



# **Gender and gender equality: universal concepts or social constructs?**

**A comparative analysis between the Western and Sub-Saharan African culture about the concepts of gender and gender equality**

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### **Abstract**

Gender equality is a topic that is high on the agenda of many international organizations that try to enhance gender equality around the globe. However, gender is a social construct and the interpretation differs across cultures. The interpretation of gender equality also differs between cultures, which can partly be explained by the differences in Hofstede's cultural dimensions. In this thesis, a comparison is made between the Western and Sub-Saharan African interpretation of the concepts of gender and gender equality. Results show that in the West, gender is a dichotomous social construct that has always shaped the social order in Western societies. In Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA), the concept of gender was almost non-existent before colonization and seniority determined the social order in Sub-Saharan African, but colonization made that the concept of gender was introduced in SSA. In general, the colonization of the West had an enormous negative impact on everyone living in the continent. Regarding gender equality, this is defined in the West from the perspective of the individual, liberty and a small power distance. In SSA, gender equality is defined from the perspective of the community, Ubuntu and a higher power distance. Furthermore, gender equality in SSA is related to the de-colonization of the entire continent.

*Keywords:* gender, equality, gender equality, the West, Sub-Saharan Africa, colonization, individualism, collectivism, power, Ubuntu.

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## 1. Introduction

These days, gender equality is put highly on the agenda of governments and international institutions. For example, the fifth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - 17 goals that are set by the United Nations to achieve prosperity and peace in the world (United Nations, n.d.) - is to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (United Nations - Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Before coming up with the SDGs, several international conferences have been held by the United Nations (UN) to discuss the topic of gender equality. During a conference in New York, starting on December 18, 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations Human Rights, 1979), which was signed by almost every country in the world. This convention wanted “to take “all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men”” (United Nations Human Rights, 1979). Another important conference was the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, which resulted in the Beijing Declaration. This declaration also wanted to achieve more gender equality for women all around the world, since this is part of all human rights (United Nations, 1995).

According to the UNESCO Africa Department (2017), achieving gender equality is very important in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as well, since women there still have to deal with many barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential, despite the fact that it is acknowledged that empowering women benefits everyone and will lead to more overall development (UNESCO Africa Department, 2017, p.10). Therefore, many policies are implemented in SSA to get more gender equality. Those policies include promoting girls’ education in multiple ways, (UNESCO Africa Department, 2017, p.31), trying to stop violence against women (UNESCO Africa Department, 2017, p. 45) and helping female entrepreneurs to start a sustainable business (UNESCO Africa Department, 2017, p. 53). The UN has also many policies to enhance gender equality everywhere around the globe, so also in SSA, which is specified in the fifth goal of the SDGs. Examples of indicators for this goal are the implementation of legal frameworks to secure equal rights between women and men, ending sexual and physical violence against women, ending child marriage and stopping female genital mutilation (FGM) (SDG Tracker, n.d.). As one can see, many things are done to empower women and to achieve more gender equality.

However, despite all those efforts, gender inequality is still very high in SSA, compared to other regions in the world. This can be shown with the Gender Inequality Index (GII). This is a “measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market” (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020a, p. 364). If the GII is high, there is more inequality

between men and women and there is less human development in comparison with a low score in GII (UNDP, n.d.-b). The Gender Inequality Index (GII) was 0.570 in 2019 in SSA, indicating that there is medium to low human development, which is the highest score of all regions worldwide (UNDP, 2020a, p. 364).

Of course, one could argue that there is still such a high level of gender inequality in SSA because not enough has been done to enhance gender equality (Dibie & Dibie, 2012, p. 96). Furthermore, the cultural practices, values and traditions in SSA might have to change in order to create more gender equality in the communities (Dibie & Dibie, 2012, p. 101). With the abovementioned statement, Dibie & Dibie clearly consider the Western practices, values and traditions as better than those of SSA, since those of SSA have to change. This is an example of ethnocentrism, which occurs when someone expresses preference or superiority of their own values and beliefs above those of another ethnic group (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012, p. 888). However, ethnocentrism from one culture or group often has negative effects for the other groups, since it makes that the dominant group will pursue their own interests and do not take the opinions and feelings of the other group into consideration when doing this (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012). The statement of Dibie & Dibie (2012) that cultural practices and values have to change shows that the Western culture is seen as the norm, meaning that the Western view on gender equality is also seen as the norm. However, research shows that policies implemented for enhancing gender equality are not always appreciated by the local communities in SSA. Wendoh & Wallace (2005) mentioned that promoting gender equality is something that is considered important by governments and several local NGOs, but not something that is always considered to be an issue by the local community. Often, the communities in SSA feel that ideas about gender equality are imposed on them, they often do not understand those ideas or don't see them as an issue (Wendoh & Wallace, 2005, p. 71). The whole concept of gender is sometimes not even understood (Wendoh & Wallace, 2005, p. 73). Local communities felt that the ideas about gender equality that are described in the Beijing Declaration did not take the African community into consideration (Wendoh & Wallace, 2005, p. 74). Especially men feel threatened by the concept of gender equality, they feel that it reduces their power. However, women also expressed that they felt threatened by the ideas of gender equality (Wendoh & Wallace, 2005, p. 76). Sometimes, they even feel that their community is disrupted if policies aiming at gender equality are implemented in their community (Wendoh & Wallace, 2005, p. 76).

The remark that the Beijing Declaration did not take the African community into consideration is an important one. It might be the case that an African interpretation of gender is different than the Western interpretation. Persons and institutions are socially created constructs (Liebrucks, 2001, p. 365). Therefore, gender is also a socially constructed concept and will differ between different cultures.

The same holds for gender equality. For example, the UN is of the main organizations that tries to enhance gender equality globally, but it is acknowledged that the United Nations often has a Western bias, mostly because the organization is controlled to a large extent by the United States (Puchala, 2005, p. 574). A criticism at the UN is that the organization often wants to impose their own values and interests upon the other countries in the world, while those are not necessary the interest of those other countries (Puchala, 2005, p. 574). One should see that norms and values are culturally and historically shaped and develop over time. Therefore, they are dynamic instead of fixed (Krook & True, 2010, p. 104). Norms of the Western culture influence the policies implemented by international organizations, but international organizations also influence the norms (Krook & True, 2010, p. 104). This also holds for the norm of gender equality as viewed by the UN (Krook & True, 2010, p. 105). These norms about gender equality were developed in a certain way by the UN, leading to a specific interpretation of gender equality. However, in SSA the development of the concept “gender equality” was probably different due to different cultural values and a different history.

Hofstede has done research about differences in culture, and he found six dimensions (such as collectivism/individualism and masculinity/femininity) along which cultures differ from each other (Hofstede, 1983). Hofstede therefore provides a framework to compare cultures, so his work can be used to discover the cultural differences between the West and SSA.

Van Stam (2017) argues that people living outside Africa often understand very little of the complex African society. He mentions that theories and research done about Africa are often completely irrelevant in SSA (Van Stam, 2017, p. 19). Therefore, he argues that the rest of the world outside Africa has to get a better understanding of the African way of living (Van Stam, 2017 p. 26). For example, Dibia & Dibia (2012, p. 99) argued that in order to achieve gender equality, the identity of women should become detached from their own families. However, an important value in SSA is Ubuntu. Among other things, this includes a collective idea of identity, meaning that one’s identity is expressed in their relation to others (Van Stam, 2017, p. 45). Therefore, the identity of women should not be detached from those of their families, since this is absolutely not in line with the value of Ubuntu. In line with the opinion of Van Stam (2017), I would like to argue that a better understanding of the African culture should be created, especially with regard to the African interpretation of gender and gender equality. This understanding of the African interpretation of those concepts can be used to see if there are differences and similarities between the interpretation of SSA and the (more Western) interpretation of gender equality by international organizations such as the UN. This difference in interpretation might give an explanation for the fact that there is still so much gender inequality in SSA according to the measurements done by the UN. Furthermore, if the implementation is not in line with the local (African) ideas and values of the role of women, the

community might be disrupted. This might result in all types of negative side effects in the local communities in SSA. Once we have a better understanding of the interpretation of the two concepts in SSA, the implementations will be more successful without creating negative side effects for the local communities in SSA.

I will compare the African understanding of the concepts of gender and gender equality with the Western way of looking at those two concepts. Therefore, the research question is: **What are the differences and similarities between the Western interpretation and the interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa of the social concepts 'gender' and 'gender equality'?** In the following thesis, I will try to answer this question with the help of literature and interviews. This thesis will be a 'compare and contrast essay', meaning that I will describe the different interpretations of gender and gender equality from both societies. After that, I will reflect on both interpretations by comparing them, to understand the differences and the similarities between the two interpretations of the two concepts between both societies.

The aim of this paper is to create a better understanding of the Western and African interpretation of gender and gender equality. A better understanding of the interpretation of both societies of those two concepts will contribute to the scientific and political debate about gender and gender equality.



## **2. Research Method**

In order to generate an answer for the above-mentioned research question, I used two different methods. First of all, I did an extensive literature review to get an idea of the definitions of gender and gender equality in academic literature. Secondly, I have interviewed one expert in the West to see how she interpreted these concepts in her work field. Furthermore, I interviewed one expert in this field in SSA, to look at her interpretation and definition of the two concepts in the context of SSA. Since this thesis is a compare and contrast essay, I analyzed the academic literature and the insights from the people I interviewed and critically reflected on the information, in order to investigate the differences and similarities between the West and SSA in the way they define gender and gender equality.

### **2.1. Literature review**

For the literature review, I searched for literature about Hofstede's cultural dimensions, gender, equality, gender equality and Ubuntu.

#### **2.1.1 Cultural dimensions Hofstede**

In order to answer the research question, it is important to know the cultural differences between the West and SSA, since gender and gender equality are social constructs based on culture and history. Therefore, I studied the cultural dimensions that are mentioned by Hofstede. The cultural dimensions of Hofstede show how societies differ in their approaches to fundamental problems that arise in every society, for example how to deal with the two different sexes in humanity (Hofstede, 1983). The search term I used and the number of results can be found in Appendix 1. For this literature review, I selected the original work of Hofstede, to get the best idea of his research about the different cultural dimensions.

#### **2.1.2 Western perspective**

I started with investigating the Western interpretation of the concepts of gender, equality and gender equality.

The review about gender and gender equality from the Western perspective started with the definition of gender and gender equality that is being used by the UN. Since the UN does so many measurements and has so many policies concerning gender equality, I assumed that the organization is very influential in the field of gender equality. Therefore, I wanted to look at the definition this organization gives for gender and gender equality. Furthermore, the Gender Inequality Index is a measure of the UN (UNDP, n.d.-b), so I also looked at the GII for the concept of gender and gender equality. I also looked at the definitions given by UNESCO and the World Bank, another organization that tries to decrease the gaps between men and women, especially regarding health and education (World Bank Group

Gender, 2020). Both UNESCO and the World Bank are very influential organizations in the field of gender equality, so I wanted to know how they interpreted the concepts of gender and gender equality.

I used the search engine 'Google Scholar' for academic literature for the Western perspective on the different concepts. I used academic literature for the interpretation of gender, gender equality and equality in general. The terms I used for getting academic literature about gender, equality and gender equality and the number of results for each search term can be found in Appendix 1. There were many results for each search term, so I chose the setting in Google Scholar that sorted them automatically on relevance. For Google Scholar, the ranking on relevance takes the full text and the author of the source into consideration, as well as the publication that contained the source and the number of citations in scholarly literature (University of Minnesota, n.d.). Therefore, I only looked at the first sixty items since those would be the most relevant ones for my research. Then I scanned the different titles to see which ones could really give a definition, and I used the articles or books that did.

For all searches, I did not select the articles based on a specific time period, so articles that were published in any year appeared. I made this decision since in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much has been written about gender and gender equality. I wanted to investigate how this has influenced the policies regarding gender equality, since for example the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was already adopted in 1979. Therefore, I investigated literature from a large period of time. Furthermore, I did not sort the articles on a specific language, but all the first sixty results were in English, so I only used articles written in English for the literature review.

### ***2.1.3 Sub-Saharan African perspective***

For the Sub-Saharan African interpretation of gender, I used the definition that is used by the UNESCO Africa Department, since this is a part of the international organization UNESCO that is seated in Africa, so I assumed that this organization could provide insight in the African interpretation of gender. Since gender is a concept that is sometimes not understood in SSA (Wendoh & Wallace, 2005, p. 73), I did not use academic literature for the interpretation of SSA for the concept of gender, since there is no literature about gender from the African perspective.

In order to find literature about gender equality in Sub-Saharan Africa, I also used the search engine Google Scholar. Since Ubuntu is such an important value in SSA, I investigated the meaning of this concept with the help of academic literature as well. The search terms I used and the number of results of each search term can again be found in Appendix 1.

Unfortunately, research has shown that the number of articles that are published by African scholars has declined in the past years, due to a low acceptance rate of articles submitted by authors from SSA (Briggs & Weathers, 2016, p. 467). Therefore, there is little knowledge about Africa and about the African perspective on the world in academic literature (Briggs & Weathers, 2016, p. 469). This means that it was hard to find enough literature with the help of search engines such as Google Scholar about the African perspective on gender equality and Ubuntu, since little has been published. In order to overcome this problem, I contacted the researcher Gertjan van Stam. He is a Dutch researcher who currently lives in Zimbabwe and who has published many articles about ethnocentrism in articles written by Western scholars about Africa. My supervisor Mia Stokmans knew him personally, and therefore I contacted him since I expected that he would have access to more literature about gender equality and Ubuntu written from the African perspective. Indeed, after I contacted him he immediately responded with several books and articles that I could use for this literature review. Together with the articles I could find via Google Scholar, I had enough literature from the African perspective as well. Furthermore, I used one of the books that he recommended to me, 'The Invention of Women: Making an African sense of Western Gender Discourses', written by Oyèronké Oyěwùmí in 1997, to investigate how the social order is determined in SSA, because the concept of gender was non-existent in SSA, so therefore the social order was not determined by gender. A list of the books and articles I used that he recommended can be found in Appendix 1.

## **2.2. The interviews**

Besides the literature review, I interviewed two different people to see how they interpreted the concepts of gender and gender equality. It was necessary that the people I interviewed were experts in the domain of gender equality and women empowerment, since they should be able to provide detailed information about the way they looked at gender and gender equality.

### **2.2.1 Selection of the participants for the interviews**

I interviewed one expert about the Western perspective and one expert from SSA, from Uganda. For getting interviews from experts for the Western perspective, I contacted organizations in the Netherlands that were concerned with women's rights. To determine which organizations I could contact, I searched on Google with the term 'gendergelijkheid organisatie nederland'. Several organizations came up that were concerned with gender equality in the Netherlands. The most relevant results automatically come up first (Google Zoeken, n.d.), so therefore I looked at the first 20 results that occurred, in order to find an organization that had experts in the field of gender equality in the Netherlands. I then contacted

a first organization from which I thought could help me the most with my research, to ask if I could interview someone about gender and gender equality.

Unfortunately, not many organizations were willing to help me with the interview, or they simply did not have time to do an interview. Therefore, every time an organization told me they could not help me, I contacted the next organization that came up after I googled 'gendergelijkheid organisatie nederland.' Furthermore, one of the women I contacted did some suggestions of other organizations I could contact as well. These organizations did not show up on the results on Google, but after I looked for information about those organizations, I thought that most of them were experts in the field of gender equality. Therefore, I also contacted several of the organizations that were suggested to me.

In the end, I found one organization that was willing to participate in the interview. This was a relatively new organization concerned with feminism. The woman I could interview was in the board of that organization and was called Mirthe (all names that are mentioned are not the real names of the participants to guarantee anonymity in this research).

For experts from SSA it was a bit harder to find someone, since I did not know any experts that live in SSA and since it is much harder to find someone via the internet who lives there. Fortunately, my supervisor had several contacts in Uganda who were experts in the field of gender equality, so therefore I contacted two of those people living in Uganda, meaning that I used a convenience sample for the interviews. One woman was able to participate in the interview at the end. She is called Anna and works at a university in Uganda.

### **2.2.2 Procedure**

I approached the participants via e-mail to ask if they were willing to participate in an interview about their work regarding gender equality and women empowerment. The text of the e-mail can be found in Appendix 2. We then set a date, and I sent them a topic list and a form for giving informed consent for participating in the interview. The form for informed consent can be found in Appendix 3, the topic lists in Appendix 4.

Both participants gave their consent for the interview, Anna did it verbally at the beginning of the interview and Mirthe signed the informed consent form and sent it back to me via e-mail.

I recorded the interview (to which all participants had given consent), to make sure that I was able to recall exactly what each participant had said in the interview.

### **2.2.3 The interviews**

For the interviews, I did an unstructured interview in which I asked the participants about their interpretation of the concepts of gender and gender equality (see Appendix 4 for the topic list). This type of interview enabled the participant to talk freely about their

interpretation, without me steering them into a certain direction. For example, I asked the participant how they thought about gender equality, and then I just let the participant talk freely. If necessary, I asked for examples or for more detailed explanations, in order to really understand their view on gender and gender equality. The main topics I discussed were the work of the participants in the field of women empowerment and their interpretation of the concept of gender equality. Furthermore, I asked them especially about gender equality in the Ugandan or Western culture, in order to see if there were any differences in interpretation.

I had the feeling that both participants felt at ease during the interview and that they felt that they could talk freely. I also really enjoyed talking with both participants and hearing their perspectives on the topic of gender equality and women empowerment.

### 3. Hofstede's cultural dimensions

#### 3.1 Introduction

Since gender and gender equality are social constructs, their meaning heavily leans of the social, historical and cultural context of the people involved. Since Hofstede provides a framework to compare different cultures, his framework will be discussed. Hofstede uses the following definition of a culture: "Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede, 2011, p. 3). Both concepts of gender and gender equality are social constructs and are rooted in culture (Lorber, 2000, p. 82). Therefore, our culture determines to a large extent how we look at those two concepts, and it is very likely that people from different cultures will look differently at the concepts, since they have a different programming of mind. Hofstede's cultural dimensions can form a basis for reflecting on the differences and similarities between the West and SSA of the interpretations of the concepts of gender and gender equality.

#### 3.2. Hofstede's research

Hofstede first explains that every society has to deal with certain fundamental problems, such as how to deal with the existence of the two different sexes, and every society deals with these problems in a different way (Hofstede, 2011, p. 3). To get an idea of cultural differences, Hofstede did a factor analysis with 32 different values in 30 countries and at first, he identified four different dimensions. Later, two other dimensions were added (Hofstede, 2011, pp. 6-7). He has identified the following six dimensions: power distance, masculinity/femininity, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, indulgence/restraint and long/short term orientation (Hofstede, 2011, p. 2). Below, I will discuss the different dimensions successively.

#### 3.3. The different cultural dimensions

Power distance is about whether power is or is not distributed equally in society and if people accept that some have more power than others (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9). The concept of power can be defined in two different ways, since power has two different faces. The first type of power is power for people who want to have prestige in life and want to have control over others (McClelland, 1970, p. 36). I will call this type of power 'power for status' in the rest of this thesis. This aspect of power is often seen as negative and even dangerous. However, the other side of power is quite positive. It is beneficial for a group if there is one leader who exercises power to make decisions for others in order to help them further (McClelland, 1970, p. 36). This type of leader with power inspires others and makes them feel confident, making the members of the group able to do the best work possible. This is a more socialized form of

having power (McClelland, 1970, p. 39). I call this type of power 'decision-making power for the community'. Different cultures might interpret power in a different way, and this might lead to different scores on power distance.

In countries that score low on power distance, children are treated as equals to parents and there is little fear or respect towards elderly people. Hierarchies are only established if this is convenient, but this means inequality of roles, so this is avoided as much as possible. In cultures that score high on power distance, children are expected to be obedient towards their parents and older people are respected. There is a hierarchy and therefore inequality in society (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9).

Masculinity/femininity is about which values are more appreciated in society, masculine or feminine values. In societies that score high on masculinity, being assertive and competitive is valued, whereas in countries that score higher on femininity, being modest and caring is more valued (Hofstede, 2011, p. 12).

Individualism/Collectivism shows if the main focus in society is on the individual or the community. Individualism means that people are expected to only take care of themselves and maybe their direct family. There are loose ties between individuals. In more collectivistic countries, the ties are very strong so there are often strong cohesive groups. A family includes not only parents and siblings, but uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents as well. People expect loyalty towards their ingroup, and in return the members get protection (Hofstede, 2011, p. 11).

Uncertainty avoidance is about the extent to which people feel at ease in unstructured or unexpected situations. Countries that score high on uncertainty avoidance often have clear behavioral codes and deviant behavior is disapproved. People living in those countries score higher on neuroticism, anxiety and stress, and structure and clarity are needed. Countries that score lower on uncertainty avoidance are more comfortable with unexpected happenings and they score lower on stress and anxiety (Hofstede, 2011, p. 10).

Short/long term orientation is mostly about whether people are more concerned with the past/present or with the future. People in countries scoring high on short-term orientation think that the most important life events have already occurred or are taking place in the present. It is valued to be a steady, considerate person and traditions are very important. Long-term orientation is more about being concerned with your future, being able to adapt to the circumstances is seen as a good thing and traditions can always change (Hofstede, 2011, p. 15).

Finally, the dimension of indulgence/restraint is about whether society values and allows hedonism or if one should try to control and regulate their own needs. In countries scoring high on indulgence, freedom of speech and leisure time are considered to be important, and a high percentage of people will state that they are happy. The sexual norms

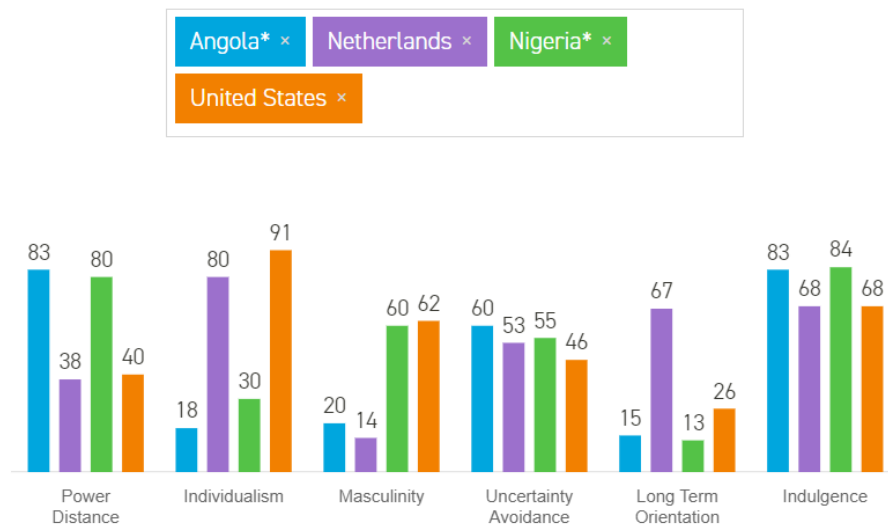
are quite lenient. In more restrained countries, people report to be less happy, and leisure time and freedom of speech are not very important. Sexual norms are stricter (Hofstede, 2011, p. 16).

### **3.4. Cultural differences between SSA and the West**

For the comparison regarding gender and gender equality between Western and SSA societies, the differences in power distance, masculinity/femininity and individualism/collectivism seem the most important. The dimension of masculinity and femininity is important since this shows how different cultures deal with the 'problem' of having two sexes in their society. Furthermore, it shows the cultural norm about gender, namely what is valued more in society, masculinity or femininity, so this will give us a good insight in the differences in interpretation of gender equality. Secondly, the dimension of power distance will give us a good insight how the different cultures look at equality. If there is little power distance, then everyone is equal, and people will consider this to be a good thing. If there is more power distance, then hierarchy will automatically be more accepted. Therefore, this dimension of power distance will help to provide insight in the interpretation of gender *equality*, to see to what extent a society thinks that there should be total equality between the two genders, or if people are okay if there is a certain extent of hierarchy. Finally, the dimension of individualism/collectivism indicates where the main identity of the individual is based on, namely the actions of the individual (individualism) or the actions of a group (collectivism). This is mainly important for the interpretation of gender and gender equality in practice since gender is an aspect of the identity of a person.

In discussing gender and gender equality, I will reflect on the different perspectives of the two cultures by using these three dimensions.





*Figure 1.* From “Compare countries,” by Hofstede Insights, n.d., <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>

Figure 1 (Hofstede insights, n.d.) illustrates the cultural differences between two Western countries (United States and the Netherlands) with countries in SSA (Nigeria and Angola). As one can see in Figure 1, the two Western countries score both low on power distance and high on individualism. Countries in SSA score the opposite on these dimensions, namely high on power distance and low on individualism. The score differed between countries in masculinity, both the United States and Nigeria scored high on this and Angola and the Netherlands scored low. This shows that some of the values differ between Western or SSA countries themselves. However, the Netherlands is an outlier here compared to other Western countries. Other Western countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany and France score 66, 66 and 43 respectively on masculinity (Hofstede insights, n.d.). This is much higher than the Netherlands, so apparently other Western countries score quite high on masculinity. Furthermore, all this data is collected in 1983 (Hofstede, 1983). Since this is already almost 40 years ago, there is a chance that the scores have changed in the meantime. However, no new data is available, so for this thesis, I have to rely on this data.

All in all, one should keep the differences between the two cultures in mind regarding collectivism/individualism, masculinity/femininity and power distance since this provides a framework for the analysis of the interpretation of the concepts of gender and gender equality.

#### **4. The Western perspective on gender and gender equality**

In this chapter the literature for the Western perspective (see Appendix 1) as well as the interview (see Appendix 4 for the topic list) with the Western expert are reported on. I will first discuss the perspective on gender, then the Western perspective on equality in general and finally I will discuss the Western interpretation of gender equality.

##### **4.1 The Western perspective on gender**

In this paragraph I will discuss the Western perspective on gender by looking at the interpretation given by international organizations. After that, academic literature and insights from the interview with Mirthe will be discussed.

##### **4.1.1 *Interpretation international organizations***

Different international organizations have a similar interpretation of gender. The United Nations defines gender in the following way:

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a women [sic] or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age. (UN Women, n.d., Concepts and definitions, para. 2)

This definition shows that gender is regarded as a dichotomous concept, someone is either a man or a woman. Also, this definition acknowledges that gender is something that is learned and constructed, and therefore depends on culture. Furthermore, in this definition there is already the notion that there are differences and that there is inequality between men and women. This raises the question if differences between men and women immediately result in inequalities between men and women, or if men and women can be different, but evaluated equally. In the chapter about gender equality, I will take a closer look at this question.

The World Bank defines gender the following: “Gender refers to the social, behavioral and cultural attributes, expectations, and norms associated with being male or female” (World Bank group, 2015).

UNESCO gives the following definition of gender:

Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Gender roles and expectations are learned. They can change over time and they vary within and among cultures. Systems of social differentiation such as political status, class, ethnicity, age, physical and mental disability, and more all modify gender roles. The concept of gender is vital, because when applied to social analysis it reveals how women’s subordination (or men’s domination) is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined nor is it fixed forever. (UNESCO, 2003, p.1)

This definition also mentions that gender is about the roles, responsibilities and expectations people have of someone, and the definition states that this is learned, just as the UN mentions. Furthermore, this definition already mentions that women’s subordination is a feature of gender, and women are always subordinated to men, instead of the other way around.

Therefore, all three definitions mostly show that gender is about social expectations that are different between men and women. Again, the definitions acknowledge that gender is culturally and socially determined, so the meaning that is attached to being a man or a woman can vary across cultures.

For calculating the GII, the United Nations Development Department (UNDP) does not give a clear definition of their interpretation of gender. For measuring the GII, they simply look at the two sexes, whether someone classifies themselves as male or female (UNDP, 2020b). Therefore, they take sex as a reference point for measuring gender inequality, instead of the socially constructed concept of gender. The difference between sex and gender will be explained in the next paragraph.

#### ***4.1.2 Academic literature and interview about gender***

A lot has been written about the concept of gender by scholars as well. A distinction is made in literature between the concepts ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. Sex refers to the differences between men and women that are biological (Holmes, 2007). Gender is about the different

norms and expectations for men and women that are produced by society (Holmes, 2007). Gender consists of two different categories, someone is either a 'man' or a 'woman' (Moore, 1994, p. 814). However, even though a clear division is made between the concept sex and gender, the biological differences between men and women determine the two different categories in gender (Moore, 1994, p. 815). Sex is seen as the most important criterium to classify a person as a man or as a woman (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127).

However, gender itself is something that is created through interaction and can change if the situation changes (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 128). Gender is something that is learned or maybe indoctrinated throughout the years (Diamond, 2004, p. 592). Therefore, the interpretation of gender can differ between different social and historical contexts. In the West, men and women face different expectations about their roles and behavior. For example, being masculine is associated with individualism, reason, science, exploitation and the public sphere. Femininity on the other hand is associated with nurturance, intuition, nature, conservation and the private sphere (Conway, Bourque, & Scott, 1987, p. 29).

The concept of gender and the division that is made between being either male or female determines how one should behave and has many social and psychological consequences (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127). These different expectations regarding one's behavior and role often manifest themselves from an early age on. In the interview with the Dutch organization, Mirthé said that she had watched a program on television where little children had to bake a cake with a horror theme. There was one little girl of seven years old who made a cake of a bride who was completely covered in blood because she had been attacked by her ex-husband. This is quite a stereotypical image about both men and women, and the girl was only seven years old. Therefore, it seems that those expectations regarding gender are internalized from an early age on.

Besides this, gender is important for one's identity, since a person has a 'core gender identity' which is a part of the whole identity of a person (Diamond, 2004, p. 592). There is also the term 'sexual identity', which makes a person aware of the way they have to fit into society (Diamond, 2004, p. 592). Therefore, since gender is a part of one's identity, changing your gender identity will change your whole identity. This is an individualistic view on gender since it shows that people have a personal identity. One's identity is not dependent on the group. This is in line with the findings of Hofstede, who showed that the West scores high on individualism (Hofstede, 1983).

Another aspect of the concept of gender is that there is a certain hierarchy between the two different genders, women are seen as disadvantaged compared to men (Holmes, 2007, p. 173). Furthermore, men are seen as the norm and their characteristics are considered to be universal. Women on the other hand have characteristics that are seen as specific for being female (Conway, Bourque, & Scott, 1987, p. 29). Therefore, liberal feminism often wants

women to be able to live up to the masculine norms, so they can participate in the system. They do not want to change the system so that it becomes more fit for women (Holmes, 2007, p. 69).

All in all, gender is seen “as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). So, gender is a social construct, and the concept also clearly determines the social order in the Western society.

The definitions that are given by the United Nations and UNESCO clearly fit into the Western line of reasoning of the above-mentioned scholars, since the organizations also mention that gender is a dichotomous concept and is something that is socially constructed. Furthermore, women are disadvantaged compared to men. One should keep this in mind when I start looking at the Western perspective of gender equality and when I compare this with the perspective of SSA.

#### **4.2 The Western perspective on equality**

Before I look at the concept of gender equality, I will explain what is meant in the West with the term equality. For this, I mainly used the article *‘Equality as a value: Ideology in Dumont, Melanesia and the West’*, written by Robbins in 1994, where Robbins reviews the work of Dumont. Dumont is an anthropologist who investigated how values are operationalized across different cultures, so he also looked how equality and egalitarianism are defined in different cultures. Robbins reviews and structures his work in this paper with regard to equality (Robbins, 1994, p. 25). In the West, we see inequality as a feature of every society and no society is in our view already egalitarian (Robbins, 1994, p. 24). So, we know what inequality looks like, but in literature, no clear definition of the term equality is given (Robbins, 1994, p. 22).

In his article, Robbins mentions different values that occur in every society, namely holism, individualism, equality and hierarchy. It depends on the culture which of those four values is more prominent (Robbins, 1994, p. 27). In the Western society, individualism and equality are the most important values, and individualism is deemed as more important than equality (Robbins, 1994, p. 29). This is in line with the findings of Hofstede since Western countries score high on individualism and rather low on power distance compared to countries in SSA.

However, individualism is often in conflict with equality (Robbins, 1994, p. 30). Since equality and individualism are each other’s opposites, they cannot both be fully realized (Robbins, 1994, p. 31). Therefore, it is good to first take a closer look at the definitions of individualism and equality. Regarding individualism, there are four main subvalues of

individualism in the West, namely the dignity of man, autonomy, privacy and self-development (Robbins, 1994, p. 31). The latter four subvalues determine how the West looks at equality: every individual should have the same amount of *dignity, autonomy, privacy and opportunities for self-development* (Robbins, 1994, p. 32). Every individual has the same individualistic rights, in order to differentiate themselves as much as possible from others. This is the definition of equality that is often used in the West (Robbins, 1994, p. 32). Furthermore “equality in individualist ideology is completely defined in terms of liberty” (Robbins, 1994, p. 32). In the West, the philosopher Kant has been very influential for the way we think about certain concepts. Kant said that we only need freedom to truly enlighten ourselves. This means that we must think for ourselves and to never rely on the wisdom or authority from others (Haynes & Hickel, 2016, p. 5). In the West, this process of liberating oneself from things that limit the individual, such as social norms and values, is very important, since this will make that the individual can realize their own full potential (Haynes & Hickel, 2016, p.6). This shows again that individualism is the most important value in the West, the individual itself should not be limited in their actions. To make that men and women can reach their own full potential, it is important that there are little hierarchical relationships in the West. Hierarchies in society pose restrictions on the liberty of individuals, since with hierarchies, individuals are interdependent of each other and a part of their autonomy is taken away by their superiors (Haynes & Hickel, 2016, p.7). In the West, power is defined as ‘power for status’ (McClelland, 1970, p. 32). Since power for status is evaluated negatively and since people in the West do not want that their freedom is limited by others, Western people do not want individuals to have more power than others. This explains why countries in the West often score low on power distance, as was mentioned by Hofstede (Hofstede, 1983, p. 52).

Secondly, it is important to get a better understanding of the definition of equality in the West. Therefore, it is necessary to see the distinction that is made between four different aspects of equality:

The first one is ontological equality or the fundamental equality of persons. Secondly, there is equality of opportunity to achieve desirable ends. Thirdly there is equality of condition where there is an attempt to make the conditions of life equal for relevant social groups. Fourthly there is equality of outcome or equality of result. (Turner, as cited in Robbins, 1994, p. 33)

Ontological equality is mostly about the dignity of people, every person has the same human dignity as everyone else. Equality of opportunity means that every person should have the same opportunity to become freer and to differentiate oneself from others (Robbins 1994, p. 33). Equality of outcome is that every person is in reality completely the same as other

people (Robbins, 1994, p. 33). The latter is not in line with the Western idea of individualism, since one should differentiate oneself as much as possible from other people, so then you have to make sure that you are not equal as others in the end (Robbins, 1994, p. 33). Finally, equality of condition is linked to both equality of opportunity and equality of outcome (Robbins, 1994, p. 34). For example, there is equality in condition if all children who go to school for the first time had the same upbringing and therefore have an equal level on which they start. Equality of condition is also not really in line with the value of individualism, since it is linked to equality of outcome (Robbins, 1994, p. 34). So, equality of opportunity, condition and outcome “are locked in a chain of entailment such that equality of opportunity expects equality of condition for its fullest realization, and equality of condition similarly expects equality of outcome” (Robbins, 1994, p. 35). However, equality of outcome is in conflict with individualism since then everyone is the same instead of different. This makes that it is so hard to grasp the meaning of true equality in the West, since equality of opportunity, condition and outcome are all intertwined, but equality of outcome is more in conflict with individualism than equality of opportunity and condition (Robbins, 1994, p. 36). The definition of equality in the West both wants similarity and difference, but they cannot be there at the same time. Therefore, the dominant value of individualism in the West determines if the focus is on being different (in outcomes) or on similarity (in opportunities) (Robbins 1994, p.36). Overall, the focus is on ontological equality and equality of opportunities in the West since these aspects of equality are not in conflict with the value of individualism. The most important aspect we focus on is equality of opportunities, everyone in society should have the same opportunity to differentiate oneself as much as possible from others (Robbins, 1994, p. 35).

Finally, besides the four different aspects of equality as mentioned by Turner, Robbins talks about another feature of equality, namely equality in relationships between individuals. He mentions that in the West, relationships are only important for the individual if they have value for the individual. Therefore, equality has little to do with equality in relationships between people. In the West, we look at the relation someone has with the state or society, because the state can give people the opportunity to differentiate themselves and liberty and differentiation are valued in our Western society. Therefore, equality is seen as being equal to the state or in society and not directly in relationships to other people (Robbins, 1994, p. 36). However, it is important to note that an individual is always part of a larger group, and the individual is also formed through those social norms (Haynes & Hickel, 2016, p.7). So, in reality people need other people to be formed, but in the West, we want to live an independent life what means that relationships in a social group are deemed less important.

In conclusion, the definition of equality in the West is complicated, since it is both about being equal (in opportunities) and being different (in outcomes) (Robbins, 1994, p. 35). The Western focus on equality makes that hierarchies are not accepted in society, making that the

power distance is low. Power in the West is defined as power for status. Furthermore, the core value in the West is individualism, and equality is therefore defined as having equal rights and opportunities to differentiate oneself as much as possible from others. However, this does not fit the social reality in the West, since every individual is raised and socialized in a social group in society. This group has certain expectations about the role of that individual and expects the person to conform to these norms. Therefore, there is a tension in thinking in the West between the world as we want it to be and the world as it is in reality.

### **4.3 The Western perspective on gender equality**

First of all, the definition of gender equality is often unclear. Politicians and people from academia do not agree with each other on the exact meaning of gender equality (Verloo, 2010, p. 22). In order to get a better understanding of the complex meaning of gender equality, I will first take a look at the definitions of international organizations that are concerned with gender equality. After that, I will look at the GII and finally I look at Western academic literature regarding gender equality. I will also include insights in this chapter from the interview with Mirthe. When doing this, I will try to see if the definitions I found about gender equality focus on one of the four different aspects of equality as mentioned by Turner, cited in Robbins, to see if we focus in the West on ontological equality, equality of opportunity, condition and/or outcome.

#### **4.3.1 Interpretation by international organizations**

When looking at the concept of gender equality, there are again quite some similarities between the different organizations that look at gender equality. The United Nations defines it as:

The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. (...) Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development. (UN Women, n.d., Concepts and definitions, para. 1)

This definition includes an aspect of ontological equality, since it states that everyone should have the same human dignity. Furthermore, the definition states that men and women should have the same opportunities and rights in life, so this is related to equality of opportunity as mentioned by Turner. Men and women should not become the same, so it is not about equality of outcome. However, the aspect of having equal responsibilities is not in line with the



paper of Robbins, since he stated that individuals in the West value liberty and having responsibilities conflicts with liberty.

The World Bank defines it the following way: "Gender equality refers to how these factors determine the way in which women and men relate to each other and to the resulting differences in power between them" (World Bank Group, 2015, p. 6). This definition shows that differences in power are important for defining gender equality. Furthermore, the World Bank sees development in gender equality as a "process of expanding freedoms equally for men and women" (World Bank, 2012, p.ii). This is an individualistic perspective on gender equality, since freedom is an aspect of individualism. The World Bank uses three dimensions to define gender equality: accumulation of endowments (such as education or land), access to economic opportunities (having the time and endowments to get their own income) and agency (women having the ability to make their own choices and to act according to those choices) (World Bank, 2012, p. iii). This will create the same opportunities for women compared to men, to make that gender should not be a determining factor in the welfare one person can achieve (World Bank, 2012, p. iv). We see therefore in this definition that women should have economic endowments to make sure that they have equal opportunities compared to men. Furthermore, this will help women to make their own choices. The aim of the World Bank is therefore mostly about creating equality of opportunities between men and women. To me, it seems that the World Bank assumes that there is no equality of condition, women are in the beginning disadvantaged compared to men, which makes it harder for them to reach their full potential. Therefore, the World Bank aims at giving women the same opportunities as men, so it is expected that by giving women the same opportunities as men, which is about equality of opportunities, gender equality will be achieved. However, to me this seems to be only one aspect of the problem. Society still determines what is expected from both men and women. Therefore, women might have the same opportunity as men, but they might not be able to make use of those opportunities due to restricting social norms. Furthermore, women themselves might have the feeling that they cannot make use of the opportunity they get. Therefore, women themselves also have a certain responsibility to actually make use of the opportunities for them, it is not only about the state providing the opportunities.

UNESCO gives the following definition of gender equality:

Gender equality exists when women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunity to realize their human rights and potential to contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results. Gender equality is the equal valuing by society of both the similarities and the differences

between women and men, and the different roles they play. (UNESCO, 2003, p. 1).

As one can see, this is again about men and women having the same opportunities in life and to realize their full potential to contribute to developments, so it is again about equality of opportunities. Women and men should both be able to contribute to society, but also benefit from the results. It says that the differences and the different roles between men and women should be equally valued. So, women should have the same opportunities, but it is okay if the outcome is different, as long as women are able to fulfill their full potential in order to contribute to society. This is a bit different than what we saw in Robbins, where individuals should realize their full potential mainly for themselves, since here the emphasis is put on the contributions to society.

However, those definitions mostly focus on the individual, what the individual should do and should be able to achieve. This therefore shows that gender equality is defined from an individualistic perspective, making that these definitions cannot easily be used in more collectivistic cultures. Furthermore, the culture and the social dynamic of gender roles are not clearly taken into consideration in these definitions. Gender is a social invention and determines the social expectations people have of each other. This aspect of gender and gender equality is ignored in those definitions.

#### **4.3.2 The Gender Inequality Index**

To get a better understanding of the Western definition of gender equality, I will look at the GII, since this is an important measurement of inequality in almost every country across the world. Furthermore, it makes the conceptualization of gender equality very observable. As said before, indicators for the GII focus on health, empowerment and economic status. Those three indicators measure the disadvantage women experience compared to men, to show the amount of loss in overall human development (Gaye, Klugman, Kovacevic, Twigg & Zambrano, 2010, p. 8). According to the GII there is complete gender equality if the GII has the value of zero (Amin & Sabermahani, 2017, p. 9).

For the indicators, several criteria have been used: "We selected indicators on the basis of their conceptual and practical relevance, the data reliability, international comparability, reasonable country coverage and frequency of availability" (Gaye et al, 2010, p. 10). The first indicator for health is the maternal mortality ratio. The rationale to include this in the GII is that it shows how important the health of women is considered during childbirth, which is in turn an indicator of the status of women (Gaye et al, 2010, p. 11). Another indicator for health is the fertility rate for 15-19-year-old girls. When girls get children at such an early age, the opportunities for their future will become severely limited. Furthermore, the health of those young girls is often put in danger when they get children at such an early age, since

their body is not fully developed (Gaye et al, 2010, p. 12). However, in the West more and more women get pregnant above the age of 35, but giving birth at such a high age also bring risks for the health of the mother (Jolly, Sebire, Harris, Robinson & Regan, 2000). This is not taken into consideration for the GII, so this is therefore a cultural bias in the GII since the focus is only on teenage pregnancies.

Of course, one cannot compare the maternal mortality rate and the fertility rate of young girls with the numbers for men, since men do not get pregnant. The UNDP argues that this is still justifiable, since it reflects the aims of society, namely that no one dies during childbirth and that no teenager gets pregnant (UNDP, n.d.-a). However, this makes the interpretation of this index quite complicated, since the other two indicators measure inequality between men and women, but this one is specific for women (Permanyer, 2013, p. 7).

Regarding the indicator empowerment, it is stated that women should be able to reflect on their own condition and to act accordingly, and they should have the information that is necessary to make changes in their lives (Permanyer, 2013). One indicator for this is education. When women are educated, they can have more enjoyable work, participate in public debates and they will be better able to lead healthy lives for themselves and their families (Gaye et al, 2010, p. 12). Furthermore, educating women is very important for escaping the cycle of poverty (Permanyer, 2013, p. 3). This shows that the focus is on ontological equality, since women should be able to live their lives in dignity. The focus is also on equality of opportunities, women should be educated since this will give them the opportunity to get enjoyable lives. Another measure for empowerment is the percentage of women in parliament, since women are often disadvantaged in politics. It is assumed that women are more visible in society if many women are in parliament (Gaye et al, 2010, p. 13).

The final indicator of the GII looks at participation in the labor market. They look here at the labor force participation, which does not take domestic or informal work into consideration. Since mostly women are in those sectors, this might not really show the amount of work women do (Gaye et al, 2010, p. 13). Unfortunately, there is simply too little data about domestic work, which makes it impossible to include this in the GII (Gaye et al, 2010, p. 14). However, since women do often mostly domestic work, this definition is quite discriminating against women, since it does not look at the role that women usually take up in society. The effort and the amount of work that women do at home is not seen and therefore also not appreciated. Only work that produces an income is seen as work and this is something that men do most of the time (Messias et al., 1997). Furthermore, paid work can make that individuals reach their full potential. Domestic work serves the community, women take care of others and often bring huge offerings in order to be able to raise their children (Messias et al., 1997). Women often organize the household, take care of the elderly and sick and are therefore indispensable in society (Messias et al., 1997). Since this work does not produce an

income and does not enable women to reach their own full potential, the labor women do is not considered to be real work. Furthermore, this work is often not valued and seen as inferior compared to paid work (Messias et al., 1997). Therefore, the fact that the GII measures the percentage of women participating in the labor market shows a gender bias, since it is a masculine, individualistic point of view that only paid work is real work.

Overall, the GII measures those three indicators since people wanted to see to what extent women are discriminated in comparison with men. The rationale is that women cannot develop their capabilities very well and they will not have the same freedom as men to make choices for themselves if they experience discrimination (UNDP, n.d.-b). To me, it seems that the three aspects of empowerment and economic status are about equality of condition. If women do not have children at an early age and do not experience any disadvantages in their health after giving childbirth, if women are just as empowered as men and if their economic status is the same, the conditions between men and women are also the same. If the conditions between men and women are the same, they will have truly equal opportunities to develop their capabilities and to become different than others. Furthermore, one can see that in this index, the value of individualism is important, since women should have freedom and women should be able to develop their capabilities. This is in line with the definition of the value of individualism given by Robbins. However, the individualistic perspective is also a Western perspective, and other countries are more collectivistic. There is therefore a cultural bias in the indicators that are used in the GII. Furthermore, it is in this index already assumed that women are disadvantaged compared to men everywhere around the globe, it is no option that men and women are already equal, or that women have more opportunities in life than men.

Furthermore, the agency of women is not taken into consideration in this index so one cannot see if women are expected to make use of the opportunities that are created or if they have the capabilities to make use of the opportunities.

Overall, the GII shows equality of condition, there is equality if women have exactly the same level of education as men and if there are as many women as men in parliament. Finally, it is a little bit about ontological equality, since the maternal mortality rate should show how much women are appreciated in a society, so if they are seen as having equal human dignity compared to men.

#### ***4.3.3 Academic literature and interview about gender equality***

In this paragraph, I will investigate how gender equality is defined in Western academic literature and I will use insights from the interview with Mirthe as well. Gender inequality can be seen in alle levels of society, in both the private and the public sphere and in the interaction between people in society (Kardam, 2004, p. 99). In the paragraph about gender, we already

saw that gender was about the social expectations we have of being male or female, and that one's sex determines those expectations. Society determines what is considered to be masculine or feminine. Therefore, it is important to look at gender equality from a macro (societal) perspective, since society will determine how we look at gender equality. It is also important to see how gender equality is defined from a meso perspective, which is about the different roles men and women are expected to take on a smaller level, namely the community they live in. Regarding equality, we saw that individualism is an important value in the West. Therefore, I will look at gender equality from the perspective of the individual as well. So, with regard to academic literature, gender equality will be discussed at three different levels, the macro-level, meso-level and the micro-level.

### Gender equality at the macro-level

The macro-level is about the constraints women often experience due to the societal structure and due to expectations society has about women. To understand this better, one can look at the concept of power on the macro-level. Celis & Lovenduski (2018) make a distinction between two types of power. The first one is positional power, which is how well women are represented in political institutions. The second one is active power, which can be divided in relational power and power for oneself. I will discuss power for oneself more in depth at the micro-level. Relational power is power that is exercised over other people, for example politicians exercising power over the subject. Regarding gender equality, men often have power over women instead of the other way around power (Celis & Lovenduski, 2018, p. 154). This power relation should not be reversed, but women should have the power themselves to change things if they want to power (Celis & Lovenduski, 2018, p. 154). For this, women need more positional power, but positional power is at the same time dependent on the enablement of active power (Celis & Lovenduski, 2018, p. 154). To get more positional power, many feminists aim at getting more female representatives in the government and more female leaders in organizations, to make sure that women's issues are taken into consideration when decisions are made (Celis & Lovenduski, 2018, pp. 155-156). This is necessary, since it often happens that one group determines how a certain situation is defined, making that groups who do not belong to the dominant one run the risk of being stigmatized (Dennis & Martin, 2005, p. 199). Right now, women are expected to obey the rules that are made by men, and men still have the political (positional) power to make those rules for women. These differences in being able to make rules and to make others obey those rules originate from differences in power (Dennis & Martin, 2005, p. 199). This shows that power here is defined as power for status, men do not have power to make responsible decisions for the community, but in order to make the rules and make others obey those rules, which will give them more prestige.

The fact that men still have more positional power also makes that masculinity and male norms are considered to be the norm and those norms shape what is considered to be appropriate behavior. Hofstede already showed that masculinity is often valued more in Western countries than femininity. Since masculinity is the norm, feminine behavior is seen as inferior. This results in a resistance in society when women start to take leadership positions. Feminine traits will become more visible then and this is not considered to be appropriate behavior (Celis & Lovenduski, 2018, p. 157). So, both the institutions and the existing rules and norms determine the power relations in society. Since mainly men are represented in the institutions and since the societal norms prescribe that masculinity is valued more, men still have more power than women (Waylen, 2014, p. 216).

For example, Mirthe mentioned in the interview that participating in society is often still defined from a masculine point of view, namely that women participate in politics and in the labor force. This is called emancipation. However, if you bring your children to school and do volunteer work, you also participate in society. This is not widely acknowledged unfortunately, just as we saw in the GII, where it is assumed that there is gender equality if an equal percentage of women compared to men participate in the labor force. Politics is mostly based on this idea as well, but this shows that the work women do nowadays, for example in the household, is often not appreciated as much as the paid work men do. You also see this in the fact that work that is often done by women, such as nursing, is paid less than work that men often do. This shows a devaluation of women's work, and it shows that many goals to achieve gender equality are still defined from a masculine point of view.

So, if both the formal institutions and the existing norms change, women will get more power and more agency in life (Waylen, 2014, p. 217). However, women should also get the power and the opportunity to change those norms, so it works both ways (Waylen, 2014, p. 219). So, an important aspect of gender equality at the macro level is that women should have positional power. Furthermore, now men often have relational power over women in society, whereas women should be able to make decisions to change things themselves.

Besides having more power, women should have the opportunity to actually participate in society and to make their own decisions. In order to do this, the societal structure and legislation often has to change. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women tried to change society to get more gender equality by changing the existing laws. Women wanted to have the same rights and opportunities as men, such as the right to divorce, to go to university and to vote. Women really wanted to be equal in comparison to men with regard to the law (Lorber, 2010, p. 1). This is also what Robbins mentioned that equality in the West is about being equal with regard to the state. Therefore, women saw inequality between men and women since the laws prohibited them to do things that men were allowed to do. Women wanted to change the external conditions that made it impossible to make achievements. Women also wanted to

become independent, so they wanted to have freedom, which is an important characteristic of equality in the West.

Finally, besides making that women get more power in life and to provide equal opportunities between men and women, the expectations and evaluations of society that women face are different than those of men. In organizations, there are often prejudices that make it hard for women to climb up in an organization. This results in the phenomenon of the 'Glass ceiling' in the West, where it seems that women can't get higher in an organization at a certain point. Fortunately, more and more women get into leadership positions, but women still only take up 30% of the leadership positions, instead of 50% which would mean gender equality (Berishvili, 2016, p. 10). For a long time in the West, this lower percentage of women in leadership positions was not seen as a problem, since people thought that men were better leaders than women. This view is now seen as discriminating against women, since it is now believed that men and women are both qualified and skilled enough to be a leader (Berishvili, 2016, p. 110). However, there are still some subcultures that believe that men are better leaders than women (Berishvili, 2016, p. 111). Research has shown that sexism is less and less tolerated in society, but huge shifts in attitudes are still occurring in society regarding gender and the roles that are associated with it (Inglehart, Ponarin & Inglehart., 2017, p. 1321). Therefore, the attitudes and stereotypes about women have to change if women want to be able to achieve the same as men.

Of course, achieving gender equality is related to other issues, such as racism or rights for the LGBTQI+ community. In the interview Mirthe said that right now, there is exploitation on many levels, and according to her, exploitation is the main cause of (gender) inequality. Women are more often than men exploited, but the West often exploits countries in South-East Asia and Africa as well. Capitalism and the patriarchal system are the main causes of exploitation, and both men and women suffer from these systems. Men suffer from it as well, since they are expected to behave in a masculine way all the time, and Mirthe called this the norm of toxic masculinity. Therefore, if we want to achieve gender equality, we have to incorporate those other forms of exploitation as well and we have to change the capitalistic and patriarchal system from within.

All in all, gender equality on the macro level means that women get more positional power, relational power and opportunities to make that they can make changes in society themselves. Furthermore, the cultural expectations and norms that women often face should become less masculine and negative stereotypes about men and women should change as well.

### Gender equality at the meso-level

The second level refers to the social interactions in the community people live in. At the meso-level, the community/family people live in determines to a large extent how the masculine perspective of Western culture is acted upon. When we look at the family, which is the first community children get into, we see that parents treat their sons differently than their daughters. Fathers often play more rough games with their sons than they do with their daughters and boys are told that they should not cry. Girls on the other hand are told that they should not fight and that they should behave in a decent way (Wienclaw, 2011, p. 35). This shows therefore that the parents have different expectations of their children if their sex is different. Later in life, men face different expectations than women from their community as well. In a family, women are often expected to take care of the household and of the emotional lives of the members of the family. Men are expected to be the providers of the family (Flynn, 2011, p. 65). Often, members of a group feel that they are obliged to live up to the expectations their community has for them (Flynn, 2011, p. 69). People often feel that they have to conform to the norms of what is considered to be appropriate for their gender. Many people who felt that they had atypical behavior regarding their gender felt pressure from their peers to change their behavior in order to conform to the norm (Boudet, Petesch & Turk., 2013, p. S3). Furthermore, women might have the legal opportunity and possibility to marry anyone they want, but they still might have the feeling that they have to marry a specific person to align with expectations from their family or society (Boudet et al., 2013, p. 103). So, in order to achieve gender equality, freedom is again important, both women and men should not be limited by the expectations of their family to do what they want. Furthermore, it is assumed that there is gender equality if people can have the role that fits them best, without taking their sex into consideration (Wienclaw, 2011, p. 38).

Besides the expectations men and women face, power is also important at the meso-level. Right now, there are often unequal power relations in families, men are mostly the ones who hold the power (Verloo, 2010, p. 110). The norm that men should have more power than women is internalized from an early age (Boudet et al., 2013). When the discourse is that the power relation is unequal and that men are expected to have more power than women, this will lead to inequality in social relations (Dennis & Martin, 2005, pp. 208-209). Therefore, gender equality means that men and women should have an equal amount of relational power in social relations.

So, as you can see, society at the macro-level prescribes the norms for behavior that is valued and considered to be appropriate, but the community you live in plays a big role as well. The community evaluates your behavior directly and makes you aware if your behavior is appropriate or not. Gender equality means that the expectations the community has should not be based on one's sex, but on one's own individual capacities. Furthermore, right now



men often have and are expected to have the power in social relations, and this leads to inequality. Therefore, there will be gender equality if both men and women have equal power, and if the community they live in also thinks that men and women should have an equal amount of power.

#### Gender equality at the micro-level

The third level that we have to take into consideration when looking at gender equality is the individual level. This is the dominant perspective in the policies aiming to enhance gender equality. Mirthe mentioned in the interview that now power is mostly in the hands of the government, but power should get closer to the people themselves. Both men and women themselves should feel the responsibility for achieving gender equality, and that not only the government is responsible for this. People should feel that they have the power to make a difference. So, at the micro-level, the concepts of agency and power are important. Agency is described as “the ability to define one’s goals and to act on them” (Kabeer, as cited in Boudet et al., 2013, p. 144). To achieve true gender equality, women should be recognized to be able to make decisions and to act accordingly, and they should have the opportunity to make decisions (Boudet et al., 2013, p. 100). Sometimes women have internalized the assumption that they are inferior to men and this makes it harder to actually use the opportunities that were given to them. Agency is necessary for this as well, since this will make that women feel that they can act according to their own values (Boudet et al., 2013, p. 141).

Regarding power, we already discussed positional power and relational power at the macro level. Celis & Lovenuski (2018) mention another aspect of active power, namely power for oneself. This is about having autonomy and the ability to regulate one’s own actions (Celis & Lovenduski, 2018, p. 153). Autonomy is about having freedom, women should have the freedom to make their own decisions (Krizsan & Lombardo, 2013, p. 79). This is in line with the findings of Robbins, who said that freedom is very important in individualistic societies.

In order to get more freedom, women should get power themselves, so they can decide or negotiate in issues, enabling them to make the right choices for themselves in life (Boudet et al., 2013, p. 99). In order to achieve this, education is important. Women with more (educational) resources will feel that they can use those resources, therefore giving them power (Kulik, 2011, p. 426). Furthermore, women should also have the power to actually use certain resources that are available to them (such as income), they should not be restricted in doing this (Nousiainen, Holli, Kantola, Saari & Hart, 2013, p. 44). Now, there is often economic inequality, women do not have the same economic opportunities as men (Nousiainen et al., 2013, p. 45). In families, one spouse often has more resources than the other, and the one with the most resources is the one with the most power. The other partner is therefore partially dependent on the other spouse (Kulik, 2011, p. 420). Most of the time, men are the ones with

the most financial resources, making that they are the ones in power (Kulik, 2011, p. 421). However, the fact that the man has the power in the household makes that men are advantaged in comparison to women, and women are dependent on men (Kulik, 2011, p. 420). Therefore, for achieving gender equality it is important that women get the power, the resources and the opportunity to make decisions for themselves.

Another aspect of gender equality on the individual level is that women should have the same opportunities in life as men (Lewis, 2006, p. 423). For having the same opportunities, men are seen as the reference point, and there is equality if women get the same opportunities as men (Kardam, 2004, p. 86). Furthermore, women should have the same responsibilities and rights as men in life, and legislation concerning individuals should always be gender-neutral, to make sure that it is not the case that some things are expected from men and not from women (Nousiainen et al., 2013). Gender equality at the individual level is therefore clearly about equality of opportunities.

So, women should have power for oneself to make their own decisions and the power and agency to act according to these decisions. Autonomy is related to freedom, which is another aspect of individualism, so here we see again that gender equality is defined in terms of individualism. Furthermore, there is a clear emphasis on equality of opportunities between men and women on the individual level, since men and women should have the same opportunities in life.

These levels are not mutually exclusive of course. An example is the GII, which measures gender equality on all three levels: the individual level (more enjoyable work and more agency), on a macro-level (being able to participate in the public debates and to be visible in society) and the meso-level (being able to help their families to live a healthier life and to escape poverty).

Furthermore, on all three levels, gender equality entails that women are not discriminated simply because they are women. Now, men and women are often treated differently, while women should have the same rights and freedoms as men (Kardam, 2004, p. 88). Therefore, depending on the issue and the level one looks at, equality of opportunity or condition should be achieved to achieve true gender equality according to the Western interpretation. This is not easy to achieve, only a fundamental change in society will lead to gender equality, to make that women become equal compared to men (Kardam, 2004, p. 91).

#### **4.4. Important characteristics of the Western idea of gender equality**

So, in conclusion, how is gender equality interpreted in the West? First of all, we saw that Western cultures score high on the dimension of masculinity as described by Hofstede. This means that being masculine is evaluated more positively than being feminine. This

therefore determines how we look at gender equality, men are seen as the reference point that women should be able to adhere to, there is gender equality if women can achieve the same as men. There is no gender equality if men do the same as women, which would mean that men adhere to feminine norms. Furthermore, the work that women do for the community is seen as less valuable and inferior to the paid work men do.

A second important value of the Western society is individualism, which determines how we look at gender equality. We want both men and women to reach their full potential as an individual, to have autonomy and to differentiate themselves as much as possible from others. Besides that, liberty is a core ideal in the West. Individuals should have as much liberty as possible, they should be able to take care of themselves. The societal structure and the community people live in should not restrict women in making use of the opportunities they have. We now see that men and women are unequal because men have more freedoms than women from the perspective of the role of men. This makes that women have less opportunities than men and that they are not able to reach their full potential, defined from a masculine perspective. Gender equality would mean that women are more limited than men to reach their full potential.

Furthermore, women should get the power they need to achieve gender equality. As we already saw in Hofstede, the West scores very low on power distance. This means that we want as little differences in power as possible. Right now, men often have power over women on the macro-level, the meso-level and the micro-level. This is often power for status, the man does not use his power to make good decisions for his wife or the community he lives in, but to get more prestige himself. In order to achieve true gender equality, women should get the same power as men, on all three levels. Women should not be dependent on men anymore, but they should be able to influence decision-making and to make decisions for themselves. However, this does mean that there is considered to be equality if women have the same amount of power as men, so this shows that men are seen as the reference point again, since men should not have the same power as women.

Besides this, gender equality in the West means that there is gender equality for the state and in society. Legislation should create equal opportunities between men and women, but in relationship to one another, men and women should not necessarily be equal.

Finally, Turner as cited by Robbins mentioned four different aspects of equality. Two of them are particularly important for defining gender equality in the West. The first one is ontological equality, men and women have equal human dignity and should therefore have the same rights. Secondly, equality of opportunity is very important, women should get the same opportunities as men and should not be restricted by society or discriminating laws to make use of those opportunities. Equality of opportunity is therefore seen as the most important determinant in the assessment whether gender equality is achieved or not.

In conclusion, the Western concept of gender equality is complicated and consists of multiple different aspects. In the next chapter, I will investigate the concepts of gender and gender equality from an African perspective, to see how people in SSA interpret those two concepts.

## **5. The Sub-Saharan African perspective on gender and gender equality**

In order to investigate the Sub-Saharan African perspective on gender and gender equality, I first investigated the value of Ubuntu more in depth. This value is very important for people in SSA, so in order to understand the interpretation of gender and gender equality, it is necessary to be familiar with Ubuntu first. After that, I looked at the definition of gender given by the African department of UNESCO and I investigated the concept of gender in pre-colonial Africa. Then, I looked at the impact of colonization on gender and gender equality and finally, I investigated the contemporary interpretation of gender inequality and gender equality in SSA, by looking at the definition of gender equality of the African department of UNESCO, academic literature and the interview I did with Anna.

### **5.1 Ubuntu and equality**

First, I will pay attention to the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is about “the essential unity of humanity” (Van Stam, 2014, p. 41). It states that personal identity and morality are collective. This means that the individual comes to life in relation to others, and therefore the needs of the group are often put first. When the needs of the group are met, it is assumed that the desires of the individual are met as well (Van Stam, 2014, p. 41). Furthermore, in Ubuntu independence is considered to be less important than interdependence. The individual should be open to other people, you should acknowledge that you belong to a greater whole (Van Stam, 2014, p. 46).

Within Ubuntu, values such as empathy, co-operation, relationships, harmony, hospitality, respect and dialogue are considered central. Ubuntu determines how people in SSA think and interact with each other (Van Stam, 2014, p. 42). Furthermore, within Ubuntu one feels responsibility for being morally accountable towards another person. This responsibility is only in relations with others, it is not so much about having individual autonomy (Murove, 2012, p. 39). Self-interest or private accumulation are not considered to be good things within Ubuntu (Van Stam, 2014, pp. 43-44). Every act of oppression is not in line with Ubuntu as well. If you don't behave in line with Ubuntu, you are considered to be an animal. Consequently, if you act out of Ubuntu, the community you live in might reject you (Van Stam, 2014, p. 42).

Equality is a core aspect of Ubuntu. Every individual is considered to be completely equal in relation to others, also regardless of their gender. People complement each other within Ubuntu, and this makes that everyone is equally worthy, even if they contribute different things (Assié-Lumumba, 2018, p. 74). Ubuntu therefore shows that ontological equality is an aspect of gender equality in SSA, since it is acknowledged that everyone has equal dignity.

Colonialism is considered to be an act outside Ubuntu, and therefore has a severe negative impact on the people living in SSA and on humanity as a whole (Van Stam, 2014, p.

44). The fact that many colonizers considered the people living in SSA as different and as inferior to themselves showed that colonialism was the complete opposite of acting within Ubuntu (Murove, 2012, p. 38).

With regard to property, there is also equality within Ubuntu. Before colonization, there was no land that belonged to an individual and everyone received enough food to live from. No one should be wealthier than others and if someone was somehow constrained in resources, others were expected to help that person. This resulted in material equality between everyone in the community. The needs of yourself should be met in an equal way with the needs of someone else. (Murove, 2012, p. 40).

As you can see, equality of outcome is a core aspect in Ubuntu as well since the outcome is expected to be the same for everyone.

So, all in all, solidarity within the community is seen as very important within Ubuntu, people are expected to look after each other. There should be equality between persons, and the focus within Ubuntu is on ontological equality and equality of outcome. Within a community the well-being of the community is promoted to achieve individual well-being, and every individual has the right and the responsibility for this. "In short, Ubuntu captures the African essence of what it means to be human" (Van Stam, 2014, p. 46).

## **5.2. Gender in Sub-Saharan Africa**

In the introduction of this thesis, I already indicated that the concept of gender is sometimes not understood in SSA (Wendoh & Wallace, p. 73). Indeed, when I was searching for literature that was written by African scholars in the search engines I had at my disposal, I could find very little literature written from African scholars about the meaning of the concept gender in SSA. This means that for the interpretation of gender in SSA, I could only use the definition that was given by international organizations.

In paragraph 5.2.2, you can read about the concept of gender in pre-colonial SSA. This paragraph gives an explanation why there is so little academic literature about the Sub-Saharan African meaning of gender, and why the concept of gender is sometimes not understood in SSA.

### **5.2.1 Interpretation gender international organizations**

There are few international organizations that really look at the perspective of gender and gender equality from the Sub-Saharan African perspective. However, UNESCO has a department in Africa as well. Therefore, I will first look at the interpretation of gender from this department of UNESCO. Their definition of gender is the following:

“gender” refers to the social meaning given to being a woman or a man. The idea reflects social characteristics rather than biological differences in defining a woman or a man. The definition has three effects: firstly, it defines the boundaries of what women and men can and should be and do, secondly, it shapes and determines the behaviour, roles, expectations and entitlements of women and men, and thirdly, it provides rules, norms, customs and practices. (UNESCO Africa Department, 2017, 13)

So again, gender in SSA is about the social characteristics. Furthermore, this definition clarifies that gender is a social construct and determines what men and women can and cannot do, but it also states that gender shapes society. So, society shapes the concept of gender, but gender also shapes society.

### **5.2.2 Gender and social order in pre-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa**

In order to understand the concept of gender in pre-colonial Africa, I read the book *‘The Invention of Women: Making an African sense of Western Gender Discourses’*, written by Oyèronké Oyěwùmí in 1997. In her book, Oyěwùmí writes about the concept of gender in the Yorùbá culture, which is a big ethnic group of people living in the southwest of Nigeria, and small groups living in Benin and the north of Togo as well (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2000). However, Oyěwùmí states explicitly that one should be careful with applying her findings of the Yorùbá culture to other African societies, since African cultures differ from one another and therefore the findings are not always generalizable to other communities in SSA (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. xiv).

However, the author lives in the Yorùbá society herself and her father was the monarch of Ògbómòsó, a polity for the Yorùbá. Hence, she grew up in the palace and was in the center of the Yorùbá society. Her mother Ìgbàyílolá was the *olori* (senior royal wife) and had a court to which many of the towns’ people could go. She writes that she had many conversations with her parents, siblings and other family about the interpretation of gender in the Yorùbá culture. Therefore, she knows many perspectives of the Yorùbá culture and therefore she can give us a very good insight in the interpretation of gender in the Yorùbá society.

One final remark, in her book, Oyěwùmí often uses the Yorùbá language for certain terms, to make clear how Yorùbá people look at certain things and to make sure that nothing gets lost in the translation. I will try to use these terms as much as possible, but sometimes I will use the English translation of the words if this makes the terms easier to understand. This might result in a loss of meaning of some of the words, but I will try to stay as close as possible to the meaning of the words in the Yorùbá language in the way the words are translated in the book.

In her book, Oyěwù mí mentions again that in the West, women were seen as inferior due to their biological characteristics. In the West, we have the so-called bio-logic, but this logic is not there in the Yorùbá society. In the Yorùbá society, societal relations come from social facts, instead of biological characteristics. Oyěwù mí uses the wording of anatomic male and anatomic female, shortened to anamale and anafemale when she talks about the anatomic differences between men and women. In the West a lot of words are either masculine or feminine, but in the Yorùbá society, the words are gender-free. There are no specific words that make a distinction between son or daughter for example. In Yorùbá, there are the words *obìnrin* and *òkùnrin* that refer to the biological differences between women and men, but they do not refer to the social concepts of gender. The words *obìnrin* and *òkùnrin* are mostly about the differences regarding reproduction, since the two categories play different roles with regard to getting children. The translation of the words *obìnrin* and *òkùnrin* with female/woman or male/man respectively that is often used is therefore incorrect. In the West, the word woman comes from man, but this is not the case with *obìnrin* and *òkùnrin*. Oyěwù mí explains that *rin* shows that there is a common humanity, and the parts *obì* and *òkù* show that there are anatomical differences. Since there it is acknowledged in the name that there is a common humanity between men and women, there is also equal dignity between men and women, which was one of the aspects of Turner, as cited by Robbins.

In the Yorùbá society, men and women can have different roles, but those roles are not necessarily specific for their sex. There was one woman for example who had the roles of ruler, offspring, mother and diviner-priest. Oyěwù mí writes that history shows us that there were important women in the Yorùbá society. Regarding work, there was no clear division of labor between anafemales and anamales. *Òkùnrin* made dinner when they were away, and *obìnrin* cooked when they were at home. Many *obìnrin* were war heroes in the past.

Oyěwù mí stated that before the colonization, we see that there were no differences in power between anamales and anafemales. In the Yorùbá society, there were several mothers in town that had to participate when collective decisions had to be taken, not only men had positional power. Their experiences and memories made that they had this (positional) power. However, it was about the collective of those women, there was not one woman had all the power. This shows that the value of collectivism was prevalent in the Yorùbá society.

So, there were no binary opposed categories of gender in the Yorùbá society. Furthermore, the categories anamale and anafemale do not represent a hierarchical order in Yorùbá thinking, women were not disadvantaged compared to men in the Yorùbá society.

All this shows that there is not really a distinction on the basis of gender in the Yorùbá society. However, Oyěwù mí writes that there were other categories that determined the social order in the Yorùbá society. The first category that determines to a large extent how the Yorùbá society was organized is seniority. Instead of sex, chronological age is very important. For



example, in social interactions, only the older persons can use the name of the other person. Also, in a first meeting, the older person has to ask the younger person how they are, not the other way around. These relationships can shift per situation, so social hierarchy is not dependent on characteristics of an individual but on the social situation. However, being older also brings a certain responsibility. The oldest child is responsible if there was a fight in the group, because he or she should have been able to stop that. To be called a *àgbàyà* (senior for nothing) is considered to be an enormous insult. This means that if you have a certain power, you immediately have social responsibilities as well. This shows that in SSA, power is defined as decision-making power for the community and is opposed to the individualistic perspective of power in the West, where power is mostly defined as power for status.

The principle of seniority helps the group to survive, since it provides control in life. Being obedient to the authority of older people is therefore considered as very important. This shows again that power in SSA is mostly defined as decision-making power for the community, someone with power is responsible for the well-being of the community and is therefore treated with respect. Not reaching your own full potential is considered to be the most important but the survival of the group, and one's actions should contribute to this goal. It is okay if there are differences in status, since this creates relations where people are dependent on one another and this can help the group to survive (Sulamoyo, 2010, p. 44). Therefore, there are quite some power differences in the Yorùbá society. This is in line with the findings of Hofstede, that the power distance is high in SSA in comparison with the West. However, power in SSA is also defined in a different way compared to the Western definition. In SSA, power is seen as decision-making power for the community, whereas the West interprets power as power for status. This difference in definition makes that people in SSA will more easily accept that there is an unequal distribution of power in their community, since they assume that the ones with power will make responsible decisions for the entire group. Power is then an instrument for the community, instead of an end in itself as it is often seen in the West.

A second distinction that determines the social order in the Yorùbá society is the 'authenticity of origin'; the difference between *òkọ* and *aya*. Here, the distinction is the mode of recruitment into a lineage. For *òkọ*, this was birth, and for *aya* this is marriage. You are an *òkọ* if you have always been an insider in the community and you are an *aya* if you get married into it. Most of the time, anafemales married into another lineage, but sometimes this happened with anamales as well. Therefore, both anamales and anafemales could be *aya*. Since being an *aya* also made that you were an outsider, this was considered to be a disadvantage. This had implications for social interactions. In comparison with a person of the same age, an *aya* is less powerful than an *òkọ*. However, an *aya* did have agency to make decisions herself in the household. Furthermore, anafemales were *aya* in the community they

were married into, but *ọkọ* in their community of birth. This had practical implications, since the anafemale kept her rights and obligations in the natal compound, even though she was married into another compound. It was not usual that anafemales inherited things from the anamale she was married to, because the assets of a community remain in a community.

A final distinction in the Yorùbá society was the prestige of your job. Certain lineages were specialized in special professions. Often, professions were inherited within the family, children are expected to carry on the profession of their family. Some professions, such as the profession of Shaman, was seen as being more prestigious and important than others.

Concluding:

There were no women in Yoruba society until recently. There were, of course, *obìnrin*. *Obìnrin* are anafemales. Their anatomy, just like that of *ọkùnrin* (anamales), did not privilege them to any social positions and similarly did not jeopardize their access. (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 78).

The social relations in the Yorùbá society are determined by completely different characteristics than in the Western society. In the Yorùbá society, there are power differences, but they are unrelated to gender. Instead, power is determined by seniority, place of birth and the importance of someone's profession.

### **5.3 Gender equality in SSA**

So, it seems that in the Yorùbá society, gender was not important to determine whether someone could take a certain position in society or not. However, Oyěwùmí writes that the colonization made that the social categories of men and women were invented by society, and that it made that only men could hold important positions in society. Therefore, I will first address the impact of the colonization on the Yorùbá society, in order to get an idea of the interpretation of gender equality in SSA. After that, I will look at the interpretation of gender equality in contemporary SSA.

#### **5.3.1 *The impact of colonization on gender equality***

The colonization by the British changed the social structure of the Yorùbá society and the values in this society drastically. Oyěwùmí writes that an important thing that stands out when looking at the process of colonization is that both the colonized and the colonizers are assumed to be male. Furthermore, in the process of colonizing, it is often described as “the taking away of the manhood of the colonized” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 121). Women are not even considered in writings about the colonization, history is only written from the point of view of

men. During the colonization, only men were addressed when making policies since in the Western world, being masculine is seen as better than being feminine. Furthermore, in Western countries such as Britain, only men had access to power. Only men were allowed in politics for example. During colonization, the British simply behaved the same way they behaved in the West, namely making and assuming that only men had power. This has had a major impact on the genderfree Yorùbá society. In the Yorùbá society, the power shifted to men as well. A hierarchy was created in society based on the physical characteristics of people. On top of the hierarchy were “men (European), women (European), native (African men), and Other (African women)” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 122). Native women occupied the residual and unspecified category of the Other. Therefore, African women had to deal with a double burden of oppression. They were colonized and therefore inferiorized, but they were also categorized into (African) women, meaning that they became marginalized in society. Overall, during colonization the European system of making policies and legislation was imposed on Africa, and this made that women were now excluded from the political sphere, since this was the case in Europe. The colonizers did not recognize the female chiefs of the Yorùbá society and women were excluded from the process of policy making at the community, local and national level. Furthermore, men were now put higher in the hierarchy than women, making that women became subordinated to men. Women were not considered to be important anymore. Everyone in African lost a lot of their power to the colonizers, but colonization made that women were completely robbed from their power, at the macro-level, meso-level and micro-level.

The colonizers introduced several new practices regarding the distribution of opportunities between men and women that resulted in the fact that power was robbed from women leading to gender inequality as it is defined in the West.

The first practice concerns the introduction of property laws. Before the colonization, both men and women inherited property from the lineage they were born in, they did not inherit from each other. Land in society was collective property of the community and individuals could not own or sell it. In literature it is now often written that women have less rights to the land compared men since people think that women are only able to access the land through men. Women should therefore get access to land themselves, apart from men. However, Oyěwùmí writes that this is a discussion in the light of the right of possessing land as an individual instead of the right to access the collective owned land, which was the case in the Yorùbá society before the colonization. When women got married into another lineage, they got indeed access through their husband to that land, but it was certain that they had access to the land through their new lineage. Women were secured in their access to land and therewith food. “The rights of the individual derived from group membership” (Oyěwùmí, 1997,

p. 143). However, the colonizers introduced laws about individual property rights. In those laws it was already assumed that the owner was an individual male. This shows that only men were seen as individuals, so only men could have private ownership of land. Furthermore, due to the fact that men got access to private ownership, the right to access the land by birth was taken away. Since women most of the time married into the lineage of men, women could not have land 'by himself'. This provision was issued by the British in 1869. This also showed the European idea that men were at the head of the household. The concept of marital property rights was introduced as well. This means that women did not have property rights apart from their husbands anymore, and husbands had now access to the property of women irrespective of their place of birth. The fact that many marriages in the Yorùbá society were polygamous complicated this even more. The people in Yorùbá took over this practice, since land is now mostly only passed on to sons instead of daughters, to make sure that only men have access to land. Denying land rights to women was already in the 1930s seen as a custom of the Yorùbá society, instead of a relatively new tradition that was developed during the colonization. This shows that the customs changed in about 70 years, which consists of only two generations. Overall, by the development of the customary law only men were included.

Secondly, during colonization Christianity was introduced. Before, in the religion of the Yorùbá religion, there were both male and female gods, and both men and women could become priests. However, the church mostly addressed men, they were expected to become pastors or missionaries. Women were expected to help their husbands with performing those tasks. Women were seen to be the foundation of their families and therefore were expected to take care of their family. Sometimes women had leadership positions later on, but they often had to fight to keep these positions. Christianity in this sense posed the patriarchal system on the Yorùbá society. The Yorùbá religion became masculinized as well, female symbols and gender-neutral gods all became male.

After the introduction of Christianity, women were also expected to take the family name of their husband, which was not a practice in the Yorùbá society before. In the West, this meant that a woman did not have individual rights, she did not have access to a bank account for example (Vasseur-Bovar & Tomlinson, 2017). It shows that the identity of a woman is dependent on their husband, and this is an indication of inferiority of the wife. Furthermore, children often get the same surname of their father. This shows that only the offspring of a man is important, not that of a woman (Vasseur-Bovar & Tomlinson, 2017). Besides this, the missionaries did not agree with the practice in Yorùbá of polygamy, this was seen as adultery. Then the question arose if the church had to baptize the wife of a polygamist. This shows that the missionaries did not see women as individuals who should be baptized, this depended on the men they were married to. Furthermore, the men who became Christian were only allowed

to have one wife, so all the other wives were discarded and their children were seen as bastards. This shows that women were actually punished for being good citizens within the Yorùbá society.

Thirdly, paid jobs were introduced. Anna mentioned in the interview that there was no public-private dichotomy in SSA before colonialism. Women and men both worked from home, since there were no institutions. The status of the work that men and women did was equal. However, colonialists introduced taxation, and with this the public-private dichotomy was created since men now had to have paid labor in order to pay taxes.

Oyěwùmí wrote that in traditional Yorùbá society, both anamales and anafemales could be employed, but women were now only seen as housewives due to the colonization. For a long time, women could not take up any positions in the civil service, only under exceptional circumstances. If they had a position like that, they could only be in charge of other women, not of men. “In other words, regardless of qualifications, merit, or seniority, women were to be subordinated to men in all situations” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 135). This was in stark contrast with the system of seniority that was prevalent in the society of Yorùbá, and with the value of Ubuntu as well.

Oyěwùmí said that the fact that paid labor work was now introduced also had severe consequences for women, even though they could not be in paid employment themselves. Domestic work was not paid, therefore the work that women did was considered to be of less value. The work men did was seen as modern, the work that women did was seen as traditional. The work women did became more and more invisible. However, the wages that men were paid were not enough to provide for them and their family, so the labor of women was just as essential for the community to survive as the work of men.

According to Oyěwùmí, ten thousands of men were employed during the building of the railways in Africa. This new way of paid labor also meant that people had to move away to places where there was work and women had to move with their husbands away from the lineage they were born into. This made that their own situation became dependent on the situation of their husbands. Before, as an *aya*, the woman was seen as a junior, but not as being dependent. Anafemales were now a wife instead of *aya*. Being the wife of their husband became the main identity of women, meaning that they were not also seen as daughters and members of the lineage. Furthermore, the family was not seen as the extended family anymore, but as the man and his wife and children. Men were now the only breadwinners, on whom the family depended.

Finally, Oyěwùmí writes that education was introduced during colonization. The fact that only men were given paid jobs and high positions resulted in the fact that more boys than

girls went to school, since the expectation of girls to become housewives did not require any education. As a result, only 25% of all the children in school were girls. Since most women were excluded from education, men had an enormous head start in 'modern' life, since education is needed to get income and important roles in society. All this has had psychological effects on both women and men, since the idea that women might indeed not be able to hold leadership positions or to receive education is now quite common in Nigeria.

After a while, girls attended education, since educated women were more likely to get married. Women in the Yorùbá society were expected to marry well, so mothers often tried to educate their daughters. However, here you see again that women only get educated to get a good husband, not to get power to decide for themselves or to take care of the welfare of their community.

All in all, we saw that the people living in Africa were inferiorized in the process of colonization as being the colonized and the natives. A distinction on the basis of sex was now made and it was assumed that women were inferior to men. Women were seen as less competent, forced into dependency on their husband and therewith women got less power. Women became subordinated to men and as a result they became invisible. The newly introduced system was patriarchal. Only men could participate in the public sphere, women could no longer take leadership positions. Moreover, equal opportunities became denied by law.

Even until today, the participation of women in education and other privileged systems is very low. Both men and women think that women are inferior and subordinated to men. In short, according to Oyěwùmí, the unsexed humanity was prevalent in the Yorùbá society, but is not there anymore due to the colonization.

### ***5.3.2 Decolonization of the concept of gender equality and African feminism***

The previous section showed us that colonization is an important cause of the existence of gender inequality in SSA. In Africa, the empowerment and liberation of women is linked with the de-colonization of everyone living in Africa (Eze, 2006, p. 100). In the beginning of the UN in 1945, ideas about equality and justice were formed and formulated in the Charter of the United Nations, but African countries were still under the yoke of colonialism when these ideas were formulated (Assié-Lumumba, 2018, p. 69). They committed their countries to create freedoms and respect for human rights for everyone, regardless their sex. This resulted in many programs that promoted gender equality and the role of education (Assié-Lumumba, 2018). However, gender equality was actually an issue that was more important for Western countries in comparison with countries in SSA. For example, in an international conference in Mexico in 1975, women from Western countries wanted to have discrimination against women

as a focus, whereas people from developing countries wanted to have other issues such as justice or development in general on the agenda (Kardam, 2004, p. 91). As a solution, the focus was put on involving women in development. However, often these issues were considered to be important by donor agencies, and not necessarily by the communities who receive the help (Kardam, 2004, p. 91). So, often the perspective on gender equality is set by Western countries, who were the colonizers of SSA. Van Stam (2014) mentions that even people working at universities in Africa often have a Western view on the world. The Western paradigm is applied on almost every society, where the free market, democracy and freedom are considered to be the most important values. As we already saw in Robbins (1994), freedom is a feature of individualism, but Hofstede showed that most African societies are more collectivistic. Hence, many academic concepts should be decolonized to make them fit within the African values and perspective on the world (Van Stam, 2014, p. 38). However, it is difficult to state what exactly makes an African woman, the focus is mostly on her being a victim of colonialism, but it does not state what it means to be a woman in SSA (Eze, 2006, p. 106). The exact role of the woman is not (yet) clearly defined. In general, African feminists want to make clear that African feminism is not the same as European feminism (Eze, 2006, p. 102). For example, feminism in Africa puts an emphasis on “female autonomy and co-operation; nature over culture; the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship” (Mekgwe, 2006, p. 16). This is already different from the Western notion about gender equality since it is about the centrality of children and multiple mothering and kinship. This is different than the individual Western notion about having opportunities for women and making that women have an equal amount of freedom compared to men, the focus and the aim is different. Therefore, de-colonization of Africa is a first step to achieve gender equality within SSA, since many practices that are imposed on SSA do not fit into African paradigms and therefore sometimes even create gender inequality. Achieving gender equality is linked to the de-colonization of the entire continent.

### **5.3.3. Definition gender equality international organizations**

First, we will look at the definition of the African UNESCO department again, to see how this organization defines gender equality.

“Gender equality” refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men and girls and boys. It means that women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunities to realize their full human rights and potential to contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development and to benefit from the results. And it indicates that society values equally both the similarities and the differences between women and men and the different roles that they play. Gender



equality is a human rights principle, a precondition for sustainable, people-centred development, and it is a goal in and of itself (UNESCO Africa Department, 2017, 13).

Here we see that it is mostly about equality of opportunities again, men and women should both be able to realize their full potential, in order to contribute to development in their country. This is already different from the Western perspective, where individuals should reach their full potential mainly for themselves. Furthermore, both men and women should equally benefit from the results, which seems to be in line with Ubuntu, where everyone should respect each other, and where the community is responsible for the well-being of the individual.

Besides this, men and women should not be equal, but both the differences and similarities between men and women should be appreciated. This shows that it is okay if men and women complement each other.

#### **5.3.4. Academic literature and interview about gender equality**

In this paragraph I will investigate the interpretation of gender equality in SSA with the help of academic literature, mostly from scholars from SSA and the interview with Anna. I will do this by looking at the three levels in society, the macro-level, meso-level and micro-level. As we already saw in the Western interpretation of gender equality, society often determines our expectations of men and women. Therefore, I will first look at the macro-level again for the interpretation of gender equality. Furthermore, Hofstede found that SSA scores high on collectivism. This shows that the community is very important in SSA. Therefore, I will look at gender equality at the level of the community as well, the meso-level.

Within the Africa community, women often feel that they are obliged to subject their own preferences and feelings to the greater good of the community. Indeed, within the community the individual should try to pursue the common good instead of their own good. However, individuals are not expected to sacrifice things that are good for themselves in order to achieve some greater goal but individuals should see that they can only get their own good when they try to reach the good of others (Lutz, 2009, p. 314). So, within Ubuntu the rights of the individual should be taken into consideration as well, so it is therefore important to look at gender equality at the micro perspective as well.

Unfortunately, there is little to no literature about the interpretation of gender equality in SSA. Therefore, I will mostly describe the African culture as it is right now and I will point out the things that show that there is gender inequality in SSA. From this, I will make assumptions what should be changed in the African society to achieve gender equality, in an attempt to see what gender equality looks like in SSA.



### Gender equality at the macro-level

Just as in the West, anafemales face many prejudices about their competences. Nicolaides (2015) states that right now, gender equality is far from achieved in Africa. Patriarchal norms are presented in SSA to children both within and outside their home, giving the idea that masculine values are more human than feminine values. This leads to the idea that the tasks and responsibilities in the private sphere are less important than those in the public sphere, and that women are not as developed as men (Nicolaides, 2015, p. 191). Now, women are oppressed only based on their sex and men are still seen as dominant (Nicolaides, 2015, p. 192). Since men see themselves as superior and women as incompetent, women are often not respected in SSA. This results in the fact that men have social dominance over women (Nicolaides, 2015, p. 201).

In SSA, the goal of feminism is to get rid of patriarchy and all practices that are in conflict with having gender equality. In order to achieve gender equality on the macro-level, one should acknowledge that women are not inferior, less intelligent or necessarily submissive in comparison to men (Nicolaides, 2015, p. 192). Furthermore, women should be seen as having equal dignity to men, and men should not have social dominance over women anymore in order to achieve gender equality (Nicolaides, 2015, p. 201). This means that men should not have relational power over women, at least no power for status.

Of course, women are different than men and have different virtues. Sometimes, it is seen that men are good leaders and that women belong in the house. However, even if this is true, the different virtues of men and women should be considered to be equally important to the community, instead of evaluating those of men as more important, which is the case right now. Feminine virtues should be equally appreciated in comparison with those of men (Nicolaides, 2015, p. 192-193).

However, women now often do not have the positional power to change things on the macro-level. Therefore, the sexist power structure has to go away (Nicolaides, 2015, p. 192). In SSA, achieving gender equality in politics is important since it is said that gender inequality will also produce inequalities in other levels, such as economic inequalities. Economic inequalities might lead to less development in the end for the entire country (Moyo & Dhliwayo, 2019, p. 257). Therefore, new policies should be created that address gender equality and women should be able to participate in decision-making on the macro-level to achieve this (Moyo & Dhliwayo, 2019, p. 257). Moreover, if more women in SSA participate in politics at the macro-level, women will become more politically engaged in their community as well (Barnes & Buchard, 2012).

Furthermore, as we already saw in the part about colonization, women became marginalized in the colonization process, they could not participate in society anymore.

Therefore, women should start to participate in society at the macro-level again, to make sure that women are no longer marginalized in society but that they can make decisions themselves for their country as well.

However, Anna mentioned that in Uganda, there is quite a lot of women in politics compared to the past. This makes that more women are represented now in Parliament or in the district quarters. Since the 1960s, the number of women in politics has increased sharply. The increase rate in SSA is the highest compared to other world regions. In 2008, 25% were women in six Sub-Saharan African legislatures. In some countries, such as Nigeria, women still have less than 4% of all the seats, whereas women in other countries in SSA, such as Uganda, occupy more than 30% of the seats. In 2008, Rwanda was even the first country in the world to have more women than men in Parliament, 56% of the seats were occupied by women (Barnes & Burchard, 2012, p. 772). The main cause of this increase was the fact that gender quotas were introduced in most countries. This means that more opportunities were offered to women to go into politics, and that more women were able to make use of these opportunities to actually go into politics (Barnes & Burchard, 2012, p. 773).

This shows that women get more positional power in SSA to influence society on a large level, but in several countries such as Nigeria, a lot can still be done to make that women get more positional power.

Concluding, gender equality at the macro-level means that women should not be seen as inferior compared to men. Furthermore, both men and women should be able to contribute to a harmonious society. In order to do that, women should get more positional power, to make that they can participate in their country and contribute to it as well.

#### Gender equality at the meso-level

In SSA, women play very crucial roles as peace makers and promoters of sustainable livelihoods (Nicolaidis, 2015, p. 201). In pre-colonial Africa, both sexes played an important role in maintaining the tribe. Women played an enormous role in society through their roles as leaders and in their role in educating and upbringing their children, so women are often seen as the backbone of the African family (Nicolaidis, 2015, p. 204).

However, in contemporary SSA, women are seen as inferior in their roles as daughters and housewives and men have social dominance over women (Nicolaidis, 2015, p. 201). In the interview, Anna mentioned that women are trained from early childhood on to become their husband's worshipper. Women should (sexually) please their husbands and not the other way around. Anna told me that her grandmother was told to never respond to a man in any way, you should never question any of his decisions. This shows that on the meso-level, men have more power right now than women, and this is mostly power for status since the man does not

necessarily take the needs of the woman into consideration in his actions. The fact that men have more power than women also makes that women do not have the power to fulfill their role in the community.

So, it is not good if men have power for status over women. However, despite the fact that feminism in SSA rejects the idea of a natural hierarchy between men and women, people in SSA do accept a merited hierarchy, when hierarchy is necessary or if one person should have more power than the other in order to make the community function well (Nicolaides, 2015, p. 193). Therefore, it is okay if men have more decision-making power for the community than women, since it will be beneficial for the community if men make decisions for others, including women (assuming that the decisions are made within the paradigm of Ubuntu where every individual is equally respected). This is again in line with the findings of Hofstede regarding the high score in power distance in SSA.

Annan, Donald, Goldstein, Gonzalez Martinez, & Koolwal (2021, p. 2) mention that right now, the husband sees himself as the main decision maker for the household, whereas women often feel that they do joint decision-making (Annan et al., 2021, p. 6). Right now, the woman often makes decisions on behalf of her husband, and the husband does not agree if she makes decisions for herself. If the wife takes power herself, this is positively related to her own health and the health of her children in SSA (Annan et al., 2021, p. 2). This shows that it is beneficial for the community if the woman gets power, it is not only beneficial for herself. However, it is also related to more physical and emotional violence of her husband if a woman takes power herself (Annan et al., 2021, p. 2). It is likely that the husband feels that his power for status is diminishing if the woman gets more power. Overall, it is beneficial for the husband, wife and children if husband and wife are both equal decision makers, or even if the wife is the one who makes most of the decisions (Annan et al., 2021, p. 2). If the woman gets more power, power is defined as decision-making power for the community, since this is beneficial for everyone in the community she gets more decision-making power.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the status of women should be acknowledged, since this shows that women are respected. Showing respect to women is an innate right of women and will be beneficial for everyone in the community. The oppression of women can be seen as a violation of Ubuntu (Van Stam, 2014, p. 50). There are many practices in SSA towards women that violate Ubuntu. An example is the practice of FGM. Women are often the ones who actually agree with this practice despite the suffering they had to endure due to this practice. Many women think that this is the way to get a suitable husband in the future (Apusigah, 2006). However, women often act in this practice as custodians, meaning that they perform this practice because they feel that they have to, not because they think that it will serve the interests of the group (Apusigah, 2006). However, this is a clear sign of gender inequality since husbands do not have to go through similar practices to get a wife.

Furthermore, the practice does not have a clear value for the community (Apusigah, 2006, pp. 34-35). A woman believes that she will be a good wife if she agrees with the practice of FGM, but since men do not have to perform similar practices, FGM adds to the power imbalance between men and women.

Anna also mentioned in the interview that FGM is now prohibited by law in Uganda, but it still happens. Often the mothers are the one who do this, since they want their daughters to find a good husband. Since FGM is seen as a way to get a good husband, this practice continues within communities. Here family ties also play a role, if the mother does not agree with FGM, the senior member of the compound might still decide otherwise, and then the practice will be performed.

Maluleke (2012) talks about several other traditional practices in South Africa that are often seen as violations of the human rights of women. These practices take the dignity of women away at the individual level, but they happen within the community. However, the practices have no value at the level of the community, so therefore I will discuss some of these practices at the meso-level. She reviews those practices while she looks at the influence of colonialism, and she takes Ubuntu as a point of departure to assess whether the practices are legitimate or not within the African society (Maluleke, 2012).

One practice that was mentioned by Maluleke is Ukuthwala, which is the kidnapping of a girl or woman to initiate marriage negotiations. At first, this practice was a normal way to get married, but now the girls are often raped and forced to marry men who are much older than themselves (Maluleke, 2012, p. 11). Rape is a traumatic experience with many negative psychological consequences, such as increased levels of anxiety and PTSD (Lončar, Medved, Jovanović & Hotujac, 2006). Furthermore, rape completely takes away the dignity of a person (Mann, 1998). This clearly shows that men use their power only for their own prestige when they rape young girls and it makes that women feel that they are worthless. This practice therefore shows that there is clearly no equality of dignity. The practice leads to gender inequality in other forms as well, since the young girls often have to drop out of school once they are married, making that they have less opportunities for further education (equality of opportunity). Furthermore, the girl has less skills and resources to contribute to the community if she was unable to finish her education. This will make that the girl is not able to contribute to the community, leading to less development for the whole community. Furthermore, the men are often much older than the girl, making that the girl is seen as subordinate in the marriage (Maluleke, 2012, p. 12). This practice is clearly not in line with Ubuntu, where the community is responsible for the well-being of the individual, and the individual for the well-being of the community. Within Ubuntu, there is ontological equality, everyone should be seen as having equal dignity, which is clearly not the case with the practice of Ukuthwala.

A final example mentioned by Anna that shows that women are seen as inferior in comparison with men on the community level is that the men often eat much more than their wife and children when they have dinner. This results in the fact that men are often healthier than women. This is a clear example that women are deemed to be less important than men, and that they are not respected as well.

The examples of the practices in SSA show that the community sometimes approves of certain practices that makes women disadvantaged compared to men. The underlying norm of these practices is that women are seen as inferior, and the practices underline this perception. The practices are clearly not in line with Ubuntu, where everybody should be seen as equal, even if their contributions are different. Changing the underlying value is not easy to change. Anna said in the interview that changing the underlying values that women are superior will probably take multiple generations, so they cannot be changed with policies that aim at changing only one or two problems, for example stopping FGM. If FGM is not performed anymore, it is unlikely that the underlying value that women are inferior compared to men is also immediately changed.

Overall, men and women do have a different role to protect the harmony in the community. Often, women are seen as peacebuilders, they have the potential to create peace in their community (Van Stam, 2014, p. 48).

Women are often the victims of conflicts, and this means that the process of reconciliation is especially important for them. Women can play an important role in this process of reconciliation, and this should be acknowledged. Right now, the woman is often responsible for the household and the family. They can raise their children in a certain way and influence their own husbands. Women should be taken out of their disadvantaged position into a position where they can change society in a positive way (Van Stam, 2014, pp. 48-49).

All in all, women have an incredibly powerful role as mothers in their communities, so they should be recognized for their ability as peacemakers and they should be given the opportunity and ability to fulfill these roles (as mothers and peacemakers) (Van Stam, 2014, p. 50).

Concluding, gender equality on the meso-level means that women should be able to fulfill their role within the community. In order to achieve this, the practices that are not in line with Ubuntu and lead to gender inequality should change or they should completely be abolished in order to achieve gender equality. Furthermore, the underlying norm that women are seen as inferior should change. Instead, women should be appreciated and respected for their role as peacebuilders within the community. Gender equality in SSA should be founded in the value of Ubuntu, where everyone is equally respected and appreciated for their unique contributions towards the community.

### Gender equality at the micro-level

The future of African feminism is: “The ability of the African woman to take her life in her own hands. It is being proactive rather than reactionary” (Eze, 2006, p. 115). African feminism on the individual level is not about taking away the power of men and giving it to women but making that everyone can thrive in the African community, including women (Eze, 2006, p. 115). Giving African women agency is important, and women were very powerful in the past, since they were warrior queens, monarchs and were in charge of economic matters (Eze, 2006, p. 102). Agency should be given back to women, to make women able to make decisions for the community themselves and to act accordingly (Mekgwe, 2006, p. 12). Women should also get the competencies and the resources they need to make contributions to their community at the individual level.

Regarding the individual competencies, Assié-Lumumba (2018, p. 67) mention that education can help to enhance and develop individuals’ competencies in order to become able to fulfill their responsibilities towards the group. Now still more boys than girls go to school in SSA. Social structures and stereotypes make that the gender gap in education keeps existing (Assié-Lumumba, 2018, p. 71). Anna mentioned in the interview that there are certain quotas from politics right now regarding the percentage of girls that should be enrolled in education. However, sometimes this quota is not achieved. Often girls are expected or needed to help their mother in the household. Because the girls have so many extra chores next to the household, there is no equality of condition between boys and girls in education. In order to compensate for this inequality, girls in Uganda often get extra bonus points in exams, to make sure that they are able to pass subjects. Another burden for girls is that there is often no adequate sanitation in schools. Anna told me that she had tried to get a budget for sanitary wear for girls, but the administrators (mostly male) did not consider this to be an important budget item. Furthermore, girls often have to deal with sexual harassment at school, making it sometimes dangerous to go to school.

Besides this, Anna said that parents send their girls often only to the fourth grade to school, this is seen as an adequate level for girls. Often mothers do not want their girls to go further in education, because it is believed that education will not make you a good wife. When women become educated, they will start to question their husband, and this is not seen as a good thing. This shows that girls are still marginalized in society and that it is difficult for girls to acquire the necessary skills that are needed to contribute to contemporary society (Assié-Lumumba, 2018, p. 70). When women are not educated, they have to stay in the private sphere, marginalized and without power (Assié-Lumumba, 2018, p. 76). However, this also makes that they cannot contribute on the long-term to their community and country. For example, farming in SSA becomes more and more digitized and the market becomes more and more liberal. Therefore, education is important since this will enable women to keep



participating in society (Assié-Lumumba, 2018, p. 80). Furthermore, within Ubuntu everyone is equal regardless of their gender. Therefore, within the Ubuntu paradigm, education should aim at making everyone equally able to develop their capacities in order to contribute to society. This means that girls should also get education, to make that women get the competencies and power to contribute to their country (Assié-Lumumba, 2018, p. 74).

Furthermore, women often do not have access to the resources that are necessary to contribute to society (Nicolaidis, 2015, p. 203). So, in order to get gender equality in SSA, women should get access to land. The existing power relations and institutions make that women often do not have access to land (Izumi, 1999, p. 10).

In the interview, Anna told me that right now, most land is owned by men. However, almost 80% of all the farmers are women. This means that women are expected to utilize the resources, but men control those resources. Men often make decisions about the resources, giving men more power than women. In some communities, there is some level of harmony when it comes to production, and this is needed to achieve gender equality. Women should be able to get control of the resources themselves to reduce gender inequality, in order to have the possibility to fulfill their responsibilities towards the community.

Finally, having children is considered to be the most important thing in life in SSA. This means that for a bride, the most important right that she has is the right to get children. Becoming a mother is an aspect of reaching your full potential as a woman (Oyěwùmi, 1994). All things that made an anafemale a better mother were promoted in the Yorùbá society (Oyěwùmi, 1994). So, gender equality in SSA also means that a woman should have the right to get children and that she should have the means to be a good mother.

In conclusion, gender equality on the individual level means that both men and women can develop their competencies to make contributions to their community. Furthermore, they should have the resources and the power to make decisions to use those resources, in order to fulfil their responsibilities towards the community. Finally, women should be able to fulfill their full potential as a woman by getting children.

#### **5.4. Important characteristics of the Sub-Saharan African idea of gender equality**

All in all, what does gender equality look like in SSA? First of all, colonialism has had a major impact on everyone in SSA. Both men and women still suffer from the impact of the changes that have been made in their societies by the colonialists. Therefore, achieving gender equality is related to the liberalization of the entire African continent from the colonial yoke. SSA should get the power again to determine for themselves what they deem important, instead of having to depend on the West for their own development.

Secondly, gender equality in SSA is rooted in Ubuntu, both men and women should be treated with equal respect and equal dignity. This means that men should no longer be seen as superior in SSA, but women should be appreciated and treated with respect as well. This means that certain practices, such as Ukuthwala or FGM should be changed or even completely abolished, since they show that women are seen as inferior compared to men.

Besides this, gender equality in SSA does not mean that men and women contribute the same, but that the unique contributions they give towards the community are appreciated and respected. However, this does mean that both men and women should get the decision-making power for the community that is needed to contribute to their community and to their country. It is okay if men have more power than women, but they have to use this power within Ubuntu, to make sure that the decisions he makes are beneficial for everyone in the community, including women.

In order to achieve gender equality, women should not be marginalized in society, but they should be able to fulfill their responsibilities towards the community (for example her responsibility as a peacemaker). The contributions of men and women might be different, but they should be equally appreciated.

Gender equality also means that women should be able to have children and to have the power to be good mothers, since this is one of the most important contributions of women towards the community in SSA.

In order to be able to contribute to the community, it is necessary that both men and women can acquire the competencies and the resources that are needed for this. Besides this, women should equally benefit from their community as men. The community is responsible for the well-being of individuals, but right now, men benefit more often from the resources within the community. This is not in line with Ubuntu however, where everyone should equally benefit from the community.

This shows that gender equality in SSA is mostly about ontological equality and equality of outcome. Within Ubuntu, everyone is equal and should be treated with respect. Having the power to make decisions should be used for the welfare of the community. Furthermore, men and women should both be equally able to make unique contributions to the community, and they should benefit from their own and others' contributions to the community as well. The community is mostly responsible for achieving gender equality.



## 6. Conclusion

Until now, we have looked at the interpretation of the concepts of gender and gender equality from the individual perspectives of SSA and the West. The research question of this thesis was: *What are the differences and similarities between the Western interpretation and the interpretation in Sub-Saharan Africa of the social concepts 'gender' and 'gender equality'?* In order to answer the research question, I will compare the interpretations of the West and SSA of gender and gender equality in this conclusion. Both the differences and the similarities between the two interpretations of the concepts will be discussed.

### 6.1. Similarities and differences in the interpretation of the concept of gender between the West and SSA

There are several similarities in the interpretation of gender between the West and SSA, at least after the period of colonization. After colonization in SSA, gender is in both societies a dichotomous concept about the social expectations regarding one's role and behavior people have due to someone's sex. In both societies, it is a social construct, meaning that society determines what is expected from men and women. For example, it is expected from a man that he is the one who makes the decisions in the household.

However, there is only a similar interpretation of gender after the colonization of SSA. Before, the interpretation of gender was completely different between both societies. In the West, the concept of gender has always been prevalent in society. Gender as a social construct determined for a long time what is expected from men and women, and those expectations were based on their sex. In SSA, the concept of gender did not exist in many communities before the colonization. Many words in the Yorùbá language for example were gender-free. One's sex did not determine what people were expected to do, or not to do.

Furthermore, gender has always structured the Western society. The division in society resulting from the two sexes is one of the main divisions in society. The social order in the West is determined to a large extent by the different sexes, men were seen as superior compared to women. Women were seen as disadvantaged compared to men and there is a clear hierarchy between the two genders. This is different from SSA, where gender did not determine the social order in society. Instead, seniority, descent and one's profession determined the social order. Anamales and anafemales were both seen as equals and were equally able to participate in society, although maybe in a different way. Both anamales and anafemales could become leaders in SSA, showing that anafemales were not disadvantaged in society.

All in all, the main difference between SSA and the West is that the concept of gender was non-existent in SSA before colonialism. In the West, gender is about the different expectations people have of a person due to their sex. Furthermore, gender has always been one of the most important dividers of the entire society.

## **6.2. Similarities and differences in the interpretation of the concept of gender equality between the West and SSA**

There are multiple similarities between the Western interpretation and the interpretation of SSA of gender equality. In both societies, I looked at the interpretation of gender equality at the macro-level, meso-level and micro-level. On all three levels, there are similarities between the West and SSA. First the similarities on the macro-level. In both the West and SSA, gender equality means that both women and men should be able to participate in society. It is not seen as a good thing if women are marginalized, for example if they cannot vote or participate in politics. In order to do this, men and women should get as much positional power as men in both the West and SSA.

Furthermore, in both societies stereotypes about men and women should change. Women are sometimes seen as incapable of being good leaders, or men are seen as superior compared to women. Gender equality means that men and women are seen as equals within society, they should be seen as having equal dignity. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that men and women are both capable of making contributions towards society.

On the meso-level, gender equality in both societies means that women have equal decision-making power for the community compared to men to be able to make decisions for their community/household. Right now, men often have more power than women and they see power as an instrument for their own prestige or status. This makes that women are not able to take good care of their family or to fulfill their responsibility towards the community.

On the individual level, women should have as much autonomy and power as men to make use of the resources that are available to them and to make decisions.

A final similarity between the West and SSA in the interpretation of gender equality regards to the four different dimensions of equality by Turner, cited by Robbins. In both the West and SSA, ontological equality is very important. Men and women should be equally respected and it should be seen that they have equal dignity.

However, there are also clear differences between the West and SSA in the interpretation of gender equality. One of the main differences between the West and SSA is that in the West, there has been gender inequality for a long time, and therefore achieving gender equality is now put highly on the agenda of many international organizations. In SSA,

the hierarchy between the two genders and the different expectations seem to be only prevalent since colonization. Furthermore, gender inequality is not the only burden resulting from colonization, everyone in SSA still suffers from the impacts of colonization. Therefore, in SSA the achievement of gender equality cannot be seen as separate from the liberalization of the entire continent from the influences of the West. The definition of gender equality and the role of a woman in SSA is still unclear, since this is defined from a Western point of view. People in SSA concerned with gender equality want to liberate themselves from the Western paradigms. This also makes that gender equality is not the main focus of policies in SSA, which is more on development and liberalization of SSA in general.

Secondly, gender equality in the West is defined from the ideal of liberty. Therefore, gender equality means that men and women should have equal liberty and the power to decide what is best for themselves. This means that both men and women should get equal power for status. Gender equality in SSA is defined within the paradigm of Ubuntu. This means that everyone should be respected and seen as equally important for the group. Power is instrumental in securing welfare for the community as a whole.

Besides this, the differences in the dimensions of Hofstede, namely collectivism/individualism, power distance and masculinity/femininity, also show the differences in the interpretation of gender equality between the West and SSA. We saw that for the dimension collectivism/individualism, the West scores high on individualism and SSA on collectivism. This makes that in the West, the focus on gender equality is mostly on the individual, men and women should both be able to reach their full potential, mainly for themselves. Both men and women should have autonomy, they should be able to differentiate themselves from others and they should be equally free to behave in the way they want to. Having children will limit your freedom, so therefore having children is only an option, not an obligation. This also makes that equality of opportunity is very important in the West. Men and women should have equal opportunities to reach their full potential, so women should receive the same opportunities as men.

In SSA, gender equality is not about reaching your own individual potential. Instead, gender equality is mostly about the fact that both men and women should be able to fulfill their responsibilities towards the community. This does not mean that the contributions of men and women are equal, but that the unique contributions of men and women are equally appreciated and respected. In SSA, having children is seen as one of the most important responsibilities of a woman towards the community, since this will help for the survival of the community. Therefore, in SSA it is very important that the woman is able to have children and to take good care of her children as well. In SSA, the focus is on equality of outcomes, since both men and

women should be seen as equals in the community and they should both equally benefit from the community.

Regarding a second dimension of Hofstede, masculinity/femininity, we saw that this differs within the West and SSA itself as well. However, literature showed that in the West, masculinity is more appreciated than femininity. This makes that gender equality means that women should be able to accomplish the same things as men, such as participating in the labor force. Furthermore, women should have the same freedoms compared to men. This is almost a contradiction with the individualistic perspective, where everyone should differentiate themselves as much as possible from others, but the social norm is still that masculine traits are seen as better in comparison with feminine traits. Therefore, it is expected from women that they are able to do the same things as men (but not the other way around).

In SSA, feminine traits such as empathy, cooperation and women's ability to promote peace within their community are highly appreciated within Ubuntu. Gender equality in SSA does not mean that women are able to accomplish the same as men, but that both should be able to make their own unique contributions to society, in order to contribute to a more harmonious society. Therefore, it seems that when I look at literature, the West scores higher on masculinity and SSA higher on femininity, which results in this difference in interpretation in gender equality.

Regarding the third dimension of Hofstede, power distance, we saw that in the West we want as little power distance as possible. In the West, power is defined as power for status. In order to achieve gender equality, men should not have more power (for status) than women, but women should have equal power as men. This means that women should get more power for their own good. Women should be able to participate in politics on the macro-level, make decisions for their family on the meso-level, but mostly that women have the autonomy and agency to make decisions for themselves and to act according to those decisions, to the same extent men can. Furthermore, women should get power to change the existing masculine norms that are prevalent in society, because this will make that stereotypes of men and women will change. This will in turn lead to more gender equality, since then the individual competences will determine the expectations society has, instead of the expectations based on someone's sex.

For SSA, the score on power distance is much higher, but power is also defined in a different way compared to the West. In SSA, power is defined as decision-making power for the community. This means that the one with power should make decisions where the well-being of the entire community is taken into consideration. The fact that the power distance is high in SSA shows that it is okay for men if they have more power than women if this is

beneficial for the community. In other situations, for example regarding making decisions for the household, it might be better for the community if women have more power than men. Individuals should make use of this power within the paradigm of Ubuntu, meaning that everyone is respected. So, men and women should be equally respected, despite the differences in power.

Besides the differences that can be explained by Hofstede's dimensions, gender equality differs between the West and SSA in terms of the level of realization of gender equality and the institutions or people that are responsible for achieving gender equality. In the West, gender equality is achieved if men and women are equal for the state. This means that the state should facilitate equal opportunities between men and women and the state should make that everyone can make use of these opportunities. Men and women should not become the same in relation to each other, but they should be equal with regard to the state in order to be able to differentiate themselves as much as possible from others. In SSA, men and women should be seen as equals in relation to each other. Both men and women should be equally respected within their community and they should both equally benefit from the community. This means that the community is mostly responsible for facilitating gender equality in SSA.

Finally, Turner as cited in Robbins, mentioned four different aspects of equality, namely ontological equality, equality of opportunity, equality of condition and equality of outcome. In the West, equality of opportunity and condition are the most important. For example, both men and women should have the opportunity to vote and to go to university. Furthermore, men and women should start from the same conditions, for example that men and women have an equal number of leadership positions, in order to differentiate themselves as much as possible from others.

In SSA, the focus was mostly on equality of outcome. Within the communities in SSA, everyone should be seen as equal and the outcome of unique contributions should be the same for everybody in the end. Therefore, the focus of equality differs between the West, and this results in a different interpretation of gender equality as well.

In conclusion, there are some similarities between the West and SSA regarding the interpretation of the concept of gender equality, but there are also many differences between the two cultures. The main differences can be explained by the different paradigms of the two societies, in the West the paradigm of liberty, and in SSA the paradigm of Ubuntu. These different paradigms make that the interpretation of gender equality is different as well. Besides this, the differences in the dimensions of Hofstede explain to a large extent the differences in interpretation of gender equality between the West and SSA.

## 7. Discussion

In this thesis, I made a comparison between the Western and Sub-Saharan African interpretation of the concepts of gender and gender equality. I made this comparison with the help of definitions given by (international) organizations that aim at achieving gender equality. Furthermore, I used academic literature and the insights of two experts in the field of gender equality, one from SSA and the other from the Netherlands. I expected that there could be negative side effects for local communities in SSA if international organizations would implement policies to enhance gender equality that are defined from a Western perspective. The concept of gender was sometimes not even understood in SSA, and local people reported that they felt threatened by the Western ideas of gender equality, since their own ideas about (gender) equality differed from the Western ideas. Therefore, I compared the differences and similarities of the interpretations of the concepts of gender and gender equality, in order to see if there were indeed many differences in the interpretation of gender and gender equality between the West and SSA. I came to the conclusion that there are more differences than similarities between the West and SSA in their interpretation of gender equality, just as I expected.

### 7.1 Limitations and future research

However, there are several limitations regarding the methods and the findings of this thesis. First of all, I was only able to interview one person for each society. It would have been better if I could have interviewed more people from both cultures to get a better idea of gender equality in practice.

Secondly, since there was little literature from the SSA perspective, I used a lot of literature that was e-mailed to me by Gertjan van Stam. However, this makes that this information might be one-sided, since this was literature that was deemed important from the perspective of one person. Furthermore, there was little literature about the Sub-Saharan African interpretation of gender equality, making that I mostly used a description of the African society as it is right now. This made it a bit difficult to compare the Western and African perspective, since the interpretations of the West were on a more abstract level. This might have resulted in a slightly wrong conclusion about the differences and similarities between the West and SSA.

Furthermore, there are some aspects of gender equality that I did not include in the interpretations of gender equality right now, but that may be interesting to investigate more in depth for future research. For example, I put little emphasis in this thesis on the dimension of health from the GII. In SSA however, the maternal mortality rate is still quite high in comparison with other regions in the world. Furthermore, HIV/aids is an enormous problem in SSA, leading to much gender inequality as well. For future research, it might be interesting to look at this

health dimension for getting a better understanding of the African interpretation of gender equality. Besides this, I also did not give much attention to the issue of domestic violence or sexual abuse, while this is also an important aspect of gender inequality in both the West and SSA. This might therefore be interesting as well for future research when looking at gender equality in SSA and the West.

Many generalizations were made as well in this thesis. For now, I mostly had findings from, for example, the Yorùbá society, and I used this to make assumptions about the interpretation of gender and gender equality for SSA. However, there are many differences between the multiple African societies. This means that not all findings of this thesis might be applicable to all Western/Sub-Saharan African countries. For future research, it might be interesting to look more specifically at one country or even at one community, to find how gender equality is defined in that specific country/community.

## **7.2 Implications**

Despite the above-mentioned limitations of this thesis, it is clear that the collectivistic nature and the paradigm of Ubuntu make that many Western ideas about gender and gender equality are foreign to the Sub-Saharan African cultures. This has implications for the policies that are developed for enhancing gender equality by international organizations such as the World Bank or the United Nations. Right now, many definitions of international organizations of gender equality are formed from a Western point of view. Therefore, the policies that take these Western definitions as a starting point will not lead to more gender equality in SSA and can even create negative side effects for the local communities. Now we have a better understanding of the Sub-Saharan African interpretation of gender and gender equality, the implementations to enhance gender equality can become more successful. Furthermore, the implementations that are done will not create negative side effects for the local communities in SSA.

Furthermore, the findings of this thesis are relevant because there are many policies these days from Western organizations that try to enhance gender equality in SSA, such as the fifth goal of the SDGs. Many of those policies aim at solving one or two specific problems, such as making that an equal number of girls compared to boys goes to school. However, the results of this thesis show that gender and gender equality are social constructs and are deeply rooted in culture and history. Therefore, policies aiming at solving specific problems will not lead to more gender equality since the underlying values are not taken into consideration. Changing those underlying values will probably take multiple generations. Hence, organizations should know this and acknowledge this, in order to create policies that focus on long-term changes instead of focusing on problems that are very measurable and can be solved on the short-term.

Finally, the colonial history of the West towards SSA teaches us that applying your own perspectives upon a completely different culture, even if this is done with the best intentions, often does more harm than good and can lead to the disruption of entire societies. It seems that SSA should have the power themselves to create policies aiming at gender equality (or completely different, more important issues), based on their own unique perspective, apart from the West. The findings of this thesis implicate that SSA should get the time to define how they want their society to look like and what gender equality means to them, without interference of the West.

Concluding, this thesis can be a first step in creating better policies to enhance gender equality in SSA without disrupting local communities. However, the main findings of this thesis also show that it is better if the West does not interfere in SSA with policies defined from the Western perspective, but people in SSA should get the power and freedom themselves to determine what they deem necessary for the development of their continent.



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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1.

#### Literature used for literature review

##### Hofstede's cultural dimensions

<i>Search terms</i>	<i>Number of results</i>	<i>Author(s) and year of publication of selected relevant articles</i>
Hofstede culture dimensions	145.000	- Hofstede (1983) - Hofstede (2011)

##### Western interpretation of gender and (gender) equality

###### 1. Gender

<i>Search terms</i>	<i>Number of results</i>	<i>Author(s) and year of publication of selected relevant articles</i>
Gender AND definition	3.340.000	- Conway, Bourque, & Scott (1987)
Sex AND gender AND western society	2.350.000	- Moore (1994) - West & Zimmerman (1987)
Gender AND western society	3.370.000	- Holmes (2007)
Gender AND identity	3.430.000	- Diamond (2004)

###### 2. Equality

<i>Search terms</i>	<i>Number of results</i>	<i>Author(s) and year of publication of selected relevant articles</i>
Equality AND western cultures	851.000	- Robbins (1994) - Haynes & Hickel (2016).

###### 3. Gender equality

<i>Search terms</i>	<i>Number of results</i>	<i>Author(s) and year of publication of selected relevant articles</i>
Gender equality AND definition	2.120.000	- Krizsan & Lombardo (2013). - Kardam (2004) - Nousiainen, Holli, Kantola, Saari & Hart (2013) - Verloo (2010)
Gender AND equality AND definition AND united nations	1.050.000	- Krook & True (2010)
Gender inequality index AND definitions	703.000	- Gaye, Klugman, Kovacevic, Twigg & Zambrano (2010) - Permanyer (2013) - Amin & Sabermahani (2017)

Gender equality AND western culture	1.300.000	- Inglehart, Ponarin & Inglehart (2017) - Lorber (2010) - Berishvili (2016)
Power AND agency gender equality	1.240.000	- Celis & Lovenduski (2018) - Waylen (2014) - Boudet, Petesch & Turk (2013).
Gender equality AND power relations	1.980.000	-Kulik (2011)
Gender equality AND gender roles	2.520.000	- Wienclaw (2011)
Defining work AND gender	2.390.000	- Messias, Im, Page, Regev, Spiers, Yoder, & Meleis (1997)

### Sub-Saharan African interpretation of gender and (gender) equality

#### 1. Gender, gender equality and Ubuntu

<i>Articles and books suggested by Gertjan van Stam</i>	<i>Author(s) and year of publication of selected relevant articles</i>
The Invention of Women: Making an African sense of Western Gender Discourses	-Oyěwùmí (1997)
Special issue of <i>African Feminisms</i> : Vol. XX, No. 1-2, 2006	- Mekgwe (2006) - Eze (2006) - Apusigah (2006)
Chapter 3 of book 'Women's Leadership in Peace-Building: Conflict, Community and Care': Ubuntu and peace: without a mother, there is no home	-Van Stam (2014)

#### 2. Ubuntu

<i>Search terms</i>	<i>Number of results</i>	<i>Author(s) and year of publication of selected relevant articles</i>
Ubuntu AND sub saharan Africa	11.100	- Murove (2012) - Sulamoyo (2010) - Lutz (2009)

#### 3. Gender equality

<i>Search terms</i>	<i>Number of results</i>	<i>Author(s) and year of publication of selected relevant articles</i>
Gender equality AND culture Africa	590.000	- Maluleke (2012)
Power AND gender AND sub saharan Africa	327.000	- Barnes & Buchard (2012).
Power AND gender equality AND sub saharan Africa	122.000	- Moyo & Dhlwayo (2019) - Izumi (1999) - Annan, Donald, Goldstein, Gonzalez Martinez, & Koolwal (2021)
Ubuntu AND gender equality AND sub saharan Africa	9.200	- Assié-Lumumba (2018) - Nicolaidis (2015)



## Appendix 2.

### Introduction letter to participants in the interview

#### *Introduction letter to participant in SSA*

Dear Anna,

I hope this message reaches you well.

Let me introduce myself: My name is Marit Messelink and I am a twenty-year-old student who is currently in the third year of the study Liberal Arts and Sciences at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. In order to complete my studies, I am now writing a thesis about gender equality as a final assignment for my study. My supervisor for writing this thesis is Mia Stokmans.

The topic of my thesis is about the meaning of the concepts of gender and gender equality of societies in Western and Sub-Saharan African countries. For getting an idea about the meaning of gender and gender equality in several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, I already did an extensive literature review. However, reports on this topic are scarce. In order to get a more in depth understanding of the Sub-Saharan African perspective, it could be very helpful to get direct insights from someone who is living in Sub-Saharan Africa and who is an expert on this topic. Dr. Stokmans told me that she knew you personally and that you were an expert on the field of gender, more specific women empowerment. Therefore, I was wondering if I could conduct an interview with you about how gender and gender equality are understood in the Ugandan culture?

The online interview itself will probably last for about one hour. If it suits you well, I would like to conduct the interview somewhere at the end of May, but the exact date can be set as you wish. During the interview, I would like to ask you questions about your interpretation of the concept of gender and about the meaning of equality between men and women in Uganda. A detailed topic list will be sent to you ample time before the date of the interview. All the information that you provide, will be used in a confidential way in my thesis.

My question for you therefore is whether it is possible to conduct an interview with you about those topics?

Please let me know if this is possible for you. Thank you in advance!

Yours sincerely,

Marit Messelink

*Introduction letter to participant in the Netherlands*

Geachte meneer/mevrouw,

Momenteel zit ik in het derde jaar van mijn bachelor Liberal Arts and Sciences aan de universiteit van Tilburg en ben ik bezig met het schrijven van mijn scriptie over gendergelijkheid. In mijn scriptie doe ik onderzoek naar de Westerse interpretatie van gender en gendergelijkheid en dat wil ik graag vergelijken met de interpretatie van deze begrippen in Sub-Sahara Afrika. Om een beter beeld te krijgen van de Westerse interpretatie van gender en gendergelijkheid wilde ik graag kijken hoe verschillende organisaties in Nederland die zich bezighouden met gendergelijkheid deze twee concepten interpreteren.

Via Google vond ik de organisatie ... en zag ik dat de organisatie zich richt op jonge feministen en graag een bijdrage levert aan het creëren van een maatschappij met meer gelijke kansen. Daarnaast zag ik dat u graag uw kennis en ervaringen uitwisselt over gelijkheid. Ik vond dit erg interessant, en daarom zou ik graag meer willen weten over de organisatie en de manier waarop jullie kijken naar gelijkheid tussen mannen en vrouwen. Dit zou mij verder ook erg helpen voor het krijgen van een goed beeld van de Westerse interpretatie van gendergelijkheid voor mijn scriptie. Ik vroeg me daarom af of het wellicht mogelijk is om iemand van uw organisatie te interviewen over het werk van ..., en hoe de organisatie daarin kijkt naar gender en gendergelijkheid?

Het zou hierbij gaan om een interview van ongeveer een uur en gezien de huidige maatregelen rondom corona zou ik het interview het liefst telefonisch of via Skype of Zoom willen houden. Tijdens het interview zou ik bijvoorbeeld willen vragen wat gelijkheid tussen mannen en vrouwen binnen de organisatie ... precies betekend, en hoe de organisatie het aanpakt om dat steeds meer in de praktijk te realiseren. Een uitgebreide topiclijst zal ruim voor aanvang van het interview worden verzonden. Indien mogelijk zou ik het interview graag ergens in de tweede helft van mei houden. De informatie uit het interview zal uiteraard vertrouwelijk worden behandeld en verwerkt.

Mijn vraag is dus of het mogelijk is om binnenkort iemand van uw organisatie over deze onderwerpen te interviewen?

Graag hoor ik van jullie!

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Marit Messelink

### Appendix 3.

#### Informed Consent Form

##### Informed consent form interview gender equality

**Bachelor thesis Marit Messelink**

##### **Consent form to participate in interview**

Marit Messelink, student Liberal Arts and Sciences at Tilburg University.

E-mail: maritmesselink@gmail.com

Phone number: 06-31162882

Academic supervisor: Mia Stokmans

The following form states all the conditions of participating in the interview. Please read through each of them carefully and indicate at the end of the form whether you agree to participate in the interview under the following conditions or not.

- ❖ I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm that I am at least 18 years old and voluntarily agree to participate in this interview
- ❖ I have had the purpose of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- ❖ I confirm that I am fully informed about the research procedure and the objectives.
- ❖ I understand that participation in this research project involves the participation in an interview, which takes about 60 minutes. I understand that questions will be asked about my work in the field of gender equality and women empowerment. I understand that questions will be asked about my interpretation of the concepts of gender and gender equality.
- ❖ I confirm that I am fully informed about the potential risks and benefits of this research project.
- ❖ I understand that I have the right to not answer certain questions and to stop the interview at any moment, without giving a reason.
- ❖ I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
- ❖ I agree to my interview being audio recorded.
- ❖ I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- ❖ I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- ❖ I understand that data gathered in this interview will only be used for the bachelor thesis of Marit Messelink.

- ❖ I understand that the information I provide during the interview will be used and that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the bachelor thesis of Marit Messelink.
- ❖ I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be securely retained until September 31, 2021.
- ❖ I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained until September 31, 2021.
- ❖ I understand that I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

Please fill in one of the two boxes

☐ Yes, I consent to participating in this interview

☐ No, I do not consent to participating in this interview

*Signature of research participant*

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Signature of participant

-----

Date

*Signature of researcher*

I believe the participant is given informed consent to participate in this study

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Signature of the researcher

-----

Date

## **Formulier geïnformeerde toestemming interview gendergelijkheid**

**Bachelor thesis Marit Messelink**

### **Formulier geïnformeerde toestemming voor deelname aan het interview**

Marit Messelink, studente Liberal Arts and Sciences aan Tilburg University.

E-mail: maritmesselink@gmail.com

Telefoonnummer: 06-31162882

Supervisor voor thesis: Mia Stokmans

In het volgende formulier staan alle voorwaarden voor deelname aan het interview. Lees ze alstublieft rustig door, en laat aan het einde van het formulier weten of u er wel of niet mee instemt om deel te nemen aan het interview.

- ❖ Ik, \_\_\_\_\_, bevestig dat ik minimaal 18 jaar ben en vrijwillig deelneem aan dit interview.
- ❖ Het doel van het onderzoek is me duidelijk gemaakt en ik heb de mogelijkheid gehad om vragen te stellen.
- ❖ Ik bevestig dat ik volledig ben geïnformeerd over de procedure van het interview en de doelen van het onderzoek.
- ❖ Ik begrijp dat deelname aan dit onderzoek inhoudt dat ik deelneem aan een interview dat ongeveer 60 minuten zal duren. Ik begrijp dat er vragen gesteld zullen worden over mijn werk over gendergelijkheid, en over mijn interpretatie van de concepten gender en gendergelijkheid.
- ❖ Ik begrijp dat ik het recht heb om bepaalde vragen niet te beantwoorden en om het interview op elk moment te stoppen zonder het opgeven van een reden.
- ❖ Ik begrijp dat ik het recht heb om contact te zoeken met de mensen die betrokken zijn bij dit onderzoek voor het verkrijgen van meer duidelijkheid en informatie over het onderzoek.
- ❖ Ik stem ermee in dat het interview wordt opgenomen (alleen audio).
- ❖ Ik begrijp dat alle informatie die ik geef tijdens het interview op een vertrouwelijke manier zal worden behandeld.
- ❖ Ik begrijp dat mijn identiteit volledig anoniem zal blijven tijdens het onderzoek en in de uiteindelijke scriptie. Dit zal gedaan worden door het veranderen van mijn naam en door elk detail te verhullen dat mijn identiteit of de identiteit van mensen die ik noem tijdens het interview kan onthullen.
- ❖ Ik begrijp dat de data die door middel van dit interview wordt verzameld alleen gebruikt zal worden voor de bachelor thesis van Marit Messelink.

- ❖ Ik begrijp dat de informatie die ik verstrek tijdens dit interview zal worden gebruikt en dat bepaalde informatie (op een manier die anonimiteit garandeert) geciteerd zal worden in de bachelor thesis van Marit Messelink.
- ❖ Ik begrijp dat het getekende formulier voor geïnformeerde toestemming, het transcript en de audio van het interview op een veilige manier zal worden bewaard tot 31 september 2021.
- ❖ Ik begrijp dat ik op elk moment tot 31 september 2021 het recht heb op toegang tot de informatie die ik heb gegeven.

Kruis hieronder aan wat voor u van toepassing is:

[ ] Ja, ik stem toe om deel te nemen aan het interview

[ ] Nee, ik stem niet toe om deel te nemen aan het interview

*Handtekening van de deelnemer*

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Handtekening van de deelnemer

-----

Datum

*Handtekening van de onderzoeker*

Ik geloof dat de deelnemer voldoende geïnformeerd is voor deelname aan dit onderzoek

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Handtekening van de onderzoeker

-----

Datum

## Appendix 4.

### Topic lists

#### Topic list interview gender equality

##### Bachelor thesis Marit Messelink

Marit Messelink, student Liberal Arts and Sciences at Tilburg University.

E-mail: maritmesselink@gmail.com

Phone number: 06-31162882

Academic supervisor: Mia Stokmans

The following topics can be discussed during the interview. It might be the case that due to time constraints, not all topics will be discussed. It might also be the case that during the interview, topics that are not mentioned below might come up that are important to discuss as well. However, the topic list below will give you a general idea of the topics that will be discussed during the interview.

#### Topics that can be discussed during the interview:

- ❖ The work the participant does in the field of gender equality and women empowerment
- ❖ The meaning of the concept of gender
- ❖ The meaning of the concept of gender equality
- ❖ Example of gender equality in practice
- ❖ Gender equality in the Ugandan society
- ❖ Examples of gender equality in the Ugandan society
- ❖ Obstacles for the realization of gender equality in the Ugandan society
- ❖ Difference in interpretation between countries

**Topic lijst interview gender equality****Bachelor thesis Marit Messelink**

Marit Messelink, studente Liberal Arts and Sciences aan Tilburg University.

E-mail: maritmesselink@gmail.com

Telefoonnummer: 06-31162882

Supervisor voor thesis: Mia Stokmans

De onderstaande onderwerpen kunnen naar voren komen tijdens het interview. Het zou kunnen dat we door een gebrek aan tijd niet aan alle onderwerpen toekomen. Daarnaast zou het kunnen dat er tijdens het interview andere onderwerpen naar voren komen die niet op de topic lijst staan maar die wel belangrijk zijn om te bespreken. Deze topic lijst geeft echter een algemeen idee van de onderwerpen die aan bod zullen komen tijdens het interview.

**Onderwerpen die naar voren kunnen komen tijdens het interview:**

- ❖ Het werk dat van de organisatie ... op het gebied van gendergelijkheid
- ❖ De betekenis van het concept gender
- ❖ De betekenis van het concept gendergelijkheid
- ❖ Voorbeelden van gendergelijkheid in de praktijk
- ❖ Gendergelijkheid in de Nederlandse samenleving
- ❖ Voorbeelden van hoe gendergelijkheid eruitziet in de Nederlandse samenleving
- ❖ Obstakels voor het realiseren van gendergelijkheid in de Nederlandse samenleving
- ❖ Verschil in betekenis van gendergelijkheid tussen verschillende bevolkingsgroepen (in Nederland)