Gender & Culture in African Societies

Duration: 6 Weeks
Course Objectives

• To critically examine existing assumptions about gender and culture
• To explore how gender relations are shaped by power relations and cultural practices in different socio-economic contexts
• To examine how cultural forms manifest unequal power relations within society.
Learning Objectives

• By the end of the session you should be able to:
  – Explain how culture shapes the positions of women and men in African societies
  – Analyze cultures and cultural practices as dynamic, contested and rooted in socio-economic conditions and power relations.
  – Identify how key concepts in gender studies are related to debates about accepted notions of culture.
Week 7: Introduction to Gender and Culture in Africa

At the end of today’s class, you should be able to:

– Define culture
– Identify the components of culture
– Myths about culture
– Distinguish between tradition and culture
– Establish the relationship between gender and culture.
– Examine culture as rooted in contemporary socio-economic power relations.
What is culture and what are its components?

• Discussion: What comes to mind when you hear the word culture?
Definitions of Culture

• Here is an often-used definition of culture:
• "Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by (a person) as a member of society." (Tylor 1958 [1871]: 1
• Note the links between the material aspects of culture (art) and the non-material (morals, etc)
• Link between definitions and key components of culture
Myths about culture

• First myth - Culture is static. In reality, culture changes over time in response to both internal and external forces.

• In terms of internal forces, as children migrate in search of work, our ideas about who should care for parents change. First, people use extended family members. When that unavailable, resort to paying non-kin to do so.

• In terms of external forces, telecommunications technology, colonialism, etc are good examples.
Myths about culture

• Second myth: Culture is the same as tradition.
• Tradition refers to a subset of the components of culture, specifically beliefs, rituals that have been passed down from generation to generation. Inherent in the concept of tradition is the notion of statism.
• Hobsbawm and the concept of invented traditions.
• Culture on the other hand is dynamic.
Gender as a cultural construction

• Culture is a dynamic construct and is socially constructed: Among the Wodaabe of the Sahel the men are the ones who apply make-up.
Gender as a cultural construction

- In some parts of Africa, men carry babies on their backs, in other parts, women do.
Gender as a cultural construction II

• Same context, different practices over time: Cape Coast Vice-Chancellor (2011)
What accounts for different cultural constructions of gender?

• Biological explanations and its limits: Biological reproduction is used to justify the confinement of the woman to the home
• Cultural explanations and its emphasis on power dynamics
Cultural practices that emphasize equality and inequality

• Discussion of Assitan Diallo article and use the Malian case to illustrate how Malian cultural practices (nuptiality advisors who are there to ensure that since women, unlike men cannot have more than one partner, the sexual needs of women with her partner are met) enhance female sexuality and how some (female genital mutilation) constrain female sexuality
Moves around the world towards egalitarian practices

- Family dynamics: House husbands in Teshie Nungua whose partners are abroad earning a lot more money than they could make in Ghana
- Paternity leave (e.g. Golden Tulip two weeks Leave for new fathers, GIMPA, Third World Network, Blue Skies)
- Religious institutions that allow women to lead (women ministers)
Summary of main points

• Culture comprises the material (art, architecture) and non-material (norms, beliefs, customs and practices, knowledge)
• Culture is dynamic
• Gender is socially constructed
• Cultural practices can create gender inequality
• Modifications in cultural practices are now opening up spaces for gender equality
Class Exercise

• Identify one cultural practice that promotes gender equality in the Ghanaian context
• Identify one cultural practice that promotes gender inequality in the Ghanaian context
Sure God created man before woman. But then you always make a rough draft before the final masterpiece. ~Author Unknown
Learning objectives

• At the end of today’s class, you should be able to:
  – Identify the ways in which social institutions create, reinforce and perpetuate unequal gender relations.
The Family

• Socialisation: Ways in which it creates inequality in the family context
  – Gender division of labour
  – Gender relations (behaviour expectations of women and men within the family context: who should make decisions)
  – Bridewealth
  – Wife inheritance
Religion 1: Leadership in religious institutions

- Old testament reference to Deborah and Esther
- Men as pastors, women as congregation
  - For Charismatic Churches: Compare CAFM, IGCG, World Miracle, Royal House Chapel, Lighthouse Chapel (Mega Churches and membership) versus Solid Rock (Smaller Churches)
- For orthodox churches point out the Catholic Church - restrictions on females as Reverend Mothers
- For Islam, prohibitions on females as Imams
Religion 11: Practices that reinforce inequality

- Covering of head (Muslim and some Christian denominations)

- Separate seating (e.g. Pentecost, Mosque, Methodist, Catholic in the past)

- Women not allowed to talk in certain gatherings
Religion 11 Cont’d

• Trokosi – Prevalent among the Ewe and Dangbe and in Benin, south western Nigeria and Togo. Estimates range between 5,000 and 20,000 (Dovlo and Adzoye 1995 and Ameh, 1998). Started in the C18th in Togo and Benin. Nine percent are below age 10. In the past livestock was used, after the 18th century started using girls
Religion II cont’d

• Witchcraft: Witchcraft allegations about women preventing family members from achieving success. Witches of Gambaga Film reinforced

• Widowhood Rites: Cannot work for a period. Men do not have to wear dark clothes for a year, women do. Dehumanising rituals carried out on women such as having to spend a night with the corpse.
Scriptural verses on egalitarianism

• There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. *Galatians 3.28*

• O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you might know each other [not that you might despise each other]. Verily the most honored among you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous. *Islam. Qur'an 49.13*
Scriptural Verses on Subordination

• Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. -Titus 2:4-5

The Quran in Sura 2:282 says:

• And let two men from among you bear witness to all such documents [contracts of loans without interest]. But if two men be not available, there should be one man and two women to bear witness so that if one of the women forgets (anything), the other may remind her Sura 2:282
Chieftaincy

• Male chiefs and their powers
• Queen mothers and their limited powers (Akan system - queen mothers nominate the chief but do not have the powers of the chief)
• National House of Chiefs, not of Queen mothers
Summary of main points

• Gender differences are emphasised right from home
• These differences are reinforced outside the home as in our religious and political institutions
Take home Exercise

• What practices (both formal and informal) promote gender inequality and gender equality at the University of Ghana?
Week 9: Gender Images and representation: media and pop culture

Learning objectives

At the end of today’s class, you should be able to:

• Identify the different ways in which gender is represented in the media and popular culture.

• Differentiate between empowering and disempowering gender images in various forms of media.
The boy is the biological son of the doctor, but the doctor is not the father of the boy. What is the Doctor to the boy?
What is Media?

- Media as institutions of socialization besides the family and educational institutions.
- Media as cultural institutions - Producing culture, channels for transmitting cultural products and also shaping culture.
- Reflective role - Media as mirrors of society
- Constructive roles - Framing in news and camera shots/angles etc.
- Media as ideological institutions – perpetuate and reinforce dominant societal stereotypes about gender, through images, language, music films etc.
Images and Representation

• Images – portrayal of women in media
• Representations- symbols, language through
  - Stereotyping
  - Objectification
  - Commodification
  - Sexualisation
  - Vilification- coverage e.g. gender based violence and abuse
Framing

• Framing refers to the ways in which aspects of a perceived reality are selected and made more salient in a communication context

• Frames are constructed in such ways as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation etc

• Frames affect people’s perceptions and acceptance of issues

• Frames can reinforce myths such as stories that suggest victims of rape are responsible for it; they asked for it/brought it on themselves usually linked to clothing.
Forms of Media Images and Representation

• Books- educational material, language of sexualisation

• Newspapers- marginalization, framing, ghettoisation, annihilation through trivialization and objectification
  Eg. Ghana Maternal Mortality Rate (GMMR) report

• Radio- Radio a friendly medium. Greater opportunities for women’s engagement with radio. However, entertainment and information programming tend to stereotype women; language
Forms of Media Images continued

- Television - visuals objectify and stereotype women (cooking, washing are women’s jobs)
- Film - stereotype, and objectify women and subject them to male gaze
- New Media - Greater opportunities for women to engage with social media which have comparatively less controls. However, high incidence of pornography and sexualisation
- Traditional Media - folk tales, proverbs etc.
- Advertising - objectification, commoditization and sexualisation. This is especially the case with music videos
What is popular culture?

• Fiske refers to popular culture as “more a culture of process than of products”
• A process that evolves through social circulation of meanings, values, and pleasures . . . the processes of forming social identities and social relationships, . . . entering into relation with the larger social order in a particular way and from a particular position
Definition continued

- Folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, working class culture, etc.
- Signifying practices - cultural texts such as soap operas, pop music, movies etc.
Manifestations

• Soap Operas and Reality Shows- Commercial interest overrides concerns about sexualisation of women- E.g. Big Brother Africa –party/dancing sessions

• Musical lyrics- innuendos e.g. *Asie Ho*; *Goozy goozy gander etc.*
Summary of main points

• The media is a powerful social institution
• The ways in which media images are presented/framed help shape our views on what women/men are and how they should/should not behave
• Media often perpetuate disempowering views about women
• The media can, however, be a source of empowering messages about women.
Take home exercise

• As you watch your favourite soap opera/Nigerian movie this week, think about the different ways in which it portrays women/men in an empowering or disempowering manner.
Week 10: Relationships and Sexuality

Learning objectives

• At the end of today’s class, you should be able to:
  – Explain the implications of gendered constructions of sexuality for intimate relationships in Africa.
  – Identify how the construction of sexuality promotes conformity to heterosexual relationships and sex mainly as a means of reproduction.
Defining Sexuality

• Sexuality refers to erotic attractions, identity and practices
Heteronormativity

• The belief that normal sexual relationships are between women and men
  – The cultural practices and symbols that reinforces this belief
• The belief that sex is for reproduction and thus childless marriages are problematic (Adomako Ampofo et al, 2009)
• Lack of appreciation of sex as pleasurable
Heteronormativity continued

• Men are to initiate and enjoy sex, women in the West are to be passive. While in Ghana, among the Akan especially, women have a right to enjoy sex, a woman who expresses too much knowledge about sex is seen as promiscuous. It is also not acceptable for a woman to be seen as running after sex.
Conformity and control of female sexuality

• Control of dressing; Apuskeleke versus otto pfister whilst in a place like California, law against sagging

• Virgin clubs for girls but not boys. (Darkwah and Arthur 2006: 136 on female: male ratio of 3: 1 in sample of virgin clubs in Accra and Kumasi)

• Female Genital Mutilation
Violence

• Physical violence
• Psychological violence
• Emotional violence
• Highlight concept of intersectionality here and how it is implicated in violence
sexual violence

• GDHS 2008 statistics:
  – 8% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have experienced sexual abuse by their husbands whiles none is recorded for men.
  – UNICEF reports 1,427 defilement cases in 2006
Culture and sexual violence

• Pervasiveness of the idea that women who are raped asked for it.
• Idea that men who rape are under the spell of evil spirits and thus not responsible for their actions.
• Disbelief in the notion of rape, particularly marital rape as evident in the Akan proverb, “No one can pull the loin cloth of a woman without her knowledge.” (Adomako Ampofo and Prah 2009: 102)
Summary of main points

• Men are to initiate and enjoy sex, women in the West are to be passive, women in Ghana are not to be seen as running after sex.
• Emphasis on the chastity of women while men are excused
Week 11: Gender, Work and Livelihoods

Learning objectives

- At the end of today’s class, you should be able to:
  - Define the sexual division of labour
  - Distinguish between reproductive and productive labour
  - Discuss the gender segregation of reproductive work
  - Discuss the changing patterns of reproductive work
Learning objectives continued

– Examine the gender segregation of productive work
– Examine the gender stratification of productive work
– Discuss the factors that lead men to take on “female jobs” and its implications
Sexual division of labour

• This refers to the specialised gender roles of men as breadwinners and women as housewives.
• This specialisation of gender roles took place in the West after industrialisation.
• Note that this does not reflect the reality in the Ghanaian context. An Akan woman who is a housewife will be viewed as a lazy woman.
Women’s work?
Gender stratification of reproductive and productive work

- Reproductive labour is work at home (unpaid and not valued e.g. nurturing children, cleaning, cooking etc)
- Productive labour refers to work for economic reward
- Community Role (women carry the sand, decision making done by men)
Gender segregation of reproductive work

• Time Use Studies and what they reveal that women use a great percentage of their time doing reproductive work while men use their time for productive work.
• UNDP studies: Reproductive labour constitutes 66% of women’s work compared to 24-34% of men’s work
• Women tend to work 3-4 hours more than men (Dugan 2005)
Changing patterns of reproductive work

- Buabeng (2010) Mphil thesis (She finds that although Agona perceptions of manhood and womanhood do not change with migration, the gender roles associated with each of the gender identities changes temporarily to accommodate the realities of life in an urban area devoid of the extended female kin networks. Husbands in Accra many of whom have seasonal jobs as masons etc much more involved in childcare than those in the Agona district.)
Gender segregation of productive work

• This refers to the unequal representation of women and men in an occupational category

• Formal sector numbers. According to GLSS V (2008: 36), 25% of males are in waged employment compared to 8.2% of females
Gender segregation of productive work continued

• Informal sector numbers. Thirteen percent of men are self-employed in non-agricultural sector compared to 33% of women while 40% of men are self-employed in the agricultural sector compared to 25% of women (GLSS V:36)
Gender stratification of productive work

• Stratification refers to the situation where women or men are clustered at certain occupational levels or tasks:

• Formal sector: women at lower levels of the civil service

• Informal sector
  – Agriculture: food crop growers versus cash crop growers (Austen on cocoa, Amanor and Daddieh on oil palm). Female food crop farmers earn less than male cash crop farmers.
Gender stratification continued

Gender stratification continued

– Eg: Ofei-Aboagye on white ware and non-white ware, exotic fruits versus other fruits, spare parts at Abossey Okai versus mother care shops, table top-shops, check-check sellers (Overa 2007) versus waakye sellers
Men in traditionally female dominated occupations

• Male nurses in Ghana:
  – Causes: opportunities for migration predominantly in the UK
  – When it becomes lucrative men rush into it
  – Effects (the glass escalator aka Williams 1992 – men rising to the top quickly in these jobs e.g. nurses)
Men in traditionally female dominated occupations continued

• Male traders in Ghana:
  – Causes – Structural adjustment and shrinking opportunities for men in the formal sector
  – Effects (changing gender identity and relations)
Effects

• When men move into women’s jobs, the pay goes up.

• When women move into men’s jobs, the reverse happens. A good example is with the position of public relations officers in media houses.
Summary of main points

• Reproductive labour has predominantly been the work of women but that is changing
• In productive labour, women tend to have the more precarious jobs,
• work in the informal sector has lower incomes, less benefits and security of income
• Gender segregation and stratification occurs in both the formal and informal sectors
• Gender stratification results in the glass escalator effect (Williams 1992) in the formal sector and regendering (Agadjanian 2002) in the informal sector, specifically trade
Class Exercise

• Using the concept of gender segregation and stratification in the workforce, what do you think the oil boom will mean for women and men in Ghana?
Closing quote for the week

Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult.

Charlotte Whitton
Week 12: Responses, Challenges and Transformations

Learning objectives

• At the end of today’s class, you should be able to:
  – Identify and state some responses to culturally constructed gender inequalities
  – Identify civil society and institutional responses to culturally constructed gender inequalities.
  – Discuss the effectiveness and transformative potential of these responses.
  – Discuss the role of individual agency in transforming gender relations
Hope for Change?
Legal Reforms

• The Criminal Code Amendment Act of 1994, Section 69 criminalises FGM and those guilty are liable to imprisonment of not less than 3 years

• Ghana’s Criminal Code Amendment Act of 1998 included sections that criminalised harmful traditional cultural practices. Section 314A criminalises trokosi as a second degree felony with those guilty liable to a term of not less than three years

• The Domestic Violence Act of 2007 (Act 732)
Civil Society Response

• Ghana Association for the Welfare of Women – Leading educational campaigns on the harms of FGM and the laws against its practice
• International Needs Ghana – Worked to free over 3500 women from 130 shrines; set up a training centre in Adidome with boarding facilities for 140 women to provide the freed women with livelihood
• Women’s Manifesto Coalition led by ABANTU for Development
• Domestic Violence Bill Coalition
Effectiveness of these responses

• FGM Act only criminalises the person who performs the excision not the parents who requests it or the community members who watch it. Some parents therefore transport their daughters across the Ghanaian border.

• Secondly, no alternative economic ventures found for practitioners of FGM.

• UNFPA documents that about 87% of the 200 trokosi liberated between 1997 and 1999 returned to the shrine (due to stigma, fear of the unknown)

• Weak enforcement of laws
Exercise on Individual responses

• Discussions
Final Recap

• Culture comprises the material (art, architecture) and non-material (norms, beliefs, customs and practices, knowledge)
• Culture is dynamic
• Gender is socially constructed
• Cultural practices can create gender inequality
• Modifications in cultural practices are now opening up spaces for gender equality
Final Recap Cont’d

• Gender differences are emphasised right from home
• These differences are reinforced outside the home as in our religious and political institutions
• The media is a powerful social institution
• Media images shape our views on what women/men are and how they should/should not behave
Final recap continued

• Media often perpetuate disempowering views about women.
• The media can, however, be a source of empowering messages about women.
• Men are to initiate and enjoy sex, women are to be passive.
• Emphasis on the chastity of women while men are excused.
Final Recap Cont’d

• Reproductive labour has predominantly been the work of women
• In productive labour, women tend to have the more precarious jobs
• Gender segregation and stratification occurs in both the formal and informal sectors
• Gender stratification results in the glass escalator effect (Williams 1992) in the formal sector and regendering (Agadjanian 2002) in the informal sector, specifically trade
Final recap continued

• Several legal reforms have been instituted to protect women in Ghana
• Civil society organisations have advocated for the passing of several legislations to transform gender relations
• Enforcement of laws continue to be a major impediment
Parting Quote

For I cannot think that GOD Almighty ever made them [women] so delicate, so glorious creatures; and furnished them with such charms, so agreeable and so delightful to mankind; with souls capable of the same accomplishments with men: and all, to be only Stewards of our Houses, Cooks, and Slaves. (Daniel Defoe, The Education of Women)