which subordinates women ... Patriarchal rights, especially but not only with regard to family, land and the economy, need serious re-examination so that they are not entrenched or reinforced" (Hassim 1991:65). Unfortunately, the ANC only succeeded in mobilising women for the national liberation struggle as opposed to mobilising them for women's liberation. This mobilisation process had the effect of reinforcing rather than challenging patriarchal relations of domination. Fortunately, however, the transitional period created the space for a feminist movement to emerge to challenge these existing forms of women's organisations that promote patriarchal relations of domination for the first time since the 1950s (Hassim 1991: 65). This trend continues to grow today.

Therefore, today, the struggle for independent living is strongly associated with the feminist agenda of women's liberation from male subjugation. Roughly put then, the aim of the feminist agenda is to assert that women are in no way less significant that men but are rather equal to men and should be given equal opportunities to men rather than merely being submissive to the dictates of men. But due to the patriarchal nature of African indigenous societies, with their emphasis on male headship and female submissiveness, some have doubted if the feminist agenda can be successful on

---

1. For these points, I am indebted to the very useful comments of the reviewer of the first draft of this paper.

the black continent (see, for example, Mwale 2002: 114-137). In other words, as the feminist movement has emerged and continues to grow in Africa, what chances are there that they will record reasonable success in achieving their goals and objectives, bearing in mind the nature of traditional African thought on gender roles? The present paper shows in part that such fears can be put to rest once we pay attention to the growing trend of female assertion of male independence on the African continent today.

Independence as a masculine symbiotic role among Africans

Perhaps, the appropriate route to take in understanding why independent living is strictly a masculine yet symbiotic role in the rich cultural heritage of Africans is a concise but vivid clarification of the ontological foundation of African communalistic societies. According to Polycarp Ikuenobe (2006: 63-64),

> In the traditional African view, reality or nature is a continuum and a harmonious composite of various elements and forces. Human beings are a harmonious part of this composite reality, which is fundamentally a set of mobile life forces. Natural objects and reality are interlocking forces. Reality always seeks to maintain an equilibrium among the network of elements and life forces … Because reality or nature is a continuum, there is no conceptual or interactive gap between the human self, community, the dead, spiritual or metaphysical entities and the phenomenal world; they are interrelated, they interact, and in some sense, one is an extension of the other.

Interconnectedness in the African community is seen as the most essential factor for wellbeing, and the maintenance of this interconnectedness, of harmony and equilibrium among beings is, in the words of Desmond Tutu (1999: 35), for "... the *summum bonum* – the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good."

Communal harmony, therefore, is seen as a good that is vehemently pursued and as such forms the basis for the much discussed African communalism. If maintaining the interconnectedness of things or ensuring equilibrium among beings is the goal, and since aggressive competitiveness is evidently inimical to such a goal, then, the African community is saddled with the responsibility of encumbering unhealthy competitiveness and promoting complementary relations among beings. Hence African communalism, in Ikuenobe's words (2006: 65),

> ... implies the need to impose social responsibilities on people in order to rationally perpetuate the relevant traditions and maintain harmony. So, maintaining harmony with the aid of the community is an essential human interest. The idea of pursuing and maintaining human welfare and interests is at the moral centre of communalism and the moral conception of personhood in African traditions … As such, communalism prescribes that people should act in a way that would enhance their own interest within the framework of pursuing the goal of human well-being and welfare in the context of natural harmony in their communities.

The community assigns roles to individual entities in a manner that promotes unity of purpose and sustains the equilibrium that is much desired. To avoid unhealthy competitiveness, such roles are complementary in nature such that if everyone plays his/her role in the community of beings, there will be harmony, and coexistence will be sustained.

The African community assigns such gender roles to both males and females. These roles are symbiotic and complementary (Taiwo 2010: 230). The African man, in his familial and social relations, exercises headship. He acts as head over his family and he takes leading roles in the community. In familial relations, he exercises authority over his wife (or wives) and children. This headship, however, comes with its responsibilities. He provides food, shelter and other necessities for his family. A man unable to do so brings disgrace and shame to himself and his household and inevitably loses the respect of both family and community members.

In terms of social organizations or institutions for the sustenance of equilibrium in the community, traditional African societies generally operate a patriarchal gerontocracy (Okoduwa 2006: 47-51). The traditional African elite group, which usually comprises kings, chiefs, elders, heroes, professional craftsmen, and priests, who are in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the community (Onobhayedo 2007: 270-271), are basically males. In fact, the African tradition is said to be permeated by patriarchal headship in areas such as religion, family life, and politics (Kambarami 2008). Men, therefore, take the lead in familial and social relations.

Women (and children), on the other hand, are submissive to the men who take the lead. The primary goal of the beautiful black girl and her family is to be under the headship of a man once she has attained the age of marriage. This

wifely position is seen as a privileged and respected one as it avails the woman the opportunity to complement the man and support him as he carries out his duties as head.

There is certainly no doubt that the woman in African traditions has vital roles to play in the society at large, roles that complements those of the man. The basic gender role of the woman in African traditions is that of a care-giver. She has the principal responsibility of caring for her husband and the children particularly in terms of carrying out domestic activities. In other words, while the man provides life's necessities for the family and goes about the duties assigned him by the community, the wife takes good care of the home and the children. By implication, she also plays a very important role in the training of the children, particularly concerning the instilling of socio-cultural and religious values and morals in the children. She therefore provides the needed support for her husband by assisting in the general upkeep and building of the family and giving backing and encouragement to the husband in his headship over the family as well as in other duties assigned to him by the community.

It therefore follows that in traditional African societies, men enjoy independent living while women are dependent on the men who lead. This is the reason a woman in African traditions is conventionally regarded as a "housewife", that is, one who rather than working (conventionally seen as a manly duty) stays at home to manage the home. Even when she works or trades, the income from her work is used to assist the husband in sustaining the household. At no time does she become the head.

Feminist movements in post-colonial Africa have often characterised the woman's role in African traditions as that of a submissive wife and a care-giver, as one of passivity compared to the active role of the man as head. According to these movements, the active roles played by both men and woman in familial and social relations can be likened to those played by the brain and the heart in humans' biological system. While the brain is the controlling centre of the nervous system, it still depends on, and needs the support of the heart to circulate blood around the body. According to Taiwo (2010: 230):

> The contributions of women towards the social, economic, political and educational developments of African societies cannot also be gainsaid. In fact, traditional African society attached no importance to gender issues because every individual had a role to play both in the family as well as in the larger society. Each gender had its traditional role in the development of the society. In other words, the position of women was complimentary to that of men. There was the non-existent of gender inequality. Each role, regardless of who performed it was considered equally important because it contributed to the fundamental goal of community survival. What this simply implies is that indigenous people in Africa performed varying roles to maintain the efficient functioning of their society, prior to colonialism. The claim, therefore, is that gender inequality came with the advent of colonialism.

However, these complementary masculine and feminine roles embedded in African traditions are fast taking a new direction in post-colonial Africa, one that is quite different from the African cultural heritage. In the section that follows, the paper pays attention to how such fast-emerging trends in gender roles in post-colonial Africa are being felt, particularly in the area of independent social living.

Miss Independent: an emerging trend in the African gender experience

The rapidly emerging and fast developing trend in the African gender experience referred to here is aptly pictured by the black American POP/R&B artist Shaffer Chimere Smith. Smith, popularly known by his stage name, Ne-Yo, on his 2008 single "Miss Independent" portrays a black working-class lady that he admires because she defies the gender stereo-typical role of a (black) woman as a dependent person. The title of the single clearly captures this point and lines within the lyrics lay emphasis on it:

Verse 1:
... Ooh there's something about, there something about the way she moves
And I can't figure it out there something about her ...
Cause she walk like the boss
Talk like the boss ...
Do what a boss do ...
That's the kind of girl I need

(Chorus):
She got her own thing
That's why I love her

Miss Independent ...

Verse 2
... Kinda woman that can do for herself
I look at her and it makes me proud
... Kinda woman that don't need my help
She says she got it, she got it
... Car and a crib she bouta pay em both off
And the bills are paid on time ...

Bridge
... Her favourite thing to say "don't worry I got it"
And everything she's got best believe she bought it ...

In these lines from "Miss Independent", Ne-Yo sings about his admiration for a girl who "takes charge" in all ramifications: she pays for her car, her house (or "crib"), and all her bills. According to Ne-Yo, we can be rest assured that "everything she's got ... she bought it;" she depends on no one for (financial) support. She is independent. The music video shot on December 8, 2008 in Santa Monica, California clearly captures such a lady that is an independent, no-nonsense bossy lady.

The remix (or Part 2) of "Miss Independent" titled "She Got Her Own" was released barely three months after the first release, in the Japan edition of the *Year of the Gentleman* album (*Intuition and Year of the Gentleman*) and features the artists Fabulous and Jamie Foxx. Ne-Yo's sentiments about the independent woman are even more strongly expressed in this version of the song.

Intro (Ne-Yo singing):
A dedication to the independent woman
To the one working hard for hers
That is just my way to let you know
I see you baby ...

Verse 1 (Jamie Foxx singing):
... She don't need mine, so she leaves mine alone
There ain't nothing that is more sexy
Than a girl that wants but don't need me
Young independent, yeah she works hard
... She don't expect nothing from no guy ...

(Chorus):
I love her cause she got her own
... I love it when she says
"It's cool, I got it ..."

Verse 2 (Ne-Yo singing):
... All the while paying the bills on time
She don't look at me like, "captain save'em"...

This author's immediate concern is not so much with the implication that Ne-Yo and his friend's appreciation and love for an independent woman have; but rather with the fact that Ne-Yo's song is obviously motivated by the same factor that motivates the present paper: the apt recognition of an ongoing change in female stereotypical role of dependency especially in African/African-American women.

Black women in Africa, particularly in urban cities, are quickly embracing this trend of independence. They are well educated, some are professionals occupying sensitive positions in big firms; others hold less professional but well-paying white collar jobs or, in some other cases, are successful entrepreneurs. This new generation of modern women are intensely buried in activities once thought to be strictly masculine, especially when viewed from the African cultural heritage: pursuing education even to post-graduate levels, securing well-paying jobs, living in well-furnished apartments, riding flashy cars, procuring landed properties, vying for political offices and appointments.

There is no doubt that the post-colonial black continent is experiencing a condensed atmosphere of competitiveness between females and males and with regard to headship roles in such spheres of our being as religion, politics, business, and education. To be sure, the focus has shifted from complementarity to competitiveness. In the area of education, for example, the number of women pursuing both graduate and postgraduate degrees has increased tremendously in the last two decades; women writers, women university lecturers, doctors, and professors have also increased greatly as well (Nnaemeka 1994: 139).

Politics is the most obvious sphere in which the masculine-feminine competitiveness has been felt. The United Nations Factsheet for "Progress of the World's Women Report" particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (UNWOMEN: 2011/2012) testifies to this. It shows for example that Rwanda with 51% of its parliamentarian being women has the highest level of women legislators in the world. According to Aili Mari Tripp:

> In the 1990s, for the first time in the post-independence period greater numbers of African women began to aspire to political leadership at the national and local levels … The 1990s was a decade of beginnings for women in politics in Africa and all indications are that we will see even greater pressures for female political representation and participation in the decade ahead.

In the area of business, economy and administration both in the private and public sectors of nation-states, the number of women holding sensitive and leadership positions such as directors, chief executive officers, general managers, and ministers are also on the increase. In fact, there are often speculations that some of these women perform more effectively than their male counterparts. One case to be quickly recalled here is that of Nigeria's Dora Akunyili who served as the Director General of Nigeria's National Agency of Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) between 2008 and 2010. Her tenure is popularly reckoned to be the best ever in the country. This has earned her an international reputation and also availed her the opportunity to serve as a Nigerian Minister of Information and Communications. These women have proved to be assertive and independent leaders.

Everyday social life in terms of social interactions and behaviours has also experienced enormous measures of feminine assertiveness and a rebuffing of submissiveness. In the standard nuclear family, it is no news that wives are no longer housewives and can no longer be "ordered around"; family life is gradually becoming one where agreements are reached between couples to avoid or minimise unhealthy competitiveness and disagreements. It is hardly the case anymore for a man to simply decide and for the wife to follow or execute such decisions. In fact, the growing trend of feminine assertiveness is so strong that it is gradually becoming an accepted norm among women such that if a woman shows elements of submissiveness today, she is seen by her fellow women as being weak and timid.

Among many female youths, there is an intense competition going on, particularly in terms of social and financial status acquired. In traditional or indigenous African societies, marriage for young African girls is a foremost priority, pursued in their late teens or early twenties. Today marriage for many African girls is, on average, from their late twenties to early thirties. It is no longer a primary focus because, on the list of priorities, other things like education and employment come first. The priority is no longer to be under a man's authority, but to be able to stand on one's own such that even when the female later gets married to a man, she can pursue her own life course and desires.

This fast developing trend of female assertiveness in African social life has emerging consequences for social relations and interactions especially between men and women.

Emerging consequences of female assertiveness

The emerging consequence of female assertiveness are twofold in their effect, namely: (i) on courtship and marriage between men and women in particular; and (ii) on family life in general. The intention here is not to delve into whether these consequences are advantageous or disadvantageous to social growth but simply to show that they exist.

In a patriarchal society, men automatically assume that they are in charge. They thus assume that it is normal that when courting a girl for marriage he should be in charge of the situation. He wants the girl and her family to know that he is prepared for marriage, that he is settled and independent enough for the girl to depend on. Most likely, this would be a situation where he is materially more buoyant than the girl, as this would give him more confidence in exercising his authority.

The case is becoming different in modern Africa. Many African girls, particularly those living in cities, secure good jobs that are sometimes better than that of the average man around them. Whether such jobs are secured by hook or by crook, these ladies are able to build a well-stocked material life around them. They live in well-furnished apartments and drive flashy cars; they take good care of themselves and their looks. There are two major reactions to this by the men in term of courtship and marriage. I will simply classify them here as the *ego-driven reaction* and the *gold-digger-driven reaction*. In the former, the man who may not be as financially buoyant as the working-class lady, but has a huge ego and

cherishes his culturally-defined headship position, is uncomfortable to approach such a lady for marriage for the simple reason that two captains cannot sail a ship. There is the strong conviction among the men that such a lady cannot and will not agree to be under a man; that, if the marriage is contracted, there will be an unhealthy competition in the home; that the lady will see him as being attracted to her because of her material possession and, by implication, depending on her. On her part, the lady will simply conclude that the man is being immature, over-bossy, afraid of a little competition and simply not man enough. This ego-driven reaction is the basic cause of delays in marriage by many young ladies.

In the latter case, the man is definitely not as materially buoyant as the working class lady; he seeks intimate relationships with the well-to-do African lady primarily for material gains. He maintains this intimate courtship with the lady but never really takes it to the point of marriage. When it becomes clear to the lady that he isn't serious, she sends him packing from her apartment. Then he goes in search for another victim to prey on. Such men are often referred to as gold diggers, who are too lazy to hustle for their own material possessions or are too selfish to provide for the lady. Ne-Yo's "Miss Independent" and "She Got Her Own" may be implicated in this regard on the basis that the praises he showers on the independent woman are mainly because she is not dependent on him, but pays her own bills. An African man with an ego believes it is his responsibility to cater for a lady no matter what she possesses materially.

In family life, the effects of feminine assertiveness have also been strongly felt. In post-colonial African societies where men and women work for similar lengths of time, being a domestic wife is hardly a virtue. In fact, many African husbands today are moving with the trend. In order to meet the economic demands of the society, men encourage their wives to take up appointments and work. Often women work for longer hours and earn more than men do (EOC 2007). For this reason, the use of house help in homes in Africa is very rampant. In this way, someone is paid to do the work allocated to the wife by African traditions. This would include cooking, washing, going to market, caring for the children and so on. In fact, house helps, nannies, teachers, boarding school masters, daycares, drycleaners, fast-food shops and the like are doing more work to cater for family needs than are parents. Many African men are also getting used to doing some domestic work themselves, particularly cooking.

Concluding remarks

The world is changing and so are socio-culturally assigned gender roles. Two things are vividly notable from our discourse so far: the culturally assigned gender social roles in Africa traditions of independency on the part of men and dependency on the part of women have been challenged by the growing trend of female assertiveness. This new and rapidly developing trend has consequences particularly in the areas of courtship, marriage and family. Whether such consequences are advantageous or disadvantageous to social interactions in post-colonial Africa is left for further research and deliberation. But one thing cannot be denied. A return to past ways of thinking and of doing things is only a mirage. Challenges in post-colonial African must be faced squarely by those they affect. If there are any adjustments to make, it will be dependent on the binding efforts on the community of selves.

References

Baden, S. & Goetz, A. M. 1997. Who Needs {Sex} When You Can Have {Gender}? Conflicting Discourses on Gender at Beijing. *Feminist Review* 56: 3-25.

Elder-Woodward, J., Hurst, R. & Manwaring, T. 2005. Foreword to Gillinson, S., Green, H. & Miller, P. *Independent Living: The Right to be Equal Citizens*. London: DEMOS: 9-16.

Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), 2007. *The Gender Agenda*. Retrieved December 15, 2011 from: *www.gendernetwork.com/*

Feinstein S., Feinstein R. & Sabrow, S. 2010. Gender Inequality in the Division of Household Labour in Tanzania. *African Sociological Review* 14.2: 98-109.

Gillinson, S., Green, H. & Miller, P. 2005. *Independent Living: The Right to be Equal Citizens*. London: DEMOS: 9-16.

Gyekye, K. 1997. *Tradition and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Habermas, J. 1984. *Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Ikuenobe, P. 2006. *Philosophical Perspective on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions*. London: Lexington Books.

Irele, A. 2001. *African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, P & Kossykh, Y. 2008. *Early Years,, Life Chances and Equality: A Literature Review*. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission in association with Frontier Economics.

Kambarami, M. 2006. Feminity, Sexuality and Culture: Patriarchy and Female Subordination in Zimbabwe. *Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series: Culture, Feminity and Sexuality,* South Africa: Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre in collaboration with Health Systems Trust, South Africa and University of Fort Hare.

Lauer, H. 2003. *Tradition versus Modernity: Reappraising a False Dichotomy*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Lopez-Claros, A. & Zahidi, S. 2005. *Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap*. Switzerland: World Economic Forum.

Ne-Yo, Jamie Foxx & Fabulous. 2008. She Got Her Own (Miss Independent Part 2). *Intuition and Year of the Gentleman*: Japan Edition. New York: Butter Beats.

Ne-Yo. 2008. Miss Independent. *Year of the Gentleman*. New York: Stargate.

Nnaemeka, O. 1994. From Orality to Writing: African Women Writers and the (Re) Inscription of Womanhood. *Research in African Literature* 25.4: 137-157.

Oke, M. 2006. Cultural Nostalgia: A Philosophical Critique of Appeals to the Past in Theories of Re-Making Africa. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15.3: 332-343.

Okoduwa, A. I. 2006. Tenacity of Gerontocracy in Nigeria: An Example of the Esan People in Edo State. *Studies in Tribes and Tribal* 4.1: 47-51.

Onobhayedo, A. 2007. Western Education and Social Change in Esan Land. *IRORO: A Journal of Arts* 7.1 & 2: 266-276

Sidanius, J. & Veniegas, R. C. 2000. Gender and Race Discrimination: The Interactive Nature of Disadvantage. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination The Claremont Symposium on Applied Social Psychology*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp 47-69.

Taiwo, A.O. 2010. Power and Womanhood in Africa: An Introductory Evaluation. *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3.6: 229-238.

The Sixth African Development Forum (ADF VI), 2008. *Action on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Ending Violence against Women in Africa: Progress Report on Achieving Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa*. Addis-Ababa: United Nations Conference Centre.

Tripp, A. M. ND. *New Trends in Women's Political Participation in Africa*. Viewed 10 July 2013, from: *http://democracy.stanford.edu/Seminar/AiliTripp.pdf*

Tutu, D. 1999. *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Random House.

UNDP, 2002. *Gender Approaches in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations*. New York: United Nations Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery.

UNDP. 2006. *Taking Gender Equality Seriously: Making Progress, Meeting New Challenges*. New York: United Nations Development Programme

UNWOMEN, 2011-2012. *Progress of the World's Women: Factsheet: Sub-Sahara Africa*. Viewed 11 January 2011, from: *http://progress.unwomen.org*

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC), 2005. *Masculinities: Male Roles and Male Involvement in Gender Equality: A Resource Packet*. New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.