

GENDER AND IDENTITY IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: RETHINKING WOMANHOOD AND MASCULINITY

By

Mark Emeka Egwuajonwu
Caleb University Imota, Lagos
emekaegwuajonwu@gmail.com

Abstract

This study critically examined the intersections of gender and identity in African philosophy, focusing on rethinking womanhood and masculinity in light of evolving societal dynamics. It explored how African philosophical traditions address gender roles, with particular attention to the impact of colonial legacies, patriarchy, and globalisation on African gender identities. Using insights from African feminist thought, decolonial feminism, and masculinities studies, the research challenges traditional notions of gender, advocating for the decolonisation of gender norms and the promotion of equitable gender relations. The study concluded that rethinking womanhood and masculinity within African philosophical frameworks is essential for fostering inclusive and just societies. It recommended that African governments implement policies promoting gender equity through education and public awareness campaigns, and that academic institutions integrate African-centred gender studies into their curricula to drive critical reflection and societal transformation. These actions aim to challenge entrenched stereotypes and support the development of inclusive, equitable identities across the continent.
Keywords: African philosophy, Gender Identity, Womanhood, Masculinity, African Feminism, Gender Equity.

Introduction

The discourse on gender and identity within African philosophy has gained prominence in recent years as scholars explore the intersections of cultural, historical, and philosophical constructs of womanhood and masculinity. Traditionally, African societies have defined gender roles within communal frameworks, where responsibilities and identities are shaped by collective goals rather than individual pursuits. However, these constructs are not static; they have been influenced by colonial and post-colonial legacies that redefined gender dynamics in ways that often-contradicted indigenous African philosophies (Kasanda, 2018).

Colonialism imposed rigid, binary gender norms, often subordinating women and privileging men in socio-political and economic hierarchies. This disrupted the fluid and diverse understandings of gender found in pre-colonial African societies. As Mama (2019) highlighted, African feminist thought has been instrumental in addressing these disruptions by reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems that affirm women's agency. Similarly, Tamale (2020) critiqued the colonial frameworks that entrenched gender inequality, advocating for a decolonial and Afro-feminist perspective to redefine identity in Africa.

Womanhood in African philosophy has often been celebrated for its centrality to family, community, and nation-building, yet patriarchal structures have historically undermined women's roles and contributions. Makinde (2004) observed that motherhood, while a source of empowerment, has also been used to confine women to restrictive social roles. On the other hand, scholars such as Akanle, Adesina, and Nwaobiala (2018) explored the resilience of female breadwinners in contemporary Nigeria, shedding light on the evolving dynamics of womanhood amid economic challenges. Similarly, Akinbobola (2019) critiqued neoliberal feminism in Africa, questioning whether it adequately addresses the lived realities of African women.

Masculinity, too, has been shaped by cultural and colonial influences. While traditional African masculinities emphasised strength, leadership, and responsibility to the community, these ideals have often been reduced to narrow, harmful stereotypes. Burrell and Flood (2019)

examined dilemmas in profeminist men's efforts to challenge gender-based violence, while Chiweshe (2018) highlighted the potential for African men to engage with feminism as a tool for societal transformation. Makama, Helman, and Day (2019) also caution against a singular feminist narrative, advocating for an African-centred decolonial feminism that includes black men in the quest for gender equity.

Philosophical reflections on gender and identity in Africa must engage with these complexities. Ipadeola (2022) argued that feminist African philosophy must address the politics of difference, emphasising intersectionality and inclusivity. In a similar vein, Kresse and Nyarwath (2022) proposed rethinking sage philosophy to include diverse perspectives on gender. This aligns with Eltahawy's (2021) advocacy for radical shifts in societal attitudes towards women and girls, urging a break from deeply entrenched patriarchal norms.

This study aims to interrogate how African philosophy can be harnessed to rethink womanhood and masculinity, addressing questions of identity, equity, and inclusion. It seeks to build on existing scholarship, such as Akinpelu's (2021) exploration of feminist-oriented movements like #EndSARS, to provide a contemporary analysis of gender relations in African contexts. By drawing on diverse perspectives and challenging colonial and patriarchal legacies, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that seeks to redefine African identity through the lens of gender and philosophy.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality Theory, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), provides a critical foundation for this study. The theory examines how multiple social categories such as gender, race, class, and colonial history intersect to create unique experiences of oppression or privilege. Crenshaw introduced the concept to highlight the distinct challenges faced by Black women, arguing that mainstream feminist and anti-racist discourses often overlooked their struggles. The theory asserts that social identities are interconnected, shaping individuals' experiences of discrimination and inequality in complex ways.

This study applies Intersectionality Theory to African philosophy, assessing how colonial legacies, patriarchy, and evolving societal norms influence gender and identity. It explores how African feminists challenge colonial gender constructs and how masculinities are shaped by economic, social, and political factors. By integrating this framework, the research highlights the varied experiences of African gender identities, offering a detailed analysis of power dynamics, cultural traditions, and socio-economic disparities in shaping gender roles in African societies.

Overview of Gender and Identity in African Philosophy

Gender and identity in African philosophy are deeply rooted in the continent's diverse cultural, social, and historical contexts (Oyéwùmí, 1997; Arnfred, 2023). Unlike Western frameworks that often centre binary and hierarchical constructs, African philosophical traditions typically emphasise communal roles and interdependence (Lugones, 2010; Tamale, 2020). However, colonial influences have altered these dynamics, creating a need to revisit and rethink the intersection of gender and identity within African societies (Arnfred, 2023; Chitando et al., 2024).

African traditions have historically framed gender in functional and relational terms, rather than as fixed biological categories. Oyéwùmí (1997) argued that pre-colonial African societies often lacked the rigid, gendered structures imposed by Western colonial frameworks, where women were marginalised and excluded from public life. In contrast, many African societies placed value on women's contributions as integral to community well-being. Yet, as Arnfred (2023) highlighted, colonial interpretations of African traditions distorted these egalitarian structures, often privileging male authority and reinforcing gendered hierarchies.

Masculinity, as a construct, has undergone significant transformation within African societies. Traditional notions of masculinity emphasised responsibility and care for the collective, yet these ideals have often been reshaped by socio-economic and cultural pressures. Van Stapele (2021) explored how masculinity in Nairobi's ghettos is shaped by economic uncertainties, leading men to redefine their identities through hustling and informal labour. Similarly, Dery (2021) examined how rural Ghanaian men negotiate masculinities, sometimes resorting to intimate partner violence as a means of asserting power within domestic spaces. This stresses the urgent need to address harmful masculinities and promote healthier, more inclusive identities, as explored by Walker (2020) and Chitando et al. (2024).

African feminism has emerged as a critical framework for deconstructing patriarchal systems and redefining gender roles. Tamale (2020) advocated for decolonial feminism, which challenges the imposition of Eurocentric gender norms and reclaims indigenous African perspectives. Lugones (2010) echoes this by emphasising the importance of intersectionality in addressing the multiple layers of oppression faced by African women. Kessi and Boonzaier (2018) further argued that a decolonial feminist psychology is essential for understanding the psychological impacts of gendered oppression on African women.

The politics of women's bodies and dress also play a significant role in discussions of gender identity in Africa. Bakare-Yusuf (2011) critiqued legislative attempts to control women's bodies in Nigeria, arguing that such interventions are rooted in patriarchal anxieties about morality and social order. Similarly, Gqola (2015) examined the pervasive issue of sexual violence in South Africa, framing it as both a symptom and a tool of patriarchal control. These analyses highlight the urgent need for cultural and legal reforms that prioritise gender justice. Efforts to combat gender-based violence and promote gender equity must also include men as active participants in the process. USAID (2015) emphasised the importance of engaging boys and men in ending violence against women and girls, while Olayanju et al. (2013) identified both challenges and opportunities in addressing intimate partner violence across African countries. Van Klinken (2016) explored how African Christianity can be a site for transforming masculinities, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDS, where gendered norms around caregiving and vulnerability are contested.

This overview accentuates the complexity of gender and identity in African philosophy. By revisiting traditional African perspectives, interrogating colonial legacies, and integrating decolonial feminist frameworks, African thinkers can offer transformative insights into the construction of gender and identity. These efforts are critical not only for achieving gender equity but also for fostering a more inclusive and just society.

Colonial and Post-Colonial Influences on Gender Constructs

Colonial rule profoundly altered gender constructs in Africa, replacing indigenous frameworks with Western-centric ideals that disrupted pre-existing socio-cultural norms (Arnfred, 2023; Oyéwùmí, 1997). Pre-colonial African societies often featured fluid and complementary gender roles deeply rooted in communal structures. However, the imposition of colonial governance introduced rigid, binary categories that privileged patriarchal hierarchies, diminishing the autonomy and societal roles of women (Oyéwùmí, 1997).

Colonial administrations legislated women's bodies and public spaces, dictating morality and dress codes as part of their civilising mission (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011). This imposition of Victorian ideals not only undermined African women's leadership roles but also reinforced harmful stereotypes about women's capacities and rights. For example, in Nigeria, colonial laws restricted women's public participation, relegating them to the domestic sphere (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011).

In the post-colonial era, the legacy of these disruptions persists. Many African nations continue to grapple with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that marginalise women and validate toxic

expressions of masculinity (Chitando et al., 2024; Mfecane, 2024). This is evident in the prevalence of gender-based violence and the normalisation of intimate partner violence, which are often framed as expressions of power and control within masculinity constructs (Dery, 2021; Olayanju et al., 2013).

Furthermore, colonial Christianity played a pivotal role in shaping masculinities by promoting the male breadwinner model and subordinating women within households and religious institutions (Van Klinken, 2016). In post-colonial African Christianity, these constructs are continually debated and reimagined to align with contemporary gender justice frameworks (Van Klinken, 2016; Chitando et al., 2024).

Decolonial feminist perspectives challenge these inherited gender norms by advocating for a return to indigenous gender philosophies and practices that emphasise relationality and equity (Tamale, 2020; Lugones, 2010). Such efforts also critique the militarisation of masculinity, which remains a potent force in conflict-affected areas where male dominance is equated with power and authority (Henry, 2017; Mukalazi, 2023).

The struggle for gender equity in post-colonial Africa is further complicated by socio-economic conditions. Economic precarity fosters hyper-masculinity and the expectation that men must assert dominance to secure status and belonging (Van Stapele, 2021; Walker, 2020). At the same time, women's resistance movements, grounded in Afro-feminist ideologies, continue to challenge these dynamics by demanding inclusive and participatory gender policies (Decker & Baderoon, 2018; Hendricks, 2017).

Revisiting Womanhood in African Philosophy

Womanhood in African philosophy offers a rich, multidimensional framework for understanding gender within the continent's cultural, social, and historical contexts. Unlike Western feminist paradigms, African feminist thought emphasises the interconnectedness of gender, community, and identity, challenging colonial narratives that often perpetuate a singular, homogenised view of African women (Mama, 2019; Tamale, 2020). This perspective resists the Eurocentric gaze, foregrounding the complexity of African women's lived experiences and their embeddedness in collective and relational values.

African feminist scholars such as Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (1997), Amina Mama (2019), and Sylvia Tamale (2020) have argued that the colonial project not only redefined gender roles but also erased indigenous understandings of womanhood. Pre-colonial African societies often recognised women's agency in social, economic, and political spheres, embedding womanhood in relational and communal values. However, colonialism imposed Eurocentric patriarchal structures that relegated women to subordinate roles and stripped them of their leadership capacities, disrupting the egalitarian frameworks previously present in many African communities (Tamale, 2020; Oyèwùmí, 1997; Makama et al., 2019).

This historical erasure has prompted African feminists to critique what Makama et al. (2019) describe as the "danger of a single feminist narrative." They advocate for a decolonial approach that centres African women's experiences while resisting universalised Western feminist discourses. For instance, Tamale (2020) underscores the necessity of decolonising legal systems and cultural practices that marginalise women, arguing for an Afro-feminist critique that responds to Africa's unique realities.

Furthermore, the concept of womanhood in African philosophy is inextricably tied to ongoing struggles for gender equality and justice. Dery (2024) proposed that reimagining gender equality requires an Africa(n)-centred feminist perspective that amplifies the voices of African women and fosters collaboration with men to dismantle oppressive systems. This aligns with Chiweshe's (2018) argument that African feminism must remain inclusive and relational, recognising men as essential allies in the fight for gender equity.

African feminist thought also critiques the commodification and victimisation of African

women in global narratives. Eltahawy (2021) challenged restrictive moral codes that confine African women, advocating for their liberation from societal norms that limit their autonomy and self-expression. Similarly, Meer (2011) called for participatory frameworks that elevate African women's agency without replicating Western-centric models.

Revisiting womanhood also involves addressing intersectional oppressions rooted in race, class, and colonial histories. Mama (2019) highlighted the importance of situating African women's experiences within broader geopolitical and economic contexts, recognising how global systems of power disproportionately affect them. For example, Gidron (2020) examined how migration and security politics in Africa frequently marginalise women while reinforcing patriarchal controls. These critiques reinforce the call for transformative feminist strategies that prioritise African women's perspectives and dismantle systemic inequities.

Masculinity in African Thought: Between Tradition and Modernity

Masculinity in African thought represents a complex and evolving framework shaped by the interplay between traditional African values and modern societal changes. Historically, African masculinities have been rooted in cultural norms that emphasised responsibility, leadership, and communal belonging. However, colonialism, globalisation, and contemporary socio-economic dynamics have redefined traditional masculine ideals, often creating tensions between older cultural expectations and new gender paradigms (Kasanda, 2018; Kresse & Nyarwath, 2022).

In pre-colonial African societies, masculinity was often tied to roles that served communal well-being. Men were expected to be protectors, providers, and custodians of culture, contributing to their communities through leadership, agricultural labour, or conflict resolution. These roles were embedded in relational and reciprocal frameworks where masculinity was aligned with responsibilities rather than domination (Chitando et al., 2024; Van Klinken, 2016). However, the imposition of colonial rule disrupted these frameworks, introducing Eurocentric ideals of masculinity that privileged hierarchy, individualism, and patriarchal dominance. This shift created a dissonance in African societies, as traditional conceptions of manhood were replaced with models that often marginalised African men within global structures of power while exacerbating gender inequalities at home (Kasanda, 2018; Decker & Baderoon, 2018).

The advent of modernity and urbanisation has further complicated notions of masculinity in Africa. As Van Stapele (2021) observed, economic uncertainty in urban settings, such as Nairobi's ghettos, has forced many men to redefine their roles as providers, often through informal or precarious means of livelihood. These "hustling" masculinities highlight the adaptive strategies men employ to maintain a sense of belonging and validation in contexts where traditional male roles are increasingly untenable. Similarly, Walker (2020) explores how modern masculinity is shaped by the need for external validation, with men navigating infidelity, economic pressures, and societal expectations to assert their identities.

The discourse on African masculinities is not merely descriptive but also interventionist, calling for the transformation of harmful gender norms that perpetuate violence and inequality. Scholars like Mfecane (2024) and Chitando et al. (2024) critique hegemonic masculinities that sustain patriarchal dominance, advocating for a more inclusive and relational approach to gender relations. Programs such as those promoted by USAID (2015) stress the importance of engaging men and boys as allies in the fight against gender-based violence, recognising that transforming masculinities is crucial to achieving gender equity.

Religion has also been a key site for reimagining masculinities in Africa. Van Klinken (2016) examines how African Christianity has contributed to gender controversies, particularly in the context of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Churches have been spaces where traditional and modern masculinities collide, with some fostering patriarchal control while others encourage transformative models of male behaviour rooted in care, compassion, and partnership.

Furthermore, the intersectionality of masculinity with other social identities, such as race, class, and geopolitical dynamics, is increasingly acknowledged. Henry (2017) and Myrntinen (2019) examine how masculinities are constructed within militarised contexts, where African men are often depicted as both perpetrators of violence and victims of systemic marginalisation. These studies underscore the need for critical perspectives that deconstruct monolithic representations of African men and instead highlight their vulnerabilities and agency within intersecting systems of oppression.

In peacebuilding and governance, the role of masculinity remains significant. Mukalazi (2023) critiques the African Union's "Silencing the Guns" initiative for perpetuating gendered stereotypes that often overlook the positive contributions men can make to peace processes. Similarly, Budoo (2020) highlights the need to address gender-based violence within the framework of the Maputo Protocol, urging for the inclusion of African masculinities in strategies aimed at fostering peace and security.

As African societies continue to grapple with the legacies of colonialism, modernisation, and globalisation, the need to critically engage with masculinities becomes increasingly urgent. African thought offers a rich terrain for reimagining masculinity in ways that honour cultural traditions while embracing progressive values of equality, inclusivity, and social justice.

Feminism and Decolonial Perspectives in African Philosophy

Feminism in African philosophy offers a decolonial lens that critiques Western-centric narratives and reclaims indigenous gender frameworks. African feminisms resist the imposition of universalised gender discourses, emphasising the contextual realities and lived experiences of African women. Decker and Baderoon (2018) highlighted the diversity of African feminisms, noting their focus on intersectionality and the need to address systemic inequalities rooted in colonial and neo-colonial histories. Indigenous African societies, as Muraina and Ajímátanraeje (2023) argued, often operated within relational gender systems where roles were complementary rather than hierarchical. However, colonial rule disrupted these dynamics, institutionalising Eurocentric patriarchal norms that relegated women to subordinate roles. Feminist scholars such as Makinde (2004) stressed the importance of reclaiming African cultural practices, like motherhood, as empowering rather than oppressive, offering a counter-narrative to Western feminist critiques.

Contemporary African feminisms also critique neoliberal approaches that depoliticise gender struggles. Akinbobola (2019) cautioned against the rise of neoliberal feminism, which often aligns with market-driven solutions that fail to address structural inequalities in African contexts. Similarly, Akanle, Adesina, and Nwaobiala (2018) documented the precarious realities faced by female breadwinners in Nigeria, demonstrating the limitations of frameworks that neglect the socio-economic constraints on African women. The #EndSARS movement in Nigeria exemplifies how feminist-oriented actions intersect with broader socio-political struggles. Akinpelu (2021) analysed the reception of feminist symbols within the movement, illustrating how feminism can challenge entrenched patriarchal norms while navigating resistance from traditional structures.

African feminist thought also intersects with peacebuilding and security discourses. Hendricks (2017) and Myrntinen (2019) advocated for integrating gender perspectives into the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, critiquing its limited engagement with African realities. By situating African women's experiences within broader decolonial frameworks, these perspectives challenge global gender norms while advancing inclusive approaches to peace and security. Ultimately, African feminism, rooted in decolonial perspectives, seeks to reimagine gender relations by centring African values, addressing intersectional oppressions, and resisting the homogenisation of feminist struggles.

Gender, Identity, and Contemporary Challenges

Gender and identity in contemporary African societies are deeply entangled with historical, socio-political, and cultural challenges, which continue to evolve under the pressures of modernisation, globalisation, and decolonisation. African feminist thought, as articulated by Mama (2019), seeks to interrogate these challenges by emphasising the need for a decolonial framework that not only critiques colonial patriarchies but also redefines African identity from a gender-conscious perspective. This redefinition is decisive as it addresses how traditional gender roles have been reshaped, often negatively, by colonial and postcolonial influences.

Tamale (2020) added a critical legal dimension to this discourse, arguing that Afro-feminism offers an essential critique of the colonial legal structures that continue to perpetuate gender-based inequalities in African societies. Decolonisation, therefore, is not only about recovering African cultural and political sovereignty but also about dismantling the gender hierarchies imposed during colonial rule. This process includes reconsidering African traditions and the intersectional forms of power that shape gender and identity. As Arnold (2023) noted, rethinking African traditions requires adequate understanding of how power dynamics within indigenous systems were altered by colonial influences, which led to new forms of gender inequality.

In this context, African men's relationship with feminism is also under scrutiny. Chiweshe (2018) explored the complex ways in which African men are engaging with feminist ideologies, often grappling with the tension between traditional masculinities and the more progressive ideals promoted by African feminism. Burrell and Flood (2019) examined how pro-feminist men steer their roles in dismantling patriarchal structures while facing their own gendered vulnerabilities. These men challenge the hegemonic masculinities that often dominate African social and political spaces, as Kasanda (2018) observed, yet they must confront the internalised sexism that limits their ability to fully embrace feminist principles.

Further complicating gender identity in Africa is the rise of neoliberal feminism, which some critics argue aligns more with Western capitalist ideologies than with African contexts. Akinbobola (2019) critiques neoliberal feminism's failure to address the specific needs of African women, suggesting that it often ignores local socio-economic realities in favour of individual empowerment models. Instead, the feminist movement in Africa requires a more collective approach that takes into account the diverse ways in which women experience marginalisation. This aligns with the position of Eltahawy (2021), who calls for a radical feminist intervention that pushes beyond the boundaries of both Western neoliberalism and traditional patriarchal systems.

Gender relations in contemporary Nigeria, as highlighted by Akinpelu (2021), are also marked by evolving discourses on gender justice, which have gained prominence in movements such as #EndSARS. The reception of feminist symbols within these movements shows how contemporary African societies are grappling with gender identity in ways that transcend traditional divisions between male and female roles. In this light, gender is not a static category but a fluid concept, constantly renegotiated in response to both internal and external challenges. Ultimately, gender identity in Africa is a complex, dynamic terrain where traditional norms, colonial legacies, neoliberalism, and feminist critique intersect. This ongoing process of reimagining gender relations and identities reflects the broader struggle for decolonisation and social justice, where gender is central to the fight against colonial legacies and neoliberal exploitation. As Kessi and Boonazier (2018) emphasised, decolonial feminist psychology plays a critical role in this transformation, providing the tools to understand how power operates through gender in African contexts, and challenging both external and internal forces that seek to maintain unequal power structures.

Philosophical Implications for Rethinking Womanhood and Masculinity

The philosophical implications of rethinking womanhood and masculinity in contemporary African societies are complex and intertwined with the ongoing struggles for gender equality, decolonisation, and social justice. One critical perspective is that traditional conceptions of gender roles shaped by both African heritage and colonial impositions require fundamental reimagining. As Oyéwùmí (1997) argued, the Western constructs of gender, which have often been imposed on African societies, have distorted indigenous understandings of womanhood and masculinity. This tension between Western gender discourses and African traditions underpins the need to reassess gender roles in postcolonial African contexts.

Tamale (2020) critiqued the colonial legacy that continues to define gender relations in many African societies, offering a decolonial feminist critique that challenges both the patriarchal and colonial structures. She emphasised that Afro-feminism, as a framework for rethinking womanhood, must decolonise not just women's bodies but also their identities and roles in society. For African men, the need to interrogate their own masculinities is equally pressing. Chiweshe (2018) reflected on how African men engage with feminism, acknowledging the complexity of adopting feminist principles in societies where masculinity has long been linked to power and dominance. Burrell and Flood (2019) explored these dilemmas, noting that pro-feminist men often grapple with the contradictions between advocating for women's rights and maintaining their traditional roles within society.

The rethinking of masculinity in Africa also touches on the issue of hegemonic masculinity, a concept that has been critiqued for its association with violence, control, and dominance. Van Klinken (2016) argued that African Christian contexts, particularly in times of crisis like the AIDS pandemic, have exacerbated these masculine ideals, creating a conflict between religious values and cultural expectations of male dominance. Mfecane (2024) expanded on this by exploring how hegemonic masculinity intersects with African masculinity studies, suggesting that these traditional gender ideals need to be redefined to create healthier gender relations.

In contrast, feminist scholars like Kessi and Boonazier (2018) argued for a decolonial feminist psychology that offers a framework to understand how both women and men are socialised into rigid gender roles. This perspective emphasises the role of education and psychology in reshaping gender identities, as it challenges harmful practices that perpetuate gender-based violence and inequity. Similarly, the work of Gqola (2015) on rape as a South African nightmare reveals how deeply gendered violence is embedded in societal structures and calls for a reevaluation of both womanhood and masculinity through a lens of justice and equality.

Moreover, the negotiation of masculinities through intimate partner violence, as highlighted by Dery (2021), stresses the impact of economic uncertainty and social pressures on African men's identity and relationships. In this light, masculinity is often understood as a performative act tied to societal expectations of power and control, creating a crisis in male identity when these expectations are unfulfilled. Van Stapele (2021) provided insight into this crisis by examining how economic hardship in urban Nairobi influences masculine identities and perpetuates practices of 'hustling,' which are closely tied to notions of economic power and social status.

For African feminisms, the need to question singular narratives and embrace a more pluralistic approach is essential. Makama et al. (2019) warned against adopting a single feminist narrative, instead advocating for an African-centred decolonial feminism that accounts for the diverse experiences of both Black women and men. This approach resists the Western feminist frameworks that may overlook African experiences of gender inequality and instead promotes an understanding of gender as inherently linked to race, class, and colonial history.

Rethinking womanhood and masculinity in Africa require a fundamental shift in how gender roles are understood, enacted, and experienced. By embracing Afro-feminist and decolonial frameworks, scholars and activists can better address the philosophical challenges of transforming these identities into more equitable, just, and inclusive forms. As Dery (2020)

and other scholars suggested, the future of African gender equality lies in decolonising not only the structures of power but also the very concepts of womanhood and masculinity, allowing for more fluid and diverse expressions of identity that are not bound by oppressive historical constructs.

Conclusion

This study advocates for a re-examination of womanhood and masculinity in African societies, urging a shift from Western-centric gender frameworks towards African-centred perspectives that consider the continent's unique socio-cultural dynamics. By critiquing hegemonic masculinity and colonial gender roles, the research highlights the need to redefine both womanhood and masculinity to foster more equitable gender relations. It emphasizes the importance of addressing gender-based violence, economic disparities, and the emotional struggles faced by African men and women through feminist, legal, and psychological lenses. Ultimately, the study calls for a decolonized understanding of gender that challenges historical oppression while promoting inclusive, fluid gender identities that respect African traditions, paving the way for a more just and equitable future for all.

Recommendation

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to address the key challenges identified.

1. The government should integrate African-centered gender studies into educational curricula to promote understanding of indigenous gender roles and decolonized feminist perspectives.
2. The government should prioritize the implementation of gender-sensitive policies to ensure equal access to opportunities and resources for both women and men.
3. The government should collaborate with civil society and communities to develop effective strategies for preventing and addressing gender-based violence.
4. Civil society organizations and local communities should work together to encourage African men to engage in gender equality initiatives and challenge harmful societal norms through pro-feminist actions.
5. Governments and international organizations should support women's economic independence through entrepreneurship programs, job creation, and microfinance opportunities.
6. Legal reforms should be made to strengthen African feminist legal frameworks, ensuring that women's rights are protected within culturally relevant and Afro-feminist-informed systems.
7. Healthcare institutions and non-governmental organizations should provide mental health services and emotional support to foster healthier relationships and reduce gender-based violence.

References

- Akanle, O., Adesina, J. O., & Nwaobiala, U. R. (2018). Turbulent but I must endure in silence: Female breadwinners and survival in southwestern Nigeria. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 53(1), 98–114.
- Akinbobola, Y. (2019). Neoliberal feminism in Africa: Is neoliberal feminism peculiarly suited to conditions in some African countries? *Soundings*, 61(71), 50–61.
- Akinpelu, O. M. (2021). Inquiring into the current status of gender relations in contemporary Nigeria through an analysis of the reception to a feminist-oriented #EndSARS logo. In *6th International Conference on New Findings on Humanities and Social Sciences* (pp. 8–29). Dublin.
- Arnfred, S. (2023). Re-visiting ‘African tradition,’ re-thinking gender and power: Learning from fieldwork in northern Mozambique. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 32(3), 286–306.
- Bakare-Yusuf, B. (2011). Nudity and morality: Legislating women’s bodies and dress in Nigeria. In S. Tamale (Ed.), *African sexualities: A reader* (pp. 116–129). Pambazuka Press.
- Budoo, A. (2020). Silencing the guns to end gender-based violence in Africa: An analysis of article 10(3) of the Maputo Protocol. *The African Human Rights Yearbook*, 4, 324.
- Burrell, R. S., & Flood, M. (2019). Which feminism? Dilemmas in profeminist men’s praxis to end violence against women. *Global Social Welfare*, 6, 231–244.
- Chiweshe, M. (2018). African men and feminism: Reflections on using African feminism in research. *Agenda*, 32(2), 76–82.
- Chitando, E., Mlambo, O. B., Mfecane, S., & Ratele, K. (2024). Introduction: African men and masculinities. In E. Chitando, O. B. Mlambo, S. Mfecane, & K. Ratele (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of African men and masculinities*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Decker, A. C., & Baderoon, G. (2018). African feminisms: Cartographies for the twenty-first century. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 17(2), 219–231.
- Dery, I. (2021). Give her a slap or two. She might change: Negotiating masculinities through intimate partner violence among rural Ghanaian men. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(19–20), 9670–9690.
- Dery, I. (2024). Re-imagining gender equality discourse through an Africa(n)-centred feminist perspective. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1(1), 1–12.
- Eltahawy, M. (2021). *The seven necessary sins for women and girls*. Tramp Press.
- Gidron, Y. (2020). *Israel in Africa: Security, migration, interstate politics*. Zed Books.
- Gqola, P. D. (2015). *Rape: A South African nightmare*. MFBooks Joburg.
- Hendricks, C. (2017). Progress and challenges in implementing the women, peace and security agenda in the African Union’s peace and security architecture. *Africa Development*, 42(3), 73–98.
- Henry, M. (2017). Problematizing military masculinity, intersectionality, and male vulnerability in feminist critical military studies. *Critical Military Studies*, 3(2), 182–199.
- Ipadeola, A. P. (2022). *Feminist African philosophy: Women and the politics of difference*. Routledge.
- Kasanda, A. (2018). *Contemporary African social and political philosophy: Trends, debates, and challenges*. Routledge.
- Kessi, S., & Boonazier, F. (2018). Centre/ing decolonial feminist psychology in Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 48(3), 299–309.
- Kresse, K., & Nyarwath, O. (Eds.). (2022). *Rethinking sage philosophy: Interdisciplinary perspectives on and beyond H. Odera Oruka*. Lexington Books.

- Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742–759.
- Makama, R. R., Helman, T., Neziswa, S., & Day, S. (2019). The danger of a single feminist narrative: African-centred decolonial feminism for Black men. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 33(3), 61–69.
- Makinde, T. (2004). Motherhood as a source of empowerment of women. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 13(2), 164–174.
- Mama, A. (2019). African feminist thought. In C. Weise (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of African history* (pp. 1–29). Oxford University Press.
- Meer, S. (2011). Struggles for gender equality: Reflections on the place of men and men’s organisations. *OpenDebate*.
- Mfecane, S. (2024). Hegemonic masculinity and African masculinity studies. In E. Chitando, O. B. Mlambo, S. Mfecane, & K. Ratele (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of African men and masculinities*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mukalazi, M. M. (2023). The African Union’s silencing the guns: Between stereotyping and owning gender roles. *Zeitschrift für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung*, 12, 289–305.
- Muraina, L. O., & Ajímátanraeje, A. J. (2023). Gender relations in indigenous Yorùbá culture: Questioning current feminist actions and advocacies. *Third World Quarterly*, 44(9), 2031–2045.
- Myrntinen, H. (2019). Locating masculinities in WPS. In S. E. Davis & J. True (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of women, peace and security* (pp. 88–97). Oxford University Press.
- Olayanju, L., Naguib, R. N. G., Nguyen, Q. T., Bali, R. K., & Vung, N. D. (2013). Combating intimate partner violence in Africa: Opportunities and challenges in five African countries. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 18(1), 101–112.
- Oyéwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonization and Afro-feminism*. Daraja Press.
- USAID. (2015). *Working with boys and men to end violence against women and girls: Approaches, challenges, lessons*. USAID.
- Van Klinken, A. (2016). *Transforming masculinities in African Christianity: Gender controversies in times of AIDS*. Ashgate.
- Van Stapele, N. (2021). Providing to belong: Masculinities, hustling, and economic uncertainty in Nairobi ‘ghettos.’ *Africa*, 91(1), 57–76.
- Walker, A. M. (2020). *Chasing masculinity: Men, validation, and infidelity*. Palgrave Macmillan.