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CHANGES IN GENDER POWER DYNAMICS IN CONGO

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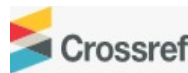
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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the changes in gender power relations among the people of Congo.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Results: The results revealed that there exist conceptual and contextual gaps relating to the study on the changes in gender power relations among the people of Congo. Preliminary empirical review reveals that Gender power relations underwent changes emanating from socio-economic and dynamics to fit within the capitalist production system.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Gender role theory and social construction theory may be used to categorize the key work design factors which may relate to gender power relations among the people of Congo. The results of this research will form the basis for further research to investigate into the areas of gender power relations.

Keywords: *Culture, Femininity, Gender, Gender Relations, Power Relations.*

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INTRODUCTION

Gender roles are diverse and varying. They rise from different cultural histories in different parts of the world, have changed in the past and are undergoing changes even now (Connells, 2022; Ferraro, 2015; Holmes, 2015; Walby, 2020). Silberschmidt (2015) agrees that gender relations are not static but are cultural and historically determined. Despite the existing studies, Connell (2015) urges that the study of gender relations in Africa has received little attention. A number of studies have revealed that gender roles have undergone transformation all over the world. According to Powell and Graves (2015) since 1986, gender relations in Australia have changed. Traditionally men were breadwinners and women took the role of care givers. However, the first constitution of Vietnam in 1946 stated that power relations in the country belong to all people and that women are equal to men in all aspects.

Worldwide, the majority of men and women had to live to rigid ideas about how they should behave and feel as men and women (WHO, 2017), studies in Latin America have found that women dedicated up to 85% of their time to domestic responsibilities whereas men were accepted to financially provide for their family. Tragos (2019) indicated that in Congo in the period of industrial revolution and modernization in urban areas men workers exhibited pride in their craft, their physical strength and earned praise for their skills in doing their work. Throughout the 1900s, the man of this generation was strong, confident, and competitive and a decisive patriarch and women were independent on the financial resources of men. Typical roles of men in Australia before World War II were breadwinners, who were paid enough money to support a family, worked until were 60 years and more, did real work which required skills and women were portrayed as mother and house housewives.

There have been a number of studies in Africa on masculine and feminine identities. However, Morrel (2021), Kimmel (2015), Hearn *et al* (2018) observe that studies on the transformation of power relations between men and women in the continent remains relatively minimal. Most of the literature on femininity pays special attention to the rights and position of women in the society (butler, 2017); Thomas & Gallagher (2017) while on masculinity researchers pays attention on hegemonic masculinity.

Western commercial cultures have destabilized gender arrangements and power relations in Japan, the Arab World and elsewhere. He further notes that neo- liberalism has brought unprecedented number of women into the waged economy putting the male breadwinner's model under severe strain. According to Okech (2018), Lambert (1950), before the introduction of western education, traditional Yoruba people in Nigeria had always spread their cultural values from one generation to another. Cultural heritage practice among the Yoruba was not women friendly. Traditionally the issue of will was non- existence. Women did not have any right to inherit anything from their father.

During the pre-colonial period the African families owned land, a man apportioned his land to sons as they married (Mbilinji, 2021). Women have use rights on their husband's farm but could not inherit land. Mother could however hold land in trust for sons. When his mother dies, the last born son would inherit the land she farmed. Communal lands such as surplus land or those used for grazing were under the control of clan. During the pre-colonial days property ownership in

Congo was a preserve for sons only (Kabali, 2018). The father owned everything in the family including the wife or wives and property such as land, and cattle. In case the father is death or absent, the eldest son of the senior wife took charge of his father's property on family property. In this view the senior son was administratively responsible for the allotment of land and use. On the other hand if the head of the family departed, a male relative took over all the responsibilities of the family property rather than the widow. No woman could take, accept or control property including the bride wealth.

Statement of the Problem

It should be understood that gender roles and responsibilities are achieved through socialization by the society. It should also be noted that the most important aspect in gender's lives is not that biologically are males and females but rather they become so through social construction. Despite the prevalence of the change of gender power relations increase in Congo few studies have been done to document such prevalence and the contributing factors. The change and the continuity of gender power relations have not received adequate attention from the scholars particularly in Congo. This neglect prompted the researcher to undertake the study.

Theoretical Review

Gender Role Theory

This theory is based on the supposition that individual socially identified as males or females occupy different ascribed roles within divergent expectations for how they ought to behave. The theory groups men and women separately and assigns them roles based on biological sex (Eagly 2017). This is premised on a structural approach to gender relations maintaining that formal institutions such as family, organizations and communities have caused men and women to behave differently. Eagly and Wood (2021) suggested that gender roles are designed to equip males and females for their designations within formalized institutions. The authors elaborate by indicating the socialization within the roles. Diekman and Schneider (2020), Dulin A, (2017) argued that gender roles led to societal norms and expectation regarding what is male and female constitutes. When the expectations are narrowly adhered it causes both genders to acquire different skill sets. This theory was useful to explain how different roles were traditionally assigned to women and men in Congo as well as the changes that have taken place over time.

Social Construction Theory

The major focus on social constructionist theory was to uncover the ways in which individuals or groups participate in the construction of their perceived social reality. It involves looking at the ways social phenomena are created, institutionalized, known, and made into traditions by humans. Gergen (2021) social constructionists' place emphasis in everyday interactions between people, how they use language to construct their reality. It regards the social practice people engage in as the focus of inquiry. Cultural influences determine how individual socially construct categories of identities. This was possible to examine the construction of masculine and feminine identities among the people of Congo. Human identity is seen as non- static and is composed within the boundaries established by the social surrounding (Berger & Luckmann, 2016). The theory further focuses on how institutions were created together in a social context and how this social context

in return helps create selves. The same way masculine and feminine identities have been influenced by the social economic surroundings. They are in flux and its reality is dependent on time and space. Similarly, gender and power relations have been undergoing transformation among the Congolese in the course of time. Hence there was a need for investigation.

Empirical Review

Komter (2021) carried out a research on gender, power and feminist theory. The study explored the question of whether attempts at developing a general feminist theory of gender and power can be considered a fruitful scientific enterprise. The recent history of feminist theorizing, that general approaches to feminist theory are doomed to fail, the possibility of using existing social theory on power for feminist analyses will be discussed present the theoretical framework of my research on marital power, which was based on Steven Lukes' concept of power (1974), and Gramsci's notion of ideological hegemony (1971). It concluded that specific approaches to power, borrowed from existing social theory, can offer some insight into specific areas of feminist concern problems with general feminist theory / existing social theory on power and feminist analysis

Acker (2020) carried out a study investigating hierarchies' jobs and bodies in relation to the theory of gendered organizations. Both feminist and mainstream political science has taken an institutional 'turn', opening up possibilities for interchange between the two fields. The study explored the potential for theoretical synthesis between feminist gender analysis and new institutional theory, focusing particularly on issues of power. After providing a brief overview of approaches to power in the institutionalism and feminist literature, it outlined some initial possibilities for dialogue between the two fields. The study concluded by considering some potential insights that a gendered approach to institutions and power would offer to new institutionalism, establishing a preliminary foundation for a wider 'feminist institutionalism' research agenda.

Regmi, Smart and Kottler (2020) carried out a study on the understanding of gender and power dynamics within the family. Among the Maori of New Zealand, Aboriginals of Australia, and other Indigenous peoples, family dynamics strongly influence the ways that issues emerge in counseling. The study explored aspects of gender and power within the context of birth practices in rural Nepal. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 postpartum women, as well as family members, to collect narratives of birthing experiences that highlight issues of oppression, marginalization, and power struggles. Implications for multicultural and social justice awareness in family therapy are discussed, especially with regard to the subtle, disguised ways that power operates behind the scenes, often sabotaging efforts by health and mental health professionals to be most helpful.

Ragins and Sundstrom (2019) carried out a study on gender and power in organizations this article advances a longitudinal, resource development model of power in organizations and uses it to organize a review of empirical research and related theory concerning differences between the genders in power. The review incorporated four levels of analysis, social-systems, organizational, interpersonal, and individual and emphasized the accumulation of resources for power at critical career transitions. Research revealed a consistent difference favoring men in accessibility to, and utility of, resources for power. It suggested that the processes involved in the development of

power differ for men and women and that the path to power for women resembles an obstacle course.

Carli (2019) conducted a research study on gender, interpersonal power, and social influence. The article reviewed research on gender differences in power and their effect on social influence. Evidence indicated that men generally possess higher levels of expert and legitimate power than women do and that women possess higher levels of referent power than men do. These differences are reflected, to some extent, in the influence strategies used by men and women and, more clearly, in gender differences in social influence. Women generally have greater difficulty exerting influence than men do, particularly when they use influence that conveys competence and authority. The findings indicated that gender differences in influence are mediated by gender differences in power.

Kenny (2017) carried out a research study on gender, institutions and power. Both feminist and mainstream political science has taken an institutional ‘turn’, opening up possibilities for interchange between the two fields. This article explored the potential for theoretical synthesis between feminist gender analysis and new institutional theory, focusing particularly on issues of power. After providing a brief overview of approaches to power in the institutionalist and feminist literature, it outlined some initial possibilities for dialogue between the two fields. The article concluded by considering some potential insights that a gendered approach to institutions and power would offer to new institutionalism, establishing a preliminary foundation for a wider ‘feminist institutionalism’ research agenda.

Keshet, Kark, Pomerantz-Zorin, Koslowsky and Schwarzwald (2016) investigated gender, status and the use of power strategies. The study examined the effects of gender and status on the use of power strategies. The experiment consisted of a computer-based problem-solving task performed in pairs, where participants interacted with simulated long-distance partners. Participants were 36 female and 38 male undergraduate students, who were assigned to be influencing agents and were required to convince their partners to accept their help in the problem-solving process. Status was manipulated by the extent to which partners were dependent upon the participants' resources. Partners were either same sex or other sex. Results indicated an interactive effect of agent gender by status. Men used more frequently ‘masculine’-typed and less frequently ‘feminine’-typed strategies than did women in low status positions, whereas in high status positions no significant gender differences in power strategy choices were found. The findings suggested that gender differences and similarities vary according to social contexts.

Fletcher (2015) carried out a study on the paradox of postheroic leadership. A study on gender, power, and transformational change. The study explored a number of paradoxes embedded in new commonly called postheroic models of leadership. It argued that although these models emphasize leadership as a social process dependent on social networks of influence, the concepts are often presented as gender and, to a lesser degree, power neutral, not only in theory, but in practice. The study explored this phenomenon, arguing that the concepts are not gender, power, or sex neutral but instead are rooted in a set of social interactions in which “doing gender,” “doing power,” and “doing leadership” are linked. It explored these dynamics and suggests that theories of leadership that fail to consider the gender/power implications of social interactions and networks of influence may lead to the cooptation of these models, resulting in their being brought into the mainstream

discourse in a way that silences their radical challenge to current work practices, structures, and norms.

Hillenbrand, Karim, Mohanraj and Wu (2015) carried a study measuring gender-transformative change. Gender-transformative approaches aim to move beyond individual self-improvement among women and toward transforming the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities. As defined by the CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS), a gender-transformative approach to development goes beyond the "symptoms" of gender inequality to address "the social norms, attitudes, behaviors, and social systems that underlie them". This approach entails engaging groups in critically examining, challenging and questioning gender norms and power relations that underlie visible gender gaps. The report broadly examined existing literature on frameworks and monitoring, evaluation and learning systems, as well as specific indicators and approaches for measuring gender-transformative change, particularly in the smallholder agriculture sector.

Diekman, Goodfriend and Goodwin (2015) investigated dynamic stereotypes of power. Despite widespread change in gender roles, women continue to have less power than men. From the perspective of social role theory, this gender difference in power should be perceived as eroding as women gain access to male-dominated roles typically associated with power. The study 1's was open-ended, reported nearly unanimously projected an increase in women's power over the next 50 years, whereas responses were equally split between projecting stability or a decrease in men's power. Study 2's quantitative findings illustrated that participants perceived women as gaining in political, economic, occupational, individual, and relational power from the past into the future. In contrast, men were perceived as decreasing in relational power but maintaining levels of other forms of power over time. Despite the projections of increases in women's power, women were not projected to reach parity with men by 2050. The study examined the implications of these beliefs for future social change.

Cowan, Drinkard and MacGavin (2015) investigated the effects of target, age, and gender on use of power strategies. The study found that females use unilateral and indirect power strategies in intimate relationships, whereas males use direct and bilateral power strategies. In the present study, differences in power strategies reported by 198 6th, 9th, and 12th graders in response to mother, father, and same-sex friend targets were examined in terms of the same 2-dimensional model. Friends differed from both parental targets in receiving fewer unilateral and indirect strategies. Fathers, hypothesized to have the most power, received fewer direct and bilateral strategies than mothers and friends. Weaker strategies were used more with parents and stronger strategies were used more with friends. Gender effects, alone and in interaction with target and grade, did not support previous gender differences.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study

relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

RESULTS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, contextual, and geographical.

Conceptual Gaps

Studies by Komter (2021), Acker (2020), Regmi, Smart and Kottler (2020), Fletcher (2015), Hillenbrand, Karim, Mohanraj and Wu (2015), Diekman, Goodfriend and Goodwin (2015), Cowan, Drinkard and MacGavin (2015) had a conceptual framework gap. Changes in gender power dynamics were not established by any of the research cited. The research did not provide a clear breakdown of the changes in gender power relations among the people of Congo. Because of this, the current work aims to fill in these conceptual gaps.

Contextual and Geographical Gap

Studies by Komter (2021), Acker (2020), Regmi, Smart and Kottler (2020), Fletcher (2015), Hillenbrand, Karim, Mohanraj and Wu (2015), Diekman, Goodfriend and Goodwin (2015), Cowan, Drinkard and MacGavin (2015) had geographical gap because they weren't actually done in Congo. This suggests that the findings may not be applicable in Congo due to the fact that the methods employed in each country vary. This study was undertaken with the intention of filling that void.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found out that Throughout the 1900s, the man of this generation was strong, confident, and competitive and a decisive patriarch and women were independent on the financial resources of men. Typical roles of men in Australia before World War II were breadwinners, who were paid enough money to support a family, worked until were 60 years and more, did real work which required skills and women were portrayed as mother and house housewives. The study was important because of its socio-economic and political impacts on the families. The study findings and recommendations will contribute to the existing knowledge. It will also form basis upon which other studies will be done. The findings may serve as useful feedback to Congolese government and policy makers because they will be able to make the right adaptation geared towards improving power relations between men and women in the society.

Gender role theory and social construction theory may be used to categorize the key work design factors which may relate to gender power relations among the people of Congo.

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