

FEMALE *MIGRITUDE* AS A CHALLENGE TO MASCULINITY (IES) IN POSTCOLONIAL AFRICA

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ABSTRACT »»»

Women's migration, which is a relatively new phenomenon, has brought about changes in the world economy. Female *migritude* abroad, particularly in developing, provides them with a new economic power, which impacts on masculinity, feminity, gender roles and relations inherited from traditions and colonization. Endowed with a new economic power, these women have the tendency to challenge the long-time established patriarchal conception of man-woman relationships.

Key words:
Africa, economy, feminity, masculinity, *migritude*.

RESUME »»»

La migration féminine, qui est un phénomène relativement récent, a occasionné des changements dans l'économie mondiale. L'émigration des femmes africaines à l'étranger, notamment dans les pays développés, les dote d'un nouveau pouvoir économique, ce qui influe sur la masculinité, la féminité, les rôles et les relations de genre hérités des traditions et de la colonisation. Dotées d'un nouveau pouvoir économique, ces femmes ont tendance à remettre en question la conception patriarcale, longtemps établie, des relations homme-femme.

Mots-clés:
Afrique, économie, féminité, masculinité, migration.

INTRODUCTION »»»

In the last thirty years, male-female studies have been broadened with the development of an additional emphasis on men and masculinity. A landmark in this development was a 1985 article by T. Carrigan, R. W. Connel, and J. Lee[93] that introduced the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" as a form of masculinity that was dominant in society, established the cultural and societal ideal for what it meant to be a man, silenced other types of

[93] CARRIGAN, T., CONNEL, R., W. and J. LEE, "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity." *Theory and Society*, vol. 14, n°5, 551-604, l985.



masculinities, and combated alternative visions of masculinity. From then on, the area has grown dramatically, culminating in 1995 in Bob Connell's celebrated *Masculinities*.[94]A starting point of much of this work covers the rejection of the idea that all men are the same and this has ushered in the shift from the concept of masculinity to the concept of masculinities. This shift in conceptual framework has enabled gender scholars to distinguish meaningfully among different and various collective constructions of masculinity and to identify power inequalities among these constructions. In other words, the concept paves the way for an understanding of the obvious truth that not all men have the same amount or type of power in society, the same opportunities, and, accordingly, the same life trajectories. The Eurocentric approach of masculinity in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, through European traders, missionaries and colonizers who operated on the African continent, has left a rich store of "dehumanizing" records, telling the world from their own perspective that Africa and its people, especially its men, are morally bankrupt[95], inept, barbaric, backward and doomed.[96]

In fact, unfortunately, despite the burgeoning of work on gender, and the work on women in particular, the issues of masculinity and *migritude* have been and still remain untapped by many gender scholars across Africa where, in some societies, colonization has introduced two systems: patriarchy and capitalism. The former promotes the importance and superiority of the male whom it defines as the head of family, the sole provider and breadwinner: the patriarch. It is based on the imperialism of masculinity with the predominance of men in such areas like sexuality, virility, and economy, through the control of production, consumption, and politics. Accordingly, men set up the areas in which women should evolve and intervene through preconceived societal and cultural concepts.

However, migration is not a new phenomenon in the history of Africa.[97] It goes back to prehistory. It has occurred on a substantial scale in many instances.[98] Amin has, for his part, in *The Migration Experience in Africa*[99], noted that the displacement of groups of people and of individuals is by no

[94] CONNELL, Robert, William. *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Policy Press, 1995.
[95] MIDDLETON, F.M. John, and KERSHAW, Greet, *The Central Tribes of North-Eastern Bantu: The Kikuyu, including Embu, Meru, Mbere, Chuka, Mwimbi, Tharaka and the Kamba of Kenya*, International African Institute (London), 1972.
[96] McFARLAN, Daniel Moore, *Calabar*, London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946.
[97] O'CONNOR, Anthony, *The African City*, London, Hutchinson, 1983.
[98] AMIN, Samir, *Internal Non-metropolitan Migration and the Development Process in Africa*, Blackwell Publishers, 1995.
[99] AMIN, Samir, "Migration in Contemporary Africa: A Retrospective View", in J. Baker, T.A. Aina, eds., *The Migration Experience in Africa*, NAI, Uppsala, 1995.



means a peculiar modern phenomenon, nor one that pertains to African people alone. From history, one realizes that people come from regions or countries that are sometimes very far from those they live in. So, the uniqueness of the modern migratory phenomenon today lies in its real connections to feminity, masculinity, the globalization of the capitalist economy as well as the current changing patterns and the increase in African women's migration: *migritude*. The term refers here to the migration of black people to foreign countries for diverse reasons. Emigration provides them with an economic power which they have never had socially, culturally, economically, and politically. This female new status has an impact on masculinity and on male-female relationships, the societal gender-constructed assumptions and stereotypes in a new world order dominated by globalization, human rights, and women's rights as well. Therefore, the questions that one may be tempted to ask are: what does it mean to be a female in a male-dominated society? How have masculinity and feminity been socially and culturally constructed? What has female *migritude* produced in terms of gender relationships? Has black women's migration ushered in a new gender approach with male "losing" power?

Using a gender Afrocentric perspective, which defers from the Eurocentric and colonial tradition of regarding Africans as lacking in almost every virtue, and a sociological approach, this study aims at developing a gendered understanding of Africa by exploring the social, political and cultural constructions of masculinity and feminity on the continent, to better pinpoint the male-female relationships in a patriarchy and capitalism-dominated society. It will also seek to analyze the result engendered by female *migritude* through the *masculinized*-female figure and the deconstruction of societal gendered stereotypes before finally unearthing the forcibly new Afrocentric gender approach with men's supposed losing power and falling patriarchy in front of women's new economic power which urges to go beyond the male-female binary for a gender conflict-free society.

THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY »»»

The postcolonial experience in Africa has continued to raise pan-Africanist discourses. In fact, the modernist hope of development and economic independence has failed to materialize. The material fortunes of many Africans have risen briefly in the wake of independence, only to decline steadily to the point where, in the new millennium, large numbers of men and women have been refrained from believing in First World promises and instead concentrate on surviving the effects of structural adjustment (1970-



1990), scarcity of food, declining employment opportunities, and the dwindling delivery of social services. This gives African people an investment in a discourse that presents them as collectively victimized by the West. Such a discourse is itself fueled by ongoing practices of "Orientalism" which systematically devalue African cultural forms and expressions and fix the continent's people with an "othering" glance. Consequently, indigenous social and political forms that have predated colonialism continue to provide political and cultural focus for attempts to present (alter) natives to Western views and conceptions of African gender, masculinity and femininity, and sexuality. Historical experience and current material circumstances have provided some basis for constructing credible and relevant arguments about the existence of "Africa" as a geopolitical reality.

Referring to gender constructions, Patricia Mohammed in *Unmasking Masculinity and Deconstructing Patriarchy: Problems and Possibilities within Feminist Epistemology*[100] (2004) establishes the complexity and dynamism of the construction of masculinity and emphasizes its interdependence with the construction of femininity. She explains why and how post-modern feminist epistemology may be useful in understanding Caribbean masculinity and femininity. In her opinion, the deconstruction of masculinity and femininity, as well as the interrogation of patriarchy, is an enterprise that requires involving both men and women. Gender, sex and sexuality, as fixed, and unchangeable cultural and social assets, have for so long shaped men's and women's identities in many African societies. In many West African customs in particular, the concepts of woman and man have been given a double meaning according to Memel-fote.[101](In biological terms, the notion of being a woman or a man refers to a group characterized by a sexual type. A woman is first of all a female and a man a male. In sociological terms, both are defined by criteria that are psychological and cultural. This author argues that the feminine population is defined by four criteria, with the first being psychological, and three others that are cultural: puberty, marriage, motherhood.

Actually, the female can be seen as a woman only when she attains puberty. As for marriage, it is an institution that is set up for each component, man and woman, to find self-fulfillment. Within this marriage institution, each gender has a specific role: women as the householder and mother, through child-bearing, and man as the breadwinner and head of family. According to

[100] MOHAMMED, Patricia, "Unmasking Masculinity and Deconstructing Patriarchy: Problems and Possibilities within Feminist Epistemology" in Reddock, Rhoda. Ed. *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinity: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. London: UWI Press, 2004.
[101] MEMEL-FOTE, Harris,"The Human Sciences and the Notion of Woman's Civilization." *The Civilization of the Woman in African Tradition*, Présence Africaine, 1975.



Connel[102] (1995) and Bourdieu[103] (1998), the awakening of a consciousness of sexual identity, and the incorporation of the dispositions associated with a determinate social definition of the social functions incumbent on men and women come hand in hand with the adoption of a socially defined vision of the sexual division of labor. These constructs are not then statistic and historical but historically and socially constructed.

Yet, there still seems to have some universal overtones with the male gender benefiting from inherited definitions of masculinity and femininity. In fact, masculinity almost worldwide has increasingly turned out to be constructed from men's wage-earning powers. Masculinity and femininity are relational constructs and the definition of either depends forcibly on the other. Therefore, femininity and masculinity as well as femaleness and maleness reflect noteworthy oppositions. Even if there is no-set of characteristics that can help to define them, there are a few enduring and pervasive features. Feminity is associated with the private sphere and traits that put forth passivity and subordination whereas masculinity becomes linked with the public sphere, and with authority and dominance. In fact, there exist different norms, values and expectations that are attributed to being a woman and to being a man in most African societies. Consequential to these different identity characteristics, men and women become two groups with different interests in so far as their relations are based on an overall structure of power and women's subordination to men. Kimmel [104](1987), Connel[105] (1995) and Bourdieu[106](1998) see that the male gender is both a prisoner and a victim of his role as the "dominating sex" and to exercise domination is not inscribed in his nature. This requires a long socialization process. Like noblesse, men are obliged to play their society's prescribed roles where honour is central. In spite of being a given privilege, this gender centrality is also a trap, for pursuing masculinity at any cost can expose them to vulnerability.

Economically and politically, there are two categories of women: the independent women, those who have acquired Western education and civil works, and are economically independent, and the dependent women, the types of women who are still economically dependent on men, which refer to the types of women who have not managed so far to cope with the transition from traditional life to modern life. Masculine and feminine ideologies are acquired by male and female human beings starting from childhood. There

[102] CONNEL, Robert, William, *Masculinities*, *op.cit.*
[103] BOURDIEU, Pierre, *La domination masculine*, Editions Seuils, Paris, 1998.
[104] KIMMEL, S. Michael, *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*. Newsbury Park, CA: Sage, Klinman, 1987.
[105] CONNEL, Robert, William, *Masculinities*, *op.cit.*
[106] BOURDIEU, Pierre, *La domination masculine*, *op.cit.*



are, however, other factors that contribute to the development of any particular brand of masculinity and feminity in postcolonial Africa. Among these one can identify the family, mass and audio-visual media, religion, education and interpersonal interactions. They oscillate between tradition and modernity to produce masculine and feminine stereotypes, sometimes mixing indigenous and foreign models. The socialization process also for male and female subjects can help to expose the dynamics in the formation of culturally and socially appropriate masculine and feminine qualities.

However, according to Louis Althusser[107] (1971), the two subjects have the tendency to reproduce, support and perpetuate the ideological practices which have contributed to preparing both sexes to act consistently with society's values and constructed assumptions and stereotypes that define what masculinity is and what feminity is. Among the most noticeable ideological apparatuses are the family and society that instill into the masculine and feminine myth and beliefs necessary to live harmoniously and peacefully in society, which Catherine Belsey[108] (1980) sees, not as a system of ideas in people's heads, or as the expression of real material relationships, but as the necessary condition of action within the social formation.

The myth of the inferiority of woman to man, as a binary opposition in some specific cases, is an ideology backed by the institutions of customs. From there, the concept of being a woman has been attributed constructed stereotypes and assumption that encompass biological weakness, moral cowardice, low intellectual capacities, and poverty. Meanwhile, man embodies virility, the values of courage, strength, wealth, and intelligence, urging Bell Hooks[109] to state that "masculine power has been defined as something which finds a natural basis in male sexual biology."

In fact, the patriarchal system has always served as a vehicle for the reproduction of gender stereotypes and assumptions, such as male power is natural. As a result, "at young age children learn that they have a privileged status in society because of their having been born male."[110] In many West African countries, the colonial system has also greatly contributed to fashioning a social formation in which the male dominates the female. The ideology of masculine supremacy is even firstly displayed at birth. In some African traditional societies, the birth of a female child has been welcomed with disappointment and curse whereas the expression of joy and

[107] ALTHUSSER, Louis, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London and New York by Monthly Review Books, 1971.
[108] BELSEY, Catherine, *Critical Practice* (New York: Methuen) Ch. 1., Dr. Charles Ess – Druru University, 1980.
[109] HOOKS, Bell, *Ain't a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, Boston South End Press, 1981.
[110] *Ibid.*, p. 97.



accomplishment match with that of a male. In kinship relation, despite the important role of maternity and that of matriarchy that are in store for woman, it is sometimes the patrilineage kinship which enjoys privilege.

Yet, in African colonial and postcolonial societies most of the women have been stripped of their position of authority and autonomy which they once enjoyed and which–determined their subjectivity(ies). New identities have, then, emerged as a result of colonization. As society has been extended economically and politically in the days after the colonial yoke, women have been more and more withdrawn from social life. Their new "colonial identities" have confined them in "natural" attributes such as household activities while those of men were limited to money-earning activities. The introduction of a money-based economy with the capitalist system has affected women's social value. It has changed some traditional practices and their targeted goals. Besides male domination, subordination characterizes matrimony relationship. Marriage is a social norm through which the African woman and man can find accomplishment of motherhood and fatherhood, respectively, with man as the "chief" component and woman the complementary and "second" hand unit. Within this institution, the cultural practice of the bride price in traditional society has been a way for the man to know the value of the woman. Unfortunately, this has turned out to bear a mercantile connotation with the payment of huge amount of money as dowry. Consequently, the woman is valued according to the amount of money she has received and not for her human value and her important role. From then on, women have been devalued to mere "commodities." The notion of dowry is itself discriminatory even if it is culture-based in many African societies. Some cultures being phallocratic have given more powers to men through the *commoditization* of the female gender, which accounts somehow for its discriminatory nature, and their possessive spirits toward women.

Accordingly, men have access to the patriarchal dividend, the power that being a man gives them to choose to exercise power over women. And this can be extended to the power to control other men's lives as well. Historical experiences determining social experiences, the ideologies propping certain types of masculinities have been punctured because of their irrelevance in a specific era. The African state is masculine and has incorporated gender disequilibrium. The evolution of the continent's political milieu and associated rights has been strongly and fundamentally influenced by colonialism, which has left it considerably masculinized and appropriated as a male sphere. The colonial power, which has been highly repressive, is highly responsible for entrenching postcolonial political masculinity. Under colonialism, the administrative, military and other personnel were male. This



means that the colonial authorities have muffled perspectives that had been open to women to escape masculine domination. Colonial patriarchal ideologies in association with indigenous patriarchal ideologies have contributed to upgrading women's subordination, exploitation, and oppression. In postcolonial African societies, political masculinity(ies) still consist(s) of a quantitative dimension, encompassing an inflated male domination at the highest state positions, and a qualitative dimension, referring to the nature of political power manifested, namely violence, authoritarianism, war, personalization of power, etc. Politics is often assimilated or even confused with war, and the war imperative makes it more a male institution and affair. Women then, through apathy and other self-defeating factors, have in turn contributed to the institutionalization of post-independence political sexism in Africa.

THE *MASCULINIZED*-FEMALE FIGURE AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIETAL GENDER STEREOTYPES »»»

Because of fundamental socio-economic change in nowadays' life, conventional and stereotyped assumptions about men and women, their roles and relations need to be reconsidered and reconstructed. What makes the difference between them in this context of migration? Women are compelled to migrate abroad in order to flee poverty and patriarchal customs and accumulate the capital that is required to set up "independent" households. Many also leave as a result of intertribal or interethnic conflicts and political violence engendered mostly by elections. There are also gender-specific cultural and social constraints on female mobility abroad. It would be, then, interesting to see to what extent African women's displacement has affected the relationship with men and to what extent they are also affected their masculinity. Indeed, the falling traditional structures, the emergence of new unstable situations, new social roles, norms and values have considerably affected gender identities as well as relations. Surprisingly, the current socio-economic change has impacted on men more deeply than on women. Once in their host countries, many of them indulge in hairdressing, small business, babysitting, household activities, dressmaking, etc as a living.

Indeed, men's roles and identities have been challenged and called into question by *migritude*. The latter, while challenging men's roles and identities, has in some ways empowered and *masculinized* women. Because of *migritude*, the real position of women today depends to a large extent on the social relationship between man and woman and on gender roles. On this also depends the perpetuation or not of hierarchy's clear-cut positions. *The* displacement phenomenon has granted women new economic powers and a



new geographic location which, through cross-cultural influences, has favored and speeded up the current gender shift. As a result, the identity of the female gender which has been defined and constructed by customs, societal beliefs, myths, stereotypes and assumptions is bound to give way to a new one that is more economically dependent. African women's migration to developed countries has simultaneously created margins and locations where they can better express themselves and make use of their new economic power in order to challenge masculinity.

However, in view of the power relations that have shifted with colonization and put women in a less advantaged conditions and positions, the female gender has created new spaces for herself. This new gender deal puts into question a combination of oppressive conditions that are traditional, cultural, political and specific to the colonial heritage and postcolonial context. So, they embark on a deconstruction and on a reconstruction process of their subjectivities by subverting gender hierarchies and existing dominant power structures within society, to move from the margin to the center, to paraphrase Bell Hooks[111] (1981). Besides customs, traditions, and the colonial experience, *migritude* will give a new meaning to the) woman within the new world order, a new world context dominated by globalization. This paves the way for her to get rid of the unjustified patriarchal society's chauvinism and sexism. Women's displacement has turned men into disadvantaged and vulnerable beings before the new economic power-holder. The socio-economic change and the break-down of traditional social institutions in Postcolonial Africa have *masculinized* and empowered women. The patriarchal structures, then, working to their detriment and to the advantage of men must be reversed and put into question.

In fact, while globalization has offered access to new technologies and nurtured a new type of "global" citizenship, it has broadened the gap between developed and developing countries. While some African men have been able to enter the global economy on something like equal terms, particularly among well-educated and well-located men in the wealthiest parts of the continent, most of them have felt the weight of globalization as poverty. As a consequence, another factor that the African man has to face is his complex positioning as "other" being within the framework of the "brutal dualistic opposition between black and white."[112] Rising unemployment and the increasing "informalization" of the world economy have undermined men's

[111] HOOKS, Bell, *Ain't a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, Boston South End Press, 1981.
[112] GILROY, Paul, "Debating 'race' in SA Scholarship." *Transformation* 47, 2001, p. 28.



economic advantage in postcolonial Africa by forcing them into low-income and low-prestige occupations formerly devolved upon women. In conditions of broader change, a contradictory process has unfolded in which the traditional sexual divisions of labor have broken down with altogether the dismantling of the patriarchal authority. Female *migritude* has been a means to break the long-standing hegemonic masculinity. But, it has also installed pressure and escalating gender conflicts. Because of that, an increasing number of men have become estranged from their families. Despite the newly acquired power, *migritude* has also victimized some women making them easy preys for some male proxenets and bandits, be they African or Europeans. They are often made to work as prostitutes in their host countries and many of them become locked in their money-earning activities that they become capitalists

With women's new *masculinization* as economic power-holders, men withdraw from domestic roles and responsibilities, leaving them on their own to take it over and play their masculine roles. As migration offers their counterparts high opportunities, men find themselves in a bind between the cultures they have espoused, the discontent and powerlessness situation they feel consequential to their new subordinate economic situation. With poverty and lack of income-earning opportunities, men live with increasing paradoxes in their lives. Though men having always benefited from patriarchal structure, female *migritude* has made men caught in limbo, in a paradoxical and frustrating position where their masculinity is at stake and their male roles, as heads of family and breadwinner, are being seriously undermined. Consequently, their weakened status will affect their sexuality. They embark on a "masculinity transfer" through tough and aggressive actions against their women: gender-based violence. They also indulge in womanizing and alcohol drinking as a way of expressing their maleness. Some resort to domestic violence as a way of soothing and masking their *lost* masculinity. Then, from household figure-heads and formal authority-holder, they undergo women's *masculinization* and they find themselves downgraded to the level of *femaleness.* Lack of decent employment and low income prevent them from fulfilling adequately their expected roles as men, husbands, and in particular as providers of the needs of wife or wives, children and other dependents. The provider and breadwinner ideology, which has emerged with patriarchy and been deepened with colonization, is being muffled up by female *migritude* in so far as it has opened up new vistas and opportunities while economically empowering women. With their new "masculine" responsibilities, they



control the household and wane men's masculinity. In this female *masculinization* process, men's authority is being increasingly challenged. Authority necessitates a material base, contrary to responsibility that is culturally and normatively constituted.[113]

GOING BEYOND THE MALE-FEMALE BINARY FOR A GENDER CONFLICT-FREE SOCIETY »»»

Women and men are two groups shaped with different norms, values, and interests. It is, then, women's interest to challenge and change men as well as the patriarchy's long-standing gender order. This will not be an easy task, for according to Connel[114], attacking men in Lacanian terms means attacking the phallus and in more orthodox Freudian terms reviving the terror or castration and this suggests a depth of resistance likely to be met. With masculinity and the phallus being at stake, and with men having for so long profited from inherited characterizations of masculinity and feminity, how to "domesticate" men without stripping them of their masculinity is the real question. In other words, there is a strong need to rethink and reconsider the stereotyped assumptions about men and women, and explore the new interactions between men's changing roles, women's new appropriated roles, and their gender identity before the *masculinized*-female figure engendered by *migritude*. With these new gender characteristics, the questions that one may be tempted to ask are: will these new configurations of masculinity and feminity be to the advantage of women, men or of both genders? In fact, in the late 1980s and 1990s a number of African women scholars, who mostly originate from Nigeria, among whom Amadiume[115] (1987-1997); Kolawole[116] (1997); Nnaemeka[117] (1997-1998); Oyewumi[118] (1997), put in place a concerted critique of Western feminism. This present article intends to lay focus on a number of ideas in order to better illustrate the need to re-define the male-female relationship by using a new Afrocentric approach to gender which sees both as ultimate partners as opposed to the western feminist one which considers them to be bound to a conflicting relationship. In fact, Western feminism has embarked on an oppositional gender *binarism* that

[113] KANDIYOTI, Deniz, "Bargaining With Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2(3): p. 274-90, 1988.
[114] CONNEL, Robert, William, *Masculinities*, *op.cit*., p. 232.
[115] AMADIUME, Afi, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, London: Zed Books, 1987.
[116] KOLAWOLE, Mary, Ebun, Modupe, *Womanism and African Consciousness*, Trenton; African World Press, 1997.
[117] NNAEMEKA, Obioma, ed., *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power : From Africa to the Diaspora*, Trenton : Africa World Press,
[118] OYEWUMI, Oyeronke, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press.



turns into theories that emphasize struggle and disharmony between men and women. It has predicated on women as victims, overemphasizing sexuality and sexual orientation and obliterating, out of ignorance or mere chauvinism, the history of African women, which speaks of agency and achievement. However, with female *migritude* and people beginning to realize that masculinity has been a fictional construction with the emerging diverse sites of intercultural conflicts and negotiations, African feminism seems to be more "applicable" to analyze the new gender approach. This African-type feminism or womanism, used to mark off the collective nature of the male-female relationship, is part of a broader, global feminist movement with particular African specificities that take into account African history and women's achievement so far.

Migritude, as an economic power-provider, informs that masculinity while being synonymous with power can also be terrifyingly fragile in the sense that it does not really exist in the sense people are led to think it does, that is, as a biological reality. It exists as an ideology, it exists as scripted behavior; it exists within gendered relationships.[119] This accounts for the fact that the male gender has been constructed around at least two conflicting characterizations of the essence of manhood. First, being a man is natural, healthy and innate, and second, a man must stay masculine and never should his masculinity be left to falter. This has been so valued, so valorized, and so prized and, since its loss can be terrible, man must always guard against loosing it. Male honor and masculine expression are highly dependent on what patriarchal society considers being women's appropriate behavior. This is a proof that female *migritude* represents an active and threatening power to male masculinity and identity.

Nonetheless, there is therefore a need to adopt new practices and approaches to gender which female *migritude* has re-inscribed and modified. Such a move will pave the way for new conventional ways of understanding men and masculinity, women and feminity by offering different images, different roles, and different options for both. This will also allow understanding, as Oyeronke Oyewumi [120](1987) has theorized it, that gender is not a primary signifier of identity in Africa. Her argument is a more extreme version of the one put forward by Ifi Amadiume [121](1987), according to whom it is colonization that has distorted local gender patterns and particularly reduced the power of women. She further states that age and other hierarchies,

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[119] KAUFMANN, Michael, *Community Power and Grass-roots Democracy: The Transformation of Social Life* (co-edited with Haroldo Dilla) London: Zed Books, 1987, p. 13.
[120] OYEWUMI, Oyeronke, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*, *op.cit.*
[121] AMADIUME, Ifi, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, *op.cit.*



which are not to be detected in the *sexualized* body, have been essential in distributing power as well as shaping identities in African pre-colonial times. The system bears much more gender fluidity than Western feminism has acknowledged and gender inversions, male wives, female husbands, have been possible. The new Afrocentric gender approach lays emphasis on the collectivities and the shared burdens of African people, men and women. This is intended to give rise to the helpful approach that *collaboration, negotiation and compromise* are key features of African gendered life.[122]

This new conception of gender within the framework of female *migritude*, though challenging masculinity, is far from excluding men. It rather includes them in order to promote development, gender equality and alleviate poverty. If genders and sexualities are the products of cultural practices and the patriarchal institution and what modify forms of sexualities and genders are forcibly produced and maintained in the hybrid societies of postcolonial places, men's entry into such niches results in both a de-gendering and re-gendering of the masculinity and feminity. Since ideology does not simply provide people with a belief system through which they adapt themselves to the world, but instead, it plays a much more fundamental role in the process by which social actors create a reality of the world in which they live[123], adopting an Afrocentric approach of gender will help avoid falling into the ideology trap of Western gender hegemony. In view of the current situation of postcolonial Africa, marked by poverty, economic backwardness, unfair globalization and Western hegemonic discourses at all levels, the new configurations of gender triggered by female *migritude*, far from being a handicap, should be turned into an opportunity for the development of the nucleus family and for both genders, in particular, and the continent as a whole.

[122] NNAEMEKA, Obioma, (ed), *The Politics of (M)Othering*. London: Routledge, 1997.
[123] MUMBY, K. Dennis, *Communication and Power in Organizations: Discourse Ideology and Domination*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1988, p. 71.



CONCLUSION »»»

This work has problematized masculinity and rejected the notion of its uniqueness and immutability. It has shown that there are many and various ways of viewing, interpreting it. But though different in interpretations, attention has been paid to power, to the normative cultural and social assumptions, and stereotypes. It has also shown that Western feminist concepts are not always adequate and relevant in understanding and analyzing gender in the African context. The work has also shown how masculinity and feminity have been represented in the process of making masculinity(ies) within the African continent and the effect of Western colonization and its aftermath. It has explored how female *migritude* has produced new forms of masculinity(ies) and feminity(ies) and redefined gender roles and relationships. It has challenged gender inequalities and patriarchy, thus offering alternative for egalitarian and conflict-free visions of masculinity and feminity. The new configurations, triggered by female *migritude*, the integration in the world economy and cross-gender influences should be taken as an advantage for both men and women.

By avoiding overlooking, taking for granted or treating men as a unified, homogeneous category, this paper has adopted a methodological approach aiming at correcting such an imbalance. It has also used a variety of gender theories to bear on the understanding of masculinity in the continent with the changing shape of masculinity(ies) across time and space and the way in which they are positioned in relation to other men (younger, older, of different ethnic group or racial origin, etc.) and women vary. This work's understanding of African men opens up from a position of diversity with infinite variations and communalities as well. However, key definitional stages have to be taken into considerations prior to any discussions about masculinity and African female migration. The first, being geopolitical, the second requires acknowledging that studying masculinity is quite dependent on the geographic area. Africa is an exceedingly diverse continent in terms of language, society, culture, religion, gender organizations, and economy. Therefore, in historical, political, cultural and social terms, it would be irrelevant to advance the notion of uniqueness of conceptual frameworks for masculinity and feminity.



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