

Anthropology And Anthropological Applications In Nigeria

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Gender Discourse and Anthropology: An Overview

CHINYERE UKPOKOLO

This chapter examines gender discourse in the field of Anthropology, and the impact of this development on our understanding of humankind, which is the goal of Anthropology. Specifically, our interest is on social and cultural anthropology. The paper identifies the preoccupations, trends and challenges of gender discourse over time. Emphases are laid on the studies on gender across regions with particular attention to the Sub-Saharan African and other societies in the Third World. Although the paper acknowledges that gender studies is inter- and multi-disciplinary in nature, it gives primacy to materials by anthropologists in the field of social and cultural anthropology. Because of the extensive nature, and the multiplicity of works available, which cannot be, possibly, exhausted here, we select some publications which, in our view, are representatives in themes and trends. In any case, Naomi Quinn in her article 'Anthropological Studies on Women's Status' (1977), has presented an extensive review of women's position in societies as represented in the literature till 1977. Carol C. Mukhopadhyay and Patricia J. Higgins in their work 'Anthropological Studies of Women's Status Revisited: 1977-1987' published in 1988, picked up from where Naomi Quinn stopped, and added a decade's extension. The two publications are reviews of compilation of works on cross-cultural studies on women at particular historical epochs. I do not intend to repeat their efforts but rather to pick certain strands from some of their texts that meet my interest and add my humble view by moving beyond their representations in terms of periods and preoccupations. If certain landmark texts have not been included here, it is not because I view them as insignificant but because I

cannot, possibly, present all texts due to space constraints. I also acknowledge few references to some texts outside the field of social and cultural anthropology. This paper also makes bold to assert that gender issues are marginalized in the mainstream theorizing in anthropology, just as gender studies in the discipline, as some of the texts have affirmed. Similarly, women contributions are under-considered in the categorization of cannon-setting texts in the discipline. All these will be explored further in this overview. I cannot but acknowledge, however, that gender discourse is an ongoing debate, an open-ended conceptualization.

Although women's studies does not necessarily mean feminist studies, this paper still traces the emergence of feminist perspective in scholarship to broaden the scope of novel readership, and to acknowledge their contributions in women emancipatory project, and knowledge production, particularly, through feminist anthropology. I identify the three phases of the movement otherwise known as waves. This formed the background against which my discourse on gender and anthropology springs.

Voices from the Fringe: A Glimpse into the Emergence of Feminist Scholarship

Within the human society, there exists a divide that categorizes the individuals into stratified groups. Sex, in many societies, is a divisive factor of first rate importance, but by itself it rarely split a society into two antithetical halves (Lowie, 1950: 4). Indeed, one's biological identity, to a very large extent, determines individual's life chances, as gender practices are bye-products of sex identification. Gender system is therefore, one of the prestige structures (Ortner and Whitehead, 1981). Gender has been defined variously as the socio-cultural and psychological patterning of the differences between male and female. It is the cultural meaning attached to biological identity. For feminist scholars, Moser (1993) posited, gender is perceived as a role, a social category, as a practice, as a performance, as social construct, sometimes as a combination of these (Moser, 1993: 433). Invariably gender is a 'doing' thing (West and Zimmerman, 1987). The performativity of gender, which Butler (1990) further stressed indicates that cross-cultural variations in gender practices exist. As a social construct, a culturally determined aspect of being male or female, it maps out restrictions, expectations,

ethics and so on within which male and female are expected to operate thereby creating gender roles for males and females (Lips 1993). Feminism is both a movement and an ideology which is accredited for challenging the cultural assumptions that tend to subordinate the woman, especially in Western social thought, while the man occupies superordinate position.

Indeed, the emergence of feminism in the 18th Century was basically to address the issue of women subordination. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was credited as the first feminist, and the individual whose works and opinion influenced feminist thought. Feminism itself is a concept difficult to define as its definition is as varied as its propagators. The variance owes to the divergent views emanating from the debate on the origin or source of women marginalization which preoccupies feminist thought since its inception in the 18th century. One basic thing that has, however, remained is the fact that feminism is an ideology that seeks for equality of the sexes (see Ukpokolo, 2004, for further explanation on the nature and types of feminisms). Feminism questions the bases for women marginalization. It rejects asymmetry of power, unequal treatment meted against women and men in the society.

The actual feminist debate by women arose in the 18th and 19th centuries in Britain and France as a challenge to male dominance in the western society at the time. The changes sweeping through Europe characterized by the rise of merchant capitalism, the decline of feudalism, the colonial encounter and the exploration and exploitation of capital, and massive industrialization raised problems in most western nations. Again, centralization of power and other upheavals characterizing European society at the time paved way, among other things, to ideological challenge of old order, of hegemony (Mies and Jayawardena, 1983). The demand for universal human rights, as was preached at the time, was deemed to be applicable only to the whites, employers, colonizers and men. The blacks, imperial colonies, and women were peripherized in this scheme. For the great Enlightenment philosophers and social commentators like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau women did not belong to those that should enjoy such rights. This obvious marginalization formed the springboard for questioning 'the divine rule' in nature. The 'exclusivist' tendency in Rousseau's social contract, for instance, offered the women no hope

of emancipation. In his social contract, Rousseau, who emphasized the value of freedom and equality, excluded women from those that would enjoy the 'general will'. He proposed a different education for boys and girls. In Rousseau's agenda, only man was rational and capable of thinking rationally and abstractly, therefore, women lacking these qualities could not be given freedom and equality (Mies and Jayawardena, 1983: 8).

The hierarchical binary opposition and peripherization of the 'other' against the 'self' characterizing the application of rights and freedom was such that the colonizers have right over the colonized, capitalists over employers, and of men over women. The marginalization and the disadvantaged positioning of the 'other', which included women, in this agenda aroused much displeasure and discontent, and the subsequent desire to change the condition of women through liberation movements. In *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1791) Mary Wollstonecraft challenged the prevailing notions about the women's nature, rationality and intellect, and women's position in the society generally. Various women movements that sprang up at the period demanded for women emancipation. Increasingly, the women openly rebelled against, and defied all forms of patriarchal domination. By the very existence of these movements, they radically question the structure of such society; they question female participation or lack of involvement in political space, in decision-making that affect their lives.

Feminist movement can be divided into three phases, often called waves, with each epoch marked by a specific concern depending on socio-political environment of the era. The first wave spanned from 19th century to early 20th century with universal suffrage which included women as the basic concern and agitation. This originated in USA in the 1820s. The second wave falls within 1960s to 1980s. The concern of this epoch was equality of the sexes before the laws. The feminists in the second wave fought against inequality before the law. One of the most important books that had influence in the era was Carol Hanisch's essay titled *The Personal is Political* which later became the slogan among the feminists. For the feminists of the era, cultural and political inequalities are inextricably linked. Other books like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Critique* (1963) where she analyzed the frustration and despondence among the middle class women and criticized the belief that women find fulfillment

through childbearing and homemaking, were major sources of inspiration for the feminists. She argued that women should be allowed to work outside the home for self actualization. Others include Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex* (1949), which is considered among the feminists as one of the fundamental documents of modern feminism. De Beauvoir's position in the work is that women's status was as a result of cultural/social conditions rather than biological factor. For Simone De Beauvoir, one is *not born* a woman but *becomes* a woman. As an existentialist who worked closely with the French existentialist, Jean Paul Satire (1905-1980), it is not surprising that De Beauvoir employed existential argument to compare women to the oppressed minority in the world.

The third wave of feminism falls within 1990s to present. This category is seen as a continuation of the second wave and aimed at addressing the failures of the earlier phase. Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble* (1990) which submitted that gender is performative, and suggests that there is no single cause for women subordination, and there is no single approach to dealing with the issue, is a leading text of the era. Other influential books in the period include Connell's *Gender and Power* (1987), which view gender as active process that structures multiple domains of social life (Hawkesworth, 1997), and Steven Smith's *Gender Thinking* (1992), which perceives gender from the functionalist perspective. The third wave feminism addressed the issue of women's reproductive and economic rights. Lots of successes have been recorded and are still being recorded in the feminist discourse through their efforts at unveiling women class condition. Women studies, obviously, started in the West with the objective of exposing sexism, and of struggle for greater equality between men and women (Sjorslev, 1998).

Today, feminist studies cuts across disciplines and fields, with each discipline using peculiar tools to discover and document women's voices. Whether in Anthropology, Philosophy, Sociology, Economics or Literary studies the aim is to add women perspective to the understanding of humankind, and knowledge production. In anthropology, feminist anthropology contributes to debates on the concept of culture and the epistemological problem of representation in anthropology in a way that allows anthropology to speak authoritatively to current debates within cultural studies over the politics of culture (Walter, 1995). As Walter further

submitted, feminist anthropology is a composite of two parts: a field of study and an approach to the study of women. It asks question about how difference in power and knowledge have been constructed over time as gender differences.

Feminism has had various criticisms, at times emerging from within the group itself. Two major categories of criticism are prominent. The first is the inescapable trap of feminism in 'bio logic' (Oyewumi, 1998), while the second is the attack from the Third World women or the women of colour. Concerning the first criticism, the attempt to search for universal causal factor for women's condition and experience can only be possible if there is a 'key' to that oppression which cuts across cultures. The only universalizing key is femaleness or biological identity. However, in articulating feminist position, feminist scholars endeavour to extricate feminism from biological determinism and its claim as the basis for women's subordinate position. This, they have not succeeded in doing as the intractable and inescapable trap of biological determinism continues to hunt the feminist discourse to date. Oyeronke Oyewumi has severally posited that as long as feminism has remained Westocentric, undermining research findings, especially by third world scholars on women in non-Western cultures, biological determinism will continue to trail feminist debate (See Oyewumi, 1997, 1998). The second criticism against feminism is the dissenting voices represented by the post colonial and Third World women. The fact that feminism has Western origin has affected, negatively, its acceptance amongst women in the Third World. Indeed, many people in this part of the globe especially in Africa, think feminism is a craze of disillusioned middle-class women in affluent societies, and "a sign of their cultural decadence" (Mies and Jayawardena, 1983). To others, still, it is a new form of cultural imperialism. One of the major inadequacies of feminist scholarship is the silencing of the men's voices in articulating women experiences. Nevertheless, feminist scholarship has contributed in diverse ways to the recognition, to some degrees, of women's voices in researches and knowledge production, leading to progressive feminist politics.

Anthropology: Gender on the Agenda

Anthropology, the science of humankind, has always shown interest in diverse aspects of humans. The focus on the holistic study of

mankind gives the discipline leverage above other disciplines in the social science and humanity in its attempt to interrogate humans, their culture and environment. In trying to do this through its subfield of social and cultural anthropology, the discipline pays attention to cultural universalities and particularities. The reason is that humankind shares common ancestors and, as such, has certain attributes, which no matter the degree of diversification this linkage is still sustained as members of a common ancestor, *Homo sapiens*. However, the fact is that in the quest to understand and reconstruct the human origin, evolution and culture history, the significant half of the human population, women, have been neglected. The result is that what we had, for a relatively length of time, was an incomplete knowledge of ourselves as members of the same group. This negligence constitutes the *modus operandi* which forms the basis of the interrogation initiated in gender studies and discourses. Today, a crescendo of books and articles, spectrums of data, are now made available to both students, and those who are interested in gender discourse either as scholars or policy makers through ethnographic accounts of women, men and children.

The question of women's class condition has generated both theoretical and methodological debates, and these debates have spanned many decades in various disciples in the social sciences and the humanity. In the heart of the theoretical debate is the question of the origin of gender inequalities present in most societies of the world. In addressing this issue, many scholars have articulated divergent views. Of these views, two broad categories emerge: the biological and the cultural schools or at times referred to as 'nature versus nurture/culture' debate. The issue is in determining which of these indices, fundamentally, shapes human behaviour and is an explanation for differential male-female status. The nature/biological category in which Freud's psychoanalytical theory features prominently and constitutes part of the springboard behind the debate of the era, posits that women subordination originated from nature/biology. Sigmund Freud, in his work titled, 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes' (Freud, 1925) noted that the female, anatomically, represents an incomplete version of the male sex in her development and this forms the basis of her subordination. Her lot in life cannot be challenged or changed. This is the "unalterable laws of nature" (Durley and

Edwards, 1986). In other words, the argument which Sigmund Freud presented is that the female's personality development represents incompleteness of the male sex. She, in his opinion, represents a portrait of castrated male. The concept of 'castrated male' gave credence to the perception of the woman as a second-class human being, especially in the Western societies, for centuries. Femaleness was synonymous with nature, and as such her condition remained unquestionable.

The other school, culture school, features prominently the feminist scholars. To these feminists, the role of culture/nurture is primary in explaining gender inequality. The culturalists, as it were, were determined to push their argument to a convincing conclusion knowing that research outcomes can set the mood of the society and possibly influence policies. On this, the culturalist united. Beyond this bond of unity exists other dividing lines severing the culturalists into further disintegrated groups. For instance, other issues that engaged the attention of the culturalists was determining which aspects of culture, for instance, actually influence the perception and position of the woman in the society. Indices like economics (the interaction between reproduction and production), socialization, religion, parenting, family structure, descent system, among other cultural influences are seen as playing roles in affecting the position of women in the society. Thus, the culturalist school remains divided to date. In any case, the heated and passionate struggle between biology and culture in gender discourse is understandable. For the culturalists, the biological determinism is a structure that must be deconstructed for fear that it might influence public opinion. This struggle was carried beyond the pages of books and journals to physical attacks. This was, for instance, demonstrated on the attack on Edward O. Wilson in 1978. In 1975, Wilson published a book titled *Sociobiology* where he argued that human behaviour is part of biological evolution of humans thereby denying cultural determinism. Wilson was seen as using nature to justify women marginalization. The book was greeted with outrage and uproar in America where feminism and Marxism was dominants. Physical attacks were aimed at Wilson to demonstrate the bitterness towards him, his book and the ideas contained in his book. For instance, Eriksen and Nielsen write:

In 1978, a member of the audience poured a pitcher of iced cold water over Wilson's head as he entered the podium to speak, and others chanted; 'Wilson, you are all wet now'. This event illustrates the passion surrounding the project of Sociobiology. – (Nielsen and Eriksen 2001: 132)

Sociobiology, thus, was viewed as a revisit of 'nature debate' of the first half of the twentieth century. The nature/culture distinction, for a very long time, engaged the attention of scholars interested in understanding the basis of women's marginalization, and it has continued to hunt feminist discourse to date.

There is no doubt that the development of anthropology as a discipline was largely influenced by the prevailing intellectual and political mood of Victorian England, one of which is basically male biased which also influenced the evolutionary theory of the 19th century. Thus, androcentrism of male scholars on one hand and the fact that discipline of anthropology itself is rooted in male-oriented tradition of the West on the other, continued unchallenged, over a long period of time, to permeate anthropological writings. The result is the dichotomous binary opposition of 'self' (the man) versus the submerged 'other' (the woman), where the 'self' takes supremacy, and is the only significant actor, above the 'other' in the human society. This hierarchical binary opposition also influenced global politics as manifested in the British ascendancy as a colonial power, which the key players perceived as representing the triumph of civilization and rationality over man's base nature. Embedded in this is what Fischer and Marcus have summed up as "pervasive ideology of social progress,...towards ever higher standard of rationality" (Fischer and Marcus, 1986:17). This construction, indeed, also formed the basis for the subordination and domestication of the woman who is perceived to be part of this natural order that must be tamed.

Although the field of anthropology is over a century old, it was not until about late 1920s that women first, scantily, gained attention in few ethnographic materials. The leader of this vanguard is Margaret Mead who published a pioneering work on gender relations titled *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928. In the text, Mead presented a detailed study of sexual and family customs of teenage girls in Samoa. The author also presented descriptions of the ritual songs and dances, costumes and ornaments of the villagers. In *Sex and Temperament*

in *three primitive societies* (1935), Mead examined sex roles and stereotypes in three societies in New Guinea – the Arapesh, the Mundugamor and the Tchambuli. She posed a challenge to the Western social thought on sex as the basis for male and female roles. Her attack on biological determinism, which was prevalence at the time following the influence of Sigmund Freud's work at the time, was intended to show that there are cross-cultural variations in gender roles. To Mead, her work is an objective description of men and women in these societies rather than pursuing feminist agenda. About thirty years after the publication of her book, the question of 'men the breadwinner and women the home maker' became topical issue in feminist thought, especially in the United States. In her book, Mead submitted that the traditional role of women as mother was 'wasteful of the gifts of many women who could perform other functions far better than child bearing in an already overpopulated world. She also argued that the traditional male role as breadwinners was 'wasteful of the gifts of many men who could exercise their special personality gifts far better in the home than in the market place' (Pollard 1992: 21, reprinted 1994). This kind of idea was a challenge to the dominant ideology inherent in American society at the period. For this, many Americans were resentful of her views. Nevertheless, Mead's characterization of Samoa culture was part of her effort to deliver a message about American culture (Fischer and Marcus, 1986: 3). Indeed, as Eriksen and Nielsen have observed, Mead's book contributed in no small way to the establishment of cultural relativism, not only in American anthropology but also in the mainstream American intellectual life (Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001:133). However, Mead's account of Samoa life was later criticized by Derek Freeman in his work *Margaret Mead and the Samoa: The Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (1983), for what he believed was not the accurate presentation of the Samoa's sexual life. Decades later after Mead published her work on the Samoa, Freeman traveled to the Samoa and came back to report that pre-marital sex was frowned upon in Samoa just as in the Western society. He further claimed that Margaret Mead's sex identity was a major hindrance to her having access to certain information about the people she studied. His report also posited that her informants were young girls who probably exaggerated their sexual exploits to entertain her. Despite the attack on Mead's work, the

book stands out as one of the earliest publications that tended to problematize gender relations. Prior to this period, women issues were rare in the available ethnographies, except as a brief mention on chapters dealing with kinship, descent system and marriage. Even in the 1970s, Mead's book of 1928 was often referred to by not only American feminists but also emerging anthropological feminists of 1970s.

Phillis Kaberry's *Aboriginal Women: Sacred and Profane* (1939) was a contribution of substantive data on women and gender with reference to Aboriginal Australia where she argued that women, just as the men, were sacred and profane. Through her work, she criticized Malinowski's 1913 work where he noted that women were excluded from all aspects of Aboriginal religion (Toussant, 1999: 606). Of significance also is the work of Leith-Ross (1939), titled *African Woman*. The book, which focused on Igbo women of southeastern Nigeria, was a product of colonial occupation and administration of Igboland, and the women war of 1928-1930 (ironically termed 'Aba Riot' by the British officials), which was a major propelling force for the research that gave birth to the work. The colonial administrator was disturbed that women could mobilize themselves to bring colonial administration in eastern Nigeria to a halt. Leith-Ross, in the book, examined the personality of the Igbo woman and her relationship with her socio-political environment. From her findings on Igbo women, the author came to the conclusion that the Igbo woman is, in theory, dependent on the man, but in practice, surprisingly independent of him. According to her, the Igbo woman, in fact, plays a significant role in her society. In her words:

It is certain that amongst the ibo [sic],... The women do play an influential part, not only by native customs, courage, self-confidence, desire for gain and worldly standing. More than men, they seem to be able to cooperate, to stand by each other even in difficulties, and to follow a common aim.

– (Leith-Ross, 1939: 22)

The feminist movement of the 1960s has had striking influence on women anthropologists, especially in America. If not for any other thing, it motivated the women anthropologists into "defining women's place in a revised theory of the evolution of human society" (Quinn, 1977: 181). The exclusion of women in the canonical anthropological texts, to the feminist anthropologists, was not just

an academic issue but also a moral problem of objectivity in the discipline, and questioned anthropology's claim that the knowledge which it offers of cultural alternatives follows "conventional notions of scientific precision and certainty" (Fischer and Marcus, 1986: 3). These women anthropologists began to focus their researches on women's statuses and roles in diverse societies across the globe, (see for instance, Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt 1975; Sanday, 1979; and Sacks, 1979), especially in the African sub-region and the other Third World continents, in search of cultural alternatives, and as case for universal gender asymmetry. This development, it must be noted, coincided with the emergence of modern feminist movements, climaxed with the Women Conference in Mexico in 1975 as the major landmark. For the whole decade, the role of women in development dominated discourses on women in the society. According to Caroline Ifeka, the motivational basis for the movement was the believe that:

[G]iven favourable social conditions, shifts in perspective could lead to associated shifts in occupational, wealth, and status patterns, which in turn modify the central norms guiding interaction among women and men. – (Ifeka, 1975: 560-561)

For the women anthropologists of the era, social relationships constituted the frameworks for women's categorization. In these social relationships, the culturally images and perceptions which the male sex conceives of the female have significant input on the political and cultural structure of the society (Ifeka, 1975). The researches then were, therefore, basically on women's position in the male-dominated system of power in the society. Thus, the first generation of scholars in anthropology who addressed women's issues in their works, focused on sex role with the intention of unveiling women's position and status. Increasingly, the 1970s marked the inclusion of gender issues and concern in anthropology through the perspective of women studies.

In furtherance of women representation in ethnographies, the 1970s was also characterized by an increasing documentation of works that reflected the experiences of women anthropologists in the field, and women's lives in the other cultures they studied. A pioneering book in that category that launched this aspect of women studies and concerns into the limelight in anthropology in the period

was the publication of Peggy Golde's edited volume titled *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences* (1970). Essays in the collection are personal experiences of individual fieldworker on the field and how these experiences influenced the quality of the data collected. One concrete thing that emerged from the collection is the fact that they were women had influence on the nature and quality of the research products. The work raised two fundamental issues in anthropology. The first was the issue of 'positioned' fieldwork, a strand of self-reflexive anthropology. The argument is that by reflecting on one's personal role in the field, the anthropologist learns to understand exactly what kind of data he/she has received (see Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001). The challenge now became to articulate how an anthropologist should conduct fieldwork in order to remain within objectivity tenet of anthropology. The second in the issues which Golde's book exposed was the question of gender in anthropology. All these two issues grossly engaged the attention of anthropologists at the time, expanding beyond a decade. Concerning the first problem, there was a proliferation of publications in the 1970s representing a new series of reflections on fieldwork, which were more overtly and accurately critical of the ethnographic research process. Some of these publications included Paul Rabinow's *Reflection on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977) and Jean-Paul Dumont's *The Headman and I* (1978). Although these works still retained the personal and confessional character of earlier fieldwork account, as Fischer and Marcus has observed, they were influential in opening up a serious discussion about the epistemology of fieldwork and its status as a method (see Fischer and Marcus 1986). Both wrote their accounts around the substantive dialogues between anthropologists and cultural 'others' encountered in fieldwork, thus, marking a shift in interpretive anthropology towards a theoretical focus on communication within and between cultures. They further noted that the paradigmatic shift which these works engendered also revealed the nature of the historical and political context of fieldwork (Fischer and Marcus, 1986).

On the gender issue which Golde's book raised, the response was amazing. There was influx of books which looked at gender in anthropology. The paucity of works on women in anthropological classics began to gain attention of scholars and researchers. Edwin Ardener published an interesting piece that introduced the concept

of female mutedness into the intellectual debate in the discipline of anthropology in 1972. The author associated the absence and subsequent voicelessness of women in canonical anthropological texts of the past era, even those written by women, to the fact that male and female anthropologists/ethnographers easily find rapport with male informants than with women. In most societies, according to him, men dominate the public space and are, therefore, easily accessible to ethnographers. Cultural expectations place restrictions on women interaction with outsiders and this account for lack of female voices. Ardener (1989) further opined that societies distinguish between the public and private domains, and these are occupied by men and women respectively.

The concept of female mutedness and invisibility which Ardner introduced into the literature generated reactions among women anthropologists especially in the United States. Although a male in seemingly female field of interest at the time, the work of this British anthropologist provoked reaction which led to the publication in 1974, of an edited work by Michelle O. Rosaldo and Loius Lamphere titled *Women, Culture and Society*. The authors, in the text, examined the many interpretive problems associated with the inadequate treatment of women and gender in the field of anthropology. In this 1974 collection of ethnographies, Ortner revisited the nature/culture debate of earlier decades in her work, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' In this essay, Ortner argues that women subordination is culturally determined, and conclusively asserted that "the whole, scheme is a construct of culture rather than nature". In her contribution in the book, Rosaldo affirmed that sexual asymmetry is a universal fact of human societies, which she noted was as a result of the dichotomy between public and private domains. She then advocated that men be brought into the domestic spheres of life for the end of women subordination. *Women, Culture and Society* is, indeed, a compilation of ethnographic works about gender relations across cultures. Commenting on the book, Ifi Amadiume noted that the authors succeeded in showing the limitations of employing the simple division of social subjects on the basis of sex as a tool of analysis. *Women, Culture and Society* also sparked off a new departure in women studies: the question of gender as a cultural construct (Amadiume, 1987:5).

Although the works of the era were preoccupied with universal

subordination of women, and attempts were made to formulate a theory that would explain the assumed universal gender asymmetry focusing on African and Third World women for data generation. For this supposedly universal gender asymmetry project, few identified gender as cultural construct. According to Eriksen and Nielsen (2001), Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) and other edited collections about women and (increasingly) gender, contributed to permanent changes in the research priorities of anthropology, not only in the 1970s but beyond as these changes themselves continued to change in the 1980s and 1990s. Sally Slocum in 1975 published 'Woman the gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology' which appeared in Rayna Reiter's *Towards An anthropology of Women* (1975), a book that was one of the groundbreaking anthologies of feminist essays in anthropology to appear in the 1970s. Other books that belong to the category include Shirley Ardener's *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society* (1978), and an edited volume titled *Perceiving Women* (1975). Robert McC Netting's 'Women's Weapons: The Politics of Domesticity Among the Tofyar' (1979); Peggy R. Sanday in her work title 'Female Status in the Public Domain' (1979); and Karen Sacks's 'Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property' (1979) contributed in defining the basis of women's second-ratedness, with regard to private/public space discrepancies. To these anthropologists, economic variables determine these discrepancies. Sanday (1979) employed the cross-cultural correlational approach to test the relationship between the economic importance of women and public female power. From her study, she affirmed that when women participate in a balanced way with men in subsistence activities, they are most likely to receive public status. In other words, the enhancement of women economic status also enhances their participation in the public space.

Within this discursive exchange in the 1970s also emerged the distinctive gender-induced problems women anthropologists encounter in the field, and this also became part of the issues that women anthropologists addressed. Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt edited work titled *Women Cross-Culturally: Change and Challenge* (1975) thrusts issues that relate to women experiences as anthropologists. A section in the voluminous book, (Section Five), is titled 'Women in Anthropology'. Essays in this section include 'Women in Anthropology Profession - 1' by Diana Barker, 'Women in

Anthropology – 2' by Pat Caplan, 'The Female Factor in Anthropology' by Caroline Ifeka, 'Aboriginal Woman: Male and Female Anthropological Perspectives' by Rohrllich-Leavitt *et al*, 'Women and Fieldwork' by Janet Bujra among others. In 'Women and Fieldwork' Janet Bujra (1975) posited that the biological identity of the female fieldworker has a definite influence upon the character of the individual's fieldwork. She noted that both men and women anthropologists experience general problems such as personal relationships, self evaluation, role playing etc. However, the female anthropologist more often than not adopt the role of 'pseudo-man' which implies that she considers herself not just equal to but not different from men in the profession, both in the choice of research issues and the manner the researches are conducted including the type of questions asked. Indeed, the acceptance of 'pseudo male' approach in anthropology also means accepting the assumption that men are the principal actors in the important social space, and that women anthropologists who study women were second-rated researchers, as the study of women was accorded second-class status within the discipline. Again, women often feel that they must assume 'pseudo-male' identity with male informants, although men never play 'pseudo-female' role in order to acquire information from women (Bujra, 1975).

Cross-cultural studies of women's lives and experiences brought into focus the divergent realities, the universalities and particularities that characterize women's lives and experiences. Class, race, ethnic and religious variabilities, for instance, are indices that yield divergent data. Women in Islamic societies, for example, live under religious beliefs, practices (especially seclusion and veiling), and principles, that affect their day-to-day lives which are different from the experiences of women in non-Islamic societies, Even within the Islamic societies again, there is no homogeneity in women's experiences. As Durley (1986) has rightly highlighted, women's lives in Islamic societies are further characterized by the divergences between "city and villages, between settled agriculturalists and nomads, and especially between classes which makes generalization difficult" (Duley, 1986:407). Invariably, with these spectrums of literature on women cross-culturally, it became obvious that women in non-western societies had not been passive subjects to male dominance, colonialism, or world history in general (Sjorslev, 1998:

298). Researchers projected the role of women in reproduction and production through their personal experiences in the field. The era was also marked by issues like the role of women in development and the effect of development policies on women.

In the process of gathering and interrogating the cultural 'other', it became evident that there were discrepancies between the data collected by female anthropologists and male anthropologists. For instance in 1975, Rohrlich-Leavitt *et al* in their work 'Aboriginal Woman: Male and Female Anthropological Perspectives' observed that the studies of male and female anthropologists about Australian aboriginal women reflected marked discrepancies in the range and quality of the data collected in the field, the differences in the theoretical and methodological approaches, and in the accompanying ideologies" (Rohrlich-Leavitt *et al* 1975: 567). They, therefore, affirmed that an exclusively male study of a culture is incomplete. Male ethnographers, they then submitted, use male informants, "whether by inclination or because of cultural requirements, and observe the activities of males or those involving both sexes, but rarely those in which women alone participate", resulting in a partial ethnography which gives birth to distorted picture. Androcentric theory and methodology of many male ethnographers further distorted the image. In the final analysis, women anthropologists brought in new pictures to understanding gender relations.

A decade after the emergence of women studies in anthropology, precisely in the 1980s, gender discourse expanded to articulating cultural construction of relationships between men and women, and this gave rise to cultural particularities through diverse cultural constructions of power, and men and women's spaces in production and reproduction. Contextual understanding of power was, thus, integrated into the discourse on gender. From this time onward, gender issues began to acquire a more complex and richer profile through the contextualization of the experiences of men and women across cultures. In 1981, Ortner and Whitehead edited an influential book in gender discourse titled, *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*. In the book, they argued that gender, sexuality and reproduction are only symbols and as such are embedded in societal construction of meanings. Gender system, they further noted, is one of the prestige structures which a society

may construct. Indeed, Whitehead is one of the recent anthropologists to reaffirm cross-cultural variations on the gender constructions which Mead had noted decades earlier. Ifi Amadiume in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987) studied Igbo society and brought in a contextual understanding of sex and gender in an African society (Igbo society). She posited in her work that sex and gender in Igbo culture do not always mean the same thing as obtained in Western social thought. For, in Igbo culture, a woman can be a husband, and a daughter can be a male. This contextual definition of sex and gender was also explored in Oyewumi (1997) titled *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* where the author argued that women as perceived today in many African societies is of colonial/western invention. The sexed-body and gender attribution or what she called "bio logic" inherent in western social thought is absent in Oyo Yoruba of western Nigeria, She argued. In the 1980s, invariably, both the concept of 'sex' and 'gender' came under severe attacks. All these are part of hard-hitting critiques of western representation of cultural 'others'.

Researches carried out by women anthropologists in the 1980s were also characterized by a re-examination of some of earlier studied societies/cultures through the lens of gender-consciousness. In 1980 a female anthropologist, Annette B. Weiner published her research findings on her fieldwork in the 1970s on the role of women in Trobriand Islands. Her conclusion was quite different from what Malinowski had admitted of the society. For instance, Weiner submitted that women's position and role was of vital significance in Trobriand Islands in the social system of the people. For Sjorslev (1998), Weiner identified the basis of women political power in the culture, which she attributed to their position in the "mortuary distribution of bundles of banana leaves and skirts, organized, produced and controlled by women, provides the basis for strength and resiliency of Kiriwina traditions (Sjorslev, 1998: 302). Sjorslev further argued that Malinowski and other (male) anthropologists had ignored the role of women's wealth in the distribution system and they had, thus, failed to see how women and their economic power play important role in stability and change. A host of other gender responsive works that challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions on life in the other societies through the inclusion of

gender concerns was all exposing the neglected aspects in the documentation of a people's worldview. Increasingly, gender began to shape, in a tremendous way, the nature of anthropological concerns. From data coming from the fields, it became clear that there are diverse ways in which Western values may distort the contribution of women in other cultures, through the imposition of external inferences such as Eurocentricism and androcentrism.

Significantly, a number of scholars have observed the marginalization of gender issues and the underrating of women's contributions in scholarships, in the field of anthropology. According to Catherine Lutz in her work titled "The Erasure of Women's Writing in Socio-cultural Anthropology" (1990), this is done through the sidelining in citation (which is one of the canon-setting practices that legitimizes the voice of the cited author), denial of publication opportunity, especially when gender issues are concerned, among other practices. She noted that a canon-setting text like Marcus and Fischer's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986), which is one of the works used to introduce to graduate students the 'most significant' works of the recent past, underrated women's contributions in the field of social and cultural anthropology. According to her, of the 226 works the authors cited, 25 or 11 percent are women. This, obviously, implies that many land-breaking works of women anthropologists were excluded from the authors' consideration. Again, the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, which considered once a comprehensive of current anthropology and a detailed guide to the most significant works in the field, yet its articles, which are solicited by an editorial board, have rarely touched on gender/feminism. Of the 85 reviews of the sociocultural topics from 1977 through 1988, only one (a 1977 piece on women's status by Quinn) dealt with that significant issue. The politics surrounding the publication of gender-related materials and the underrating of women contributions are sour grapes in an academic discipline. This in itself exposes further the politics and power struggle which gender discourse engage in. Lutz, therefore, observed that this development implies that "dominant epistemologies might entail androcentric assumptions about nature and rationality". She, therefore, lamented political strategies inherent in the failure to publish works on women and works of women, works by black and anti-racist scholars while the tendency to overvalue works by

white scholars are prevalent. In her work *Engendering Knowledge: The Politics of Ethnography 2*, Pat Caplan concluded that this, indeed, highlights how knowledge is produced, anthropological mode of production and, the conditions and social relations that engender knowledge (Caplan, 1988:16).

Indeed, other fields such as Psychology, Economics, Philosophy, History, Religion, Literature and other social sciences and humanities impact positively and elaborate anthropological concerns. This is not surprising as Clifford Geertz in his paper titled, 'Blurred Genres' (1980) had noted the tendencies towards borrowing of ideas and methods from one discipline to another. In gender discourse, multidisciplinary influences rather than constituting distractions, form relevant discursive components which actually broaden and elaborate on anthropological interests. The reason is that gender discourse in itself is both inter- and multi-disciplinary in nature. For instance, Ester Boserup's work *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970) where she critiqued the assumption that modernization and industrialization has improved women's status in the Third World, Africa in particular provided data that are of interest in the field of anthropology. The study is also relevant to scholars' search to understand women's economic contributions in the Third World. According to Escobar (1995) this work and a number of other studies "have shown that development has not only rendered invisible women's contribution to the economy but it has had a detrimental effect on women's economic position and status" (Escobar, 1995: 171). Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock's *Women and Colonization* (1980), documented the destructive consequences of Western developmental approach, using anthropological perspectives, expanded and complemented Boserup's work. In the context of our discussion in this chapter, development should not be viewed in the narrow sense of the word whether as a process or as exchange but inclusive of all paraphernalia of the contact with the West, and all the outcomes that characterize that contact: marginalization of women's former power base, the sidelining of women's interests and role, the devaluing of those beliefs and practices that engendered her significance in the social networking, are all parts of the indices of westernization and 'development' (see Okonjo 1974, 1975, 1976 and Van Allen 1972, 1974ab, 1976 for other works that pay attention to colonialism and the loss of women

power base in Africa, especially in Igboland). Nevertheless, anthropology has remained distinctively unique through the use of ethnographic/qualitative technique in conveying its ideas.

Invariably, the 1980s marked a decisive change in anthropological researches. The impact of gender discourse on anthropology brought in other issues, and meaning became context-specific and further offered deeper interpretations of anthropological reports. The shift from women studies to gender studies widened the scope of understanding and interpretation of women condition within cultural and societal contexts through the integration of men. Gender as a new analytical tool enhanced the quality of the data collected in the field and the analysis of the same ethnographic data. Whether one talks about power, kinship, the oppressed/the marginalized, the colonized or in fact knowledge production, gender was there to offer a new insight into our understanding of power and human relations. In the area of economic anthropology, for instance, as if a reaction against 'Man the Hunter', Frances Gahlberg published an edited volume titled *Woman the Gatherer* (1981). This shaped further the conceptualization of small scale economy. Retrogressively, in 1971 and 1975, Linton, and Sally Slocum respectively have published 'Woman the Gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology'. For Linton, there is unwarranted undue theoretical emphasis given to hunting in anthropological reconstructions of the evolution of hunting-gathering groups (Quinn 1977). Sally Slocum in her 1975 publication criticized the concept of "Man the Hunter" as developed by Sherwood Washburn and C. Lancaster (1968). Sally Slocum challenged the bias in the discipline of anthropology which pride itself in objectivity. According to her:

The perspective of women is, in many ways, foreign to an anthropology that has been developed and pursued primarily by males. There is a strong male bias in the question asked, and the interpretations given. This bias has hindered the full development of our discipline as "the study of human animal. – (Slocum, 1975, as reprinted in MacGee 1989: 394)

The publication of Gahlberg (1981) was, as it were, a revisitation of and a further attack on the marginalization of women position in the production of knowledge in anthropology and the exclusion of women contribution in the evolution of human culture history.

The effect of Gahlberg (1981) was revolutionary in the discipline. Eriksen and Nielsen (2001) summarized it thus:

In 1967 it had still been unproblematic to speak of non-agricultural societies under the heading 'Man the Hunter'. In 1981, the collection of *Woman the Gatherer* was published (Dahlberg 1981), and since the late 1970s, this kind of economy has been known as foraging, or hunting and gathering economy. In many cases, it was shown the gathering conducted by women and children contributed much more to subsistence than the men's hunting. – (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001: 125)

Arguably, in the 1980s till the present, the objectifying gaze has turned, not on women alone as exemplified by feminist anthropology and women's studies of 1970s, but on men, women and children for a better understanding of human condition. Chinyere Ukpokolo's recent publication titled 'Gender, Symbol and Traditional Peacebuilding Among the Nanka-Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria (2007) is a re-examination of the taken-for-granted assumption that women lack participation in 'oji' (kolanut) and 'ofo' (staff of authority and justice) ritual performances in Igbo culture. The work, utilizes the female presence in Igbo cosmology, linking this to the cyclical, non-linear worldview of the people, and exploring and relating this to 'oji' and 'ofo' ritual performances, brought earlier conclusions into question. The work thus, critiqued the long-held assumption in the literature by Igbo scholars and non-Igbo scholars alike concerning these peace symbols to reveal hitherto unreported dimensions of female participation. The case being made here is that it will be oversimplification of the issue to assume that only those works written by androcentric and Euro-centric non-African scholars that deny women of space in socio-cultural reality. There is, therefore, the need for continuity in the interrogation of not only the cultural 'others' but also 'selves' within the orbit of gender discourse in anthropology utilizing the space which postmodernism offers.

Post-modernism, which is a component of what Fischer and Marcus (1986) termed 'postparadigm', the midwife of gender discourse, brought significant changes both in the manner of knowledge production and the content of that knowledge itself. Postmodernism is not just an era, but also "an ideology, an analytical

perspective and also an aesthetic that described the worldas discontinuous and fragmented,... a world of many, local, individual voices, rather than a world of hegemonic schools and ideologies” (Eriksen et al 2001:140). It is an epoch that gave voice to the voiceless, leading to the increasing recognition of those that had hitherto been undermined/peripherized. Within this ideological paradigm, cultural heterogeneity and pluralism was upheld as encompassing humans’ attempt at understanding himself, and human kind is progression to the promise land. The question of homogeneity of knowledge which had characterized rationality, championed by Western science/rationality came under energetic attack. Jacques Derrida, for instance, asserts that the entire history of Western metaphysics from Plato to the present is founded on a classic, fundamental error (see Bresler, 2003; MacCarthy, 1991). The great error is in searching for what Derida calls ‘transcendental signified’, an external point of reference upon which one may build a concept or philosophy. He further submitted that Western metaphysics has invented a variety of terms that function as centres: ‘reason’, ‘self’, ‘origin’, ‘being’, ‘truth’, ‘essence’, and so on. Each can operate as a concept that is self-sufficient and self-originating and can serve as transcendental signified against which others can measure themselves, denying the representation of other voices across cultural boundaries. Male hegemony, which has characterized values and meanings, constituting the framework of epistemologies, cannot be separated from this transcendental signified. The postmodernist movement has provided a leeway, an alternative mode of representation, through the critique of the framework of the Enlightenment, and by extension, male hegemony. This period, as Fischer and Marcus (1986) have again rightly noted, is characterized by a pendulum swing from an era of totalizing theory that was relatively secure to a period when paradigms lose their legitimacy and authority. It is within this atmosphere that gender discourse emerged to unveil the power play that turned representation into politics, occluding a particular reality from entering into historical arena.

Indeed, the emergence of gender discourse in anthropology over the past three decades has further engendered knowledge production and opened up a whole range of issues of anthropological concern that have continued to shape our world and our definition of ourselves and others. Gender discourse has ever since continued to

thrust social and cultural constructions of meanings and symbolisms, some of which were until recently, unacknowledged. The bridging of the gap between reality and assumption, which gender discourse engages in, and the integration of this into a people's categorization in the anthropological literature, is expected to continue to shape and determine the future of anthropology, the science of humankind.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the preoccupations and trends in gender discourse in the field of social and cultural anthropology. From the fore-going analysis, we have been able to identify major preoccupations over time. From the earliest, rare, presence of women, to interest on the voices of women which was prevalent in the discipline in the 1970s when modern feminist anthropology emerged, to the 1980s when a holistic approach to the understanding of women through the study of both sexes, knowledge production has greatly been enriched. While the women studies focused on sex role and status of women in the sociopolitical space, gender discourse identified cultural construction of sex and gender as they translate into power in socio-cultural contexts. The emerging scenario is the interplay of power in production and reproduction by showcasing how sex identity and gender attribution are features of power struggle at the underlay of human relationships. Women condition was reflected as the consequence of the interplay of power relations within the society, a product of male hegemony. The interest in holism evident in gender analysis, increasingly, impacted positively on the understanding of humans. Those anthropologists, especially women anthropologists, who re-examined both the earlier works with the hope of unveiling the constructs and structures that have constituted and gave credence to the inequality, and unjustifiable be framework of value, through their fieldwork experiences have brought new perspectives into anthropology, and have all contributed to our understanding of ourselves.

We cannot but reason that anthropology owes it to humanity not only to document human behaviour across cultures but also ensure that in this documentation objectifying reality through the lens of gender will ensure that accurate and authentic representations are made. This will not only provide for a better

and more comprehensive cultural landscape in the literature, but will enrich the data of those interested in utilizing such findings in policy formulation and programmes. This, in turn, guarantee that they do not make avoidable mistakes by neglecting half of the human population. This omission will not only imply our failure to realize a significant goal of anthropology but will also constitutes a signification, a missing link, in our attempt to move knowledge and humanity forward. This overview has also highlighted that the need for a critical reinterpretation of indigenous cultures through indigenous voices/perspective still remains part of the mandate to African and other Third World anthropologists, especially those interested in gender discourse. Although much has been done in this area, there are vast issues yet to be interrogated as evidenced in Ukpokolo (2007). We strongly believe that in the 21st century, much can still be done in reconstructing anthropological knowledge if we are, indeed, going to have epistemologies devoid of bias of any type, be it androcentrism or ethnocentrism. Otherwise, anthropology's claim to knowledge, its claim to reliable knowledge of cultural alternatives, will continue to be, for a long time to come, under 'energetic' attack.

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