

Subordination and Complementarity: The Visibility Paradox of Women in Cameroonian Traditional Societies

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Abstract:

In Africa generally, customary law in most cases gave women a subordinate position. In the case of the Cameroonian women, they were simply living according to cultures passed down from their ancestors. It is indisputable that the most arduous and least lucrative tasks fell on women. In pre-colonial and colonial Cameroonian traditional societies for example, women were confronted with and evolved within an atmosphere of prevailing sexism. Some were subjected to men in almost all spheres of life. She was at the service of the man and he punctuated her existence from her early childhood. Women took second place, played secondary roles and were considered the property of men who had them at their convenience. The ordinary woman rarely came before the man in terms of rights or duties. However, the objective this paper is to dissect a striking paradox that emerges between her social status, her economic and religious role and her political functions. The paradox stems from the fact that in African civilisation for the most part women are simultaneously valued, dominated and sometimes oppressed. From their subordinate positions, women struggled to make themselves visible sometimes with the help of social constructs. However the use of female associations was pivotal in upgrading the status of the Cameroonian traditional woman. Without claiming to rebalance social relations or privileges through these women's societies, this research partly attests to why Africans sometimes honoured women. This research was realised based on the exploitation of both primary and secondary sources. Qualitative analyses were formed and historical methods were used in developing and interpreting relevant data. The historical research methodology helped the author to trace, narrate, describe and analyse the felicitous status and relevance of women in Cameroonian traditional societies.

Keywords:

Subordination, Cameroon, Women, Visibility, Complementarity.