

# Attributes of African Culture: The Problems of Race and Gender Discriminations

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## ABSTRACT

In modern decades, sociologists have increasingly adopted an parallel framework to inspect and explain the complex and interconnected nature of inequalities in the areas of race, class, and gender. The land of Africa has suffered tremendously under the rule of the English colonisers. Racism and Gender discrimination in South Africa has existed throughout the history of South Africa.

The effects of racism were still felt today, and South Africa had developed the National Action Plan to fight against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance. Women are strongly represented and even over represented in the cultural and creative sector, or at least in some fields of this sector. However, despite what one could think when looking at their quantitative superiority in public cultural institutions or programmes of higher education in cultural management and the arts, the creative sector is far from offering equal opportunities for women and men. The barriers found in the creative sector for women are not different from those observed in other economic sectors.

This paper aims to discuss some points on Attributes of African Culture i.e. the problems of race and gender discrimination in Africa. South Africa has a painful history of racism connected to the criminal injustices of the apartheid era, which institutionalised oppression against all people of colour.

**Keywords:** Gender, Race, Apartheid, identity crisis, xenophobia

## INTRODUCTION

Literature, has always been the carrier of myriad shades when it comes to the portrayal of different aspects of either the society or a particular community at large. There are otherwise hidden attributes which are very easily unmasked by the artistic genius of different other writers. It can hardly be found when a literary piece of writing has not lived up to the correct representation of the ramifications of the particular age in general. Human beings are always accustomed to living in a particular world where there is luxury, where there is comfort and where there are not many obstacles to overcome. We, the humans, have always associated ourselves with progress. We sort of hate a halt kind of a scenario. But then, there are numerous examples in various literary segment where the lives of either a particular community or a particular category is not a bed of roses. The lives of those categories seem to be adorned with numerous struggles and hardships which greatly heighten the issue that there are always layers of hardships and struggles which different cultures and communities have to undergo during their course of their journey.

Race and gender issues have a intense impact on society. Race is sometimes considered melted, outdated, and overtaken by social categories perceived to be more important like ethnicity and religion in shaping inequities and injustice (Kothari, 2006). Women in South Africa have gained considerable rights and opportunities since 1994, but this has not yet adequately dealt with inequalities which are still very widespread among the genders. African culture continues to promote patriarchy in many different ways and this perpetuates the subordination of women. One major issue surrounding women in South Africa is one and only the problem of violence. Abuse against women and children is still extremely common and feeds into the culture and tradition of male dominance. Because women are still refused rights and are seen as inferior to men, they are more likely to be mistreated at the work-place, in the community and at a personal level. Women are viewed as the property of men, first of their fathers and then, when they got married, of their husbands. This is encouraging male dominance and also increases and encourages violence against women.

Talking about notable African writers, the place of one of the notable writers, J.M. Coetzee in South African literature remains an uncontested one. He has been someone who, apart from dealing with the stigmatised curse of racial discrimination, vividly brings to the fore the dimensions of ethics of colonial domination. What is significant when it comes to comprehending the fictions by Coetzee is that the aspect of the colonial part lurks large as Coetzee blatantly criticises the atrocities meted out to the indigenous people by the whites. His *Waiting for the Barbarians*, rightly considered to be his masterpiece, is a vivid evidence of his concerns for the native people.

### **Racism in Africa**

A question that comes naturally to many lips is why should a particular race claim superiority over another race? Why is there still human rights abuse in the world despite the professed campaign for the elimination of human right abuse and racism? This inquiry is no less a scholarly pre-occupation given the fact that most countries profess adherence to the United Nations charters on abuse especially. What do these countries actually mean when they speak of Human Rights? Are they referring to the natural and universal equality among all people irrespective of class, race, gender, or country of origin? It appears that, in terms of universal profession of human rights and condemnation of racism, theory differs from practice as the former is abused by the state and individuals while the latter dictates the terms of relations between Africa/Black and the West/White.

Racism involves discriminatory or abusive behaviour towards people because of their imagined "inferiority". There has been wide-spread belief that there are human races within the human species, distinguishable on the basis of physical differences. Scientific research shows, however, that "human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups", and that race is an imagined entity or social construct. All humans belong to the same species and, therefore, it makes no sense to talk of "races". The impact of racist ideologies has been devastating to humanity; it has justified slavery, colonialism, apartheid of peoples. It has been the basis of the Nazi ideologies and of the programmes to exterminate Jews and other "inferior peoples".

Unfortunately, racism continues to be present in contemporary European societies, Africa and politics. Although race is no longer accepted as a biological category and only few people believe now in "superior races" with an inherent right to exercise power over those considered "inferior", the impact of racism lingers on and takes on different forms, such as cultural racism or ethnocentrism, the belief that

some cultures, usually their own, are superior or that other cultures, traditions, customs and histories are incompatible with theirs.

Racial discrimination is as pervasive as gender discrimination even in America. Many black women suffer in silence and endure scars of sexual abuse and harassment from childhood. Sexual assault and rape are common means of subjugating a black woman and her spirit. Hence, they invariably train their children to cope with discrimination in any form without offering resistance. It is as painful journey for a black woman from childhood till the end.

### **What is Gender Discriminations?**

Gender discrimination describes the situation in which people are treated differently simply because they are male or female, rather than on the basis of their individual skills or capabilities.

The following is a list of discriminatory acts you may come across among your peers, at home, at school or in the workplace.

- Sexual harassment, catcalling- Harassment and catcalling on the street are prime examples of how women's right to walk freely around their environment is restricted.
- Gender stereotypes at school and work- Stereotypes are how societies expect people to act based on their gender. For example, girls should stay at home and help with housework and childcare, should dress modestly and not stay out late at night. People are often judged by how well they adhere to the gender stereotypes.

These stereotypes can often bleed out into school and work, where girls are less likely to be encouraged into science and technology subjects or leadership roles, due to the perceived 'male nature' of these pursuits.

- Objectification and poor representation- Objectification is when a person is treated as a commodity or an object without regard to their personality or dignity. However, girls are also often represented poorly in entertainment and the media in ways that reinforce damaging gender stereotypes and traditional roles.

### **How To Challenge Gender Discrimination**

We are all influenced by gender. Gender norms (or rules) So, what is appropriate for girls and for boys, women and men to do in our society. Because of gender stereotypes, girls and women are often less valued and have lower social status.



Sophie (front) is a gender equality and sexual health campaigner from Uganda. She helped create the Girls Get Equal campaign.

Girls and women suffer most of the negative impact of rigid gender norms and roles, they are more likely to experience restrictions of their freedom and mobility, they experience epidemic levels of violence and harassment across the globe and have fewer opportunities to choose how to live their lives.

But boys and men suffer too. Ideas about what it means to be a man force boys and men to behave in very limited ways which can harm them. Negative masculinities encouraged in boys serve to perpetuate the cycle of discrimination and inequality.

Denying people the freedom to choose their path in life because of their gender prevents them from fulfilling their full potential. There is lots we can do to help build a more gender-equal world. Understanding the deep roots of gender inequality and challenging discrimination when we see it are the first steps.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, racism is a concept and practice of discrimination whereby a particular race assumes a position of superiority when treating the other race as inferior or less human: while this may be understood as common place, it remains a fact that the most often practice of racism is White superiority where Blackness determines "inferiority" and where the darker the skin, the greater the level of "inferiority" and some members of the "inferior race" aspire to attain the position of superiority at all cost. For instance, pop star Michael Jackson underwent cosmetic surgery to change his face and there is a custom among many US-American Blacks to straighten their curly hair: such practices would be deemed inappropriate and destructive in the opinion of Onwueme as expressed in *Riot in Heaven*. The greatest effect of racism is the self-erosion, low self esteem, and identity crisis for the victims

There are different cultural norms among the African people which promote male dominance and treat women as subordinate to men. Women deserve to be respected and treated as equals by their male counterparts, especially when it has such a huge influence over the possibility of life and death. Unless we deal with this lack of respect for women and youth, the problem of race and gender discrimination will continue to haunt us in Africa. Men are not afraid of being equal with women and are willing to change their behaviour and attitudes. This should include developing new masculine and feminine ideologies, especially among the youth. The involvement of men in programmes especially the fight against the problems of race and gender discrimination is essential.

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