

# Gender and Changing Forms of Inheritance among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria: A Case-Study of Women's Inclusion in Landed-Property Bequest in Ijesa Land

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**Abstract:** Over the years, gender has been one major factor which determines what goes to an individual in inheritance acquisition in the Yoruba society of the South-west Nigeria. As it is in most patriarchal societies there has been unequal positioning of male and female children to inheritance. The study investigates gender and the changing form of inheritance among the Yoruba of South-west Nigeria. Quantitative data was collected from randomly selected respondents numbering one hundred and twenty-five. The quantitative data collected were analysed with statistical package for the social sciences and the formulated hypotheses were tested using chi-square. Findings revealed that. The inheritance system is still in favour of the male than the female children due to patriarchal culture which still prevail among the Yoruba people. The Yoruba still believe that female children are not permanent member of their 'first' family, therefore if given a landed property, when married, it will become the husband's property. The study also confirms the future possibility of female inclusion into landed properties inheritance acquisition in Ijesa land. The study therefore recommends that the Yoruba should de-emphasise the culture of patriarchy which promotes the superiority of men over women. people should be encouraged to stop seeing women as not being part of their 'first' family and also, as someone who cannot adequately handle landed properties even if it's transferred to them after their parent's demise, women should be out to seek for redress whenever they are being discriminated upon in inheritance sharing.

**Keywords:** Gender, Inheritance, Acquisition, Landed-properties, Transfer

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gender is the expectations about attributes and behaviours appropriate to women or men and about the relations between women and men, which are usually shaped by culture. Gender identities and gender relations are critical aspects of culture because they show a picture of how family life should be lived on daily basis. Not only this, it can also be extended to the wider community and the workplace (Sunam, 1999). In every society, gender functions as an organising principle which give cultural meanings to being male or female (Araviashvili, 2014; Levy and Pinto, 2012)). This can be clearly seeing in the categorisation of labour along the gender line as we have in some societies where there are clear

patterns of "women's work" and "men's work," both in the household and in the wider community – and cultural explanations of why this should be so. The patterns and the explanations differ among societies and change over time. While the specific nature of gender relations varies among societies, the general pattern is that women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over the decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives (Jayachandran, 2014; Carmen & Cheryl, 2006).

Traditionally, there has been male dominance over the sharing of inheritance of the deceased persons in Nigeria (Kennedy & Eremie, 2016; Ekhatior, 2013; Makama, 2013; Salaam, 2003). It is generally held by the Yoruba in relation to inheritance that female children are not 'real' members of their 'original' family, since they are expected to marry and move out of their fathers' household. This is due to the patrilocal culture that prevail in every Yoruba society (Obboh, 2005). Based on this belief, therefore, land-inheritance essentially concerns only the male-members of families (Nmadu, 2000). Women are significantly excluded from the sharing of land-property with their male-siblings, they can only inherit less valuable or movable properties such as clothing, gold, money, and even sharing in the debt incurred by the deceased when alive (Levy & Pinto, 2012; Aina, 1998; Sussman, et.al., 1970).

Despite the degree at which the world is becoming a 'global village' and cultural elements and values move across national boundaries(), yet, new values are not formed and traditions still play an important role in shaping social practices (Owagbemi & Aruna, 2018). Equality of rights of children irrespective of gender to inheritance is not shared by the Yoruba society neither is the unequal distribution of inheritance seeing as unfair. in most cases, both men and women never saw anything bad in the discriminatory aspect of inheritance and this make women who are at the receiving side silent on the issue (Pearson, 2000). This privileged division of inheritance among children along gender-line has paved way to the development of unequal positions for men and women in regard to power and social status not only in

the family but also in the society (Jayachandran, 2014; Sussman, et.al., 1970).

This study seeks to investigate if gender is a barrier to inheritance; the gender disparity in inheritance acquisition and future possibility of gender equality in inheritance acquisition in South-West, Nigeria

## II. PATRIARCHY THEORY AND INHERITANCE

Patriarchy as a theory is used in this study to explain factors militating against women inheritance of immovable properties such as land, houses, farmland, etc. Patrilineality - an 'off-shoot' of patriarchy - is the indigenous cultural practice mostly responsible for the exclusion of the female-members of a family from land-inheritance (Ann, 2001). Theorists of patriarchy (Kramarae, 1992; Aina, 1998; Stacey, 1993) - the predominance of the male in social life - view male as controlling access to institutional power; and, it is argued that males mold ideology, philosophy, art and religion to suit their needs. The exercise of male dominance or power, is viewed as somehow conspiratorial; and; women whatever their economic status - are perceived as an oppressed class. Moha (2016) examined and acknowledged the disparity in male and female relationships, and concluded that the disparity was to the detriment of women. Sexual domination, according to her, is the most pervasive cultural ideology which reinforces fundamental concepts of power. Within patriarchy, men, by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, and the division of labour define the part women are to play; and, this, also, determines what goes to women and men in the society. Women are widely perceived as a mere subgroup in a man's world. Patriarchy is believed to be equivalent to culture; and, culture is patriarchy. The values of the patriarchy consign women to willing, cooperative, and passive victims in their domination by men.

## III. METHOD AND MATERIALS

Quantitative method of data-collection was used to collect data among 125 respondents who were randomly selected from Ijesaland, Osun State, Nigeria. To select the sample size for this study, multi-stage sampling technique was employed. Five towns were purposively selected from Ijesaland in the first stage. The selected towns are: Ara Ikeji, Erin-Ijesa, Ijeda, Iloko and Ilesa. In the second stage, one street was selected from each of the selected quarters. In the third stage, systematic random sampling was used to divide the streets into blocs, and from each of the selected streets one block was randomly selected from where the respondents were drawn. **The** quantitative data that was collected were analysed using descriptive techniques, under which, tabulations, cross tabulations, means, simple frequencies, percentages were used; while the formulated hypotheses were tested using Chi-square analysis.

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### IV.I Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Questionnaires were administered to one hundred and twenty-five (125) respondents among whom were 71 (56.8%) male and 54(43.2%) female. The age distribution of the respondents shows that 37(29.6%) were between 18-27years, 27(21.6) between 28-37years, 38-47years 30(24%) and 48years and above 31(24.8%. Information on religious affiliation indicates that 75(60%) were Christians, 42(33.6%) belonged to Islamic religion and minority were traditionalists 8(6.4%). From the respondents' income per month, it was revealed that 26(20.8%) earn between ₦7,500-₦13,500, 23(18.4%) earn between ₦13,500-₦19,500, 33(26.4%) earn between ₦19,500-₦25,500, 40(32%) earn between ₦25,500-₦32,500; while 3(2.4%) earn more than ₦32,500.

### IV.II Gender as a Barrier to Inheritance in South-West, Nigeria.

In view of the perceptions on the place of gender in inheritance, Seventy-six (60.8%) of the respondents agreed that gender dictates who takes what in inheritance practices, 43(34.4%) disagreed, while 6(4.8%) were undecided. Sixty-six respondents (52.8%) concurred that gender is a limiting factor when it comes to privileges and inheritance rights, this is because female children are not always considered when it comes to sharing of landed properties, while 54(43.2%) thought otherwise and 5(4%) were undecided. Majority 75(60%) of the respondents also revealed that female children are not entitled to landed properties because of the cultural belief in instability of the female children in their parents' houses, 42(33.6%) disagreed, while 8(6.4%) were undecided. In a similar trend, 64(51.2%) of the total respondents affirmed the statement that female children cannot be taken to be full-fledged members of their family, hence, they are not to be considered for landed properties, 56(44.8%) negated the statement, while 5(4%) were undecided. Lastly, it was revealed that 94(75.2%) of the total respondents agreed that the indigenous Yoruba culture does not give room to female children in inheritance issues, 21(16.8%) disagreed, while 10(8%) were undecided. On the average, 75(60%) of the sampled respondents confirmed gender as a barrier to inheritance.

### IV.III Gender Disparity in Inheritance Acquisition.

On gender disparity in inheritance acquisition 64(51.2%) of the sampled respondents were of the opinion that their experience so far on inheritance issues has been fair, 41(32.8%) thought otherwise, while 20(16%) were undecided. It was also revealed that 55(44%) of the sampled respondents agreed that the male children are the heirs of their parents, therefore they should have total control over their parents' properties, 63(50.4%) disagree, while 7(5.6%) were undecided. Still on gender disparity in inheritance acquisition, 64(51.2%) of the respondents agreed that male children should be given more preference in inheritance acquisition

because of their sex and continuity of the family's name, 54(43.2%) disagreed, while 7(5.6%) were undecided. Lastly, it was observed that 61(48.8%) of the sampled respondents agreed that male children should continue to dominate the inheritance sharing, most especially, they should be considered for landed properties, 60(48%) disagreed, while 4(3.2%) were undecided. Furthermore, it was revealed that 62(48.8%) of the sampled respondents agreed that female children are not to be given things that are durable e.g., landed properties in inheritance, 57(45.6%) disagree, while 7(5.6%) were undecided. Still on gender as a basis for inheritance acquisition, 84(67.2%) of the respondents agreed that the patriarchal nature of the society has made the inheritance systems more favourable to the male gender, 30(24%) disagreed, while 11(8.8%) were undecided. Lastly, it was observed that 82(65.6%) of the sampled respondents agreed that inheritance acquisition should be based on the decision and will of the deceased and not on gender basis, 30(24%) disagreed, while 13(10.4%) were undecided. The average summary further indicated that 63.2(50.56%) of the respondents confirmed gender disparity in inheritance acquisition, while 51.4(41.12) thought otherwise.

**IV.IV Future Possibility of Gender Equality in Inheritance Acquisition**

In considering the future possibility of gender equality in inheritance acquisition, 88(70.4%) of the total respondents agreed that female's right to property inheritance should be given much attention in the future, 33(26.4%) thought

otherwise, while 4(3.2%) were undecided. Also, 82(65.6%) of the sampled respondents were of the opinion that with modernity, female children will soon have their rightful position in the sharing of their parent's properties, 30(24%) thought otherwise, while 13(10.4%) were undecided. It was also supported by majority of the respondents 82(65.6%) that with the change in women's status i.e. not as the wife alone, but also as major players in the family's right to acquire landed properties will soon become visible/possible, 27(21.6%) thought otherwise, while 16(12.8%) were undecided. 56(44.8) of the sampled respondents agreed that men are now seeing reasons why women should be considered in inheritance acquisition, 37(29.6%) disagreed, while 32(25.6%) were undecided. Lastly, it was observed that 81(64.8%) of the sampled respondents agreed that as women are becoming conscious of their rights, there may likely be an end to female neglect in inheritance sharing, 28(22.4%) disagreed, while 16(16.2%) were undecided. The average summary further revealed that 77.8(62.24%) of the respondents confirmed future possibility of gender equality in inheritance acquisition.

**IV.V Test of Hypotheses**

The two null hypotheses were tested using non parametric statistics of Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between gender and landed-property inheritance.

Table 1: Chi-Square ( $X^2$ ) analysis on the relationship between gender and property inheritance in Ose LGA, Ondo State.

	N	Mean	SD	$X^2$ Cal	df	SL	$X^2$ Tab	Remark
Relationship between gender and property inheritance	125	3.33	0.617	56.737	16	0.05	26.30	Sig

Source: Field Work 2018

$X^2$  Calculated: 56.737

$X^2$  Tabulated: 26.30

df: 16

SL: 0.05

Table 1 shows that at 0.05 significant level and degree of freedom of 16,  $X^2$  calculated is 56.737, which is greater than  $X^2$  tabulated value of 26.30. Hypothesis one is therefore

rejected. This implies that there is statistically significant relationship between gender and property inheritance in Ilesa, Osun State.

Table 2: Chi-Square ( $X^2$ ) analysis on the relationship between socio-economic characteristics of respondents and their perception of gender inheritance.

	N	Mean	SD	$X^2$ Cal	df	SL	$X^2$ Tab	Remark
Relationship between socio-economic characteristics and gender inheritance	125	2.02	0.69	102.32	52	0.05	67.50	Sig

Source: Field Work 2018

X <sup>2</sup> Calculated:	102.32
X <sup>2</sup> Tab:	67.50
df:	52
SL:	0.05

Table 2 shows that at 0.05 significant level and degree of freedom of 52, X<sup>2</sup> calculated is 102.32, which is greater than X<sup>2</sup> tabulated value of 67.50. Hypothesis one is therefore rejected. This implies that there is statistically significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics of respondents and their perception of gender inheritance.

#### V. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was evident in the responses of the respondents that gender is still a limiting factor to privileges and inheritance rights among the deceased children in Ijesa land, Osun State. The privilege and preferential treatment for the male at the detriment of the female children in inheritance is explain among the Ijesa people with the logic that male children are continuer of patrimonial lineage. This inference can be drawn from the respondents affirmation to the statement that female children cannot be taken to be full-fledged members of their family as supported by the indigenous Yoruba culture which also disqualifies them from inheriting landed properties from their parents. The patriarchal nature of the Yoruba society has made the inheritance systems more favourable to the male than the female children. This was also confirmed by the test of hypothesis which shows a significant relationship between gender and property inheritance in Ijesa land, Osun State, Nigeria.

In the same vein, slightly more than half of the sampled respondents agree that female children are capable of handling landed properties, therefore, they should be given responsibilities as regards inheritance. Based on this assertion, more than two third of the respondents confirmed future possibility of gender equality in inheritance acquisition, most especially in the transferring of landed properties to the female children.

Based on these findings the following recommendations are made: gender should be less emphasised in privileges and inheritance rights, this is because both male and female children have their responsibilities, and most times, to fulfilling these responsibilities depends on their financial status not gender. The Yoruba society should de-emphasise the culture of patriarchy which promotes the superiority of men over women. This is because, there have been several occasions where women excel more than men when they contest for societal, religion and administrative positions. Finally, women should be encouraged to stop seeing themselves as not being part of their 'original' family and also, as someone who cannot adequately handle landed properties even if transferred to them from their parents.

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