

Gender Ideology, Global Africa, and the Challenges for Pan-African Studies in the 21st Century

by

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I presented this paper in Liverpool, England at the Africa 2000 Conference in August of that year, and revised it for the National Council for Black Studies Annual Conference in March 2005 in Atlanta, Georgia. In some ways, its publication in the JPAS marks a Sankofa moment when, as scholars and students of African World Studies, we have 'reclaimed' much from our 'legacy cultures,'¹ and can employ those multiple legacies 'in order to move ahead.' It also marks an analytical crossroad where our growing trepidation about women, youth, working people, and people of color in Africa and the African Diaspora resides. That crossroad is frequently strewn with the debris of sexism and disdain for our rich cultural endowment at a time when we need to embrace the legacy of women's leadership if we are to move forward. A brief narrative from Odu Ifa frames our discussion. My methodology variously employs the language, lexicon, and meaning along with the thoughts and practices of Yoruba, Akan, and African American cultures. Acknowledging the limitations and challenges in such an undertaking, I intend 1) to provide oral and written data and contemporary analysis to guide our discussion of the complexity of diverse African gendered environment, 2) to propose the concept of 'legacy cultures' as a model for contemporary political and cultural analysis, and 3) to extrapolate one set of culturally-based ideologies that may contribute to the growing body of scholarly works on Africana studies and particularly women of African descent globally. By 'legacy cultures,' I mean the transnational and local (re)configurations of African cultures in the twenty-first century, and the presence of African worldviews and expressivity in modern world environments. The term, 'legacy cultures,' distinguishes earlier patterns of cultural evolution occurring within traditional African environments. It marks these natural occurrences from their progeny cultures on the continent and in the Diaspora.

The term, 'legacy cultures,' unlocks the potential application of Africa's cultural heritages to new modalities and protocols for development in the twenty-first century. It allows us to embrace the breadth and depth of our global experiences, customary and pluralistic, in a more liberated discourse on the continent and in the Diaspora. The concept of legacy cultures allows us to address the institutional and infrastructural needs of Africa's global humanity and our place in the world generally.

Leadership Discourse in Odu Ifa

A narrative in Odu Ifa, (Yoruba oral texts), expounds upon the consequences of poor leadership (rulership in the narrative). According to the text, the town of Modakeke was ruled by a king named "Dead from the Neck Up" who turned the regency upside down.ⁱⁱ As a result, people lost their way and forgot their appointed roads, that is, they forgot their living purpose which, at the core of Yoruba worldview, is to maintain balance and harmony among human beings. The Odu Ifa says, "the world is a simple place, it is the confusion of the mis-educated that has created problems. The Creator made things simple to confuse the fool." Obviously, "Dead From the Neck Up" refers to senseless behavior, lack of emotional intelligence, social progress, and political savvy.ⁱⁱⁱ Restoring balance and harmony is a major theme in Odu Ifa which seeks to understand the context and circumstances that create imbalance and disharmony in order to return to social equilibrium. In Odu Ifa, we choose which path to follow by choosing whether or not to make the necessary sacrifices to achieve that equilibrium. The wisdom of Odu Ifa inspires me to ask, "What role does Pan-African Studies play in the twenty-first century? What lessons of our legacy cultures and lived experiences are available to guide us now? How will we engage them? We assert that Africana Studies, irrespective of its various names, must reclaim its 'appointed road,' by actively reclaiming its primary intellectual leadership position in Africa and the African Diaspora. As knowledge and cultural workers, Africana Studies scholars must provide appropriate analysis and directions to redress the confusion facing global communities of the twenty-first century. Exploring Odu Ifa offers perspectives and ways of critically engaging the contemporary world so that we may restore balance and harmony among human beings. The dynamic nature of Yoruba; cultural legacy in Africa and the African Diaspora gives us a lens through which to gauge the complex interplay of gender and social engagement, and specifically, the complex meaning of motherhood in our legacy cultures. While we may be far from these ideals presently, we must analyze the effects of gradually losing control of this aspect of our cultural compass during the last four decades of Africana Studies scholarship and the last five centuries of the Ma'at. As knowledge and cultural workers, it is our responsibility to explore our past in order to redesign a livable present if we intend to create a sustainable future. This is the challenge of Modakeke and the significance of rivers in global African cultures.

Ideological Foundations and Theoretical Framework

One of the greatest challenges facing the global African community in the twenty-first century is the transformation of its *legacy cultures*^{iv} into viable modalities for survival and for the reclamation of our humanity, purpose, and identity. When I speak of legacy cultures, I refer to those culminating experiences initiated by our historical experiences as African and African Diaspora peoples. Our legacy cultures include the historical experiences of the Yoruba; Akan, Wolof, Hausa, Igbo, Kongo, African-Brazilian, African-Cuban, and African Americans which exist today in the dynamic synergy of African and African Diasporic cultures. On the continent and in the Diaspora, those experiences offer models of development, gender ideology, theories of globalization, and new challenges for Africana studies in the twenty-first century. At the dawn of this new millennium, our legacy cultures are more than mere nostalgia and nomenclature; they offer ways of reclaiming our agency in the world. The collective treasure trove of our experiences in written documents and oral narratives, proverbs, songs, and humor locates and records the ways of knowing and valuing the wisdom and contradictions in our legacy cultures. These critical cultural guides are available to our intellectual and activist traditions, and are certainly relevant to the theoretical development of Africana Studies in the twenty-first century.

Using the inspiration of the Akan symbol of Sankofa, our legacy cultures can help us to think about and work for our global restitution. This principle liberates us to engage our legacy cultures deeply as tools for reasserting agency in the twenty-first century. Using aspects of Akan, Yoruba, and African American cultural legacies gives voice to some of our most documented and visible global cultures. As I have argued elsewhere,^v my focus on Yoruba culture is one way to understand our creativity and responses in diverse environments. Given the extensive reach of Yoruba; and Akan cultures in the African World, a comparative method can open a window to our complex identities and visions of our future. Yoruba; Akan, and African American cultural heritages serve this essay as the sources for our excavation. In a sense, we are exploring the role of matrices of identity as agency in a social and cosmic order.

African people, like all human beings, mark their cultures by a shared vision of social survival and regeneration which is usually found within their classical traditions; in our case, within our oral and written traditions. For global Africans, our legacy cultures and experiences abound with examples of good and bad leadership, in which women are also implicated. Odu Ifa narrates a time when confusion reigned, a time similar to the current era of global leadership. In Obara-Okanran, when Orunmila asks what happens when “Dead from the Neck Up” ruled Modakeke? The three adepts reply:

During Modakeke reign, the father holds the plate for his child to eat, the child sweeps the inner courtyard of the house while the father sweeps outside, the child rides the horse, and the father walks holding the back of the horse. Orunmila said, ‘indeed you were there (as a witness).’ The adepts said that “the women stay home, the men grind pepper, the woman stays home and the man carries dirty clothes to the river to wash; that is how stupid they all were in those days. The women wanted men to bear children. Orunmila said, “Let everyone take their appointed road as ordained by Olodumare.” The world is a simple place, it is the confusion of the (mis)educated that has created problems. Olodumare created confusion to confuse the fool.^{vi}

As scholar-activists in the Pan-African/Nationalist tradition, our appointed roads as adepts means that we are responsible for observing, critiquing, and reinventing new pathways and modalities for restoring harmony to the world. It means discerning the roles and responsibilities for which we are most capable and, and are in most need, to execute. Our appointed roads mean clarifying the meaning of our cultural heritages, especially, the meaning of our historic and lived experiences. Our legacy cultures can be powerful tools to critique our past, illuminate our future pathways, and achieve our goals. We can say that our purpose is to replace “Dead from the neck up” with what the Akan celebrate as *Akwaisi Adae* or ten years of righteous rulership.^{vii} Like the Adinkra symbol, *kyinkyinren*, we are required to change ourselves while playing many roles in the twenty-first century. Truly, the work before us demands that we reactivate our cultural signposts, remap our destination, and prepare a world order that reflects the ethical meaning of all human life.

In the post-Civil Rights/Black Power era, our intellectual responsibility demands that we ask who we are as women and men of African descent, what our roles are in the world, and where we are going. We are more than forty years beyond the Black Studies movement at San Francisco State University, and we must pause to reflect upon these years. Our legacy cultures in Odu Ifa asks if we are ready to do the hard work required to re-shape our destinies and the worlds in which we live, breathe, and have our being. The narrative of Sundjata forces us to ask if our workers can extricate the iron-will of survival found in many of our global cultures so that we can stand up with wisdom, courage, and fortitude to shape new world realities? Osun asks whether we are ready to hear the wisdom of women in counsel with men and with our own inner heads in the art of living and dispensing social justice. Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. Du Bois ask if we are ready to enter the global space signified here. “Only the Black Woman can say, ‘When and where I enter/ the whole race enters with me.’ ” Where and how does the African world woman, her family, and her race enter in the twenty-first century?

The World is a Marketplace: Gender Ideology in Yoruba Culture

The Yoruba; proverb, “The World is a Marketplace, Heaven is Home,” suggests that human beings seamlessly travel between these two terrains, eternally negotiating the multidimensionality of human life. The relationship between marketplace and home reaffirms the duality of our cultural ideology, and emphasizes our humanity and divinity, our earthly and ethereal environments. This ideological duality forces us to grapple with purpose and usefulness, with the significance and meaning of life for our own sake and for our successive generations. It forces us to rethink the roles of women and men within this context, for this relationship alone fosters one of the most fundamental aspects of any cultural ideology or practice. Calling upon the resources implied in our cultural legacy forces us to frame a “cognitive cultural assessment,” as a way of knowing through which we taste the world. Our global identities spring like lotus blossoms from the rich, scattered soil of our legacy cultures, and therein lie some of the many keys to an African-centered cognitive cultural assessment. I am arguing for a Sankofa perspective that links our legacy cultures as the sources and lens through which African Diaspora and African cultures return beyond rhetoric for nourishment, sustenance, and direction. We can then complete the circle by intertwining a future vision with the ability of global African cultures to sustain themselves and invigorate our continental cultures in an unbroken dialogue.

Guiding Principles in African World Ideology

There are several guiding principles in our legacy cultures that are found in Yoruba orature and cultural praxis. One is the focus on socio-cultural balance. Another is the principle of harmony and restitution expressed in Odu Ifa. As will be discussed, balance and harmony are twin concepts that infuse every function in the marketplace on earth (ile) and in the homeland in heavens (orun). Our life challenges, it is believed, occur when something in earth, nature, animal life, or human beings is out of balance. Divination, as a means of discerning that discord, leads the client, individual or communal, to reveal not only the problem but also the process by which to solve it. The tradition asks the client to actively engage in his/her own problem-solving in order to restore or maintain balance and harmony as the natural order of existence. That natural order is expressed variously in the infinite life cycles of the ancestors, living, and unborn; in the music, song, and dance that communicate with and animate the human spirit; and in the confrontation among human or non-human forces which often threaten to disrupt such order. Renewal and rebirth continually refuel the sense of being and beingness in the world. The invaluable nature of our human existence relies upon ancestors who leave behind wisdom for the living to use and build upon in order for the unborn to inherit and manifest, test, and refine it again.

For example, Osun's sacred peregun plant symbolizes this inter-relationship between the perennial (renewal) and the eternal (quintessential living energy or rebirth). In the sacred texts, Osun as the Mother icon, or meta-narrative, is a vehicle for the synergistic release of human life through the birthing process. As a vehicle, Mother, *iya*, becomes emblematic of the perennial, eternal spheres of being, humanity, divinity, and nature.

Why focus on the Yoruba-speaking peoples? The fact that there are about forty million Yoruba; speakers in Western Nigeria and the Republic of Benin, and several million Yoruba; descendants in the Western Atlantic Diaspora alone testifies to the relevancy of Yoruba; culture, worldview, and practices. The syncretic retentions and renewed interest in Yoruba culture, art, and spirituality throughout the African Diaspora require serious engagement with the question of how Yoruba thought explains its gender ideology. I am mindful of the fact that a similar argument can be made for the Akan, Wolof, Mande, Temne, or Luandan cultures to name a few; all of whom have suffered major depopulation as a result of the trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic slave trades. I have chosen Yoruba culture because of my long years of work in this area, and because it is my hope that others will undertake similar studies with respect to the aforementioned cultures among others.

In order to enhance the confluence among many West African cultures, I will make comparisons with other regional cultures that either illuminate certain ideas or offer alternative, even oppositional meaning. While they are not the major purpose here, such comparisons are intended to avoid the misreading of my analysis of Yoruba culture as either essentialist or universally African. To the contrary, we are yet to know enough about how West Africans think and articulate that thinking in their daily lives. Indeed, West Africa's diversity itself requires that we understand its plethora of cultures and cultural ideologies if we are to make sense of the world we purport to study. My other lectures and publications in Yoruba and Akan cultures speak to the cross-cultural approach to the region's intellectual richness and to the formulation of comparative African world studies. Further, addressing Yoruba gender ideology within its own milieu locates a cultural point of departure where the mother figure becomes more than "life-giving" functionary; the mother also orchestrates and negotiates the pitch and tenor of daily life and future existence. In the oral narratives, women are able to reproduce and to deny reproduction, an essential power which translates into food production (farming), food preparation (cooking), food distribution (marketing), and human survival (sacred power). This productive capacity is divinely bestowed by Olodumare upon Osun at the moment of initial creative impulse to design and populate the world. The power to produce and reproduce lies within her womb, while that to nurture and deny nurturance reposes in the ase of her cooling and healing waters. This quintessential power of women is codified in diverse verbal and visual art forms which signal the central ideological role of women, and by extension, of mothers, in this otherwise patriarchal society.

Women as Custodians of Water, Earth, and Fire: Tending to the Cocoyams

For the last twenty-five years, Africana women scholars have contributed to the extraordinary development of Pan-African Women's Studies. In a 1996 publication titled, *Pan-Africanism: Politics, Economy, and Social Change in the Twenty-First Century*, Fatima Mahmoud points out that African and Diaspora women must "rewrite African women's history with the emphasis on women as agents rather than victims of history."^{viii} Mahmoud calls for women of Africa and the Diaspora to write their own history, indeed their own cultural ideologies. She states that

Revisiting our history is not a longing for the past; rather it is a call for self-empowerment as we look at the past in order to embrace the future creatively and persistently. We need to rewrite the history of our women ancestors, to shed light on their powerfulness, their prominent role in the history of Africa and the diaspora (sic), and their ability, knowledge, and wisdom in resource utilization, in religion, arts and all aspects of culture and life.^{ix}

Fatima B. Mahmoud seems to chide us to 1) further explore the implications of African Feminism as defined by Philomena Steady,^x 2) to further examine and develop the theories of Diop^{xi} and Amadiume^{xii} on matriarchy; and 3) to recast our discourse about global African women in a cultural and historiographical framework. To Mahmoud's call, we add the work of Sierra Leonean scholar Philomena Steady who defines African Feminism as a humanistic feminism. From this perspective, African and African Diaspora men and women are viewed as dual sides of the same complementary and frequently asymmetrical relationship.^{xiii} This is illustrated by the fact that African women embody both reproductive and productive ideals as the quintessential life-giving and life-sustaining abilities. My own research in Yoruba cultural history and language illuminates the central role of women as icons of power in Yoruba thought.^{xiv}

In Yoruba parlance, those ideals enshrine cultural images of human and divine power in a mother-bride-wife matrix. The Yoruba word, *iya*, in some contexts, conflates social roles and biological gender. *Iya*, mother, extracts biological and social meaning in such roles as *igbeyawo*, bride, and *iyawo*, wife. *Iya* also locates civic and social responsibility in *iyalode*, head of the marketplace, and *iyale*, female head of the household. *Iya* denotes female identity in its biological context; but it is not limited to gender since other terms like *iyagbawo* and *iyawo* imply active roles and processes as well. In these later cases, *igbeyawo* and *iyawo* can refer to someone who enters into a new relationship from outside of a natal family or who transitions from a non-initiate to an initiate in a religious sense. In both cases, the role of the person and purpose of the action take precedence over the biological gender of the person or persons involved. Each linguistic instance implies responsibility and attachment to a particular social institution or cultural organization.

Since the root word, *iya*, is inextricably tied to women, we can intimate that women are expected to lead and to carry a wide range of responsibilities in the socio-cultural environment. Where mother-icon bears specific prowess in the cultural environment, the bride-wife-mother continuum creates a kinetic interplay and tension among these roles. Mother is the most revered source of our humanity, and is therefore guardian of the household, and of the unborn, living, and ancestors. This is the domain of the *iyale*.

These elaborate meanings underscore the fact that women are expected to take on multiple roles, responsibilities, and activities in their social and political environments. As Steady tells us reproduction is production, a concept that is just now gaining credence in the West. Titles such as *iyalode* and *iyale*, which illustrate women leadership, carry weight in the economic and family setting. West African market women who are already known for their business acumen can also claim substantial leadership in market organization and distribution under an *iyaloja* or female head of the market. As the heads of the household (*iyale*), these women provide, manage, and sustain their children and families' basic needs. Men as heads of the family (*bale*) sustain and protect the family compounds and extended family in tact. The balance of power and role between the *bale* and *iyale* contributed to view that African families once enjoyed more stability than they do today. However, one could also posit that these differentiated roles contributed to the ability of enslaved African women to preserve what they could of their families, children, and heritages. One could also posit that the forced detachment of these culturally significant and complementary roles not only exacerbated sexism in our traditional and Western experiences, but also distorted our understanding of a culturally relevant road back to some form of sustainable social organization in the twenty-first century. We are already there; we just need to recognize the signposts.

Perhaps this legacy resonates in Anna Julia Cooper's 'When and where I enter.' Culturally speaking, African-descendant women claim their central position in the discourse involving African people's history, culture, and future. Many African and Diaspora women claim their agency in meaning of African life on the continent and beyond. Mother is more than life-giver and life-sustainer; she is a source of personal and communal strength well beyond childbirth itself. This mother-centeredness is more than maternal, child-bearing yearning, or an idyllic myth of longing for equal time in a supposedly masculine world. It is, as Diop implies in *The Cultural Heritage of Black Africa*,^{xv} a guiding principle that defines and unifies diverse African worldviews and cultural identities. For the Akan, it is *mgoya*, or the mother blood, that defines new human life. For the Yoruba, it is the perfectly beaded comb of Osun that divides the pathways of human life, and therefore guides that which she helps to create. In both cultures, it is mother presence that identifies and locates our place in the world. These continental African examples are not absent of, or antithetical to, father presence.

For the Akan, the white semen of fatherhood and the red menstrual blood of motherhood consolidate families in a cultural articulation of birth and belonging that makes community knowable. For the Yoruba, the transformative power of *aje*³ is knowable through the vision of divination, manifested by the use of the womb, and activated by the work of the *oriinu* or inner head, our destiny.

Mother-centeredness celebrates duality, a dominant cultural motif whose purpose vibrates with harmony and balance in all matters human and divine. As the Akan say, “through the womb of woman all humanity passes,” to which the Yoruba add that “without human beings there are no deities.” In Akan and Yoruba discourses, we envision the how and why of mother-centeredness, and the iconographic power of mother and grandmother among African-descended cultures globally, especially in the Diaspora. Since mother envelops and nurtures the essence of father’s semen and mother blood, transforming both genders is the ultimate power or use of the womb. The transformative agency of the womb with its mystery and duality defines our humanity and connects us to our divinity. No wonder that the human and/or divine displacement of Mother, as the narrative of *Osun* and the *IrunMale* illustrates,^{xvi} ushers chaos into the world while, in short, nothing happens without her. The fact that African social and interpersonal discourse identifies roles and responsibilities in biological terms as female crops and male crops is more an acknowledgement of such dualities than a reflection of the subordination of the feminine gender. For it is *cocoyam*, a woman’s crop, that feeds the family after the *yam*, a male crop, has turned to seedling. Mother-centeredness imposes critical responsibilities on African women as the custodians and active agents of human life. We are not obfuscating the realities of women's oppression in Africa and the African Diaspora. We are, however, seeking to reclaim the women's agency found in African legacy cultures as a mechanism for redressing global oppression.

Further, the Yoruba language, like many other African languages, is gender neutral in its pronoun usage; this neutrality is perhaps a subtle emphasis of role/responsibility over biology in social obligations and functions. Because of this, I disagree with Oyewumi’s argument that the West created the category known as woman in African gender discourse.^{xvii} On the contrary, I believe that the absence of genderizing pronouns and the presence of dual socio-political structures acknowledge the variegated roles and duality of human beings themselves. In many African cultures, women define and influence the structural roles and responsibilities which, in turn, define female and male relationships to identification with mother. For example, the Akan queen mother carries, as part of her responsibility, the role of first determining the suitability and character of male candidates for rulership/leadership in the Akan courts and townships. Similarly, the *iyale* (senior wife) plays the role of family matriarch and chief advisor to the head of the family or compound or ruler. These roles implicate women as power brokers in the socio-political affairs of the family, community, and state.

If this were not so, then neither title, *ohenemaa* nor *iyale*, could carry any socio-cultural or political weight. Nor would it be possible for *ohenemaa* and *iyale* to also perform as wives and mothers within their own families or as leaders and nurturers with the agency that they demonstrate. Perhaps Akan and Yoruba cultures articulate mother-connectedness differently, but in both cases, it is mother blood that solidifies blood memory among the extended family and interconnected compounds on the continent and throughout global Africa.

This returns us to Diop who proposes that matrifocality is the primary organizing social principle in African cultures, perhaps in recognition of its central cultural role. In fact, true to the Osun narrative, chaos has reigned since women were displaced by the invading male dominated forces from both the East and the West on the continent and in the Diaspora. Perhaps we should rethink the cultural legacy of women's leadership in social, political, economic, and intellectual milieus through the reconstructed lens of mother-centeredness. Perhaps women's wisdom still functions as a guiding principle in our socio-cultural discourse that should remain central to the re-establishment of authority over our own lives as a people. This is a fundamental argument in the work of Filomena Steady.^{xviii} We can extrapolate from the work of Steady and Amadiume that contemporary African women globally have been as revered for their courage and loyalty as much as they have been reviled for them. Globally, African-descendant women have been both the victors and the spoils of wars. They have been marred by Africa's internal and external past, and have carried the burden of enslavement, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and now globalization on their backs and in their hearts. Africana women have fought to maintain the right to speak for themselves wherever they reside about their realities without the subtle censorship that attempts to silence their collective voices as Audre Lorde reminds us.^{xix}

And it is not just Western feminism that attempts to abrogate Africana women's voices; it is also religious fundamentalism, neo-traditionalism, and phallo-centric nationalism, all of which attempt to hermetically seal Africana women, indeed all women, as appendages to their respective ideologies. The long struggles to regain African autonomy and self-determination oftentimes have overshadowed the critical need to understand African-descended women in cultural and historical contexts. Moreover, the usurpation of African and African Diaspora women's agency and autonomy has likewise undermined the re-establishment of African men's agency and autonomy. Africana Studies has long since prided its work and its agency on the notions of community and family. But if we are to reconnect those communities and families with ideas, visions and practices to which they may best respond, then we must extract from the study of our legacy cultures the language and worldviews to which they may respond constructively, and upon which new organizations can be built.

Odo to gba gbagbe, orisun agbe ni.

**Global Africa: The River that Forgets its Source Creates a Dry Patch.
*Bi gbigbe ni'gbe.***

Cultural memory plays a significant role in the transmission of global African cultures. One of the signature poems of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Power Movement was Langston Hughes' *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*. He recalls the ancient existence of African-descended people in the world, and our long association with sources of knowledge and of rivers, the source of all life. The line from his poem, "I've Known Rivers, ancient, dusky rivers, my soul has grown deep like the rivers,"^{xx} conjures those atavistic memories, thus Hughes (re)members the source of African humanity by reconnecting global African life not only to continental African origins, but also to its dispersal throughout the world.^{xxi} Originally dedicated to Dr. W.E.B. DuBois who first published it in the *Crisis* magazine in 1921, this poem reverberates with the Yoruba proverb, "the river that forgets its source creates a dry patch." In Yoruba thought, the Osun, Oya, and Ogun rivers are associated with creativity and power. With the Osun River especially, the association with creativity and power is ensconced in her oral tradition and annual festival.^{xxii} In divine and ethereal terms, she is the source through which the ase of Olodumare flows as Mother who parts the pathways of life. Yoruba oral tradition celebrates her womb which protects the embryonic forms created by Obatala. The tradition celebrates her body as it ebbs and flows with sustenance and life-giving movement. Osun's femininity is alluring and sensual; her fullness attracts three of the most powerful male deities in the Yoruba pantheon – Orunmila, Sango, and Ogun (wisdom, leadership, and power respectively).

As the source of femininity, Osun weds her knowledge of ase to that of her male counterparts, thereby activating these principles. This complex mythology seems to suggest that mother-icon, woman-power, and femininity are quintessential to maleness and father-icon, and that together they form the ideals of balance and harmony in Yoruba social-political organization. In the cultural context, woman as source is more than cultural essentialism or romanticism; woman is the cultural and ideological point of departure from which the social, political, and economic organization evolve. She is the spring from which humanity flows, akin to water as source of all life. As is the natural order of things, life begins with a rupture in the water that surrounds the fetus, creating the impetus for human beings to emerge from the womb full of new life and possibilities. Symbolically, the womb is a taproot to eternity without which human life collapses, the promise of regeneration fades, and the cultural life-force dies. Yoruba gender ideology reflects the many rivers of change that have flowed into its complex cultural history and ideology.

Applying these concepts to our contemporary environments gives us a yardstick and criteria for assessing and correcting our crumbling communities and lives. Can we use these ideals, for example, to change the language of discourse in order to measure how far Africana women and men have moved away from our socio-cultural and communal roles? What has happened to the veneration of humanity as a simple practice and truth, the message of Modakeke? More importantly, how do we resurrect our ethical and moral codes of behavior?

Ideology in Africana Studies and Gender Discourses

Although African people are devaluated and marginalized globally, overcoming the internal devaluation, marginalization, and disregard of African and Diaspora women is one of our greatest challenges. At a time when Africana women and men should be most unified, we are locked in subtle and not so subtle forms of internal gender bias and conflict. This is occurring at an historical juncture when white women and their children are benefiting most from the struggles of the Civil Rights and Black Studies era in terms of employment opportunities and the mainstreaming of Women's Studies in the academy. Despite the gloriana tributes paid to Africana womanhood, gender conflicts and imbalances permeate the scholarly, activist, and global communities. These conflicts and imbalances threaten to destabilize our efforts at Africana renewal, and weaken our ability to transfer the fruits of our labor, knowledge, and power to successive generations. In truth, many of these challenges reflect unsettled historical and contemporary phenomena that are the offspring of bitter internal wars, enslavement, colonialism, neo-colonialism, global capitalism, and historic sexism in African thought.

Other internal aspects of these challenges reflect unresolved cultural issues that receive little or disproportionate critical attention. Yet the most difficult obstacle involves our own inability to come to terms with the West, its racial and gender conflicts. This latter hurdle seems to have exacerbated our own gender issues that include marginalizing, disrespecting, and disdaining women in our communities. Confusing our own sexism and Western sexism has deflected attention away from our internal issues and our very real need to engage in focused and subjective self-analysis. For while it is certainly true that sexism exists in Akan and Yoruba cultures, it is also true that traditional, or if one prefers indigenous, ideologies contain the socio-cultural mechanisms appropriate to resolve these challenges. Intimidated by vitiated cultural practices and overt Western distortions, we often fail to interrogate traditional thought in a manner that is conducive to our own understanding of its many practicalities, benefits, and contradictions. Moreover, within African Diaspora cultures like African America, we insist that there be continually studies of women such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Anna Julia Cooper which can offer critical cultural insights beyond an evocation of their names.

Undoubtedly, their roles were of great importance to their own contemporaries as they are to us, because they exemplify how they used their agency globally and nationally to address African World issues. How well Pan-African/Africana Studies grapples with the exploration and utilization of our legacy cultures in the twenty-first century to address gender, racial, and cultural inequities will determine, in part, our ability to reconstitute those ideals and practices for the development of our communities. Without question, one of our great challenges in the twenty-first century will be the continued excavation of our global histories and cultures. However, our most urgent challenge will continue to be how well we utilize the inheritance of our variegated cultural legacies to ensure our progress and prosperity well into the future.

ⁱ I am coining the term, 'legacy cultures,' as reference to the collective African cultural patrimony found among global African communities.

ⁱⁱ Fasina Falade. *Ijo Orunmila*. Lynwood, CA: Ara Ifa Publishing. 1998. 32.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} *op cit*. See the definition of 'legacy cultures' above.

^v "The Goddess Osun as a Paradigm for African Feminist Criticism." *Sage: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women*. (Summer 1989), 27-32; s.a. "The Orisa Principle: Divining African Literary Aesthetics." *Orality, Literacy and the Fictive Imagination: African and Diasporan Literatures*. Tom Spencer-Walters, ed. Troy, Michigan: Bedford Publishers. 1999. 45-70.

^{vi} Fasina Falade. *Op Cit*.

^{vii} Field Notes. Akwaisae Adaye Celebration, Kyebi, Akwapin Region, Ghana, 1990-91.

^{viii} Fatima B. Mahmoud. "Building a Pan-African Women's Movement." In *Pan-Africanism: Politics, Economy, and Social Change in the Twenty-first Century*. Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (Ed). London: Pluto Press. 1996. 242.

^{ix} Fatima B. Mahmoud. 238.

^x Filomena Steady. *Black Women Cross-Culturally*. Cambridge, MA: Schenckman Publishing. 1981. s.a. Steady, "African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective." In *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: A Reader*. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Andrea Benton Rushing (eds). Howard University Press, second edition. 1996.

^{xi} Cheikh Anta Diop. *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity*. Chicago: Third World Press. 1978.

^{xii} Ifi Amadiume. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*. London: Zed Books. 1987.

^{xiii} Steady. Op cit.

^{xiv} Since 1992, from my field notes, translations, and a growing body of publications on Yoruba Studies, the pivotal role of mother becomes more evident. This forms the basis for much of this analysis.

^{xv} Diop, op cit.

^{xvi} Diedre Badejo. *Osun Seegesi: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power, and Femininity*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press. 1996.

^{xvii} Oyeronke Oyewumi. *The Invention of Women: Making An African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1997.

^{xviii} Filomena Steady. Op cit.

^{xix} Audre Lorde. "A Litany for Survival," *The Black Unicorn: Poems..* New York: Norton. 1995. 31-32.

^{xx} Langston Hughes. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, eds. New York: Vintage. 1922. 23.

^{xxi} Langston Hughes. 23.

^{xxii} Diedre Badejo. *Osun Seegesi*. Op cit.