

## **Patriarchy and African Values: A Philosophical Inquiry into Gender Disparity in Nigerian Governance**

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### **Abstract**

*The systematic marginalization of women from governance in Nigeria remains a persistent issue, often justified by appeals to traditional African values. This paper critically examines the philosophical and ethical dimensions of this disparity, challenging the notion that patriarchy is intrinsic to African traditions. It argues that traditional African values, such as communalism and Ubuntu, emphasize inclusivity, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, contrary to their patriarchal reinterpretations. Historical evidence highlights the leadership roles women held in pre-colonial African societies, demonstrating that gender equity aligns with the original ethos of these values. However, colonialism and religious influences distorted these traditions, embedding male dominance into governance systems. This research explores how patriarchal ideologies are perpetuated through cultural narratives, institutional structures, and societal norms, marginalizing women's contributions in both political and traditional governance settings. It employs a philosophical method of analysis to examine this systematic marginalization as a profound ethical failure that undermines principles of justice, equality, and social progress. Drawing on philosophical ideologies such as Rawls' theory of justice, Nussbaum's capabilities approach, and Ubuntu, it calls for a reevaluation of African values to dismantle patriarchal distortions. This paper advocates for policy reforms, cultural reorientation, and educational initiatives to foster gender equity in governance. It concludes by emphasizing that inclusive governance not only reflects the ethical core of African values but also enhances societal cohesion and progress, offering a transformative pathway toward justice and equality for all members of society.*

**Keywords:** *patriarchy, African Values, Gender disparities, Governance, inclusivity.*

## **Introduction**

African values, deeply rooted in communal living, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, are celebrated as the bedrock of societal harmony across the continent. In Nigeria, these values manifest in governance structures that prioritize collective welfare, often through hierarchical systems of authority. However, such systems have historically skewed toward male dominance, raising philosophical questions about the role of tradition in shaping gender roles. Governance, as a mirror of societal norms, reflects the values and ideologies upheld by a community. The persistent gender disparity within Nigerian leadership thus points to broader tensions between cultural traditions and the modern ideals of equity and inclusion.

Across Africa, similar trends highlight the entrenchment of patriarchal norms in governance. For example, in Ghana, traditional chieftaincy systems, which historically excluded women, continue to influence political participation. As Mba (2015) explains, "the cultural emphasis on male leadership in many African societies is less about inherent values and more about historical misinterpretations of tradition" (p. 78). This perspective highlights the critical distinction between African values and their patriarchal applications. Similarly, in South Africa, the post-apartheid era has seen efforts to balance cultural heritage with gender equity. As Dlamini (2018) notes, "cultural values are often manipulated to exclude women from leadership, even though there is evidence of their historical roles as community leaders" (p. 92). In Nigeria, gender disparity in governance is particularly pronounced. As of the 2023 elections, women occupy only 3% of Senate seats and 4% of House of Representatives seats, marking a 19% decline compared to the previous assembly (Carnegie Endowment, 2023). This drop reflects the ongoing systemic challenges faced by women in political leadership. While structural barriers such as limited access to education and economic resources play a role, cultural perceptions of gender are equally significant. Historical trends further illustrate this challenge. In

1999, women held 2.8% of Senate seats, which increased to 8.3% in 2007 but has since dropped back to 2.8% in 2023. Similarly, in the House of Representatives, women's representation was 3.3% in 1999, peaked at 7.2% in 2011, and has now declined to 4% in 2023 (Invictus Africa, 2023). These statistics highlight the fluctuating but overall limited progress of women's political participation in Nigeria. Scholars such as Aina and Adesanya (2016), Oyewumi (2016), and Chitando (2018) argue that patriarchal interpretations of African values often position women primarily as custodians of the home rather than as active participants in public life. Oyewumi (2016) highlights how colonial influences reinforced male dominance in African societies, while Chitando (2018) examines the role of cultural narratives in shaping gender hierarchies. These perspectives illustrate how traditional values have been reinterpreted in ways that limit women's roles in governance. This interaction between ideology and governance is not unique to Nigeria but is evident across the continent, where women face systemic exclusion despite their contributions to societal development. Globally, Nigeria ranks 184th out of 190 countries in terms of female political representation, demonstrating the stark gender imbalance in governance (CDD West Africa, 2023). This ranking solidifies Nigeria's position as one of the countries with the lowest levels of female political participation worldwide.

Philosophically, this debate centers on whether African values are inherently patriarchal or have been co-opted to serve patriarchal ends. Scholars such as Nyasani (2017) argue that "African values, when properly understood, emphasize **interdependence** rather than hierarchy, advocating for mutual respect and shared responsibility between genders." (p. 66). This interpretation challenges the notion that gender disparity is an unavoidable consequence of African traditions, suggesting instead that such disparities arise from historical distortions and colonial legacies. The objective of this paper is to analyse the role of patriarchy and misogyny in governance through the lens of African

values, and philosophical foundations and proposing ethical reinterpretations. As Ndlovu (2019) asserts, "For governance to be truly reflective of African values, it must embrace inclusivity and reject the patriarchal distortions that undermine societal progress" (p. 103). This perspective aligns with the broader imperative to reconcile cultural heritage with the demands of justice and equality, ensuring that African values serve as a foundation for inclusive governance rather than a justification for exclusion.

This paper employs philosophical analysis to examine the relationship between patriarchy and African values in Nigerian governance. The study engages in conceptual clarification by defining key terms such as patriarchy, African values, gender dynamics, and governance, establishing a clear framework for discussion. Additionally, a historical analysis is conducted to trace the evolution of gender roles in African societies, highlighting how colonial and religious influences contributed to reshaping traditional African values. This historical perspective helps to contextualize contemporary gender relations in governance. A normative ethical evaluation is also undertaken, drawing on philosophical theories such as Rawls' theory of justice, Nussbaum's capabilities approach, and *Ubuntu* to assess how African values can be interpreted in ways that promote fairness, representation, and social cohesion in governance. Furthermore, the paper incorporates policy analysis to explore potential reforms, cultural shifts, and educational strategies that can enhance women's participation in governance while aligning with African communal values. By adopting this approach, the study critically engages with both historical and philosophical perspectives to provide a well-rounded understanding of gender dynamics in Nigerian governance.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

To critically analyse the intersection of African values, patriarchy, and gender disparity in governance, it is essential to establish a clear

conceptual framework. The meanings of these terms are not static but have evolved due to cultural, historical, and socio-political influences. A precise understanding of these concepts will aid in examining how they interact within the context of governance in Nigeria. African Values and Patriarchy: African values are deeply rooted in the principles of communalism, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. These values traditionally emphasise interdependence, where each member of society plays a role in ensuring harmony and progress. However, with time, particularly due to colonial and religious influences, these values were reinterpreted to support patriarchal structures that prioritize male authority over inclusivity. Patriarchy, in this sense, refers to a system where leadership and governance are largely dominated by men, shaping societal expectations in ways that limit women's access to political and decision-making roles. While African traditions historically recognized the importance of women in leadership evident in figures such as Queen Amina of Zazzau and the Igbo *Umuada* these roles have been diminished under contemporary patriarchal governance models. Thus, rather than being inherently exclusionary, African values have been distorted to justify male dominance in governance.

Gender Disparity in Governance: Gender disparity in governance is a reflection of the systemic inequalities that have developed over time, shaping perceptions of leadership and power. While women are not completely excluded from governance in Nigeria, they continue to face structural and cultural barriers that limit their full participation. Governance, as the process through which power and authority are exercised, should ideally reflect inclusivity and justice. However, in many African societies, gendered power relations dictate who holds authority, reinforcing social hierarchies that marginalize women. This disparity is not merely a political issue but a deeply philosophical one, as it challenges the ethical foundations of governance, justice, and equality. If African values are truly based on collective well-being, then

a governance system that systematically limits women's participation contradicts its foundational principles.

**Governance and Ethical Considerations:** Governance, whether traditional or modern, is central to the organization of society and the distribution of power. In African societies, governance historically functioned within communal structures, where leadership was seen as a duty rather than a privilege. However, the infusion of patriarchal ideologies into governance structures has resulted in a leadership model that prioritizes hierarchy over inclusivity. Ethical considerations in governance require an interrogation of these structures, questioning whether they align with the fundamental principles of justice and equity. If governance is to truly reflect African values, then it must move beyond its current exclusionary practices and embrace a model that recognizes the agency and contributions of all members of society, regardless of gender.

These clarifications provide the foundation for analysing the role of patriarchy in shaping governance and gender relations in Nigeria. By revisiting African values through an ethical and philosophical lens, this study seeks to demonstrate that governance, when properly aligned with the true essence of African traditions, should promote inclusivity rather than systematic exclusion.

### **African Values, Patriarchy, and Inclusive Governance**

African values emphasize communal living, shared responsibility, and the structured organization of society to maintain harmony and collective well-being. These values formed the foundation of traditional African governance, where leadership was rooted in cooperation rather than competition. Communalism, *Ubuntu*, and the complementarity of gender roles were essential components of these governance structures. However, over time, these values were reinterpreted through a patriarchal lens, leading to rigid gender roles that restricted women's participation in leadership. The shift from inclusive governance to male

centred authority was largely influenced by colonial and religious forces, which imposed Eurocentric gender norms that marginalized women (Oyewumi, 2016).

Communalism, a key African value, emphasizes cooperation, mutual respect, and the prioritization of collective welfare over individual aspirations. Traditional African societies were structured around group decision-making, where leadership was a shared responsibility rather than an exclusive privilege. As Gyekye (2010) argues, communalism fosters governance systems that rely on consensus rather than autocratic rule, ensuring that leadership serves the interests of the entire society. Despite its inclusive nature, communalism has often been misinterpreted to justify hierarchical structures that favour male dominance in governance. While African traditions historically acknowledged women's roles in decision-making, colonial systems restructured governance models to reinforce male authority. This led to the exclusion of women from political power, despite historical evidence that women held complementary leadership roles in pre-colonial societies. As Amadiume (2015) observes, women such as the Yoruba *Iyalode* and the Igbo *Umuada* played critical roles in governance, ensuring that female voices were integral to community administration. However, colonial policies replaced these participatory structures with rigid patriarchal hierarchies, reinforcing the notion that leadership was the domain of men.

*Ubuntu*, another foundational African value, promotes human dignity, moral responsibility, and collective well-being. The philosophy of *Ubuntu*, captured in the phrase "*I am because we are*," suggests that leadership should be guided by compassion, fairness, and a commitment to serving the community (Letseka, 2013). Within the context of governance, *Ubuntu* calls for inclusive leadership that values the contributions of all members of society, regardless of gender. However, contemporary governance structures have often failed to uphold these ethical principles, instead perpetuating exclusionary

practices that limit women's participation in leadership roles. The erosion of *Ubuntu*'s ethical foundation in governance is evident in the systematic marginalization of women, often justified by cultural narratives that reinforce gender hierarchies. As Chitando (2018) explains, proverbs and myths that depict women as caretakers rather than decision-makers have been used to legitimize their exclusion from governance. This ideological shift contradicts the original essence of *Ubuntu*, which values equity, justice, and the recognition of every individual's contribution to society. If governance in Africa is to reflect the ethical foundations of *Ubuntu*, it must reject patriarchal distortions and embrace leadership structures that promote gender inclusivity and fairness.

A crucial but often overlooked African value in governance is complementarity, which emphasizes the balanced contribution of both genders to leadership and decision-making. Unlike the rigid gender hierarchies introduced by colonial and religious influences, traditional African societies often recognized that men and women had distinct but equally significant roles in governance. According to Nzegwu (2017), the concept of complementarity ensured that leadership was not a privilege of one gender but a responsibility shared between men and women. The historical presence of female rulers, advisors, and political strategists in African societies strengthens the fact that governance was never intended to be exclusively male-dominated. However, the imposition of Western gender ideologies disrupted this balance, redefining power dynamics to favour male leadership while relegating women to subordinate roles (Oyewumi, 2016). The result has been a governance system that reinforces exclusionary practices, contradicting the foundational African values that once supported shared leadership. Addressing gender disparities in governance requires a return to the principle of complementarity, ensuring that leadership structures recognize the equal contributions of both men and women rather than sustaining systems of dominance and exclusion.

The philosophical significance of African values in governance lies in their ethical foundation, which prioritizes justice, fairness, and collective responsibility. However, governance structures that marginalize women contradict these values, reinforcing the need for critical re-evaluation. As Wiredu (1996) asserts, governance must be ethically grounded in principles that promote inclusivity rather than exclusion. The marginalization of women in governance is not just a political issue but a moral and philosophical failure, as it distorts values that originally emphasized balance and cooperation (Eze & Okonkwo, 2019). The challenge, therefore, is not that African values inherently support patriarchy but rather that they have been misinterpreted and manipulated to serve patriarchal interests. A governance model that genuinely reflects African values should not sustain male dominance but should instead embrace shared leadership, participatory governance, and ethical responsibility. By drawing from the principles of *Ubuntu*, communalism, and complementarity, governance in Africa can be reshaped to reflect the equitable and inclusive leadership structures that were once central to African societies.

### **Gender Disparity in Nigerian Governance**

The political and traditional governance setting in Nigeria has long been characterized by the underrepresentation of women, a reality deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and cultural ideologies. Women's limited participation in governance is not merely incidental but a reflection of a systemic bias that has persisted over time. The structure of political representation in Nigeria remains dominated by male voices, pushing women to the margins of decision-making processes. Although political parties have introduced measures such as reduced nomination fees and exemptions from certain requirements to encourage female participation, these efforts have not yet translated into equal representation in leadership positions. Broader societal beliefs continue to position men as natural leaders, while women often face structural and cultural barriers that limit their full political

involvement. The exclusion of women is not limited to formal political structures but extends to traditional governance systems, which are often regarded as the custodians of cultural values. In many Nigerian communities, traditional leadership positions are almost exclusively reserved for men, reinforcing the perception that governance is inherently male. Anunobi (2019) explains that "traditional institutions function as gatekeepers of patriarchal norms, systematically marginalizing women and preventing them from participating in key decision-making processes" (p. 41). Even in instances where women are granted nominal roles, these positions often lack substantive authority, effectively silencing their voices in critical deliberations. Such practices perpetuate a governance culture that devalues women's contributions and institutionalizes their exclusion. At the local level, governance structures are similarly shaped by the absence of women in community decision-making processes. In rural areas, where traditional norms are particularly influential, women are often excluded from councils or assemblies responsible for making decisions that directly affect their lives. Edeh and Ifemeje (2021) assert that "the systematic sidelining of women in local governance reflects deeply ingrained societal beliefs that view leadership as a male domain" (p. 312). This exclusion not only deprives women of the opportunity to contribute to governance but also creates policies that fail to address their unique needs and challenges. The absence of women's perspectives in these structures perpetuates inequality, as decisions are made without considering the diverse experiences and insights that women bring to leadership. The barriers to women's participation in governance are also perpetuated by political party structures, which are often organized in ways that discourage female involvement. Political parties, as the primary vehicles for accessing formal political power, remain deeply gendered institutions that prioritize male participation. As Okuchukwu (2015) observes, 'Over the years, women in Nigeria have been relegated to the background and are circumscribed within the political arenas by

structures, procedures, and ideologies that favour men, as well as the existence of an invisible "glass ceiling" that blocks their upward mobility and full participation.<sup>1</sup> This systematic exclusion is further reinforced by societal expectations that continue to frame leadership as incompatible with traditional gender roles for women.

The philosophical implications of this exclusion are significant, as they challenge the ethical foundations of governance. The systematic marginalization of women in governance contradicts the principles of justice, equity, and fairness that are central to social and political philosophy. Rawls (1971) argues that "a just society must ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities to participate in its institutions and decision-making processes" (p. 302). The exclusion of women from governance in Nigeria thus represents a profound ethical failure, as it denies them the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of society and perpetuates structures of inequality. Philosophers have long analysed and challenged systems of exclusion that deny certain groups equal representation in governance. Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, for instance, emphasizes the importance of creating institutions that enable individuals to realize their full potential. Nussbaum (2000) contends that "a society that denies women equal participation in governance undermines their ability to exercise their capabilities and contribute meaningfully to the collective good" (p. 227). By excluding women from governance, Nigeria not only violates fundamental principles of justice but also deprives itself of the transformative potential that inclusive leadership brings. The absence of women in governance also has broader social implications, as it reinforces stereotypes and societal expectations that limit women's roles in the private sphere. The exclusion of women from public leadership positions sends a message that governance is inherently male, perpetuating cycles of inequality that extend beyond the political realm. As Arowolo and Aluko (2020) observe, "the marginalization of women in governance reflects and reinforces societal beliefs about their

inferiority, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion" (p. 57). These cultural narratives not only deny women the opportunity to lead but also shape societal attitudes that view their exclusion as natural and inevitable. The philosophical dimensions of this issue highlight the urgent need for a re-evaluation of governance structures and cultural norms in Nigeria. The marginalization of women is not merely a matter of individual discrimination but a systemic issue that reflects broader societal values and institutional practices. Addressing this disparity requires a fundamental shift in the way governance is conceptualized and practised, one that recognizes and values the contributions of all members of society. As Duflo (2012) explains, "inclusive governance is not only a matter of fairness but a prerequisite for effective decision-making and the creation of equitable policies" (p. 1060). The exclusion of women on this note represents not only an ethical failure but also a missed opportunity to harness the full potential of Nigeria's diverse population.

### **Reimagining African Values and Gender Representation in Nigerian Politics**

The persistent underrepresentation of women in Nigerian governance presents a complex intersection of traditional African values, colonial legacies, and contemporary political structures. Despite constituting nearly half of Nigeria's population, women's participation in political leadership remains strikingly limited, with only three out of 109 Senate seats and 15 out of 360 House of Representatives positions held by women. This disparity emerges not from authentic African traditional values, which historically embraced female leadership through figures like Queen Amina of Zazzau, but rather from distorted interpretations of these traditions that have been shaped by patriarchal ideologies. The philosophical concept of *Ubuntu*, emphasizing shared humanity and mutual reliance, provides a compelling basis for examining this disparity. As Mbiti (1969) articulates, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am' (p. 108), suggesting that the marginalization of

women fundamentally contradicts the communal principles underlying traditional African governance systems. This philosophical perspective aligns with historical evidence of female leadership in pre-colonial Africa, challenging contemporary justifications for women's exclusion that incorrectly invoke traditional values. While Nigerian women have demonstrated increasing political ambition, with 360 women contesting federal positions in the 2023 elections, structural barriers persist. These obstacles include patriarchal societal norms, prohibitive campaign costs, and institutional discrimination within political parties. Notable figures like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala have made significant contributions to national development, yet their success stories remain exceptions rather than the norm. As Gyekye (2010) argues, "African communalism, far from promoting exclusion, highlights the connection of all individuals in the society, making the marginalization of women both unjustifiable and contrary to the core of these values" (p. 138). This critical examination reveals that the current gender disparity in Nigerian governance stems not from authentic African values but from their misinterpretation and distortion through patriarchal lenses. Addressing this imbalance requires not only policy reforms and institutional changes but also a philosophical re-engagement with traditional African values that emphasize inclusivity, communal well-being, and shared leadership responsibilities.

### **The Path to Change**

The systematic marginalization of women in governance in Nigeria is not a fixed reality but a mutable construct that can and must be reshaped through deliberate action and philosophical reflection. The path to change requires a multifaceted approach that interrogates the philosophical foundations of governance, reorients cultural narratives, and lays the groundwork for an inclusive future. This transformation is not merely a political or social endeavour but a deeply ethical one rooted in the principles of justice, equality, and shared humanity. Philosophy has always served as a powerful tool for questioning

entrenched systems and envisioning alternatives. Social and political philosophy, in particular, provides a critical lens for interrogating the structures that perpetuate gender disparity. As Arendt (1958) argues, "philosophy's role is to dismantle the unquestioned assumptions of the status quo and open the door to new ways of thinking about human association" (p. 197). In the context of Nigerian governance, this means challenging the patriarchal norms that have come to define leadership and proposing alternative models rooted in inclusivity. Social contract theory, for example, emphasizes the idea that governance arises from the collective will of all members of society. By limiting women's participation, Nigeria fails to honour the fundamental principles of this contract, creating a governance structure that is neither representative nor just.

The ethics of care offers another critical philosophical perspective that underscores the importance of including female voices in governance. Developed by feminist philosophers such as Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (2003), the ethics of care emphasizes relationships, empathy, and the moral significance of attending to the needs of others. Noddings (2003) argues that "a governance system that neglects the ethics of care fails to address the mutual reliance of human lives and the moral obligation to consider diverse perspectives in decision-making" (p. 67). Women's perspectives, shaped by their unique social roles and experiences, are essential for creating governance systems that prioritize the well-being of all citizens. This ethical framework challenges the traditional, hierarchical models of governance and advocates for a more inclusive approach that values collaboration and mutual respect.

In the Nigerian context, education must go beyond formal instruction to include a deliberate effort to challenge cultural narratives that perpetuate gender inequality. This involves not only integrating gender equity into school curricula but also fostering public awareness campaigns that promote the values of inclusivity and shared humanity.

As Gyekye (1997) notes, "education must aim to transform not just knowledge but attitudes, creating a society in which justice and equality are recognized as non-negotiable ethical imperatives" (p. 204). The systematic marginalization of women in governance represents an ethical challenge that contradicts the principles of fairness and justice central to both African and Western ethical thought. Rawls (1971) argues that "justice as fairness requires the equal participation of all individuals in the institutions that shape their lives" (p. 302). In the same vein, African philosophy, as articulated by thinkers like Wiredu and Gyekye, emphasizes the interdependence and equal worth of all members of society. The underrepresentation of women in governance is thus a betrayal of both African communal values and universal principles of justice. An ethical re-interpretation of African values offers a pathway toward more inclusive governance. By drawing on the principles of *Ubuntu*, revisiting historical examples of female leadership, and critically examining cultural practices through an ethical lens, African societies can create governance systems that reflect the ideals of justice, equality and shared humanity. As Wiredu (1996) concludes, "A truly ethical society recognizes the contributions of all its members, embracing diversity as a source of strength rather than division" (p. 182). This vision requires a commitment to both cultural transformation and institutional reform, ensuring that the governance systems of tomorrow are not only inclusive but also just.

Cultural reorientation is equally critical to achieving gender equity in governance. African societies are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, which, when reinterpreted, can serve as powerful instruments for change. Traditional African values such as *Ubuntu* and communalism, as previously discussed, emphasize interdependence and collective well-being. These values can be leveraged to challenge the exclusionary practices that systematically marginalized women. As Gyekye (2010) notes, "the re-interpretation of tradition is not a rejection of the past but a necessary adaptation to ensure that cultural values remain relevant

and just in contemporary society" (p. 140). This process requires a deliberate effort to disentangle African values from patriarchal interpretations and to highlight their potential for promoting inclusivity. Storytelling, art, and community dialogue play a vital role in this cultural reorientation. Storytelling has long been a cornerstone of African societies, serving as a means of transmitting values, preserving history, and fostering social cohesion. By centering stories that highlight the contributions of women to governance and community life, societies can challenge the narratives that perpetuate gender inequality. Adichie (2009) eloquently states, "Stories have the power to create or destroy, to humanize or dehumanize, and to shift perceptions in profound ways" (p. 12). Similarly, art whether in the form of literature, music, or visual expression can serve as a medium for challenging stereotypes and imagining new possibilities for governance. Community dialogue, facilitated through town hall meetings, traditional councils, and other communal platforms, can provide spaces for critical reflection and collective re-imagination of cultural norms.

A vision for the future must involve not only philosophical and cultural shifts but also practical steps toward creating an inclusive governance system. This vision begins with the recognition that gender equity is not incompatible with African values but is, in fact, a natural extension of them. A governance system that integrates these values with principles of justice and equality will be more reflective of the diverse voices within society. Wiredu (1996) advocates for "a re-conceptualization of governance that balances tradition with modernity, ensuring that cultural heritage informs but does not constrain progress" (p. 183). This vision requires a commitment to both institutional reforms and cultural revolution, creating a governance structure that is inclusive, just, and effective.

## **Conclusion**

The systematic marginalization of women from governance in Nigeria, often justified by appeals to tradition, is not an inherent feature of African values but rather a distortion of their ethical essence. When reinterpreted through a philosophical lens, African values such as *Ubuntu* and communalism reveal a deep commitment to inclusivity, shared responsibility, and the dignity of all members of society. The strength of African communalism resides in its ability to evolve, adapting its principles to address the demands of justice and equality in a dynamic context and African values when critically re-examined, offer a framework for addressing gender bias and fostering equitable governance systems. Far from being obstacles to gender equity, African values can serve as powerful tools for reshaping governance to reflect justice and equality for all. Bridging the gap between tradition and progress requires collective action at every level of society. Policymakers must commit to institutional reforms that dismantle structural barriers to women's participation, while communities must engage in cultural reorientation efforts that challenge patriarchal norms. As Gyekye (2010) stresses that, "tradition must be subject to ethical scrutiny, ensuring that cultural practices align with the principles of justice and human flourishing" (p. 142). This collective effort must also include educational initiatives that promote gender equity from an early age and public awareness campaigns that highlight the ethical and practical benefits of inclusive governance. It is only through such concerted efforts that the vision of a just and inclusive society can be realized.

Finally, we must reflect on the lessons of history to guide our path forward. African societies once celebrated female leadership, as exemplified by figures like Queen Nzinga of Ndongo, Yaa Asantewaa of the Ashanti Kingdom and Queen Amina of Zazzau, whose legacies challenge the narrative that governance, is inherently patriarchal. If our ancestors could envision and embrace female leadership within their cultural circle, what prevents us from reclaiming that legacy today? As

Chimakonam (2019) poignantly asks, "Is it not the duty of every generation to reinterpret tradition in ways that promote justice and inclusivity for all?" (p. 64). This question compels us to confront the barriers whether cultural, institutional, or psychological that sustains gender disparity in governance and to commit to their dismantling. In the words of Letseka (2013), "A society that values the principles of *Ubuntu* must recognize that the inclusion of all, particularly women, is essential to collective progress" (p. 155). If we are to honour the ethical foundations of African values and the universal principles of justice, we must work collectively to build a future where gender equity is not an aspiration but a reality. The challenge is great, but so too is the potential for transformation when tradition is guided by the light of ethical reflection.

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