SUMMARY

The difference between women and men lie in culture. They are socially constructed and not biological determined. The social construction of the African women is the outcome of cultural learning through the process of socialization. Socialization is a life time process though childhood socialization is most significant. Basically, the process occurs through the family, the school, the church and the mass media, known as the agents of socialization. The African culture is entrenched in patriarchy and as a result the African woman is less valued than the African man. The man wields authority over the women and this authority may be experienced as oppressive. The African woman only becomes relevant from the point of view of the African man. These differences between the woman and the man are reinforced through cultural practices such as socio-political, religious, economic and legal institutions from generation to generation.

INTRODUCTION

Every society has a culture which shows the patterned way of life of the particular people, no matter how simple that culture may appear to be. Human beings have the capacity to create and sustain culture (Modo, 2004), thus every culture contains within it those features which guarantee the survival of its people. The different parts of each culture must fit together if it is to function efficiently; the different parts of each culture must fit together if it is to function efficiently; and of course every culture is to a large extent an efficiently functioning system.

Tylor (1871) defined culture as “the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. Krober (1953) defined it as “The mass of learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas and values and the behaviour they induce”. This definition viewed together with the fact that the networks of relationships unique among human beings are habits and
behaviours that are acquired; imply that society is part of culture (Onwuejeogwu, 1992). Modo (2004) defines culture as “acquired human behaviour and its manifestations. Such manifestations could be in material or non-material form”.

Culture is learned and shared from generation to generation through the socialization process (Omite and Ogionwo, 1994) and in most cases cultural behaviour differs in form from one culture to another giving rise to cultural variations. Such variations may exist in cooking practices, bodily adornment, marital practices and so on. In other words, culture may be universal, yet unique as observed by Modo (2004). The African people lay much emphasis on culture and attach much importance to one’s place of birth and lineage. In other words it is not the individual that matters so much as the individual with others (Etuk, 200). For example it is still a common practice in traditional Ibibio land (in Nigeria) that if someone whose origins and connections are not very well known, a stranger or sojourner for instance infringes a rule or violates a custom, the appropriate sanctions are usually suspended until those connection and origins are ascertained; for that individual may be part of a relationship which prohibits the application of the sanction (Etuk, 2003), in such cases, it is not the individual in isolation who is primary but the chain of relationships in which the individual stands. Without such “roots” the individual would be quite exposed and helpless. Therefore, African people lay much emphasis on culture, for the African, culture often times implies something that cannot be questioned or changed. For example in Ghana there is an Fm ration station that repeats throughout the day, “Wonnim ammameru a, wonsu e amaneru” meaning “when you know culture you don’t destroy culture” (Akintude, 2001).

However, African culture consists, even in language of endemic sexism that has given rise to gender stratification, male entitlement, female subordination and gender inequalities. The experience of women on the African continent especially in the manifestations of patriarchy, suggest that women are not seen or considered in their own rights but rather they are appendages of their husbands: To this degree that “the concept of human rights have tended to mean men’s right” (Akintude, 2001). Therefore women have not been studied in their own rights; and this discourse is an attempt to make contribution in the area of the cultural ban on women and to direct focus on women inclusiveness and empowerment.

AN OVERVIEW OF CULTURE AND THE ARCANE WOMAN

This issue of male domination pervades most societies in the world. Akintude (2001) describes the world as “male dominated with evidence of old tradition and myths giving eminence to men to the women detriment in fact the culture of the world give the verdict detriment that women were less than men.

Etuk (2002) pointed out that what placed women in their different positions below men were the different beliefs and custom of societies. Mythology and folklore were part of such beliefs and customs used in tribal societies to explain
and justify the status-quo. In most African cultures it is believed that a woman is similar to a property acquired for the comfort of the man. Hence wife beating is one aspect of domestic violence in African families. Also in traditional African societies, the girl child is not recognized as an important member of the family and a family with only female children is regarded a “barren”. In line with this belief the girl child loses inheritance rights to her father’s property and only sons have the right of inheritance. The importance of this practice or belief is further enhanced by the fact that even in matrimonial societies men (mother’s brother) are most often in charge. Again in the area of economic and political role though women take part in the production and consumption of goods, men usually dominate in matters of exchange of such goods between the community and outsiders (Modo, 2004).

In addition, he observes that among the Nupe only women are witches (‘gaci’). It is believed also that the female witch become effective and deadly only when she adds male power- ‘eshe’ (a power similar but superior to witchcraft) to it. Another aspect of the oppression and affliction of the African women is the area of widowhood. As rightly opinioned by Akintude (2001) “what the African widow experiences during widowhood is better imagined than experienced”. Among the Yoruba you can hardly find a man who dies a natural death and the ready suspect is of course the wife. However, when the wife dies the contrary is the case. The widower is never accused or suspected. In the case of the female widow, she is often stigmatized as the “killer” of her husband and made to undergo dehumanizing rituals.

In Anambra State of Nigeria, “daughters of the lineage” will make sure that the widow cries early in the morning and late at night daily until they feel satisfied to relieve her of the cry. For three months she will be “purposely confined to protect her from the spirit of her dead husband. She will have to be wearing a tattered cloth and she will not be heard. If she wants to call anybody, she will have to use a stick to tap on a chair”. (Akintude, 2001). Taboos surrounding women’s menstruation also restrict their movement and labour. For example, they may not be allowed to cook for their husbands because they are considered impure or polluted and they cannot get near certain grooves or shrines. The African kinship and family institution primarily locates men and women in their status quo of the dominating and the dominated, the liberated and the unliberated, and the superior and the inferior.

The extended family performed many functions which included the socialization of its young members into the norms and values of society, allocation of land and the adjudication of disputes. Children were perceived as belonging to the extended family. It had collective responsibility irrespective of the fact that the immediate domestic units of the nuclear family practice facilitated the inculcation of norms and the socialization process and childcare resources could be poled. Iyavyar et al (2001) notes that traditional society in Nigeria was ordered by a clear gender division of task and a strong sense of hierarchy.
Male children were a source of pride and pleasure; wives were acquired through the payment of dowry or bride price. As a result they were regarded as a form of property with productive and reproductive functions. They had no rights of property or inheritance except in Muslim families (Iyavyar et al 2001). The socially recognized role of women was to bear and raise children, care for their husbands and engage in household chores. They occupied a servile position and were dependent on their husbands. For example they engaged in farmland work, wood gathering, trekked long distances with heavy loads on their heads to and from the farm, carrying babies on their backs as well (sometimes) but are not entitled to financial proceeds from the farm lands they cultivate for their husbands.

Women in Nigeria were not given the privilege of decision making in the nuclear family, the extended family unit or the wider community. Leadership belonged only to the males, Iyavyar et al (2001) notes that though such attitudes have been slow to change the number of women politicians have increased in recent times. However, they are still very much fewer than men.

The status of some women have also been enhanced especially those who have acquired high levels of schooling. Nevertheless, girls still enjoy less educational opportunities than boys. (National Planning Commission Abuja and UNICEF Nigeria, 2001). As a result they also have more limited employment opportunities than men and tend to be concentrated in low skilled, low-income jobs (Iyavyar et al 2001).

**SOCIALIZATION PROCESS AND THE AFRICAN WOMAN IN SOCIETY**

Giddens and Dunever (2000) defines socialization as the process whereby the helpless infant gradually becomes a self-aware, knowledgeable person, skilled in the ways of the culture into which he or she is born. Otite and Ogionwo (1994). It is the internalization of societal values, norms and beliefs. Through the socialization processes the individual in society learns bow to points out that in broad terms, socialization may be defined as an interactional process whereby a person’s behaviour is modified to conform with expectations held by members of the groups to which he belongs. They note that socialization refers only to those changes in behaviour and attitude having their origins in interaction with other persons and which occur through learning. Socialization can be accomplished through learning the folkways or customs, symbols and language of one’s society, reading books, journals and have in the socially acceptable manner both as a person and as a member of society and gets integrated into the group. Integration is achieved by the preparation of new members or potential new members to behave by doing the things the larger group wants done, to think in the way the group desires and to interact in the approved manner.

The groups or social contexts within which significant processes of socialization occur are referred to as agents of socialization. They include the family, the school, the peer group, the mass media and the church. However, family types differ from one culture to another and even within the same culture.
The conjugal type of family exists in European and American cultures while the extended family type exists in the African and Asian societies. In the conjugal type of family the parents are nearly always the sole agents of the socialization process whereas in the extended family, the control and direction of its numerous children require the supervision and regulation of not only the parents but also of all other members of the extended family.

Socialization from the very beginning sets women at a location and sets men at another location. Female socialization experiences stress connection and concern for others from early childhood. Chodorow, (1978). Brody (1990:80), for example argues: girls are encouraged to identify with and be dependent on, theft mothers. As the ones who are taught to be nurturers, homemakers, and “kin keepers” in the family, they constantly receive signals that they should be like their mothers. Boys, on the other hand, are encouraged to be instrumental and active like their fathers”. In the past, Nigerian gilds were socialized into the roles of housewife and childbearing as well as nurturing. They were also socialized into roles of the weaker sex. They were expected to be ‘good’ and to bear ‘good’ children. Therefore when the child is ‘bad’ that child is termed ‘the mother’s child’. But when the child is doing well, he/she is the father’s child and pride. The girl gradually learns to walk gracefully and is told that in family gatherings she is only to be seen and not to be heard. She is socialized into domestic activities. Otite and Ogionwo (1994) observe that this could be exhibited in character or in acrobatic and wrestling displays. For example young boys gradually learnt not to cry in situations where it may be quite appropriate for young girls to cry. Robert (1996) points out the suggestion that the West African parallel to behaviour being considered “unnatural” for women was to say that such behaviour was “un-African or ‘against tradition”.

Also, the school as a socializing agent encourages students to pursue a definite curriculum of subjects, restrict certain subjects to children of each sex. This is true for both single sex and mixed schools (Ledaar et al 1973). The school curricular sets girls to go into leisure subjects such as English, Home Economics or Catering, Music, English, Literature and other similar subjects while it sets boys to go into technical and science subjects such as Engineering, Technical drawing, Woodwork, Surveying, Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics. Again, schools encourage boys to be more assertive and achievement oriented than girls (Bailey et al 1992). In the area of spot the girls are encouraged to play table-tennis and volley ball or hockey games while the boys are encouraged to play boxing, football and horse ridding.

Newspaper, periodicals, journals, other printed materials, radio, television and video games as well as the internet, form part of the daily experience of people, influencing attitudes, and opinions of young people - The picture books and television programmes with which young children come into contact tend to emphasizes differences between male and female attributes. Over twenty years ago, a research was carried out to analyze gender roles in some of the most widely
used pre-school books and it was found that there were several clear differences, in gender roles (Weitzman, 1972). Males played larger parts in the stories and pictures, girls were portrayed in domestic activities and women were portrayed as wives, mothers or witches or fairy godmothers. The church as a socializing agent teaches religious values and moral codes that shape the thinking and behaviour of the individual. Sex in socialization can be observed in the role of women as nun. Although the rituals and observances of different order vary, all nuns are regarded as ‘brides of Christ’ (Gidden, 2001). In the African traditional religion, most goddesses are also ‘housewives’. That is they have husbands, for example in some Nigerian religion, the ‘Olokun’ goddess (‘mami-water’) has a husband. Also priestesses are wives of male goods.

**AN OVERVIEW OF PATRIARCHY AND THE LOCUST STANDI OF WOMEN**

History and culture have produced certain myths and generalization about women, which to some degree apply to practically every human society. For example, women produced children, are mothers and wives, they take care of them and are subordinate to male authority. Nigeria is a patriarchal society where women engage in the same rigorous activities with men. However, the men determine how the financial benefits that are the outcome of such tasks will be shared or used. For example in farming societies, particularly in the farming of palm nuts, women together with the men farm, process and trade but give the money to the men who might decide to keep it for themselves (Onwuejeogwu, 1992). Also identified by Jike (2001) is the existence of “institutionalized legitimization stereotypes which more or less “portrayed women as appendages of a traditionally entrenched patriarchal system of male dominances”.

Also, the fact that the social structure maintains a low level of differentiation for women has been observed by Ledaar et al (1973). “Women are expected to attain to, and do attain to lower levels of skills” (Ledaar et al, 1973). They are seen to belong to a section of the labour market which functions in the economy by providing a supply of necessary low-cost labour (Bernstein 1973). Welfare, counseling, social work and other similar subjects are frequently seen as something women are innately well equipped to do because they are innately equipped to be wives and mothers. It was a “common tendency in the past to treat a woman’s class as derived from her husband if she married and from her father if she is not” (Bernstein 1973). It has been observed that Nigerian, male undergraduates dominate the science and technology fields, especially, in Agricultural and Forestry Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Petroleum Engineering and Veterinary medicine while the female are mostly in Nursing and Human Nutrition (Erinosho 1994, Balogun 1985a, 1987).

On their, part, Cassel and Maths (1997) noted that there are barriers to women leadership in public organizations. These barriers include lack of educational potentials and qualifications, the patriarchal factor and management. In the writings of Igbue (2004) Achunine (2004), Erinosho (1994), and many others
patriarchy is the strong factor against women’s ability to occupy the positions of organizational leadership and management and to a large extent women are excluded from high statuses occupations and positions of power. The rise of the women’s liberation movement has produced the hot debate on the reasons for a sexually based division of labour and the inequality between male and female roles. One reason they gave was the fact that gender roles are culturally determined and inequality between the sexes result from socially constructed power relationships.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Socialization theory is sometimes referred to as social learning. Socialization is the process by which individuals learn the culture of their society (Otite and Ogionwo, 1994); Haralambos and Halborn, 2000). It has also been defined as a “process which connects societal structure with the promotion of personality via the idea of role learning or internalization (Ganny, 2004). Socialization begins at childhood and is a lifelong process. The agents of socialization include the family, the educational institutions, the mass media, the occupational group and the peer group (a group whose members share similar circumstances and are often of similar age). Socialization guarantees the transmission of norms, values, beliefs and custom of any society from generation to generation through the learning process.

The family is the basic agent of socialization of younger ones. Social learning as the child grows up represents an extremely important stage in the socialization process. The processes of child training in different societies provide diverse sets of values. Thus the Yuroke fathers would stress thrift and sexual restraint while the Comanche father of North America would stress bravery (Onwuejeogwu, 1992). The use of verbal applications such as “You’re a naughty boy” or “That’s a good girl” is to lead children to identify with their gender. The fact that male and female children are exposed to different activities has been identified by Oakly, (1974). For example, girls are particularly encouraged to become involved in domestic tasks. In the Nigerian society, the mother and other members of the family play their parts in socializing or educating the children. The girls are usually left to theft mothers to teach them how to cook and perform domestic works, for instance, among the Igbo of Nigeria. Among the Fulani the eldest brother teaches the younger brothers how to herd cattle and obey their seniors (Onwuejeogwu, 1994). Thus from birth males and females learn masculine and feminine roles.

Onwuejeogwu (1992) reveals that women are in charge of Agriculture. The men do the heavy clearing, while the women do the weeding. Men help the women in harvesting and transporting the baskets to the compound. Men tend the tobacco, palm nut, raffia-palm and kola-nut tree plantation and from the sales provide money for the family’s use. Men and women make pottery, but men sell the pottery outside the villages. Women also do the general cooking and feeding of the
families. Small children look after the small babies and stronger ones fetch water for domestic use. When the children are big enough they help their parents according to the sex. Age grade associations and secret societies exist separately for men and women in society. Some of the women associations have elaborate initiations ceremonies in which the girls are taught and educated in the values of womanhood (Onwugeogwu, 1992). Conclusively it becomes obvious that the African society deeply socializes it women folk in the culture of womanhood (for example domesticity, care- giver, trainer, farmhand, etc) and second place or subordinate to men from childhood and for life.

Also Erinosho (1994) points out that infant toys are sex-typed arid that while girls’ toys relate to domestic and family roles, boys’ toys and more scientific and educational. Thus early socialization results in masculine and feminine thoughts, attributes and behaviour patterns. Nosike (1996) writes concerning Nigeria that “socialization often account for the popular belief that girls do not need education since they will marry and raise children rather than work at a job outside the home where educational qualifications are required”. Alutu (2000) adds that consequently, having been excluded from education many women have come to believe that their abilities are restricted to cooking, cleaning and taking care of children based on the traditional and customary values in the society.

The mass media, industries and social organizations are not left out of the socialization process that prepares females for the ‘cult’ of womanhood. Pereira (1997) writes that, “woman is not an autonomous being, since she is defined not in herself but in relation to a man… one is not born, but rather becomes a woman”. The picture books, magazines, journals and magazine programmes and adverts as well as the internet with which individuals come into contact; all tend to emphasize differences between male and female attributes. Interviews carried out on conceptions of women among Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, TIV, Tula, Biron (Plateau State) and Krio (Sierra Leone) revealed some characteristics of women which include female, mature, married, mother, housekeeper, bearer of children, cook, wife, farmhand, and role model for her children. Hence in Hausa there is a phrase, ‘ba mata ba gida’ meaning literally, “no wife no home” (Report of the Network for Women studies in Nigeria, 1996).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The socio-cultural construction of women vis-à-vis power relationship of society via their roles paint a picture of the African woman as the helpless, the subordinated, and the oppressed irrespective of cultural change and inclusion into the global culture. This is because global culture itself is embedded upon the features of characteristics of the gender status quo. Even in the role taking and role setting social learning becomes the focal point from which society draws conclusion about who or what women are.
REFERENCES


