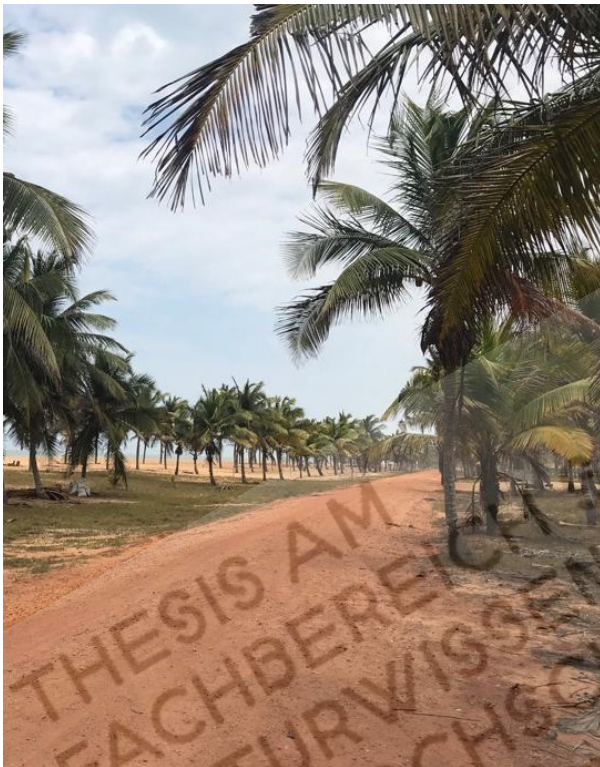


Hochschule Düsseldorf  
University of Applied Sciences

**HSD**

Fachbereich Sozial- & Kulturwissenschaften  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies

**SK**



# FEMALE LEADERS IN SOUTH BENIN -

(Un)Doing Gender: Opportunities and  
Challenges along their Biographies

## MASTER THESIS

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines  
Master of Arts (M.A.)

**Anna Stepper**

Geboren am 03.06.1990 in Neumarkt i.d.Opf.  
Matrikelnummer: 768720

Erstgutachterin: Dr. Talia Vela-Eiden  
Zweitgutachter: Prof. Dr. Walter Eberlei

Eingereicht am: 15.07.2020

MA Empowerment Studies  
Sommersemester 2020

# Content

<b>List of abbreviations .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Research question .....	3
1.2. Structure of the present work .....	4
<b>2. Contextualizing the field of research.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Benin – General information .....	5
2.2. Politics in Benin - A brief overview .....	6
2.3. Women in Benin .....	9
2.3.1. Women in Benin’s history – “herstories” .....	10
2.3.2. Women in today’s Benin.....	12
2.3.3. The legal framework – women’s rights in Benin .....	17
<b>3. The theoretical embedding.....</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1. Clarification of terms .....	20
3.2. Socialisation of gender in Benin .....	24
3.3. African Feminism(s) .....	26
3.3.1. “The invention of women” .....	26
3.3.2. Intersectionality.....	27
3.3.3. The history of African Feminism(s) .....	28
3.3.4. Contemporary African Feminism .....	34
3.4. African Feminism and Human Rights.....	36
<b>4. Empirical Analysis .....</b>	<b>42</b>
4.1. Research Design .....	42
4.1.1. Qualitative Sampling.....	43
4.1.2. Transcription and method of analysis.....	43
4.2. Field study and participatory observation .....	44
4.3. The interviewees .....	45
<b>4.4. Opportunities and challenges as a woman - from the perspective of Beninese female leaders .....</b>	<b>47</b>
4.4.1. Experienced opportunities .....	47
4.4.2. Experienced challenges .....	54
4.4.3. Individual gender socialisation .....	55
4.5. Reflections on my role as a researcher .....	67
<b>5. Interpretation and research findings.....</b>	<b>69</b>
5.1. Gender inequality and strategies to tackle them.....	69

5.2.	“It’s not that I’m a feminist” and female solidarity.....	75
5.3.	The mediatory position from the perspective of the interviewees .....	77
<b>6.</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>81</b>
	Further literature .....	90
	List of figures .....	91
	List of empirical data .....	91
<b>8.</b>	<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>I</b>
8.1.	Figures .....	I
8.2.	Interview guideline .....	IV

THESIS AM  
 FACHBEREICH SOZIAL- UND  
 KULTURWISSENSCHAFTEN  
 DER HOCHSCHULE DÜSSELDORF

## List of abbreviations

AU	African Union
BMZ	<i>Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung</i>
BTI	Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DSW	<i>Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung</i>
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDII	Gender Inequality Index
GFM	Genital Female Mutilation
GIZ	<i>Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i>
GNP	Gross National Product
HDI	Human Development Index
IHDI	Inequality Human Development Index
IIAG	Ibrahim Index of African Governance
INSAE	<i>Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique</i>
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer and Intersex
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SAP	Structural Adaption Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
WEF	World Economic Forum

THESIS AM  
FACHBEREICH SOZIAL- UND  
KULTURWISSENSCHAFTEN  
DER HOCHSCHULE DÜSSELDORF

# 1. Introduction

“My project is not to entertain readers with one more exotic tale or shock them with another astounding revelation about womanhood in a faraway place. All I wish to do is communicate in intelligible terms another mode of being female. But this is more easily said than done.” (Lazreg 1994)

According to *Stiftung Weltbevölkerung*, the number of women currently living on the globe meets more or less the number of men. 3,82 billion women and 3,89 billion men were inhabiting our planet in 2019 (ibid. 2019, 7,7 billion in July 2019).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, when it comes to the great challenges of humanity such as climate protection, women are playing and are going to play a crucial role. Their participation is increasing in many places, but gender gaps are also persisting and are often significant in fields such as decision making, access to (higher) education and unpaid care work (WEF 2019). The global and regional efforts in order to achieve the *Agenda 2030*<sup>2</sup> (UN 2015) or the *Agenda 2063*<sup>3</sup> as well as the *climate goals*<sup>4</sup> (Paris Agreement) as crucial milestones need to move together with paradigm shifts, including paradigm shifts towards increasing gender equality. Clearly, these challenges cannot be solved without the large contribution, and thus a process of empowerment, of women (BMZ 2017, 2).

What is needed, is empowerment of women and equal access as well as equal opportunities for both women and men. Especially at the level of decision-making, women are worldwide underrepresented. Simultaneously, creating equal access for women does not draw on quotas only but must be accompanied with an increasing share of unpaid care work at home as well as models of reconciliation of both, the private and the professional life.

---

<sup>1</sup> In 2050 9,7 billion people will live on this planet. The world population is growing by 225,690 people in a day (DSW 2019b).

<sup>2</sup> The Agenda 2030, as one of the currently most important guiding frameworks of the international community and cooperation will only be mentioned in the margins of this work due to a necessity of thematic limitation. Nevertheless, it represents a huge lever regarding gender mainstreaming and also financing as well as joint efforts in order to increase gender equality worldwide. Gender Equality represents both a unique Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) as well as a crosscutting objective which is furthermore particularly emphasised within SDG 1, 4, 8 and 10 (UN 2015).

<sup>3</sup> “AGENDA 2063 is Africa’s blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future. It is the continent’s strategic framework that aims to deliver on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development and is a concrete manifestation of the pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance” (AU 2020)

<sup>4</sup> “The Paris Agreement [2015] sets out a global framework to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. It also aims to strengthen countries’ ability to deal with the impacts of climate change and support them in their efforts.” (European Commission 2020)

The present study provides one example of analysing how women in leadership positions manage these interlinkages of family and work. It focuses on the lived realities of Beninese female academics with regard to their gender socialisation, their career pattern and the named reconciliation of the private and the professional sphere. Driven by the wish to display the perspectives of privileged Beninese women in order to generate missing knowledge in relation to the difficulties they face along their life course and the opportunities which helped them thrive, I decided to dedicate this study to women in management positions in Benin. Furthermore, this wish stems from the overwhelming availability of literature with a focus on rural and/or poor women and a resulting significant lack of (qualitative) data regarding privileged women on the African continent. Or in the words of the African feminist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí:

“The focus on elite African women in a number of the papers is also a welcome corrective to the overwhelming focus on African poverty and the victimhood of women. The overrepresentation of African women in much of the literature as desperate victims robs them of agency, which in turn often leads to a devaluation of African experiences of resistance and nullifies African females as a resource for developing feminist ideas and theories. A focus on elite women also sharpens our engagement with gender issues as we explore the intersection of class and ethnic privilege in relation to gender disadvantage.” (Oyèrónké 2011, 2)

Amina Mama (2017), a Nigerian-British African feminist scholar further specifies

“Every [African] family has multiple status in it and in places where there is no welfare this is an economic as well as a ‘cultural’ familiarism which you don’t have in the west. So, I’m saying that we are all connected across classes (...). And the role of women in different classes is completely different. (...). Instead of just feeling embarrassed about our elitism, it doesn’t matter where you came from, it matters what your vision is and where you want to take things.” (Mama 2017)

As a white and western anthropologist with a couple of years of work experience within the sector of international cooperation, I’m confronted by multiple critiques regarding my privileges and background and hence my research interest by feminist scholars of non-Western contexts: This does not mean that it became impossible for white women to describe for example black women’s lives, but the field access always needs to be participatory and should never be based on attributions that would only reproduce objectification out of a paternalistic-feminist perspective of ‘care’. Privileged women in general should be very aware of their privileges whenever they want to describe and analyse the lived realities of less privileged women (Holzleithner 2016, 31). A particular sensitivity regarding one’s own position as well as the complexity of contexts beyond religious and ‘cultural’ elements is crucial to this end (ibid.).

My anthropological background allows me to take a perspective at eye level and always comprises a comprehensive approach while generating knowledge as detailed as possible in order to display emic<sup>5</sup> knowledge and perspectives. Trying not to correspond to fundamental critiques of African feminists with regard to white feminists, this study is among others theoretically embedded in a variety of non-Western and especially African feminists' theories and displays the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees in a direct manner.

### 1.1. Research question

While doing an internship in a development organization in Benin, numerous conversations with especially female colleagues of mine drew my attention to the diverse areas of life they are seemingly forced to perform in and to succeed at the same time, namely profession, education, being a wife and motherhood. Most existing works regarding gender equality in the Beninese context focus on the political participation of women (Lagacé 2007, Attanasso 2012, Douvi 2018) or the livelihood and challenges of rural women. However, this paper will draw on women in leadership positions while contemplating their biographies. Thereby, attention will be given to the challenges and opportunities they were and are dealing with, with regard to their gender socialisation. Furthermore its expressions in their professional and private life shall be looked at closely.

Hence, the following master thesis addresses gender equality in Benin and more specifically first, ***biographic preconditions, especially aspects of the women's gender socialisation that facilitated or hindered the formal education they had received as well as their professional career*** and second, ***the fluidity of their gender socialisation with regard to time as well as in comparison of both private and professional level.***

The given subject will be embedded in both African feminist theories (or feminism(s) from Africa) as well as feminist critique on human rights. A broad contextualization consisting of an overview of recent Beninese history, the historical patterns of female implication and participation in the region emphasizing existing "herstories"<sup>6</sup>, the

---

<sup>5</sup> "An emic view of culture is ultimately a perspective focus on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society, often considered to be an 'insider's' perspective. (...). An etic view of a culture is the perspective of an outsider looking in." (Lumen 2020)

<sup>6</sup> "[H]istory considered or presented from a feminist viewpoint or with special attention to the experience of women" (Merriam-Webster 2020a; cf. Kelchner 2004; Ashby 1995). „In historical research from the late 80s, for example, Fatima Mernissi (1988) and Bonlanle Awe (1991) explored the need for 'herstory' in African historiography, with their



existing gender gaps within different sectors as well as the Beninese legal context regarding women's rights, shall provide the necessary background information.

Overall, the following research question arises: **In which way did the gender socialisation of women in management positions in southern Benin facilitate or hinder their professional career, how did their gender socialisation change during adulthood and what are its expressions at professional and private level?**

In order to respond to the described research question, I've undertaken a field study in Cotonou, the economic capital of Benin, during the second half of the year 2019. While redefining and specifying my research interest, I had the chance to conduct six qualitative interviews. All six interviewees were living in Cotonou at the time.

## **1.2. Structure of the present work**

Chapter 2 ([Contextualizing the field of research](#)) of the present study provides broad and at the same time detailed contextual knowledge regarding the field of research. It gives a brief overview on Benin as a country, its politics since recent precolonial history, sets an emphasis on *herstories* within Beninese history and provides general information on the current situation of women in Benin.

Chapter 3 comprises the [theoretical embedding](#) of this study, clarifying some key terms in the beginning in order to outline past and current discussions around African feminism(s) on the one hand as well as feminist critique on human rights on the other hand. Finally, chapter 4 ([Empirical Analysis](#)) encompasses the analysis of the empirical data generated on the ground consisting of some field notes and the interview transcripts. Chapter 5 provides an [interpretation and research findings](#), while chapter 6 ([Conclusion](#)) comprises some concluding remarks.

---

comprehensive accounts of women's agency and subordination transcending the limitations of insular anthropology and developmentalism" (Lewis 2005).

## 2. Contextualizing the field of research

### 2.1. Benin – General information

Benin is a rather small West African country counting 11 million inhabitants on a surface of 112,662 km<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, being located between Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria, Benin plays an important role with its deep sea port often functioning as an entry point for goods with nearby destinations, mainly Western Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Niger (Gaesing et al. 2019, 14). The country has been marked by very diverse historical events and periods. Being still a young democracy, Benin was ruled by kingdoms until French colonisation.

It is estimated that Benin will reach the number of 12,864,634 inhabitants by July 2020 (CIA 2020, Benin). The population of younger people is particularly high, nearly 65% of the population is younger than 25 (ibid.).<sup>7</sup> In total, Benin counts about 60 ethnic groups speaking mostly specific local languages as their mother tongue (GIZ-LIP 2020).<sup>8</sup> Besides French, which is used as the official language, Fon and Yoruba are the most spoken languages in the South (ibid., GIZ-LIP). Given that the South is far more populated than the North, two thirds of the population are living on 15% of the country's surface. This is why Fon language (and related) is the most spoken local language in Benin (World Atlas 2020). While citing these attributions, I would like to underline, that, as in all former colonial states in West Africa, these ethnic groups find themselves scattered over two or more countries, since the arbitrary drawing of new boundaries as a consequence of the Berlin Conference in 1884 did not consider any ethnic affiliations:

„In the subsequent meetings, Great Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, and King Leopold II negotiated their claims to African territory, which were then formalized and mapped. (...). Neither the Berlin Conference itself nor the framework for future negotiations provided any say for the peoples of Africa over the partitioning of their homelands. The Berlin Conference did not initiate European colonization of Africa, but it did legitimate and formalize the process. In addition, it sparked new interest in Africa. Following the close of the conference, European powers expanded their claims in Africa such that by 1900, European states had claimed nearly 90 percent of African territory.“ (Appiah; Gates 2010)

In order to give a brief overview over Benin's recent history and the role of women within different areas, the following chapter provides an overall summary whereas chapter

---

<sup>7</sup> „Benin's total fertility has been falling over time but remains high, declining from almost 7 children per women in 1990 to 4.8 in 2016.“ (CIA 2020, Benin)

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the spoken languages cf. <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/BN>

[Women in Benin's history – rewriting history through “herstories”](#) focuses more on the female part of history.

## **2.2. Politics in Benin - A brief overview**

I would like to start with precolonial history focusing on the kingdom of Dahomey since it was located in Southern Benin the region on which my study is drawing.

### ***Precolonial and colonial history***

The kingdom of Dahomey,<sup>9</sup> consisting mostly of Fon society and founded in the Southern region with its capital in Abomey, was deeply involved in transatlantic enslavement<sup>10</sup> and became famous, among others, because of its legendary female warriors, the Amazonians (GIZ-LIP 2020). These Amazonians, or as they were locally called “Agoojie” (Vido et al. 2015, 77) were probably established by queen Hangbé, the only female monarch of Dahomey in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Queen Hangbé was the first and last female leader of the kingdom for three years (1708-1711). In fact, she had created the women's army corps in the first place, which was reinvented by King Guézo one century later (Attanasso 2012, 28 f.). Her regency is not cited in many chronicles yet, but increasingly it is.

“After a short rule, she was forcibly deposed by her power-hungry younger brother, Agaja. (...). Yet her legacy lived on through her mighty female soldiers. Oral and written accounts differ over the origins of the women-only corps. (...). It was King Ghezo, who ruled over Dahomey from 1818 to 1858, who officially integrated the Amazons into the army. This in part was a practical decision, as manpower was increasingly scarce due to the European slave trade.” (Macdonald 2018)

The last king of Dahomey (Gbêhanzin, 1882-1892) before French colonisation is known for his long-standing resistance trying to build alliances with former German Empire which did not avert the victory of France in 1892 after two years of colonial war. Hence, Gbêhanzin was banished to Martinique (GIZ-LIP 2020).<sup>11</sup> In 1894 the French proclaimed nowadays Benin as the French colony Dahomey. The colonial era lasted until 1960.

“In the colonial period, Dahomey received scant attention from the French authorities. Its contribution to the wider French empire was, however, substantial. Dahomey was a source of administrators for wide areas of former French West Africa. [D]octors, lawyers, teachers (...) as well as businessmen held positions of influence as far afield as Dakar and Brazzaville.” (Noel 1999, 59)

---

<sup>9</sup> In Fon language it is called kingdom of Danhomé (GIZ-LIP 2020). This kingdom was founded during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and existed until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it lost the colonization war against French troops (Vido et al. 2015).

<sup>10</sup> I prefer to use the term “enslavement” instead of “slavery” in order to rehumanize the victims of this dehumanizing practice. “ [The dahomean king] Guezo did business with the Brazilian slave trader Francisco Felix de Souza, handed over to him the people he himself had hunted and even made De Souza a viceroy for his good services. The story was filmed by Werner Herzog based on the book 'The Viceroy of Ouidah' by Bruce Chatwin as 'Cobra verde' with Klaus Kinski in the leading role.” (GIZ-LIP)

<sup>11</sup> During the colonial period, the country was also called ' Quartier Latin' of francophone West Africa, since many administrative officials with French school education were preferably assigned in other colonies of West Africa. (GIZ-LIP 2020)

### ***Postcolonial era (1960 – 1989)***

On the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1960 Benin declared its independence as the *Republic of Dahomey*. The following years were marked by significant political instability (ibid.). After five successful and three failed *coups d'état*, five different constitutions as well as 14 changes in presidency, major Mathieu Kérékou became president through a final *coup d'état* in 1972 (GIZ-LIP 2020). He transformed the *Republic of Dahomey* into the *People's Republic of Benin* in 1975 and launched a one-party rule through the *Parti de la Revolution Populaire du Bénin* (PRPB, People's Revolutionary Party of Benin; Noel 1999, 63)<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, his presidency described the socialist period of the history of Benin Republic by the fact that he declared Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology while establishing good relations with the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China (Groß 2019, 8 f.; GIZ-LIP 2020). Major Kérékou remained president until 1991. In 1989, after a long period of ongoing protests, an increasing number of Beninese who were encouraged by the collapse of the Soviet Union, condemned the tremendous mismanagement at government level and "requested more democracy" (freely translated according to GIZ-LIP 2020). Benin's democratic change and transition became exemplary for Western Africa.

### ***Democratic transition (1989 – 1991)***

During named protests, civil society organisations, such as student organisations and trade unions played a crucial role (Banégas 1997, 40 ff.). In response to the increasingly visible and loud protests in 1989, President Kérékou finally dropped Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology as well as the one-party system (Groß 2019, 8). Benin is considered as pioneer when it comes to democratic transition in Africa. Numerous states have imitated its process more or less successfully. Hence, Benin represents a model of pacific democratic transition (ibid. 1995, 1). This latter took two years and took place quite smoothly (ibid.). Finally, Kérékou agreed with the establishment of a national conference, named *Conférence Nationale des Forces Vives de la Nation* (GIZ-LIP 2020). This latter one introduced a multi-party system as well as the democratic constitution. Nicéphore Soglo emerged as winner of the first democratic elections that took place in 1991. Since that time, several peaceful and democratic changes have followed (Groß 2019, 8-9).

---

<sup>12</sup> for more information regarding these 12 years after Beninese independence. cf. Noel 1999, 59 ff. and GIZ-LIP 2020, Geschichte und Staat

According to Bratton et al. (1997) Kérékou expressed his “profound, sincere and irreversible desire to change” (ibid., 2) with regard to the abuses of power during his legacy and apologized correspondingly (ibid.). Economically, the democratic transition led to numerous transitions, too.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Post-socialist era***

Since then, five presidential elections (1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016) and seven parliamentary elections have followed (1991, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019). Newly elected president Nicéphore Soglo, former employee of the World Bank had to face enormous socio-economic and political challenges. He found himself president of a nation with devastating economic deficits as a result of the far-reaching expenditures the nationalized companies paid during the 70s (Houngnikpo 2001, 79). Nevertheless, Soglo managed to reduce the country’s deficit from 10,7% of the GNP in 1989 to 3,1% in 1993 (ibid., 80). While being respected at the international level, Soglo increasingly lost support at national level (Lagacé 2007, 22). This is why his new and old opponent, Mathieu Kérékou, won the following elections in 1996 and again in 2001. Kérékou thus received the nickname “the chameleon” (GIZ-LIP, 2020).

Despite widespread speculations on possible constitutional changes which would have allowed Kérékou to transcend two legal presidential legacies, this did not happen. In 2006, Dr. Boni Yayi, former chairperson of the African Development Bank, won the elections fulfilling the population’s yearning for a paradigm shift which needed a new face. His slogan “[ça] doit changer, ça peut changer, ça va changer!”<sup>14</sup> (ibid.) met the Beninese population’s approval. The numerous reforms he announced and promised in the beginning of his legacy, mainly in areas such as economy, infrastructure and governance, were only partially realized and accusations of corruption, mismanagement and waste of money increased by the end of his first presidency. The state’s deficit became very high. In combination with the global financial crises at the same time, many people’s existence was threatened (ibid.).

---

<sup>13</sup> Benin received for example a “democracy bonus” from the United States cancelling all its debts. Furthermore, France and Germany increased loans and donations followed by a democracy subsidy of 50,000 CFA per inhabitant in 1991 (Akindès 1996, 59).

<sup>14</sup> “It has to change, it can change, it will change” (freely translated)

### **Current political situation**

Once again, Benin's democratic stability was reconfirmed in 2016. After two presidential legacies, Yayi did not run for presidency in accordance with the constitutional two-term limit. Patrice Talon, an independent candidate with significant support of an opposition alliance, won the presidential election in April 2016<sup>15</sup> (Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2018, 3).

While Yayi was increasingly criticized by civil society organizations (CSOs) during his second term, Talon enjoyed more and more support by Benin's CSOs.<sup>16</sup> The current president, a successful businessman in Benin, announced major reforms across all sectors and a single term presidential mandate. Nevertheless, *The Bertelsmann Stiftung* pointed out that two major challenges or contradictions exist. On the one hand, having replaced many civil servants by his key allies is contradictory to his announcement that only competence will lead to the allocation of posts. "There is an evident conflict of interest between Talon's role as president and his business interests" (ibid., 4). On the other hand, the fact that

"Benin's democracy continues to be characterized by a weak party system (...), corruption and clientelism, and opaque relationships between key businessmen and politicians, [questions] [t]he state administration's capacity to implement reforms" (ibid.).

### **2.3. Women in Benin**

Some, but few in number, scientific works regarding women, mainly focusing on political participation or women's organizations in Benin were published during the last two decades. These are for example "*Femmes et pouvoir politique au Bénin. Des origines Dahoméennes à nos jours*"<sup>17</sup> (Attanasso 2012), "*Femmes et Politique au Bénin : Un défi à relever*"<sup>18</sup> (Lagacé 2007), or "*Stratégies des Associations Autonomes de Femmes Béninoises*"<sup>19</sup> (Douvi 2018). Another crucial source for this present study represents Chantal Codjo's "*Inégalités originelles. Un regard sur la socialisation de genre au Bénin*"<sup>20</sup> (2019), which will be outlined more explicitly in chapter 3.1.3. [Socialisation of Gender](#).

---

<sup>15</sup> "Talon is one of Benin's most successful businessmen. He has built a business empire by focusing on the country's most profitable sectors, particularly cotton and the Port of Cotonou. His election follows a bitter "affair" between himself and Yayi. The affair escalated during Yayi's second term, when Talon was accused of plotting against the president and having attempted to poison Yayi. To some extent, Talon's election and the broad support that the new president has mobilized have depolarized the political climate." (Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2018, 3)

<sup>16</sup> However, *shrinking spaces* have been observed during this legacy, regarding for example the freedom of the press or limited strike rights (Civicus 2020)

<sup>17</sup> "Women and political power in Benin. From Dahomean origins to the present day" (freely translated)

<sup>18</sup> "Women and politics in Benin a challenge" (freely translated)

<sup>19</sup> "Strategies of Autonomous Associations of Beninese Women" (freely translated)

<sup>20</sup> "Original inequalities. A look at gender socialisation in Benin" (freely translated)

### 2.3.1. Women in Benin's history – "herstories"

In order to understand current gender role models in Benin, it is crucial to examine how they have changed over the last centuries and decades. There are few sources (e.g. Vido et al. 2015; Sheldon 2017) providing information on women's participation and influence in precolonial Benin. According to Marie-Odile Attanasso, women had not been that visible during this period. Their visible participation in public and political life referred mostly to the

"amazons, a brave and fearless women's army corps [which] won wars and extended the hegemony of the kingdom of 'Danxomè' over the neighbouring regions. But this presence in political life was gradually reduced to a small portion at the advent of colonization" (ibid. 2012, 17; freely translated).

Nevertheless, they contributed to high-ranking decision-making in the Kingdom of Dahomey. In addition to the *agooji*, the institution of a queen mother was formalized around 1720 within the kingdom of Dahomey. From now on the king ruled jointly with a reign-mate, "a woman chosen from the ranks of the wives of the previous king. While that woman might not be actual mother of the king, she was from the cohort of the royal cowives and was considered to be the royal mother" (Sheldon 2017, 46).

As the kingdom of Dahomey was one of the principle places in West Africa involved in enslavement, many women found themselves being solely responsible for their households and the education of children. This was due to the fact that mostly men were deported since their average price was higher. Moreover, whilst men were deported to the Americas, many women were enslaved within African kingdoms: "The reason for this pattern included the valuable agricultural labor women could provide, as well as their ability to bear and raise children" (ibid., 29). In addition, this logic of women representing valuable labour for agriculture probably contributed to an increasing tendency of men to marry more than one woman in order to achieve a large labour supply within their household (ibid., 16). Hence, polygamy (a person having several spouses) or rather polygyny (a man having several wives) was perceived as a necessity.

"There were examples of families where the cowives viewed each other as rivals,...). And there were counterexamples of families where the first assisted in finding a suitable second wife and appreciated having someone to share in the burdens of farm work and child-raising. (...). Allowing only men to have access to multiple spouses was [and still is] inherently unequal, but the practice of polygyny by itself was not always a source of friction and discontent<sup>21</sup>." (ibid.)

---

<sup>21</sup> Stories of numerous wives refer mostly to royal families. A British visitor documented in 1724 an estimated number of 1000 wives in the king's palace in Dahomey (Sheldon 2017, 45). This incredible number can be also explained through the fact that the king's adopted also their father's wives.



Little documentation with regard to polyandry exists in general and thus also concerning West Africa. Nevertheless, a study of Smedley Audrey (2004) suggested that the community of Birom in northern Nigeria allowed married women to have relationships with men other than their husband which was seen as “good, appropriate and even necessary” (ibid.).

“Women were free to choose the man to whom they wished to be connected, and the relationship was formalized by the presentation of a goat from the outside man to the woman and her husband. There was an expectation that [these so called] *njem* partners would help each other with farming, and there was an ongoing exchange of gifts and services throughout the relationship, which in many cases lasted years.” (Sheldon 2017, 17)

Since today’s southern Benin consisted of several reigning kingdoms at the time, female role models within neighbouring kingdoms shall shortly be contemplated as well. Some Ibo groups in Western Nigeria, for example, had at the same time female queens (Omu) and masculine kings (Obi), whereas *Omu* “represented the female equivalent of male power in the community” (ibid., 30, freely translated). Within Oyo society (Yoruba), the control of the complex hierarchical administration system was assured by the numerous king’s wives. “They were his ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ and spied on their travels for trade” (ibid., freely translated). And last but not least, another crucial female role was attributed to the king’s mothers (*reine-mères*; ibid., 31). This refers again to the Kingdom of Dahomey as well as to the former Ashanti Kingdom in present-day Ghana. Ashanti king’s mothers<sup>22</sup> were always asked for advice in decision making, e.g.

“appointment of a leader, act of alliance, act of war, removal from office, etc. Its role in the development of traditional political consciousness has left indelible marks. It forged the morale of the warrior by exhorting him with poetic and meaningful songs, valuing courage and relegating death to the background” (ibid., freely translated).

With the beginning of French colonization women became increasingly invisible in decision making “so that their roles and status in relation to those of men will become undervalued” (Houinsa 2008, 26 ; freely translated). Even beyond Benin’s Independence Day, the application and validity of the legal text, *Coutumier de Dahomey*, granted few rights to women. Accordingly, article 127 stated for example “the wife has no legal power... she is part of her husband's property and inheritance” (Médénouvo 2004, 16). Although women’s visibility and participation changed positively during the socialist regime in Benin, their legal

---

<sup>22</sup> According to some beliefs, women at young age are not constantly pure which is why they can only take on certain functions when they are menopausal. Then they become “tangnionon” in Fon language (Attanasso 2012, 50).



status had not changed significantly until 1977 (cf. [The legal framework – women's rights in Benin](#)).

During the socialist era, women participated increasingly in social and political life. Indeed, some of them were even leading trade union movements (Acac, 2002). On the one hand, women's concerns became more important both for the government and the trade unions (ibid.). On the other hand, setting up the *Organisation des Femmes Révolutionnaires du Bénin (OFRB)* in December 1983 was mainly part of the national propaganda structure: They would bring the revolution to the masses (Attanasso 2012, 65). Attanasso claims that during Marxism-Leninism, a decade after independence, women had the most significant access to different levels of the political arena of Benin (ibid.).<sup>23</sup> Consequently, women's public representation decreased continuously, which is above all striking in comparison to existing women's representation in neighbouring countries. In 2016, women's representation rate within the Beninese parliament was 7% contrary to Chad 15%, Niger 13%, Mali 9%, Burkina Faso 9%, Ghana 9% and Togo 18% (UNDP 2016, 24).

One exception could be observed during the presidency of Yayi, who appointed a share of 30,7 % female ministers. Even if the announced promise of 50% was not fulfilled (ibid., 114), this constituted a significant progress. Since the last parliamentary elections, 8% among the 83 members of parliament are women (Benin Republic 2020a). Due to recent ministerial appointments, 21% of the Beninese ministers are women within the current government (Benin Republic 2020b).

### 2.3.2. Women in today's Benin

Since the present work focuses on female academics who have grown up and are currently living in the southern part of the country it is crucial to analyse women's access to economic and educational resources as well as their political participation in Benin. Doing so, the *Africa Human Development Report: Accelerating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa*, which was published in 2016 by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), can provide good orientation.

In order to measure in-country inequality along different categories such as *gender*, the UNDP introduced the IHDI (Inequality Human Development Index) in its HDR in 2010.

---

<sup>23</sup> Women were also systematically assigned to state-owned enterprises as the interview with Catherine shows (ibid., first part [00:08:48]).

The IHDI henceforth adds inequality to the three existing HDI<sup>24</sup> dimensions, namely “a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living” (UNDP 2016, 146). “The loss in human development due to inequality is given by the difference between the HDI and the IHDI and can be expressed as a percentage. As inequality in a country increases, the loss in human development also increases” (ibid., 25).

Among the top twenty African countries with the highest change in HD from 2000 to 2014, Benin is placed 19<sup>th</sup> with a change of more than 0.2 (ibid., 22). However, the country is placed 10<sup>th</sup> with regard to its overall IHDI loss (nearly 37.5 %) from HDI (ibid., 24). In order to get a more global idea of this loss per region, the chart below gives an overview and clearly shows the biggest loss in human development due to inequality to be reported for sub-Saharan Africa.

IHDI comparisons by Region			
Region	Human Development Index (HDI)	Inequality-adjusted Index (IHDI)	Overall loss in human development (from inequality) %
Sub-Saharan Africa	0,52	0,35	33
South Asia	0,61	0,43	29
Arab States	0,69	0,51	25
Latin America and the Caribbean	0,75	0,57	24
East Asia and the Pacific	0,71	0,57	19

Figure 1: IHDI comparisons by region (United Nations Development Program 2016, 25; slightly adapted)

Besides the IHDI, there are two gender-specific Human Development Indicators.

“The **GDI [Gender Development Index]** measures differences between male and female achievements in three basic dimensions of human development: (i) **health**, measured by female and male life expectancy at birth; (ii) **education**, measured by female and male expected years of schooling for children, and female and male mean years of schooling for adults aged 25 and older; and (iii) **equitable command over economic resources**, measured by female and male estimated earned income.” (emphasis added; UNDP 2016, 27)

With regard to Benin the report indicates that inequality, in terms of gender and the HDI, is rather high, whereas gender inequality at income level is rather low (ibid., 28). Countries like Mali or Niger, for example, show quite a high inequality level regarding both indicators, HDI and income.

“The **GII [Gender Inequality Index]** is the second index on gender differences and reflects gender-based inequalities on three dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity. Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates; empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women and attainment in secondary and higher education by each gender; and economic activity is measured by the labour

<sup>24</sup> “The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living.” (UNDP 2016, 146)

market participation rate for women and men.(...). Regarding the GII value, the closer the value is to zero, the higher the gender equality.”<sup>25</sup> (emphasis added; *ibid.*, 30)

Figure a “Gender equality, social institutions and women’s empowerment” in the [appendix](#) shows that this latter value was scored 0.614 for Benin in 2014, while the average rate for Africa was 0.548 and for West Africa 0.628. This same figure also displays very clearly the low percentage of Beninese women in parliament with regard to the Economic and Social Council’s recommendation of at least 30% (1990) by 1995 and 50% by 2000 (UN 1996).<sup>26</sup> At both, a regional and continental level, Benin is at the lower end with regard to women’s representation in parliament. More specifically, Benin ranks second last in West Africa with 7,2% of female representatives in parliament, ahead of only Nigeria at 6,1%. At the continental level, Benin was placed fourth last, in front of only Swaziland, Nigeria and the Comoros (UNDP 2016, 77). Nevertheless, under the adoption of a new electoral law by the Beninese government, the situation regarding women’s representation among the general assembly has improved slightly. The number of deputies will be increased from 83 to 109 with 24 seats reserved for women (Jeune Afrique 2019).

In terms of public management, Benin had at least 22% of leadership positions occupied by women in 2011/2012 (cf. figure 2). Among the listed countries, only South Africa and Botswana surpassed the threshold of 30% (UNDP 2016, 80). The situation is similar when it comes to women in leadership positions in trade unions (which are very common in Benin), as figure 3 shows. Around 20 percent of leaders were women (*ibid.*, 81). Especially regarding female entrepreneurial leadership Benin ranks high: As figure b ([appendix](#)) shows, almost 45% of Benin’s enterprises had women among their owners between 2006 and 2013. This puts Benin in the fourth place, after Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Liberia, followed by Capo Verde, starting at around 33%, Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria among others (*ibid.*, 69).

---

<sup>25</sup> „In recent years, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has developed the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). The SIGI measures gender gaps in social institutions across a number of variables related to discriminatory family codes – restricted physical integrity, son bias, restricted resources and assets, and restricted civil liberties. Higher SIGI values indicate higher inequality. (...). Countries with lower gender inequality also have lower discriminatory social institutions.” (UNDP 2016, 32-33)

<sup>26</sup> This target was once again reinforced during the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, when the international community reported little progress regarding these targets at the fourth World Conference on Women. “At the Beijing Platform for Action it became obvious that this target would not be met in 2000, as only seven parliaments had reached the 30% quota set for 1995. Current progress indicates that the target of 30% will be met in 2025.” (GIZ 2014, 7)

Women's participation in public administration and managerial positions		
Country	Overall	Decision-making levels (%)
Benin (2011, 2012)	19	22
Botswana (2012, 2009)	52	45
Gambia (2007)	25	20
Mali (2009)	28	15
Morocco (2009)	34	15
Nigeria (2006)	24	22
South Africa (2011)	56	35
Tunisia (2011)	41	27
Uganda (2011)	33	22

Involvement in trade union leadership positions in selected countries				
Country	Percentage of women out of the total (%)	Total number of women	Total number of men	Total number of leaders
Uganda	34	30	59	89
Mozambique	27	102	270	372
South Africa	26	6	17	23
Benin	20	69	269	338
Burkina Faso	19	41	180	221
Ethiopia	17	662	3,010	3,632
Ghana	12	25	180	205
Tunisia	1	1	99	100

Figure 2 (bottom left): Women's participation in public administration and managerial positions (UNDP 2014 in 2016, 80; slightly adapted)

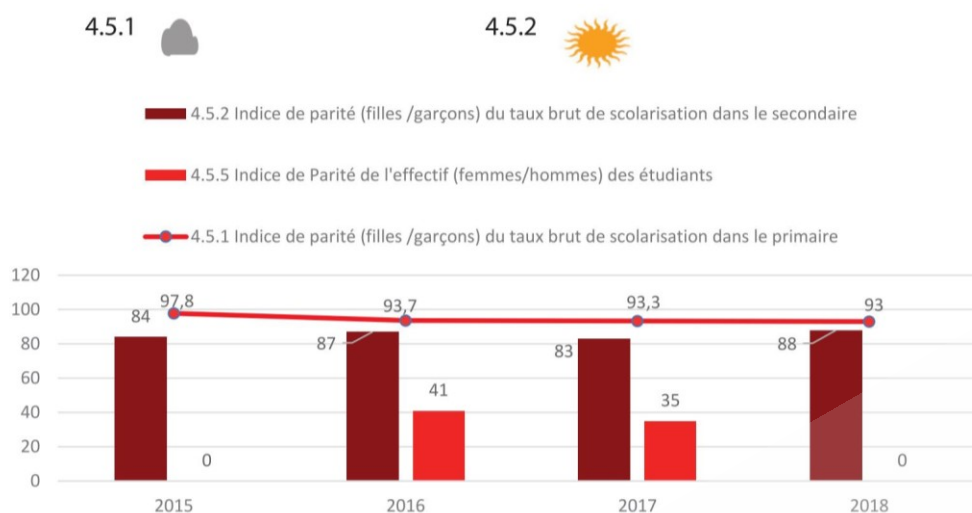
Figure 3 (bottom right): Involvement in trade union leadership positions in selected countries, by sex, 2007 (UNECA 2007 in UNDP 2016, 81; slightly adapted)

Regarding women's access to education in Benin, it can be noted that the former president's initiative of abolishing primary school fees in 2007/2008 improved gender parity significantly when it comes to primary schooling (GIZ-LIP 2020). The last census in Benin confirmed this rather low gender parity in primary schooling, whereas figure 4 illustrates that the gender gap expands with the level of education. With regard to gross primary school enrolment, amounting 96.6% in 2013, the rate was 96.6% for boys and 94.1% for girls, resulting in a gender parity rate for primary school enrolment of 97.4 (INSAE 2016, 11)<sup>27</sup>.

In addition, it is important to mention net enrolment at this level, which had reached only 56.9% in total. Thereby, 55.7% of the enrolled girls and 58.1% of the enrolled boys (both between 6 and 11 years old) actually went to school (ibid.). Considerably smaller were the percentages regarding secondary school enrolment. Only 52.2 % of the young population (between 12 and 19 years old) were enrolled (gross secondary school enrolment), whereas this percentage was 60.5% among boys and 43.4% among girls resulting in a gender parity rate for secondary school enrolment of 72.0 (ibid., 12).

<sup>27</sup> The closer the rate is to 100, the higher the gender parity.

Figure 4: Evolution of the indicators 4.5.1, 4.5.2 and 4.5.5 of the target 4.5. (Benin Republic 2019, 154)



Especially with regard to the tertiary education of women, the West African region scores badly within the continental context (view figure c, [Appendix](#)). Benin's recent country report (2019) for the General Assembly of the United Nations, reports on its progress in the achievement of the nationally prioritized goals and targets regarding Agenda 2030. In summary, figure 4 illustrates the disparity of the current gender parity rate while comparing primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment of women and men (ibid., 153). For every 100 men enrolled in tertiary education in 2017, there were only 35 women.<sup>28</sup>

This excludes the literacy rate, which shows that women and especially women above 45 represent the biggest group of illiterate people in Benin.

*“Les générations les plus anciennes sont moins alphabétisées que les plus récentes. En effet, la proportion de femmes alphabétisées passe de 17 % chez les 45-49 ans à 51 % dans le groupe d'âges 15-24 ans. Chez les hommes, la proportion des alphabétisés passe respectivement de 43 % à 67 %. Quel que soit le sexe, le taux d'alphabétisation est plus élevé en milieu urbain (46 % pour les femmes et 65 % pour les hommes) qu'en milieu rural (25 % des femmes et 46 % des hommes)”<sup>29</sup>* (emphasis added, République du Bénin 2019, 32).

<sup>28</sup> According to the African Gender Scorecard, which was published by the African Union in 2015, ownership of land in particular for women in Benin and in most of its neighbouring countries is very far away from gender parity. Benin attained only one out of ten points, where of ten signifies total gender parity, which was reached only by Cabo Verde (ibid., 7). The only West African country ranging higher than Benin was Ghana with six points.

<sup>29</sup> “Older generations are less literate than younger ones. The proportion of literate women increases from 17% among women from 45-49 to 51% among women from 15-24. Among men, the proportion of literate men increases from 43% to 67% respectively. Regardless of gender, the literacy rate is higher in urban areas (46 per cent for women and 65 per cent for men) than in rural areas (25 per cent of women and 46 per cent of men).” (freely translated)

### 2.3.3. The legal framework – women's rights in Benin

During colonization, the Napoleonic Civil Code and the “*Droit Coutumier*” (adopted in 1931, Médénouvo 2004) existed alongside one another. However, it was mainly the latter one that applied which in and of itself was

“hostile to the objectives of recognition and protection of women's rights and interests. Indeed, customary law developed during colonization made out of women more subjects than rights holders, minors always placed in social relations under the guardianship of men, whether father, husband, brother or son.” (freely translated according to Attanasso 2012, 63).

It was not until 1977, that the Fundamental Law of August the 26<sup>th</sup> was adopted, that women's legal status in Benin began to improve. Its article 124 states that the “*femme en République Populaire du Bénin est en droit l'égle de l'homme au point de vue politique, économique, culturel, social et familial*”<sup>30</sup> (ibid., 64) thus providing a fundamental juridical instrument for Beninese women to promote and defend their rights. This was the first time that the principle of equality between men and women was adopted in Benin (ibid.). Just two years after the United Nations had announced its “Decade for Women” (1975-1985) and the first global women's conference took place (ibid., 67). In 1990, Benin Republic adopted this principle of legal equality between men and women in an expanded way as a part of its constitution as follows:

*“L'Etat assure à tous l'égalité devant la loi sans distinction de race, de sexe, de religion, d'opinion politique ou de position sociale, - l'homme et la femme sont égaux en droit, - l'Etat protège la famille et particulièrement la mère et l'enfant. Il veille sur les handicapés et les personnes âgées.”*<sup>31</sup> (emphasis added; Constitution de la République du Bénin, Article 26)

Hence, equality in front of the law should be guaranteed for every citizen, regardless of his or her ethnicity or skin colour, gender, religion, political opinion and social position. Moreover, the state has to protect the family and especially the mother and the child. It also watches over people with disabilities or the elderly.

Concerning the adoption of international human rights treaties, Benin is marked in dark blue on the interactive dashboard mapping of the status of ratification which means that the country has ratified at least 15 of 18 treaties, whereas Benin ratified 17 (except the Optional Protocol to the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which was signed in 2013 but has not yet been ratified, OHCHR 2020).

---

<sup>30</sup> “Women in the People's Republic of Benin are equal before the law to men in the political, economic, cultural, social and family spheres” (freely translated)

<sup>31</sup> “The State shall ensure equality before the law for all without distinction as to race, sex, religion, political opinion or social position, - men and women shall be equal before the law, - the State shall protect the family and particularly the mother and the child. It shall take care of the disabled and the elderly.” (freely translated)



Consequently, the legal national framework itself with regard to the protection of women and the provision of almost all existing human rights to women, is remarkable and promising. Therefore, the indicator score for “laws on violence against women” published by the Ibrahim foundation is 41.7 for West Africa whereas it stood at 66.7 for Benin (Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2020). However, the relevant question is whether or not and to what extent these rights are actually respected, protected and fulfilled. Figure 5 gives an overview of the relevant international and regional legal declarations and instruments affecting women’s rights in Africa (UNDP 2016, 95).

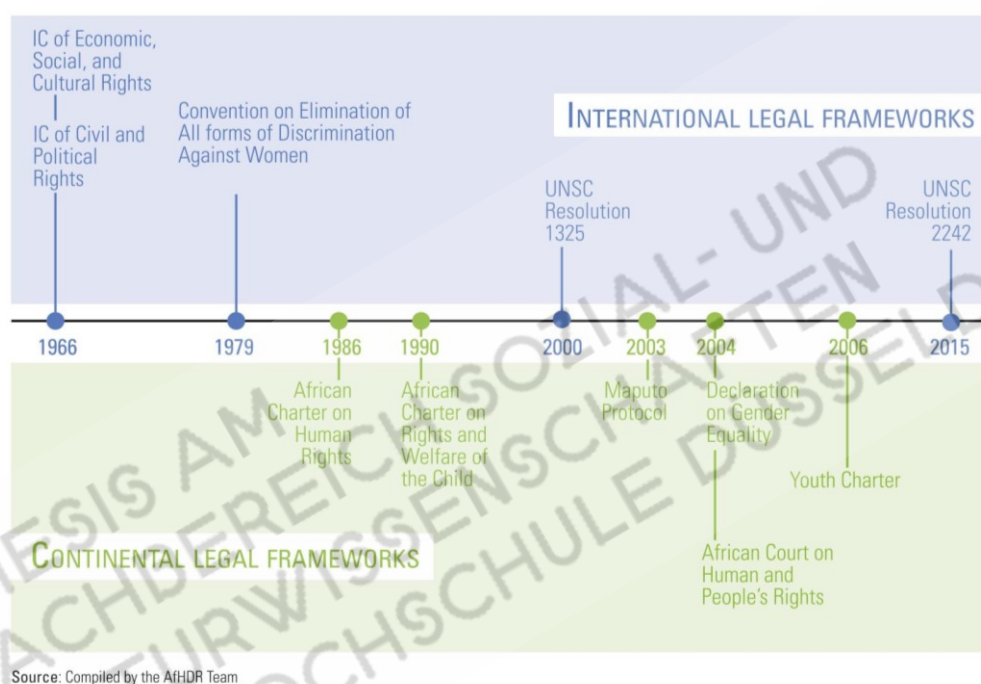


Figure 5: International and regional legal declarations and instruments affecting women’s rights (UNDP 2016, 95)

Among these Benin ratified, for example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979, in 1992 (OHCHR 2020)<sup>32</sup> without any reservations. Furthermore, in the same year it ratified both the International Convention of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention of Civil and Political Rights. These latter two being fundamental pillars of international law.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Benin signed the Optional Protocol to this Convention (2000) only in 2019 (OCHR 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Benin also holds a National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 since last year. The resolution is regarded as a milestone in terms of women’s rights because it “shined a light on the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and recognised their absence from peace talks as a security concern” (Grimes 2019).

At a continental level, regional legal frameworks regarding women's rights start with the African Charter on Human Rights (1981/1986, ratified by Benin in 1986). Where the preamble says

"[r]affirming the pledge (...) to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa, to coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa and to promote **international cooperation** having due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the International Declaration on Human Rights" (emphasis added, African Union 1986, 1)<sup>34</sup>.

Furthermore, the UNDP cites the Maputo Protocol or the "Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa" (2003/2005, ratified by Benin in 2005) and the establishment of the African Court on Human and People's Rights (2004) among others (UNDP 2016, 95; AU 2020). However, Benin recently decided to withdraw its "declaration [...] allowing individuals and NGOs to submit cases directly to the African Court" (De Silva 2020).

The Maputo protocol says:

"States Parties shall commit themselves to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of women and men through public education, information, education and communication strategies, with a view to achieving the elimination of harmful cultural and traditional practices and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either the sexes, or on stereotyped roles for women and men." (AU 2003)

Further important gender-related international agreements are the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) as well as the Agenda 2030 with its Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2015) highlighting the gender dimension and women's rights especially within SDG 5.

---

<sup>34</sup> With regard to women's rights Article 2, 18 and 19 are crucial. Article 2 says "Every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedom of recognition and guaranteed in the present Charter without distinction of any kind such as race, ethnic group, color, sex, language, religious, political or any other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status" (AU 1986) and article 18, paragraph three the following: "1. The family shall be the natural unit and basis of society. It shall be protected by the State which shall take care of its physical health and moral. 2. The state shall have the duty to assist the family which is the custodian of morals and traditional values recognized by the community. 3. The State shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of the woman and the child stipulated in international declarations and conventions." (ibid.)



### 3. The theoretical embedding

The following chapter will provide the theoretical embedding of the present work drawing on the past and current discussions around African feminism(s) on the one hand as well as feminist critique on human rights on the other hand. First, current theories around African feminism(s) will be discussed which will lead us feminist critique on human rights afterwards.

Furthermore, since the present study sets a focus on the gender socialisation of the interviewees, after a clarification of the most relevant terms, a brief overview will be given regarding gender socialisation in Benin based on Dr. Chantal Codjo's "*Inégalités originelles. Un regard sur la socialisation de genre au Bénin*"<sup>35</sup> (2019).

#### 3.1. Clarification of terms

##### Gender

Starting point, of course, is the term or rather the concept of *gender*, which Sandra Harding called "a revolution in epistemology" (ibid. 2003, 311). The biological sex which had served (and still does) as a reference in order to assign a category of sex to each person, is solely based on anatomic characteristics. Within this framework, new-borns are mainly categorized as either male or female. A growing number of countries gives henceforth a third option to its intersex citizens. Some South Asian countries (Pakistan 2009, Bangladesh 2003 and India 2014) added for example the option *hijra*, which is the locally used term for intersex persons (Eisele 2017). Germans have been able to choose the option *diverse* since January 2019 (BMI 2018). Since Judith Butler's publication "Undoing gender" (2004), a discourse around *gender*, its normativity and the idea of gender as socially constructed became louder and almost a matter of course. This led to a collective rethinking of why and how gender roles are constructed and how individuals oscillate between these learned gender roles and one's own inner awareness of a personal "gender identity"<sup>36</sup> (ibid.). *Gender* is thus our learned behaviour, our learned perception of how a girl or a boy has to

---

<sup>35</sup> „Gender Socialization in Benin“ (freely translated)

<sup>36</sup> "Gender identity is the gender with which an individual identifies. Gender diversity is based on feelings of belonging to a particular gender and gender identity, for example as a woman, a man, transgender or intersex or other local and indigenous self-identities (...)." (GIZ 2019, 17).

behave, has to look like, to dress. It is the way we are socialised mostly in accordance with our attributed sex.

These constructions of dominant gender roles include what Butler calls normative violence, meaning the exclusion through norms, when committing violence against subjects (Sinder 2016, 166 ff.). Subsequently, this can lead to physical or psychological violence. For instance, when a person identifies with a *gender* category (*gender identity*) that from a normative perspective does not fit to the assigned sex (psychological violence) or when an intersex person is operated on as a young child in order to make the person fit into the binary system of male or female (physical violence). Gender norms mostly give power to men and discriminate against women. "Hence the differential distribution of norms of recognition directly implies the differential allocation of precarity" (Butler 2013, 88).

Based on this approach, Octobre (2014, 12 f.) understands *gender* in four dimensions: 1) the constructivist perspective where *gender* is seen as a social construction, 2) the relational perspective which understands *gender* as a system of relations where the feminine and the masculine are constantly constructed in mutual dependence; 3) the binary and hierarchizing perspective where *gender* is seen as a power relation based on the principle of the hierarchization of *sex* and finally 4) as part of the approach of intersectionality in which *gender* represents one category of overlapping and interweaving power relations at various levels (ibid.).

According to the African Union and the United Nations

**„[t]his social positioning of women and men is affected by among others, political, economic, cultural, social, religious, ideological and environmental factors, and thus can be changed by culture, society and community. Gender constructions are dynamic and fluid; they change over time and can be different in different cultures.** As an example of socially learned differences, women's role in most societies has traditionally been to take care of the household and the children, whereas the role of men has been to provide for the family by working outside the home. In most societies, these traditional perceptions of women's and men's roles have changed and are constantly evolving (emphasis added; AU, OHCHR, n.d. 15).“<sup>37</sup>

This definition that was published in "Women's rights in Africa" points out the fluidity and the impetus of the concept of *gender* and thus the idea that accordingly, gender

---

<sup>37</sup> as an anthropologist among others I understand culture in terms of the expanded concept of culture, which means that everything is culture. Hence, culture is a product of human practice and is constantly cocreated through social behaviour. It is not homogenic and there is no underlying cultural consensus, rather it is constantly changing and being negotiated (Wicker 1997). Culture thus comprises dissent, heterogeneity and contraindications and cannot be perceived as a demarcated entity – increasingly less in an increasingly globalized and interconnected *glocal* world (Sökefeld 2001, 125-126). Culture is less a question of authenticity than of hybridity (Werbner 1997, cf. García Canclini 1995).

constructions are never static. Moreover, “they change over time (...) and are constantly evolving” (ibid.) or in the words of Judith Butler, they are performative. Gender “is real only to the extent that it is performed”<sup>38</sup> (Butler 1988, 527) and does exist in a relational way (between gendered subjects). It is also an answer, a reflection of normativity. Accordingly, LGBTQI persons often do not correspond to this binary gender construction and see themselves confronted by law enforcement (e.g. Nigeria) or indeed normative violence, which often results in physical or psychological violence (e.g. Benin).<sup>39</sup> This emphasizes the shortcoming inherent in most policy papers, gender strategies, legal texts and of course religion where the binary relation between men and women or the male and the female tends to be reproduced and consolidated. Where feminist theory and activism mostly seeks to overcome binary gender categories, institutions are often deepening and perpetuating binary gender norms, and thus “heteronormativity”<sup>40</sup> (Butler 2004, 24), the. Additionally, this binary approach, mostly with respect to policy strategies, legal texts and the human rights, illustrates and reproduces a hegemonic “male bias” (Eisler 1987, 297) within these narratives, which will be further deepened in [African Feminism und Human Rights](#).

## Gender Equality

Having defined *gender* and *gender identity*, we can now discuss the term *gender equality*, which is an overall and guiding goal of the international community:

**“Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. 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.”** (emphasis added; UN Women 2020a)

Gender Equality is thus a guiding principle regarding human rights and sustainable development. Moreover, according to UN Women, gender equality encompasses

**“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. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken**

<sup>38</sup> Gender performance thus describes the individually performed gender identity meant to be observed by society as well as to mostly correspond to its norms and gender discourse (Butler 1988, 187).

<sup>39</sup> The LGBTQI community in Nigeria is very active online but only in safe spaces. Lots of them had to flee due to a severe exacerbation of their legal status in 2014 (Kamara 2014). The visibility of LGBTQI persons in Benin in online spaces is very low. According to an article (Hossou 2018) in the “Le Monde” journal, there were only ten associations defending the rights of LGBTQI persons in Benin in 2018 whilst non of them was legally recognised (ibid.). In Benin homosexuality is legal at the age of 21, in Nigeria it is illegal up to now and can lead to death penalty (ibid., humandignitytrust 2020). Even though homosexuality is legal in Benin, most of the homosexual persons in Benin do not dare the outing, because of a highly perceived danger of judgment and violence through the community.

<sup>40</sup> Heteronormativity describes the binary system of gender that entails only two sex assignments to which the attributed gender corresponds in the same binary way. Thus “male” corresponds to the gender category “masculine” and the “female” to the gender category “feminine” (Butler 2004, 24).

into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men (emphasis added, *ibid.*)”.

Furthermore, as demanded by SDG 5, the United Nations define Gender Equality as “[p]roviding women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes” (UN 2020b). Or to put it even more general terms, it is about “women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere” (UNDP 2016, 15). The promotion of gender equality is increasingly popular in the framework of international cooperation which is once again visible in UN Women’s definition, because gender equality can be seen both as a “precondition for, and indicator of sustainable people-centred development” (*ibid.*). It is also seen as a driver of democracy and of huge possibilities for economic growth (UNDP 2016).

### **Socialisation of Gender**

The socialisation of gender describes the way gender stereotypes grow and are constructed<sup>41</sup> over time and within a certain context of community. Furthermore, it designates the process of how gender norms are passed to community members depending on their attributed sex (Codjo 2019, 25; cf. Octobre 2014, Vallet 2009).

This is happening along two different dimensions. First, the dimension of **learning**, which emphasizes the importance of bodies of socialisation (the socialisation of individuals) and second, the **internalization of norms** which emphasizes the role of the socialised individual (Codjo 2019, 25).

West and Zimmermann (1983) called this process of learning “doing gender” and thus established this nowadays widespread term. This learning comprises norms of how a ‘real’ girl and a ‘real’ boy is expected to be and is based on a heterosexual matrix which is constantly reproduced mainly by language, but equally clothes, objects and hobbies, amongst others (Codjo 2019, *ibid.*, Butler 1988). A binarity of sex is being (re)produced within this process of socialisation and thus the binarity of gender (Butler 2004, 24).

*“Ceci fait que la présence de propriétés féminines chez un garçon/homme représente un grand danger social, il en est de même de la présence de traits masculins chez une fille/femme, car, chaque*

---

<sup>41</sup> I would like to draw attention to Hobsbawm’s et al. (2012) publication *The Invention of Tradition* at this point where it is said that “ ‘[t]raditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” (Hobsbawm 2012). Using the term ‘tradition’ mostly implies an assumption that the underlying social practice one wants to describe had been existing for a long time, which is often not true. For this reason I do avoid the use of this term.

*sexe doit rester dans sa 'colonne' au sein de la matrice normative créée par le groupe social*<sup>42</sup>  
(Octobre 2014, 20 in Codjo 2019, 25).

The **internalization of norms** points in a similar direction, focusing on the individual's capacity to either correspond to codes, social norms or to distance oneself from them (Dubat et al., 1996). It is thereby important to underline the individual's capacity to distance oneself from codes and social norms which implies that normativity does exist, but not each person feels the need to correspond to it. It is possible to "undo[...] gender" (Butler, 2004). Hence, given this capability, a person's gender identity will differ from normative gender attributions and allows the individual to break with normative gender expectations.

### **3.2. Socialisation of Gender in Benin**

Chantal Codjo recently published (2019) her study regarding the socialisation of gender in Benin from the sixties until now. She was born in Benin in 1969 and has been living in Belgium for 12 years. The study represents the only scientific and empirical source that provides far reaching insights and evidence on the socialisation of gender in Benin. I would like to give a short overview of her main findings:

***Between the mid 60s and the end of the 80s***, parents educated their children very often based on a binary hierarchization of gender drawing on religious and societal norms. Hence, a superiority of boys and a discrimination of girls was passed on from generation to generation. This hierarchization was also reproduced in societal structures, such as schools<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, the dominant family model at the time, which was polygamy, specifically polygyny, led to families with many children which in some cases consolidated the disempowerment of girls. Financial scarcity did not allow the same opportunities for all of them. Boys, and above all the first-born could study elsewhere and live independently, contrary to girls (Codjo 2019, 56 f.). Some of the male interviewees called this retrospectively "*injustes*" (ibid., 57) or "unfair" with regard to their sisters "who today are experiencing some kind of inferiority complex" (ibid., freely translated). This lived reality was described by the majority of the interviewees whereas a minority grew up in families where both, boys and girls, had the same opportunities and duties. In these cases, firstborn

---

<sup>42</sup> "This makes the presence of feminine features of a boy/man a great social danger, as well as the presence of masculine features of a girl/woman, since each sex must remain in its 'column' within the normative matrix created by the social group." (freely translated)

<sup>43</sup> Besides school, the church (or other religious places) represents an powerful structure where gender socialisation in Benin takes place.

children sometimes adopted the educational role. Besides family and school, the individual itself has a certain influence on this process of his or her gender socialisation, through his or her motivation and persistence, and thus contributing to the construction of its gender identity (ibid.).

***When looking nowadays at young adults and children (1990 to 2018)***, the interviewees stated that the binary hierarchization of girls and boys has changed, specifying for example that “relational crises between men and women for which solutions have been sought” (ibid., 80; freely translated) led to new forms of gender socialisation. Hence, the interviews have shown, that gender constructions became dynamic and thus changeable for the interviewees. Parents tailored educational approaches and methods towards a more equal socialisation of boys and girls depending on what was perceived as possible within the current societal context and its gender normativity (ibid.).

Finally, Codjo’s study has shown that parents often took discriminatory decisions regarding their daughters because of prevailing constructions of femininity. The latter mostly referred to the need for controlling the girls’ sexuality (ibid., 105). At the beginning, this comprised the limited access to schooling in order to fulfil reproductive tasks. From 1990 onwards, the interviewees underlined what the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity (*Ministère de la Famille et de la Solidarité Nationale*) stated in its National Policy on Gender Promotion (*Politique Nationale de Promotion du Genre, PNPG*): even when girls are in school, they have reduced chances to graduate due to “sexual harassment, lack of financial support from parents, early and/or unwanted pregnancies, early marriages, overwhelming burden of housework” (MFSN 2008, 16; freely translated). All of these points lead to the assumption that girls and women in Benin have mainly been discriminated against because of their assigned reproductive role on the one hand and because of a strong female objectification as an object of desire on the other hand (cf. Codjo 2019, 105). As a result, girls have (had) less or no access to schooling, are very exposed to sexual violence (harassment and/or rape) and have less freedom than boys, such as the possession of a personal phone or moving freely and independently (cf. Lucie, first part [00:05:35]).

In summary, Codjo (2019) underlined that a notable shift in the construction of gender, in this case, masculine and feminine, has taken place. Over this time, and more precisely, more specifically over the course of the two contemplated generations, the situation of

girls has increasingly improved. Nevertheless, in some areas such as girls and young women's remaining in school, access to tertiary education, political participation and unpaid care-work, gender inequalities persist.

With regard to the present study, existing qualitative data regarding especially the perspective of (privileged) women (occupying leadership positions) shall be broadened. Codjo's findings do provide a crucial basis regarding the gender socialisation of the interview partners I have chosen. I would like to generate a deeper understanding of their perspective on their gender socialisation and how their individual biographies consequently smoothed, facilitated or hindered their way towards professional female leadership.

### **3.3. African Feminism(s)**

Since the study focuses predominantly on female perspectives, feminism, and in the case of women's gender socialisation in Benin, African feminism and its discourse are crucial to discuss. Furthermore, these latter approaches shall frame the empirical data among others in this present study. Chapter [3.3.2.](#) will outline the historical level of African Feminism and its different trends. Afterwards chapter [3.3.3.](#) discusses contemporary African Feminism(s).

#### *3.3.1. "The invention of women"*

"The invention of women" (Oyěwùmí 1997) started in Europe when a strongly patriarchal perception emerged there in the midst of the Enlightenment. While the idea of equal human rights for all human beings became increasingly tangible,

"political theorists and republican revolutionaries in both the United States and France extrapolated from new biological dimorphism grounds for excluding women from membership in the political community. Asserting that reproductive physiology determines individual character and political capacity (...)" (Disch et al. 2016, 5).

Later, during colonial times of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this led to the exclusion of women at several levels, deriving from the understanding, that excluding women from certain spheres of life, constitutes a "more advanced civilization" (Towns 2009, 2010). Consequently, colonialism displaced existing forms of women's political authority within colonized countries (Disch et al. 2016, 5; cf. Okonjo 1994; Chatterjee 2013) and hence the perception of an hierarchization of sex was exported and enhanced or created discrimination against women. Oyěwùmí calls this "the invention of women" meaning the

exportation of Western patriarchal gender discourses to the African context (Oyěwùmí 1997).<sup>44</sup>

### 3.3.2. Intersectionality

"Feminist theories took from the analysis of sex an important insight that they generalized to other social markers: the insistence that 'difference' is not a fact of nature but a vector of power" (Disch et al. 2016, 5). Accordingly,

"feminist theorists conceptualize race and sex as political constructs, the product of particular ways of thinking that privilege some while disadvantaging others. Building on insights from critical race theory and postcolonial theory, feminists conceptualize racialization and gendering as political processes that create and sustain divisions, stratifications, and modes of domination within and across intellectual and national borders" (ibid., 4).

Moreover, much of contemporary feminist theory actually refers to intersectionality<sup>45</sup> (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Cooper 2016) and leans on "a fundamental insight about power" (Disch et al. 2016, 8) from black feminism, namely the interacting and co-constituting of "the various systems of power" (ibid.). Hence, gender normativity does not only attribute gender norms; these latter are also embedded in further constitutive norms deriving from other forms of oppression: e.g. racism, capitalism or heterosexuality.

This intersectional perspective shall equally form a starting point from where I, conscient of my privileges as a white female researcher, wish to discuss the theoretical embedding of this study as well as to analyse the collected empirical data.

---

<sup>44</sup> "The reason that the body has so much presence in the West is that the world is primarily perceived by sight. The differentiation of human bodies in terms of sex, skin color (...) is a testament to the powers attributed to 'seeing'. The gaze is an invitation to differentiate. Different approaches to comprehending reality, then, suggest epistemological differences between societies. Relative to Yorùbá society, the body has an exaggerated presence in the Western conceptualization of society. The term 'worldview', which is used in the West to sum up the cultural logic of a society, captures the West's privileging of the visual. It is Eurocentric to use it to describe cultures that may privilege other senses. The term 'world-sense' is a more inclusive way of describing the conception of the world by different cultural groups." (emphasis added; Oyěwùmí 2003, 4)

<sup>45</sup> "[T]he complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups" (MerriamWebster 2020b).



### 3.3.3. The history of African Feminism(s)

Some African feminists reject Western feminism which is not “*une remise en cause du féminisme en tant qu'idéologie (...), ni une occultation des mobilisations sociales qui s'y greffent, mais plutôt une mise à distance du féminisme en tant que cadre universaliste de mobilisation*”<sup>46</sup> (Latourès 2009, 144). Since Western feminism is based on an “excessive individualism” according to Caballero (2001, 15; freely translated), it is “not compatible with African social models where the emphasis lies on community” (ibid., freely translated).

Douvi describes how many African women who are engaged in improving gender equality in their countries will not necessarily call it *African feminism* or identify with this term. Several African women do “*mènent des luttes importantes*” (fight important battles; Douvi 2018, 13) around subjects like work, education and participation (Mianda 1997, 95). When some of them call it *African Feminism* it may not focus on theorizing the lived realities in the first place but rather on solving problems African women face in their daily life (ibid.). Moreover, Feminism and some African Feminisms differ in terms of its/their perspective on masculinity. African feminists might not reject or want to adopt ‘masculine’ power (Ilboudo 2007, 166). According to Mikell (1997)

“African feminism owes its origins to different dynamics than those that generated Western feminism. It has largely been shaped by African women's resistance to Western hegemony and its legacy within African culture. Clearly, it does not grow out of bourgeois individualism and the patriarchal control over women within capitalist industrializing societies (Engels 1972) where prosperity and education followed by cycles of crisis/decline (economic as well as political) have pushed women into more active economic roles.” (ibid., 4)

Mikell further specifies that the slowly emerging African feminism at the time was first and foremost “heterosexual, pro-natal and concerned with many ‘bread, butter, culture and power’ issues” (ibid.). In contrast, the simultaneous debates in Western countries in relation to “essentialism, the female body and radical feminism” (ibid.) were not relevant for African feminism.

“The African variant of feminism grows out of a history of female integration within largely corporate and agrarian based societies with strong cultural heritages that have experienced traumatic colonization by the West. Women have experienced marginalization in the capitalist-oriented transition of these societies to an ‘independence’ fraught with economic dependence. **This difference in the development of ‘feminism’ has caused considerable friction in many ways (...). Until recently, the reference points for Western feminists and African women activists have been totally different, because Western women were emphasizing individual female autonomy, while African women have been emphasizing culturally linked forms of public participation.**” (ibid.)

---

<sup>46</sup> „a questioning of feminism as an ideology (...), nor a concealment of the social mobilizations that are grafted on to it, but rather a distancing of feminism as a universalist framework of mobilization.” (freely translated)

Furthermore, Mikell associates a certain convergence of African and Western feminism in the feminist response to the failure of male-dominated multi-party politics and the collapse of national economies orchestrated by western Structural Adjustment Plans (SAPs) which greatly affected women. African women thus felt the need to “verbalise and demonstrate their vision of women’s roles for the future” and had “a growing determination to put forward their own socio-political agenda” (Mikell 1997, 4).

At a more general level, Lilian Lem Atanga (2013) picked up on the questions “whether ‘feminism’ can and does exist as such in Africa?” and “If yes, in what form?”. Several African scholars have been trying to answer these questions. Both African and ‘Western’ scholars continue to discuss the subject. In 2006, some African feminists participating at the African Feminist Forum in Accra, concluded that ‘feminism is feminism full stop; no buts, no ifs, no howevers’ “. (Atanga 2013, 301). However, African feminism comprises its specificities due to the problems women are facing on the continent (ibid.). At the same time, talking about the one *African Feminism* might be problematic and essentialising given the significant diversity of lived realities by women in African countries. Of course, not all of them are facing the same problems (ibid., cf. Dosekun 2007).<sup>47</sup> Atanga thus suggests the use of the term *Feminism(s) in Africa* in order to consider the plurality of feminist perspectives and approaches on the continent on the one hand and to avoid the essentialisation of the term *African Feminism* on the other hand. According to Mama, it is better to talk about “ ‘Feminism in Africa’ or ‘African feminisms’ because theories and practices that comprise the struggle for women’s liberation vary widely according to context” (ibid. 2014). Finally, despite the fact that ‘African feminism’ as a term comprises essentialising elements (cf. Spivak 1988), it may be used for its “strategic or political value” (Atanga 2013, 302) highlighting ‘African specificities’<sup>48</sup>.

Marren Akatsa-Bukachi (2005) asks if there is actually any “discernible feminist school of thought that is actively *African*” (ibid. cited after Atanga 2013, 302) in contrast with other feminists stating that *African feminism* is not different from ‘*Western feminism*’ since women in Africa and the global North both face “oppression, repression and discrimination when it comes to gender relations” (ibid.). Nevertheless, ‘*Western feminism*’ falls short of

---

<sup>47</sup> Obviously, women from north Africa are not confronted with the same challenges as women in sub-Saharan Africa (Sadiqui 2003).

<sup>48</sup> which then would be a sort of “strategic essentialization” (Spivak 1988)

its application within African contexts when it comes to taking into account existing norms of gender relations that actually object to the 'Western' perspective. This is for example the case when gender norms in Africa are not patriarchally oriented, but rather matrilineal (Amadiume 1987). Amadiume describes here an example from Nobi (Igbo) society in present day Nigeria where infertile (heterosexual) women could marry other women in order to have access to land, but also political positions. As a consequence, since these female 'husbands' could not have children with their wives, they had men to sire children with no claim over the children (ibid.). Hence, these gender relationships within systems of oppression need to be explored but should not lead to further 'essentialising' (Atanga 2013, 304).

According to Rushing (1996), it is also the importance of values such as family or children for African women that leads them to object to some 'Western' feminist ideas, amongst other things, an overemphasis on male dominance (Oyèrónké 2005, 99). This "fighting battles against men" (Geisler 2004, 9) can seem presumptuous while speaking about women living in mostly collectively organized societies where state welfare is extremely limited and family is the best security and insurance a woman can have (Atanga 2013, 3). In contrast to this point of view, Amina Mama underlines the following:

"It seems obvious to me that African women do have aspirations that go far beyond securing their survival: political, economic, social, intellectual, professional and indeed personal desires for change. It may be true that most African women are trapped in the daily business of securing the survival of themselves, their families and their communities—but that is merely symptomatic of a global grid of patriarchal power, and all the social, political and economic injustices that it delivers to women, and to Africans." (Mama 2001)

Further critique towards 'Western' feminism refers to its hegemonic position and thus the epistemological power 'Western' feminists can carry out while writing about African women. "African feminists claim that such feminist researchers (including African diasporic researchers) do not live the reality of African women living and working in Africa" (Atanga 2013, 304). Nevertheless, since the 80s, both African feminists and 'Western' feminists, have learned to listen to each other:

"The constant tirades against 'white feminists' do not have the same strategic relevance as they might have had 20 years ago when we first subjected feminism to anti-racist scrutiny. Since then many Westerners have not only listened to the critiques of African and other so-called 'third world feminists'—they have also re-considered their earlier simplistic paradigms and come up with more complex theories. Postcolonial feminism owes much to African, Asian and Latin American thinkers. Western feminists have agreed with much of what we have told them about different women being oppressed differently, and the importance of class and race and culture in configuring gender relations. Having won that battle why would we want to abandon the struggle, leaving the semantic territory to others, and find ourselves a new word?" (Mama 2001)

This statement of Amina Mama leads us to the afore mentioned question of whether or not to call it Feminism while talking about “the African women’s presence in international feminisms” as Amadiume (2001, 47) called it. Mama argues for the use of the term *African Feminisms* - instead of other suggestions, for instance, Womanism or Motherism<sup>49</sup> - because of the fact that white feminism had always learned from African women’s experiences and included these findings in their conceptualizations of ‘Western’ feminism, “even if not properly acknowledged as such” (Mama 2001). In addition, “white feminism has never been strong enough to be ‘enemy’—in the way that say, global capitalism can be viewed as an enemy” (ibid.). I do agree with Amina Mama, which is why I will apply the term *African Feminisms* in the following,

### **Intellectual and popular African feminism(s)**

Different approaches within African Feminism(s) have emerged throughout the last 40 years. On the one hand, there is intellectual African Feminism (which is not necessarily described as such by its representatives). Some scholars see it as close to ‘Western’ feminism. Amina Mama for example can be located within this context of intellectual African feminist, along with Patricia Mc Fadden (2005) or Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (2005). Despite this classification, it is important to mention that their intellectual perspective is very much combined with activism. According to Mama, African Feminisms should be about creating linkages between African academic feminism and African feminist activism (Mama 2018). Which is also why she dedicated much of her feminist work to this objective<sup>50</sup>.

Furthermore, Mama defends her intellectual work, calling herself a “knowledge worker” (Mama 2017), perceiving universities as “justifiable sites for struggle” (ibid. 2014):

“Identifying as both feminist and African is an act of resistance that provokes both patriarchal and imperialist reflexes in most of the systems and institutions we encounter in the course of our lives and careers. Because no institutions exist outside of societies, all are imbued with patriarchal power relations, so all are also justifiable sites for struggle. (...). The university to my mind is a strategic location that must be de-mystified and liberated from its histories of complicity with elite interests because it is an important site for the reproduction – or transformation – of hegemonic ideologies

---

<sup>49</sup> **Womanism:** Alice Walker used this term for the first time in 1983 in her *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, specifying that “womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender” (ibid., xii). “Although Walker states that a womanist is a black feminist or feminist of colour, she insists that a black feminist as womanist talks back to feminism, brings new demands and different perspectives to feminism, and compels the expansion of feminist horizons in theory and practice” (Science Encyclopaedia 2020)

**Motherism:** Catherine Acholonu, for example, describes it as an Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism, a “multidimensional Afrocentric theory” (1995: 110) defining what she perceives as being “the essence of African womanhood” (ibid.).

<sup>50</sup> e.g. by building up an African Gender Institute in South Africa or the foundation the online journal “Feminist Africa” (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt 2018)

and values, as well as for the technical know-how and skills. They tend – unless interrupted – to be conservative, androcentric institutions that reflect hegemonic ideologies and legacies of imperialism, classism, racism, sexism and so on. (...). However, universities also have histories of struggle – especially evident in feminist women and gender studies, and in some places, ethnic studies. These fields can be understood as ongoing efforts to purge the colonial-patriarchal legacies that permeate the structures of the academy. The shifting naming of ‘women’s studies’ to ‘gender and women’s studies’, to ‘feminist studies’ reflects the fact that feminist interventions in the academy are continuously being appropriated and depoliticized.” (Mama 2014).

Simultaneously, on the African continent, it is crucial to gain more presence of African feminist scholars at universities in order to allow critical exchange among them - an exchange of theories, ideas and experiences. On the one hand, their visibility is impeded through “the fact that [their] writing and research is seldom respected in the African academy” (ibid.). On the other hand, “very little space [is] [afforded] [to] [African] [scholars] in the existing Western-based feminist journals, where [their] work is subject to norms and gatekeeping practices that only allow occasional publishing of individual articles by a few established individuals” (ibid.).

Furthermore, Oyèrónké (2005) points out that nowadays ideas and publications within the field of “women and gender studies in Africa [...] continue [...] to bear the imprint of traditional anthropology and developmentalism” (ibid., 382). This would thus influence students’ gender perceptions, leading to a certain bias with regard to the literature that is being used or even the general “orientation of gender research” (ibid.). Hence, “African gender research and advocacy [continued to adapt to development policy and ‘traditional’ anthropological approaches] though many feminist scholars have successfully mapped alternative paths and goals” (ibid.). This dominance thus “need[s] ongoing scrutiny in order for us to take progressive postcolonial agendas forward” (ibid.).

**“For African scholars who consider themselves feminist, there ought to be more of an exchange of ideas with Western feminists that does not privilege Western-originated ideas, but that would problematize them. To the extent that this is done effectively, feminism as a movement and, indeed, feminist theories will be enriched. Then, we can talk about the possibility of engineering sisterhood.”** (emphasis added, Okome 1999, 19)

Besides the intellectually driven African feminism, *popular* African feminism is part of feminisms in Africa and was especially strong in the beginning of African feminism(s), comprising a range of different forms of activism (Snyder and Tadesse 1997). Popular African feminists mainly critique intellectual African feminism for being that little bit too westernized. According to Okome (1999), mainly urban and educated African women are intellectual African feminists, being “brainwashed” (Snyder et al. 1997) by so-called white feminism through having received their education abroad and exporting these ideas

afterwards (Okome 1999). Consequently, “intellectual feminism, [would] condemn[...] aspects of African ,culture’ such as polygamy, (...), [and] echo the paternalistic attitude and tone of ‘Western’ feminists towards African women” (Atanga 2013, 305).

Popular African feminism on the other hand, describes a rather practical and pragmatic approach aiming at maintaining

“‘cultural’ identity, opening up spaces for women to earn a living and properly care for their families, and seeking better living conditions for women and children, this valuing of family and culture above all else can also include being involved in polygamous relationships and women’s own acceptance of genital mutilation and very early marriage” (Atanga 2013, 306).

This sort of cultural pessimism within popular African feminism, could perpetuate precolonial ‘culture’ “at the expense of women’s rights, thus sustaining male hegemony” (Atanga 2013, 306). In this way, popular African feminism needs to be criticized for, among other things, sustaining harmful practices and “for blindly and uncritically embracing ‘African’ cultural practices (some of which are not only dangerous but infringe on human rights, e.g. genital mutilation) and rejecting foreign-inspired best practices, just because they are foreign/western, no matter how beneficial” (ibid.).

At the same time, it is important to emphasize, that many female leaders in Africa, especially West Africa, who hold significant economic power – dating back to the precolonial era (Sheldon 2017, 36-61) — are illiterate. Hence, Toure et al. (2003) claim that intellectual African feminism apparently has something to learn from popular African feminism and that the success of these businesswomen should not be ignored but rather used in order to create a link between the two approaches.<sup>51</sup> Up to now, as chapter [Women in today’s Benin](#) has shown, the gender gap at the level of economic participation in Benin is rather low in comparison to other areas or neighbouring countries.

Apart from these two approaches, which were most widely discussed in the 1990s and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, some African women reject the term “feminism” in general. Some see feminism as almost synonymous with lesbianism because of affiliations like “anti-men, anti-child” (Atanga 2013, 302) while other approaches remain “distinctly heterosexual, pro-natal” (Mikell 1997, 4) which is contrary to Western feminism and intellectual African feminism. It is now clear that African feminism and even a plurality of it exists for most

---

<sup>51</sup> “[T]here are many women in the economic sphere who are generally illiterate but still hold considerable shares in sectors such as fishing, market gardening, trade ... In West Africa, for example, they have monopolised the distribution of fabrics and several food products and in some countries, they constitute the majority of the rising class of owners of small- and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs).” (Toure et al. 2003, 2)

African scholars or activists being engaged in gender equality and justice. The following chapter will deepen the discussion regarding contemporary expressions of African feminism.

#### 3.3.4. Contemporary African Feminism

"[T]rue feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and self reliant. The majority of the black women in Africa and the Diaspora have developed these characteristics, though not always by choice." (Steady 1985, 35)

According to Amadiume, there are African feminisms, militant in some cases, that have represented every day lived realities for African women (Steady 1985, 35). These realities were not new when 'Western' feminism 'arrived'. Mama 2011, Oyèrónké 2005, Lewis 2005 and Mupotsa 2007 are known representatives of contemporary theorizing of African feminism(s). Despite the fact that Gwendolyn Mikell (1997), an early African feminist, had often been criticized for her focus on 'culture' and for using it as a legitimization for women's oppression and discrimination in Africa,

"[s]he however laid the foundation of African feminism (in both broad and narrow senses), and indeed additionally talked of how African women also struggled to overcome gender hierarchy and inequality in both public and private/domestic domains, to deconstruct the institutional legitimization of gender difference and discrimination." (Atanga 2013, 308)

Contemporary African feminists are aware of the necessity to take into account contextualized lived (often contingent) realities and accordingly to rewrite *herstories* or generate knowledge in this respect. These lived contingent realities can include women expected to be silent or at least reticent in public (ibid., 303). Besides the need to generate contextualized knowledge, many African feminists agree on the point that a pan-African networking among both academics and activists is crucial. This needs to come along with an academization independent of *developmentalism* and 'Westernized' thinking within African universities, which, in turn, will allow a more radical and emic approach to gender, African *herstories* and African feminism(s). Indeed, since the

"establishment of the first 'women in society' course in 1979 at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria, and a decade and a half after the AGI<sup>52</sup> began the continental program to strengthen the feminism in African gender and women's studies (...), [f]eminist movements have become more assertive and influential in Africa, and there are now significantly more students, scholars, activists and writers engaged in feminist scholarship across the region. The establishment of new gender and women's studies centres, teaching programs and research projects has continued apace, **including the first initiatives in French-speaking Africa (Senegal and Burkina Faso)**. Feminists who have had the experience of working across disciplines and perspectives, within and outside academic institutions and sometimes across national borders, now support one another, and as a result have developed a steadily growing sense of the value of their work, both locally and internationally" (Mama 2011, 17).

---

<sup>52</sup> AGI means African Gender Institute in Cape Town, South Africa

Mama describes her an increasing dynamic within African feminism, its institutionalisation and the networking among African feminist movements and scholars, both locally and internationally. Furthermore, the citation indicates “first initiatives in French-speaking Africa” (ibid.) which shows a linguistic barrier between mainly the anglophone and francophone African feminists communities leading to different dynamics and discussions.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, feminist networking among African feminists and activists had intensified a lot throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A “new level of community, one that is not merely imagined” (ibid.) was achieved. Of course, new possibilities of networking through digital solutions facilitated and encouraged this new impetus (Mama 2011, 17), including “a virtual space that extends far beyond the meetings and workshop spaces that have been created” (ibid.). But also, the extent of real-life conferences and meetings is significant and “historic” (ibid.) having “allowed dozens of Africa’s feminist thinkers to come together at various African locations and carry out collaborative work on intellectual projects” (ibid.). African feminism, as Lewis (2005) points out, is now mostly paying attention to “voice, communication [and] the understanding of women’s roles as political and historical actors” (ibid., 381). Atanga states that

“[c]ontemporary African feminism thus involves rewriting the identities of African women not only as passive victims of male dominance and patriarchy or as preoccupied with the concerns of their ‘Western’ sisters, but as active social, economic and political agents in the development of their countries, having the freedom and ability to combine some ‘traditional’ practices as mothers and wives with public roles” (ibid. 2013, 309).

Moreover, Mama argues that contemporary African feminism is also “about challenging the status quo, or about describing the ways in which the contemporary patriarchies in Africa constrain women and prevent them from realising their potential beyond their traditional roles as hard-working income-generating wives and mothers” (Mama 2001). It is about these women having access to “respect, dignity, equality, lives free from violence

---

<sup>53</sup> In relation to sexual harassment, comparing for example Benin and Nigeria, many women in Nigeria joined the #metoo movement. Inspired by the novelist Chimamanda Adichie’s famous TED talk “We should all be feminists” (2017), many shared their victim stories publicly, mainly on Facebook. In her publication *Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* the novelist stated “I don’t think sexism is worse than racism, it’s impossible even to compare. It’s that I feel lonely in my fight against sexism, in a way that I don’t feel in my fight against racism. My friends, my family, they get racism, they get it. The people I’m close to who are not black get it. But I find that with sexism you are constantly having to explain, justify, convince, make a case for.” (ibid.) A sort of missing solidarity among women was equally named by almost all interviewees except Chloé. In Benin, a public debate regarding sexual harassment happened only this year, in May 2020, subsequent to Angéla Kpeidja’s testimonial having been the victim of numerous acts of sexual harassment aggressions on labour day. As a journalist, she testified to having been a victim of sexual harassment in the workplace during her whole career. Afterwards others joined her in their public testimony, such as et Pricile Kpogbeme, an unemployed journalist who failed to find another job after having refused sexual harassment by her former superiors (LO 2020).



and the threat of violence” (ibid.). Instead of focusing “only on juxtaposing male dominance with female subordination or on fighting battles with men, [...] fertility rates or poverty” (Atanga 2013, 308, cf. Oyèrónké 2005), contemporary African feminism is about “creating spaces for women to participate in the management of their societies. This includes empowering women through access to resources such as health, education, and housing” (ibid.).

This shift also accompanies an increasingly broad idea of gender and sexual identity within African feminism(s) where intellectual African feminism is influencing other approaches. In their totality and diversity, the described different African feminist approaches do invite us to look at them from a human rights’ perspective.

### 3.4. African Feminism and Human Rights

*“Universelle Normen, so die Kritik, könnten selbst einer gewissen Partikularität nicht entkommen, wodurch sie zwangsläufig zu Ausschlüssen führen. Ausgeschlossen sind diejenigen, die den Normen des Universellen nicht entsprechen. Anstatt universellen Deutungsperspektiven eine grundlegende Absage zu erteilen, sind auch im poststrukturalistischen Feminismus Ansätze entstanden, in denen das Universelle stets offen gehalten und in selbst- und machtkritischer Perspektive kulturell übersetzt werden muss, um Ausschlüsse zu vermeiden.”* (emphasis added, Leicht et al. 2016, 10; cf. Suarez-Krabbe 2014 and Dhawan 2010)

Hence, several women’s networks from the Global South and within Postcolonial Studies, describe the liberal understanding of human rights as a paternalistic and “rest-colonial” act (Leicht et al. 2016, 11). It would lead to an incapacitating victimization of mainly women and marginalized groups (ibid.). At the same time, postcolonial scholars do not entirely criticize human rights as a strategic framework in terms of its utility with regard to a wide range of emancipatory requests. Or in the words of Gajatri Spivak who does not question the universality of human rights as such but rather calls them an “enabling violation” (Spivak 2007, 176). She criticizes the one-dimensional genesis, the asymmetric subject positions as well deficient implementation policies regarding human rights (Spivak 1999, 127). Furthermore, she places this “violation” in a world in which mainly women have been confronted by a “double colonization” (freely translated, Dhawan 2010, 374) through patriarchal-nationalist oppression on the one hand and colonial subordination on the other hand (Leicht et al. 2016, 11). This underlines the constitutional relation between human rights and feminism, which is marked by breaks and contradictions and as such sets the conditions for their productive connection (ibid.).

Leicht et al. also point out, that

“emancipatory theories and practices always run the risk of being instrumentalized for the purposes of domination and power. Especially in the context of global conflicts (for example, over the distribution of resources) and ideological struggles (for example, over the sovereignty of interpretation), references to human rights as well as gender issues can be misused as forms of legitimation for hegemonic claims to power. They can also be reinterpreted into stereotyping and paternalistic interpretations, in which, for example, cultural resentments contribute to the establishment of victim identities” (freely translated; *ibid.*, 12).

At this level, different approaches discussing the legitimacy of women’s discrimination in the context of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ find little common ground (*ibid.*, 26). One can distinguish three main positions: 1) A liberal feminist human rights’ universalism that determines ‘cultural-religious’ arguments as problematic in themselves, 2) a postcolonial feminist human rights’ critique that criticizes Western imperialism disguised as feminist concerns, and finally 3) a mediatory position that builds upon the idea of women’s rights as human rights, but equally tries to do so by being sensitive towards religious and ‘cultural’ differences without “Western-ethnocentric arrogance” (freely translated; Holzleithner 2016, 26) and this grounded in the undeniable insights of postcolonial critique (*ibid.*).

Hitherto, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) has been the only binding legal framework regarding women’s rights and thus represents a milestone in the history of women’s rights (Wichterich 2020, 38).<sup>54</sup> This interdiction of discrimination is “asymmetric” (Rudolf 2014, 35) as it concerns only the discrimination of women. CEDAW comprises among others defensive rights against the state; cultural, social and economic rights as well as those rights, “which oblige the state to act against private individuals” (freely translated; *ibid.*, 37), which is particular to women’s rights. This wide-ranging and ambitious legal framework contributed to the internationalization of the idea of gender equality (*ibid.*, 38). Nevertheless, CEDAW counts the most (wide-ranging) reservations of member states among all legally binding UN frameworks (Holzleithner 2016, 23). 123 states have ratified the convention until now,

---

<sup>54</sup> Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), women were engaged in advocating for a broader inclusion and consideration of women. A group of female activists around Hansa Mehta (India) succeeded in putting forward the use of “human beings” instead of “all men” in the English version (Rensmann 2006, 136). Already in 1945, Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic) and Bertha Lutz (Brazil) achieved a linguistic inclusion of women within the United Nations Charter, which underlined then the nations’ faith in “the equal rights of men and women” (UN Charter 1945) in its preamble (Wichterich 2020, 37). This formula was taken over into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*ibid.*). As a result, a minimum standard regarding the fulfilment of human rights regardless of the biological sex was established (Rudolf 2014, 28 f.). Over time, other feminist concerns became central, which have shown the need for further international legal frameworks. At the beginning of the 70s, these concerns became increasingly specific. “Now the focus shifted to the fact that women have specific needs in the area of human rights due to their situation, especially at the interface between public and private life, which are not covered by the usual canon” (freely translated; Holzleithner 2016, 22).

exceptions are for example Sudan and the USA (ibid.). Many reservations are asserted in order to allow the member states a continuity of unequal treatment of men and women at the level of matrimonial and family law or cultural and religious rights (ibid.). The three different approaches discussing the legitimacy of women's discrimination in the context of 'culture' and 'religion' shall be outlined in the following sections.

### **Liberal feminist human rights' universalism**

Susan Moller Okin (1998, 1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000) are popular scholars following the liberal feminist human rights' universalism, rejecting cultural relativism in all its forms and being sceptical towards all contextualized positions. In the words of Okin "[r]especting 'cultural differences' has really become an euphemism for restricting or denying women's rights" (ibid. 1998, 36). Within this discourse, 'culture' and religion represent a threat to female autonomy because they are mainly asserted in areas which largely define women's scope of action. This would, for example, be the case in areas such as sexuality, marriage, reproduction, childcare or dressing. Interestingly, the underrepresentation of women in several public spaces or the rather strict codes they are asked to adhere to while in public much more than men, are only marginally discussed (Holzleithner 2016, 27). Okin is mainly criticized for her position that many women would have better lives if the cultures in which they are born into simply "became extinct" (Okin 1999, 22) or at least were encouraged to change in a way that promoted equality of women (ibid., 23). The expression of becoming "extinct" is indeed drastic and should be perceived as extremely critical. Further critique regarding Okin comprises her reproducing racist stereotypes while talking about patriarchal discrimination of women living in patriarchal (religious) communities, also with regard to the values and norms migrants bring with them (Okin 1999, 18). She seems to apply a standard of a liberal state which should consequently be nothing but a blessing for migrants. The question is thus "[y]our culture or your rights" (Shachar 2001, 90).

## Postcolonial feminist human rights' critique

The second position, namely postcolonial feminist human rights' critique, condemns mainly the power of definition of white middle class feminists within the discourse around women's rights as human rights and the way they speak for other women, trying to 'save' them with their wordiness (Holzleithner 2016, 28). Scholars of this position question the possibility of common women's interests as such, which is why they reject liberal feminist approaches on the one hand as well as radical feminist approaches on the other hand (ibid.). By assuming that these common interests have always existed, imposed "Zwangsfreiheiten"<sup>55</sup> (Sauer et al. 2008) from above seem inevitable. Furthermore, this conflicts with "genuine feminist principles" (freely translated; Holzleithner 2016, 29):

*"Feminismus basiert auf dem Konzept der Partizipation - der Idee, dass die Erfahrungen von Frauen gehört und einbezogen werden sollen, insbesondere jener Frauen, die ökonomisch und mit Blick auf ihre Möglichkeit, politisch Einfluss zu nehmen, am Rande stehen. Wenn der feministische Menschenrechtsdiskurs nun darauf hinausläuft, die Stimmen betroffener Frauen - jener, die ,gerettet' werden sollen - systematisch zum Schweigen zu bringen, dann macht er sich genaue jener Verfehlung schuldig, die feministische Kritik am konventionellen Menschenrechtsdiskurs moniert. Auch die Vernachlässigung sozialer und ökonomischer Rechte wird derart prolongiert." (Holzleithner 2016, 29)*

In accordance with this critique Volpp disapproves of focusing only on 'exotic' violence (Volpp 2001, 1208) such as forced and child marriage or GFM. Legal frameworks that do restrict and provide criminal proceedings are of course legitimate and necessary. However, the international concentration on these subjects appears to assume that violence against women was a 'cultural' problem and that only some 'cultural' groups were concerned (Ertürk 2007).

Another strong argument against the liberal-feminist approach arises with regard to what Eisenstein calls "imperial feminism" (ibid. 2003), an increasing instrumentalization of women's rights in order to legitimate, for example, anti-migration policy or even military interventions as happened in 2011 when the USA attacked Afghanistan. At this time, Laura Bush, the first lady, spoke publicly about women's rights and defended the intervention as legitimate to free Afghan women. "Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear and punishment" (cited after Kapur 2006, 671-672).

---

<sup>55</sup> "compulsory freedom" (freely translated)

“Imperial feminism” represents one of the worst expressions of the narrative of progress that continues to be extended through the liberal feminist perspective (Kapur 2006, 668).<sup>56</sup>

### **Mediatory position**

Common ground can be found with regard to the mediatory position, which describes a position, similar to a differentiated postcolonial feminist position, that is conscious of the threats a non-reflected application of the universalist human rights’ approach can contain and at the same time defends the need and the legitimacy of universally valid human rights: “We cannot not want human rights. Rights are radical tools for those who have never had them” (Kapur 2006, 682). If a continuous cooperation in feminist solidarity is to be possible, it seems crucial that feminist analysis should not originate from privileged places. “If we pay attention to and think from the space of some disenfranchised communities of women in the world, we are most likely to envision a just and democratic society capable of treating all its citizens fairly” (Mohanty 2003, 510). Joan C. Williams noticed that “[a] delicate situation exists whenever a white woman describes a traditionally subordinated group” (ibid. 1999, 62). Therefore, in this cases field access always needs to be participatory and the white researcher should be specifically careful not to reproduce objectification out of a paternalistic-feminist perspective (Holzleithner 2016, 31).

Furthermore, another element of this mediatory position represents the critique regarding “colonizing effects of Western feminist scholarship” (Mohanty 2003, 516). Mohanty describes an existing intellectual hegemony, identified in the 90s within academic feminism tending to assign female scholars of the Global South much more the role of generating contextualized knowledge instead of generating theory. Holzleithner (2016) called this a “*Tendenz, Theorie aus der Geschichte nichtwestlicher Gesellschaft auszulöschen*”<sup>57</sup> (ibid., 31). This is ironic, given that scholars of the Global South are thus facing the same difficulties as Western feminists in their respective disciplines. This means that their theories only marginally influence the broader theoretical discourse, under the assumption that their approach is too specific (ibid.). Hence, theory building within feminist

---

<sup>56</sup> “Ein starker postkolonialer-feministischer Ansatz ist daher von Grund auf skeptisch, was menschenrechtliche Interventionen anbelangt, seien sie im Akademischen oder im Politischen angesiedelt. Zu sehr scheinen diese von kolonialistischen und imperialistischen Bezügen vergiftet. Die universalistische Menschenrechtsrhetorik leidet gewissermaßen unrettbar an ihrer Geschichte und Gegenwart der Exklusion, verzerrenden Wahrnehmungen und staatlicher wie internationaler Gewaltausübung.” (Holzleithner 2016, 30)

<sup>57</sup> „Tendency to erase theory from the history of non-Western society” (freely translated)

theory is likely to be the product of a rather distorted privileged perspective (ibid., 32). “[S]ince [white feminists or multiple privileged feminists] cannot fully know or transcend the advantages conferred to them” (Dhamoon 2013, 93), they continue to be a part of the problem.

Consequently, a feminist approach avoiding bias structures, always needs to consider the multidimensionality of women’s location within power relations<sup>58</sup>, applying the intersectional approach in a consistent way and reflecting one’s own positioning within these power relations in order to avoid harmful abuse of power.

“Cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micropolitics of context subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes” (Mohanty 2003, 501). This is also where and how the meaning of universality unfolds. It represents human rights’ claim against exclusion, no “new non-humans or less humans” (Kapur 2006, 681) should be created. Human rights are to be understood as a continuous response to the violation of human dignity (Bielefeldt 2008, 125).

Moreover “[h]uman rights advocates need to realise that they also wield power once they participate in the terrain and can be implicated in perpetuating its dark side” (Kapur 2006, 684). Hence, it is crucial that they do always act self-critically (Holzleithner 2016, 35). Finally, according to Holzleithner (ibid.), the merit of feminist human rights work consists mainly of constantly deconstructing gender categories as political categories used to legitimize structures of power-over (cf. Veneklasen, Miller 2007) and domination. It is about deconstructing the seemingly ‘natural’ and normal silence of “male privilege” (Eisenstein 2004) and creating space to transform gender constructions and relations.

---

<sup>58</sup> Read distinguishes two types of power, “zero-sum” and “variable-sum” (Read 2011, 3). Power over is the classical “zero-sum” power relation. Further three types of power expression belong to the category “variable-sum”, namely power to, power with and power within. In the case of “variable-sum” power expressions, while one possesses power, this does not reduce another person’s power (Veneklasen, Miller 2007).

## 4. Empirical Analysis

### 4.1. Research Design

In order to break with possible tendencies of objectifying women of the Global South, of women with less privileges than me, I wanted to tell *herstories* of women occupying leadership positions, let the women speak for themselves and get closer to understand their lived opportunities and challenges. This will guide us along their biographies with a focus on the interplay between societal expectations placing women rather next to or behind men and individual experiences of far reaching autonomous and independent decision-making at work. Despite this autonomy, to what extent do they want or need to comply with societal normative gender roles? The guiding research question shall be once more mentioned here: **In which way did the gender socialisation of women in management positions in southern Benin facilitate or hinder their professional career, how did their gender socialisation change during adulthood and what are its expressions at professional and private level?**

I have chosen the Beninese context, since I have rather good contextual knowledge, having lived in Togo and Benin for almost two years and having continuously felt inspired by the strength and seeming ease with which the women I encountered managed so many different spheres of life at the same time. When I learned about the possibility of doing an internship at an international organisation in Cotonou, Benin, I started the field study with a preliminary desk study in May 2019. I did my internship from June 2019 to December 2019. During this time, I carried out a participatory observation which allowed me to have direct access to women in leadership positions within companies (private employment), the public sector (public employment), and the start-up sphere (self-employment).

The method of participatory observation was crucial „um [...] eine größtmögliche Nähe zu[m] [...] Gegenstand [zu] erreichen, [...] und die Innenperspektive der Alltagssituation [zu] erschließen“ (Mayring 2002, 81).

Numerous informal conversations allowed me to identify six interviewees providing most of the underlying empirical data of this study. I applied the method of guided interviews using guiding questions that I had formulated beforehand. However, this guidance was applied in a flexible way depending on the interviewee and her answers. The first part of the interview concentrated mostly on the interviewee's biography and was thus narrative,

while the second part was problem-centred and focused more on the societal level and its gender norms (cf. [interview guideline](#)).

#### 4.1.1. Qualitative Sampling

Qualitative and especially ethnological research aims to capture and display “collective organizational patterns” as well as “social structures of meaning” (freely translated; Kruse 2014, 240) by generating deep and holistic knowledge regarding subjective experiences and perspectives. This detailed knowledge on individual perceptions, allows the researcher to generalize results regarding the research topic (Kurse 2014, 243; Przyborski et al. 2014, 178 ff.). Bearing in mind that this study refers to a heterogenic field of investigation, I have made sure to question women of different age, with different professions, working in different sectors (public, private, self-employed), living in different family arrangements (single, married, mother or not) and from different socio-economic backgrounds with regard to the family in which they grew up.

#### 4.1.2. Transcription and method of analysis

Back in Germany, I transcribed all interviews with the application MAXQDA and analysed them using the method of qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2010). The following transcription rules were formulated and applied. Continuous use of the lower case in French language except for accentuations and names of places formed the basis. Furthermore, the transcription takes into account the locally transformed use of French, following French spelling and grammar rules while also including common speech and dialect.

'	△	glottal stop, little break while speaking
.	△	lowering the voice
?	△	rising the voice
(?)	△	incomprehensible content
?	△	question
eeeeh	△	protracted syllable or letter
AAA	△	emphasized word/syllable/letter
(1, 2)	△	number in brackets indicates the duration of the pause in seconds
(.)	△	small break
(..)	△	longer break
(laughing)	△	other sounds of speech, interruptions or background noise
[...]	△	simultaneous speaking, interruption or short confirmation of the other

Throughout the subsequent content analysis, the transcription was paraphrased in English. Consequently, I developed codes and finally categories on the basis of the paraphrase.



Hence, the paraphrase became increasingly the, raw material' codes and categories were referring to. In a first step, I formulated freely associated categories, that were already slightly framed by my practical experience on the ground as well as the guidance through the research question and the corresponding theoretical embedding. This resulted in an unstructured synthesis combining induction and deduction, which was then harmonized in a second step and screened against matches (Flick 2010). Citations of the transcripts within this paper were transformed into valid French orthography (longer citations, providing the English translation in the footnote) or translated into English (short citations).

#### **4.2. Field study and participatory observation**

Since I met several women occupying leadership positions, following their pathway in a determined and confident manner while trying to correspond to certain expectations of being a ,good' mother, wife and housewife at the same time, I have increasingly been wondering how this could even be possible. Knowing that most of the existing (qualitative) analysis drawing on women in Benin focuses on either rural women or women in politics, I wanted to give a stage to leading Beninese women in different sectors. Thereby, I wanted to focus on how they manage the reconciliation of family and work and thus partly contradictory gender norms at work and societal level.<sup>59</sup> Within this course, my further aim was to find where their determination and self-confidence comes from.

Continuous informal conversation with female leaders gave me initial insights into some of the lived challenges and seeming contradictions they are facing. Soon it was clear, that the women's determination needs to be accompanied by the husband's or partner's will and support if she is in a partnership.<sup>60</sup> Through my internship and the knowledge of the Beninese context as well, I had easy field access and could without difficulty gain the women's confidence and willingness to give an interview.

During the explorative phase, I recognized that these women tend to divide their private and professional life in a strict manner. It is rare that they talk about the reconciliation of both. Therefore, I perceived it as even more important to shed light on these interdependencies and to outline the difficulties these women are facing. Given the huge gender gap at the level of tertiary education, female academics represent a small minority

---

<sup>59</sup> for example being expected to take decisions at work whereas at home it is maybe the husband who takes the decisions.

<sup>60</sup> since all the interview partners are heterosexual, the word partnership describes in the following a relationship or a marriage between a man and a woman.

among Beninese women. However, the percentage in southern Benin might be somewhat higher, since the public universities are mostly located in the South.

#### **4.3. The interviewees**

In order to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewees, I will introduce them using pseudonyms in the following sections. I have offered the possibility of anonymity to all the interviewees with the aim of allowing them to make their own choice and perhaps to extend the utterable. They have all opted for anonymity.

I conducted a interviews with Lucie (30, married, two children), Celine (28, single, no children), Catherine (67, married, three children), Justine (28, single, no children), Sylvie (21 in partnership, no children) and Chloé (47, married, two children) .

**Lucie** works for an international organization in leadership position. She is thirty years old and grew up in Cotonou. Her parents are academics who grew up in a rural area and encouraged her in her studies as much as her four brothers. Nevertheless, Lucie stated that her education was stricter than her brothers' education. She had less freedom regarding societal life beyond school and church than her male siblings. Lucie followed a rather linear career, getting to know several international organizations through internships after having completed her bachelor and in this way entering fully and moving up step by step. She obtained several diploma studying alongside work as it is usual in Benin after having received the bachelor diploma. Finally, she and her husband do have two young children, who were born within the last seven years.

**Celine** is a 28-year-old Beninese woman that equally occupies a leadership position in an international organization. She grew up as the first-born child in a rather financially poor family in Cotonou. As the first-born child she bore a lot of responsibility at young age and helped her mother to take care of her siblings and the house. She did not grow up with any limitations, as she says, nor as a girl or through having elder brothers who told her what to do. Also, her father did not intervene too much except when it came to the encouraging to study. Her parents did not endorse a relationship until she was 26, which is exceptional for Benin. Celine specified, that she discovered her femininity rather lately since her parents and especially her mother did not attach that much importance to it. Celine could be called a born leader since she has been in the lead since her early childhood. Her big motivator in life is her wish to be able to provide a better life standard of living for her and

her family than the one she grew up with. Simultaneously, she wants to be a good example for her siblings. Finally, she perceives her leading tendency as a “*handicap*” (Celine, [00:19:18]) when it comes to love relationships.

**Justine** has a diploma in tourism and has been working in the tourism sector for almost seven years. She is 28 years old. Since the loss of her father at the age of thirteen, she did not receive any support from her nuclear family. Her father lived in polygamy (polygyny) and Justine’s mother was his fourth wife. They had three children. Justine broke with her family at the age of 17 due to physical and psychological violence through one of her elder brothers. Her motivator is her father who had played a crucial role in her life and gave her security at the time. She wants to make him proud. Currently, she is leading a popular restaurant in Cotonou but is facing precarious working conditions. Despite rather good payment, she is often working 15 hours a day and is thus extremely exhausted. She states not to believe in love relationships anymore due to several profound disappointments.

**Sylvie** is a very young and creative female entrepreneur. At the age of 21 she has already completed her bachelor’s in law and is running two companies. She founded a catering start-up at the age of 18 and started with biodegradable packaging one year ago. Sylvie leads her own self-marketing through social media channels and is regularly invited to start-up conferences. She had founded an exchange group for Beninese start-ups at Facebook, too, that she shut down later due to not having enough time. Sylvie is proactive, has lots of ideas and is most of the time occupied with answering requests and calls. She says that her business is finally doing well enough to afford travelling in 2020. Her parents, she stated, do have a very healthy relationship and always took their decisions together. Each time she had a business idea in mind, her mother asked her “do you think you are capable of doing this?” and when Sylvie answered “yes” she had her parents’ full support who are now both working with her. Her role model is her mother whom she has always observed running several businesses at the time. Sylvie is the second-born child out of four children, with one elder sister and two younger brothers. She is currently in a relationship.

**Chloé** is a 47-year old experienced female entrepreneur who grew up in a prosperous Beninese family, attending schools in France and Benin and having had the possibility to study in Europe. She came back to Benin at the age of 27 and started her own

business in interior design and event management. She married in her late thirties and has two young children.

**Catherine** is a 67-year old former CEO of a Beninese state-owned enterprise, a pioneer in a male dominated environment. After her retirement she was engaged in politics for a couple of years. She specified that she has had her husband's support along her entire career and that they had formed a very good team always making sure that one of both was at home with the three children. She has been passionate about team sports which helped her to open up on different levels and to raise her self-confidence.

#### **4.4. Opportunities and challenges as a woman - from the perspective of Beninese female leaders**

According to Atanga (2013, 304), "most educated women (feminist or otherwise) face the dilemma of challenging conservative patriarchal practices while being seen as 'African women', i.e. without being accused of having been 'colonised' or influenced by western feminism". Having this in mind, the following analysis of the interviews will provide insights into possibilities and limits of "challenging the status quo" (Mama 2001) these women are confronted with. Starting with possible sources of self-confidence, we will first contemplate [experienced opportunities](#) at young age, before analysing early [experienced challenges](#) the interviewees had to face. The main part of this analysis consists of displaying the [individual gender socialisation](#) they have undergone on a general level. Furthermore, its expressions as well as modifications at private level on the one hand and professional level on the other hand will be specified.

##### **4.4.1. Experienced opportunities**

This first section draws on experienced and observed opportunities of the interview partners on a general level with regard to their life within their family of origin. It also contemplates the sources of motivation when it comes to asserting themselves as a woman. Two categories resulting from the content analysis will form the basis for this chapter. Regarding opportunities I would like to focus on 1) "opportunities at young age" and 2) "motivation".

## Opportunities at young age

Several interviewees underlined the huge support that they had received from their parents, especially related to their education. This support includes on the one hand financial support, e.g. the payment of the school fees, as well as board and lodging which was provided at the parents' house. Some received this care until obtaining their bachelor diploma, others until their high school graduation. Celine told me during an informal conversation that it was very common in Benin to takeover one's living costs once you have your bachelor diploma.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, this support comprised the encouragement in one's own capacities and to make clear, that the parents value the school attendance of their daughters as much as those of their sons. Lucie described here a challenge as well, namely the fact that her education was much stricter than her brothers'. She had for example no access to a mobile phone until high school graduation and could rarely go elsewhere than to church or school. In this way, her parents tried mainly to prevent her and the family from early pregnancy. This point will be deepened in [experienced challenges](#).

By contrast, Sylvie stated that "there's no real distinction. [...] There's a little brother who follows me, we're three girls and a boy, but he cooks very well too, so there's no real distinction" (Sylvie [00:08:23], freely translated). All four brothers and sisters could go to university. Furthermore, she describes the encouragement of her mother as follows: "[W]hen I wanted to start my catering business, I said, mommy, I want to start my catering business. She said, do you think you could handle it? I said yes. She says okay but you will need a freezer to store the products" (ibid. [00:10:22], freely translated).

*"[D]eux ans après quand j'ai lancé les emballages, (...), je disais maman je veux faire autre chose. Je n'arrête pas la bouffe mais je veux faire autre chose à coté. Je dis je veux faire les emballages biodégradables. (...). [E]lle m'a dit tu es sure? Je fais oui, elle fait ok. [D]onc le lendemain je suis allée acheter quelques fournitures."*<sup>62</sup> (ibid.)

This shows how much Sylvie had learned to know her capacities herself and to what extent especially her mother trusted her when she confirmed her capability to realise something.

Lucie equally stressed that her parents have encouraged them in the same way

*"aussi bien garçon que fille, (...), il nous ont encouragé, ils nous ont motivé, ils nous ont donné les moyens et goals nécessaires pour évoluer. (...) [J]usqu'à l'université ils nous ont soutenu, jusqu'à ce*

---

<sup>61</sup> 06.11.2019

<sup>62</sup> "Two years later, when I started with the packaging business, I said to my mother I want to do something else. I won't stop the catering, but I want to do something else aside. I say I want to make biodegradable packaging. (...). She told me. Are you sure? I say yes, she says okay. So the next day I went to get some supplies." (freely translated)

*que chacun de nous trouve un stage débouché payant et c'est là où ils ont arrêté de financer et nous même on a pris le relais*<sup>63</sup> (Lucie, [00:20:39]).

Her parents had limited resources but still they managed financing their children's education until university, which is why she says she was very lucky and that this had helped her a lot. She also mentioned that she was encouraged by her teachers from college to university, "because I responded well in class, both in college and in university, the teachers encouraged me to go beyond that, very, very much" (Lucie, [00:22:49], freely translated).

The core values, Catherine had received as education from her parents are "to be able to fight in life and to take care of myself (...). So I can say here are the sources of the education that my parents gave me, humility, obligation" (Catherine, first part, [00:00:27], freely translated). Furthermore, she underlined that she has not missed out on anything during childhood. Her parents took care of her until high school graduation and allowed her to do sports, which she has continued to do throughout her life. "When I graduated from high school, I knew that, [...], life is something you have to be able to build it yourself [...]. [Sport] helped me a lot to open up a bit to the outside world, [...] otherwise I was very shy" (ibid., first part [00:01:26], freely translated). "Everything I wanted to do, (...), I was able to do, no parent forced me not to do" (ibid. third part, [00:03:47], freely translated). Nevertheless, she is very conscious about the fact that this represents no matter of course in Benin and is therefore very grateful towards her parents. She met many women throughout her career who did not even have the right to speak up freely.

Lucie and Celine perceive themselves as lucky to have had the opportunity to receive so much formal education. While Celine holds currently two bachelor's degrees and a master with the perspective of starting another master in 2020., Lucie as well holds several university diplomas, is working full time since her bachelor graduation and is currently doing her PhD while being in employment. Both confirmed that it is important to constantly acquire new certified qualifications to be competitive enough. Nevertheless, at this point a certain level of pressure arises.<sup>64</sup>

Celine who grew up in a rather poor family had the opportunity to receive a scholarship during her bachelor studies. Otherwise it would have been difficult to graduate. This is also

---

<sup>63</sup> "both boys and girls, (...), they encouraged us, they motivated us, they gave us the means and goals we needed to evolve. (...) Until university they supported us, until every one of us found a paying internship and that's when they stopped financing and we took over." (freely translated)

<sup>64</sup> The partially extreme academisation within the rather small academic milieu in Benin might give an indication to the limited availability of job offers and thus the huge competition around every single employment opportunity.

why she decided to do two bachelor's degrees at the same time with one allowing her to make a living.

*"Dans le fond je suis rentrée à l'université sans aucune bourse mais en ayant juste un secours et je souhaitais transformer ce secours là en bourse pour pouvoir investir dans mes études pour pouvoir subvenir à quelques besoins auxquels me parents ne pouvaient pas forcément subvenir<sup>65</sup>" (Celine [00:02:15]).*

The interviews have equally shown that most of the interviewees, five among six, have parents or at least one parent who has completed academic studies. In some cases, only the father could accomplish at least the bachelor's degree (Celine, Justine, Sylvie), whereas the mothers had to quit school before high school graduation. In the case of Lucie and Chloé, both mother and father completed university.

Particularly Chloé specified that her grandmother had already achieved a good level of independence and could also read and write which was extremely rare for women at the time<sup>66</sup>. Chloé indicated that "mom's mom has been a woman who had a say" (Chloé, [00:00:04], freely translated). It is thus on her mother's side that she grew up surrounded by several independent women. She cited for example the fact that her mother and her three sisters all together had the possibility to obtain a university degree. "So the [daughters] of my grandmother, they were already independent women, so I'm an independent woman" (Chloé, [00:01:18], freely translated).

Finally, Celine stressed that she does not have any inferior complexes as a woman<sup>67</sup> due to the fact that she has not received a gendered education (cf. Codjo 2019, 57; AU 2003).

*"[J]e suis quelques fois heureuse, puisque ça m'a ôté certains complexes. C'est à dire moi très tôt face aux hommes, j'ai pu prendre la parole aisément, c'est à dire que un homme ne m'intimide pas. Ce n'est pas parce qu'il est un homme, il a parlé, c'est une parole d'évangile non contradictoire. (...). [G]race à mon père, je suis très informée de beaucoup de choses<sup>68</sup>." (Celine, [00:14:03])*

Also, at technical level she perceives herself as independent: "Small plumbing jobs, things at home, I do them myself or if there are heavy things, I can pull them myself. (...) It really helped me in achieving independence" (Celine, [00:15:08], freely translated).

---

<sup>65</sup> "Basically I went to university without any scholarship but with just some rescue money and I wanted to turn this rescue money into a scholarship to be able to invest in my studies to be able to satisfy some needs that my parents couldn't necessarily satisfy for me." (freely translated)

<sup>66</sup> cf. nowadays percentage of illiterates among women aged 45-49 reaches only 13% (Republic of Benin 2019, 32).

<sup>67</sup> with regard to gender hierarchisation giving power to men while disempowering women

<sup>68</sup> "I'm happy sometimes, since it's taken away some of my complexes. That is to say, very early and in front of men, I was able to speak easily, that is to say that a man doesn't intimidate me. It is not because he is a man, he spoke, that it is a word of gospel that is not contradictory. (...). Thanks to my father, I am very informed about many things." (freely translated)

In contrast, Justine had to get by on her own very early. After her father's death "I learned how to fight early, how not to let it happen, I did little jobs as a waitress, then I always moved my neck. I can't have anyone stepping on me" (Justine [00:00:33], freely translated).

To sum up, most interviewees stated having received far-reaching support and encouragement of their parents during their childhood whereas Lucie received a much stricter education than her brothers and Celine described an education which was rather gender-neutral. They were all born into families where at least one parent had obtained an academic diploma. Only Justine refers to her childhood as mainly challenging, due to the loss of her father at early age.

### **Motivation today**

Simultaneously, Justine's father remains a strong motivation in her life:

*"Si je m'étrangle comme ça, je sais que notre père est passé par là. (...). Notre père il a commencé de rien. Son papa il est mort quand il avait deux ans, il a quitté le village. Il s'est fait tout seul, (...), il est devenu super riche. [D]onc on a cet exemple tout un chacun de nous, donc c'est notre exemple, notre modèle" (Justine, [00:07:15]).*

She wants to make her father proud, which is why she is working so hard and just tries to make her living and to save some money whenever possible.

In comparison, Catherine found first of all lots of energy and motivation in her sports activity: It has given me the joy of living because when I find myself in my sports environment, (...), I am very happy. [...] Doing sports gave me a lot of openness, [...], it allowed me to make myself known" (Catherine, [00:04:24], freely translated) which helped her later at work, too. Moreover, being confronted with a male-dominated working environment, she has developed a strong motivation based on fighting for oneself. Consequently, she says, this has allowed her to open up to the whole world (ibid., [00:05:33]).

*"Moi je suis une femme de défis, j'aime relever les défis. (...). Vous savez que pour pouvoir rester parmi les hommes, il faut s'affirmer. Il faut montrer de quoi on est capable et c'est ça aujourd'hui qui me fait porter cette femme lourde. (...). [E]t c'est ça d'ailleurs qui a fait que je cherche toujours à faire un peu plus<sup>69</sup>" (ibid. [00:07:15]).*

This "*un peu plus*", always trying to give a bit more, also lead her to entering local politics once she was retired. She knew the problems the people on the countryside were

---

<sup>69</sup> "I'm a woman of challenges, I love challenges. (...). You know to be able to stay among men, you have to assert yourself. You have to show what you're capable of and that's what makes me carry this heavy woman today. (...). And that's why I always try to do a little more." (freely translated)



confronted with through her work and now finally wanted to contribute to an improvement of their living conditions. A special motivation regarding her commitment in local politics is the empowerment of women that did not have the chance to receive as much formal education as she had. She also observed that Beninese women start to assert themselves increasingly and states that change needs to come from the women themselves, it cannot be induced through law only (Catherine, third part, [00:03:47]). Despite numerous difficulties for women within the Beninese society according to Catherine, once women manage to assert themselves and men acknowledge that, women would not have any problems. She would like to contribute to this aim with as she calls it “the little knowledge, the little experience” (ibid.) she has. In general, she perceives herself as privileged and says that she has got everything and reached everything she needed, so now she wants to provide her knowledge and experience in order to help to find solutions and to see if they can have a positive impact. Hence, one crucial element of her motivation to push things forwards is gratitude for what she has received and learned in life.

Celine has a strong level of motivation based on a very competitive perspective and the wish to improve the living conditions for herself, her family on the one hand and to be a guiding example for her siblings on the other hand.

*“J’ai toujours eu un esprit de compétition et étant aînée de ma famille je voulais toujours être celle qui faisait bien, celle qui servait d’exemple parce que très tôt comme j’avais commencé à montrer quelques caractères, je sais pas, un peu intello sur le plan scolaire, assez correcte [...] sur le plan social, j’étais souvent félicitée. Ça m’encourageait et ça m’obligeait à maintenir le cap sinon à dépasser mes limites<sup>70</sup>.” (Celine [00:07:52])*

She even speaks of an obligation to go beyond her limits. Celine mentions the good feedback she received several times and that she was forced to be good at school, to always be an example and behave correctly. Furthermore, she specifies that she was victim of mobbing at school, because of her skinniness at the time. Her parents made it possible for her to attend schools which were mostly visited by wealthy children, but this negative experience had marked her and represents another reason for her wanting to change her family’s situation:

---

<sup>70</sup> “I always had a competitive spirit and being the oldest in my family, I always wanted to be the one who did well, the one who set an example because very early on, as I had started to show some character, I don't know, a bit intellectual academically, and socially correct [...] I was often congratulated. It encouraged me and it forced me to stay the course or even go beyond my limits.” (freely translated)

*“Donc pour moi c’est cela que j’ai mal vécu, (...), donc je me suis dit je vais tout faire pour réussir dans la vie et changer un peu la situation de ma famille, pourquoi pas ma propre pour qu’elle ne ressemble pas à ce que j’ai connu jusqu’à aujourd’hui. Donc pour moi ça a été un grand moteur”<sup>71</sup> (ibid.).*

With regard to her siblings she states “I need to be able to be among the people who inspire them. (...) I wouldn't like if tomorrow they said oh our big sister who couldn't” (ibid., freely translated).

Sylvie takes her motivation from an intrinsic motivation to try out things. “I love to touch everything” (ibid., [00:00:45], freely translated). Entrepreneurship was the right thing for her to do because she wanted to be independent, manage her time in her way and be able to be herself at any time.

*“[J]e me voyais pas vraiment avoir un emploi du temps fixe. Genre tu te lèves le matin, tu vas bosser, tu reviens le soir, cassé et tout. (...). Déjà je suis un peu entêtée et je ne garde pas vraiment ce que je pense donc la plupart ce sera des prises de tête soit avec l’employeur soit avec les collaborateurs”<sup>72</sup> (ibid., [00:07:26]).*

Furthermore, she could follow her mother’s example, knowing that it is possible to succeed as a female entrepreneur<sup>73</sup> and that her parents will support her. Her mother had been employed as a hairdresser for 25 years but decided to quit and start different small businesses at a given time instead, due to very long daily working hours. She had been a crucial source of inspiration for Sylvie. “Mom, she's very entrepreneurial. I've never seen my mother do nothing. When you feel that this activity is not profitable anymore, she always had another activity aside (...)” (ibid., freely translated).

Sylvie details that she likes what she is doing and that she tells herself that she does not have the right to fail because of the numerous text messages she receives on social media from people who feel inspired by what she is doing and to whom she is continuously giving advice (ibid., [00:42:16]). She wants to remain this source of inspiration.

It can be seen from the analysis of this category that the interviewees draw their motivation from resources and experiences that differ from woman to woman: for example 1) wanting to make somebody proud (Celine, Justine); 2) sports, inner gratitude or the wish to have a

---

<sup>71</sup> “So for me, that's what I've been going through badly, (...), so I told myself I'm going to do everything I can to succeed in life and change my family's situation a little bit, why not my own so that it won't be like what I've known up to now. So for me it's been a big driving force.” (freely translated)

<sup>72</sup> “I didn't really see myself having a fixed schedule. Like, you get up in the morning, go to work, come back at night, broken and all. (...). I'm already a bit stubborn and I don't really keep with me what I think, so most of the time it will be a hassle either with the employer or with the employees.” (freely translated)

<sup>73</sup> as indicated in chapter [Women in today's Benin](#) (figure b) has shown, the economic participation of women in Benin is high in comparison to its neighbouring countries within the formal sector (cf. Toure et al. (2003)). But also within the informal sector, of course, the female labour force and revenue is significant. Most of Beninese women have one or more selling businesses running.

positive impact on societal level (Catherine); 3) following an example (Justine, Sylvie); 4) wanting to be an inspiration (Sylvie, Celine) as well as 5) improving one's life conditions and the one of one's own family (Celine). The following chapter will briefly highlight experienced challenges at young age before the individual gender socialisation will be contemplated in detail afterwards.

#### 4.4.2. Experienced challenges

Regarding the experienced challenges I would like to focus on the category "challenges at young age". At this level, Catherine, Sylvie and Chloé did not mention significant difficulties. Contrary to Celine, who listed several challenges at young age: First of all, there were the limited financial resources of her parents, which is why she made two bachelor degrees at once and was, as she sees it, exposed to mobbing at school. Additionally, she perceives it as the major reason for being shy as a child and teenager.

Also Justine stated having received only very little support from her family after her father had passed away. Not only did she have to deal with this loss, but also with continuous physical violence through one of her elder brothers. One day, her brother attacked her with a knife. She was 17 years old and called the police, but her mother told them to leave and defended it as a family affair. This is when she left her family's house. Her oldest brother had the chance to study in the United States and is now a professor at a known university there. The firstborn had these privileges, but she did not (cf. Codjo 2019, 56 f.).

On a more general basis, Lucie stressed that she perceives herself as lucky because she was not restricted by anyone. Nobody tried to hinder her in evolving. Nevertheless, she shared that being a man would have allowed her to be freer, it would have been easier for her to realise certain things.

*"[D]'agir sans que les gens ne puissent avoir des pensées sur moi, sans que les personnes ne puissent me coller des images, des stéréotypes (...). Ils [les hommes] ont plus de liberté que nous. Ce que eux ils font la société ne commente pas. Parce que tu es une femme, tu le fais et on te commente. Parce que c'est toi qui dois éduquer les enfants, parce que c'est toi qui dois bien te tenir dans la société."*<sup>74</sup> (Lucie, fourth part [00:00:46])

Significant challenges are thus 1) financial scarcity and 2) the early loss of a parent as well as childhood experiences of physical and psychological violence.

---

<sup>74</sup> "To act without people being able to have thoughts about me, without people being able to stick me with images, stereotypes (...). They [men] have more freedom than we do. It's because society doesn't comment what they are doing. When you are a woman, everything is commented. Because you are the one who has to educate the children, because you are the one who has to behave well in society." (freely translated)

#### 4.4.3. Individual gender socialisation

This section draws on the transcription parts in relation to the category “gender socialisation” as well as the subcategories “relationship level” and “professional level”. Starting with a general analysis of the gender socialisation the interviewees have reported on, specific expressions of it at relationship and professional level will be contemplated afterwards.

Lucie shared that she understood only at university in how far it was unusual that her brothers had taught her how to cook. Her mother taught cooking and doing some housework to all of them, even if Lucie finally had to help more with regard to these tasks. Yet, she emphasized that her education was much stricter in comparison to her brothers’ education. “Because my parents’ perspective was that, you know, managing the household will be the woman’s task, so they need to pay even more attention to me” (Lucie, first part [00:05:35]). For instance, when she wanted to go out with friends, she had to answer much more questions than her brothers. Her parents were also afraid of a teenage pregnancy and in general she perceived her education as much more gender specific than the one her brothers had received. She was only allowed to have a boyfriend after high school graduation, which is also when she received her first mobile phone contrary to her brothers who had mobile phones much earlier.

*“Parce que ça compte beaucoup, (...), quand quelqu’un te drague dans la rue, il te donne son numéro. [Les parents] ne veu[llent] pas ça. Tu es la seule fille, on a tout notre espoir sur toi, tu ne dois pas faire de gaffes, parce que si tu fais de gaffes là, c’est le nom de la famille que tu mets en danger et c’est l’honneur de la famille que tu essaies d’ébranler comme ça (...). [O]n dit que, si on dit maintenant que la fille de telle personne là, (...), elle est allée à l’école [et] tombée grosse, maintenant elle va rester à la maison, tout le quartier va savoir. La famille va savoir, tout le monde va dire que c’est une honte pour nous, mais dans le même temps, si c’est un gars qui va engrosser une autre à l’école, (...), c’est pas un [tel] problème (...). Parce que le gars (...) peut continuer à l’école, personne ne saura que lui il a engrossé une fille.”<sup>75</sup> (emphasis added, ibid.)*

From a present day perspective she says that she has surely received the education her parents thought was best for her. They grew up in a small village and moved to Cotonou later. They taught them what they knew, but she also remarks that her brothers and her combine the positive elements of what they have received from their parents with what

---

<sup>75</sup> “Because it matters a lot, (...) when someone approaches you on the street, he gives you his number. The parents don’t want that. You’re the only girl, we have all our hope on you, you mustn’t make mistakes, because if you do, it’s the family’s name you’re putting in danger and it’s the family’s honour you’re trying to undermine like this (...). They say that for example, this is that person’s daughter, [...] she went to school [and] got pregnant, now she’s going to stay at home, the whole neighbourhood will know. The family will know, everyone will say it’s a shame for us, but at the same time, if it’s a guy who makes another girl pregnant at school, [...] it’s not such a problem [...]. Because the guy (...) can continue to go to school, nobody will know he made a girl pregnant.” (freely translated)

they perceive as right and have learned later. “There are positive aspects in the education that my parents gave me and (...) we were able to keep those positive aspects, but we were still able to transgress the other aspects and (...) open the way a little bit” (ibid., first part [00:13:39], freely translated). If she had a girl, she would be also very careful in order to prevent the high probability of an early pregnancy in Benin. But she would not want to be that strict, allow her to have a mobile phone and be rather a friend than somebody who the children are afraid of. “Someone she can come and see all the time and talk openly with, someone who is there, who listens to her, who gives her advice, who puts her at ease” (ibid., first part [00:10:40], freely translated).

At the same time, she will teach her sons that the man is the head of the family.

*“[J]e ne peux pas leur apprendre autre chose, (...), parce que c’est l’environnement dans lequel on évolue. Si moi je leur apprends autre chose et que ils vont dehors et (...) découvrir d’autres réalités, ça va être un choc pour eux. Et ils seront aussi en contradiction avec la société dans laquelle ils évoluent, j’ai l’obligation de leur apprendre ce qui est établi comme norme, mais aussi (...) de mettre un peu de flexibilité dedans pour attirer leur attention sur le fait que ils peuvent quand même permettre à l’autre de donner son point de vue, permettre à l’autre si tu décides dans certains cas, c’est pas toujours lui la personne qui connaît qui doit toujours décider. (...). Mais l’information de base, c’est que [...] quand même l’homme [...] est le chef de la famille<sup>76</sup>.”* (emphasis added, ibid., second part [00:20:09])

Since the man is often perceived as head of family in the Beninese society which is henceforth only very marginally reflected<sup>77</sup> within the “code des personnes et de la famille” (Benin Republic 2004), Benin’s family law, she specified, she has to educate her sons in a same way. Equally she perceives it as her obligation to put as much flexibility as possible into this education which would allow a marriage where decisions are taken with as much consensus as possible. This point will be further deepened at “relationship level”.

Justine observes a lack of solidarity among women in Benin. “What is also sad is that girls or women do not show solidarity. The same person you’re going to laugh with now is going to get you in trouble again” (Justine, first part, [00:00:33], freely translated) which is why she had mainly male friends until now. Nevertheless, she has got three “sisters” (ibid.), very close friends, with whom she forms a sort of chosen family today. In general, Justine started

<sup>76</sup> “I can’t teach them anything else, (...), because that’s the environment we’re in. If I teach them something else and they go outside and (...) discover other realities, it will be a shock for them. And they will also be in contradiction with the society in which they evolve, **I have the obligation to teach them what is established as a norm, but also (...) to put a little flexibility in it** to draw their attention to the fact that they can still allow the other person to give their point of view, allow the other person if you decide in some cases, it’s not always him the person who knows who always has to decide. (...). But the basic information is that [...] the man [...] is still the head of the family.” (freely translated)

<sup>77</sup> e.g. through chapter 3, article 14 which allows the husband to decide where the couple is going to live in case of prior disagreement among the partners (Benin Republic 2004).

to feel better when she learned to say no to some people and decided to be only with people that make her feel comfortable. "You have to [...] express yourself and that's how people will respect you" (ibid., freely translated).

Furthermore, Justine stated that women in Benin accepted too much oppression which is why she is not surprised regarding the current situation of significant gender inequality in Benin. According to her, it is perceived as totally normal when a man cheats on his woman in Benin, but a woman doing so will be judged heavily by society (ibid.).

As already mentioned above, Celine details that she was raised "*comme un garçon*" (like a boy, (ibid., [00:07:52])), which she perceives retrospectively as partly negative. Having relationships was sort of taboo while she was a teenager and even until two years ago. The focus lay on her duties to

*"réussir dans les études, tu dois planifier ta vie, organiser ta vie, les enfants c'est pas maintenant. (...) [C]e qui fait que très tardivement j'ai pris conscience de ce que je suis une femme, un homme doit me faire la cour [...], je dois ah faire des choses pour séduire, pour plaire à (?), tout m'est tombée dessus" (ibid.). "Je n'étais non plus très bien préparé à comment me rendre plus féminine, belle. J'ai beaucoup plus appris à partir de mes amis, de mes copines et tout qu'en famille"*<sup>78</sup> (ibid., [00:12:46]).

She could not really approach her parents to get some advice when she needed it (ibid., [00:16:06]).

With regard to expressions and fluidity of the interviewees' gender socialisation, the following two sections describe and compare relationship and professional level.

### Relationship level

At relationship level Justine underlines that she contemplates the submission to her future husband as her duty as a wife but this submission should not be misunderstood as disrespect. She further states that especially women requested this submission.

*"[U]ne femme qui fait comme un homme, même les femmes te disent non, tu dois te soumettre à ton mari. Oui on sait qu'on doit se soumettre mais on n'a pas dit d'être ton tapis quoi. Je suis d'accord [pour] la soumission (...). La soumission n'est pas synonyme de manque de respect. Se soumettre à son mari, pour moi c'est quand même mon devoir de femme. Faire à manger, mais pas tout le temps non plus, il peut aussi le faire lui-même, mais pas que ça soit genre obligatoire. (...). Moi, je suis en tout cas, c'est pas que je suis féministe, mais je suis contre l'injustice. (...) Même si tu opprimes un homme, je vais te dire non, donc c'est par une question de respect"*<sup>79</sup> (emphasis added, Justine [00:00:33]).

---

<sup>78</sup> "succeed in school, you need to plan your life, organize your life, kids, this isn't the time. (...) [T]he reason why I became aware very late in life that I am a woman, a man has to court me [...], I have to do things to seduce, to please [...], everything fell on me. I wasn't very well prepared either to make myself more feminine, more beautiful. I learned a lot more from my friends, my girlfriends and everything else than I did with my family." (freely translated)

<sup>79</sup> "a woman who acts like a man, even women tell you no, you have to submit to your husband. Yes, we know you have to submit, but we didn't say to be your rug. I agree [with] submission (...). Submission is not synonymous with disrespect. To submit to one's husband is still my duty as a woman. To make food, but not all the time either, he can also do it

On a general basis, Justine already had many relationships, some of them were serious. However, since she had experienced several profound disappointments, she is currently not looking for a partner anymore. On the contrary, Chloé stressed that she would just leave if she no longer felt comfortable with her husband. Some of her female friends, however, do even need adhere to their husband's idea of adequate dressing for a married woman. They are for example not allowed to go out in a dress with a v-neck. Trousers in particular were perceived as inadequate for women in public. "There's too much of that. (...). The men here don't like their wives in pants. They feel it is (...) frowned upon (...). You will notice that women of a certain age or level don't wear trousers" (Chloé [00:09:00], freely translated). However, Chloé emphasized that she never thought that clothes would make the people.

In spite of being happy not to have any inferior complexes, Celine underlines that she has a "a little problem of submission" (ibid., [00:19:18], freely translated) – a seemingly contradictory perspective. This was due to the fact that she did not have a bigger brother or cousin who gave her orders as she describes it. What she also perceives as a problem is her tendency to take the lead.

*"[L]es hommes ne comprennent pas et ne supportent pas toujours parce qu'ils estiment qu'on doit être soumise et qu'on doit leur laisser prendre leur responsabilité et tout qu'on doit s'occuper de la femme, ce que moi je n'arrive pas forcément à faire ou à laisser faire.<sup>80</sup>" (Celine [00:19:18])*

Celine says that she often feels that men do exploit her leading tendency, she does everything but does not manage to express criticism either. On the other hand, she details that her leading tendency often makes her oversee the man's potential: "It's a big difficulty for me, a big difficulty" (ibid. [00:23:12], freely translated). Hence, she thinks she is the problem whereas the problem lies much more in the fact that she does not comply with normative gender constructions.

Lucie's perception of gender 'norms' and predefined gender roles started to change at university, where she got to know her current husband who grew up with three elder sisters. Through her husband she became more extroverted and opened up. In his family, daughters and sons were charged with the same tasks which made her realize that she

---

himself, but not that it's obligatory. (...). I'm, **not that I'm a feminist**, but I'm against injustice. (...) Even if you oppress a man, I'm going to say no, so it's a question of respect." (freely translated)

<sup>80</sup> "Men don't understand and don't always put up with it because they feel that you have to be submissive and let them take responsibility and everything, that they have to take care of the woman, which I don't necessarily manage to do or let them do." (freely translated)

wants to give the same education to her children, whether son or daughter (Lucie, first part [00:05:35]). She and her husband were very close friends for a couple of years and Lucie underlined the huge support at both an emotional and practical level she had received from him since the beginning. It was not money she was looking for, but somebody who could listen and be there. When they moved in together, they decided to rent an apartment on their own in order to be independent from their families. For the success of a Beninese marriage it would furthermore be very important for the husband to know how to protect his wife from too much interference from his parents. She says she is lucky because her husband does this very well. It is very common in Benin that the husband's parents intervene in their son's marriage which often leads to far-reaching problems in the relationship. In order to prevent this, it is indispensable that the husband knows not to give to many details in a respectful manner when questions are asked. On the other hand, the couple needs to be clear about what they want in life:

*“C'est même la base de la réussite du foyer dans notre pays au Bénin. **Parce que la majorité de ce qui se passe ou les gens ne s'entendent pas dans leur foyer, (...), ce sont les beaux parents qui viennent de se mettre dedans.** Donc il est vraiment nécessaire que, le couple s'entend vraiment, qu'ils savent ce qu'ils veulent et que ils ne laissent pas les parents venir les influencer, **que ils respectent les parents et qu'ils reconnaissent la place des parents mais que ils sachent vraiment les barrières à poser, c'est très important, sinon rapidement le foyer là va se déstabiliser**”<sup>81</sup>.* (emphasis added; ibid., first part, [00:24:30])

Moreover, Lucie underlines her husband's support with regard to the children at home and at work. He takes care of the children at night as much as she does, and they are a good team in this respect. When she has an upcoming business-trip, he tries to make it possible to accompany her in order to take care of the baby so that Lucie can totally focus on the content of her mission.

The biggest challenge in Lucie's relationship with her husband was the acceptance of him as the head of family and consequently to accept him taking important family decisions in the last instance alone. Lucie described how she needs to approach him in order to convince him of her opinion. It is very strategic in order to avoid the husband's “no” which means a “no”.

*“[S]ur le cou dans une discussion il peut te dire non, je ne veux pas, il est énervé, (...), point. Et la discussion est terminée comme ça. (...). Tu n'es pas d'accord, mais tu ne dis rien et tu le laisses (...).*

---

<sup>81</sup> “It is even the basis of the success of a marriage in our country in Benin. **Because the majority of what happens where people don't get along in their homes, (...) it's the parents in law who get into it.** So it is really necessary that the couple really gets along, that they know what they want and that they don't allow the parents to influence them, **that they respect the parents and that they recognize the place of the parents but that they really know the barriers to put, it is very important, otherwise the relationship will quickly be destabilized.**” (freely translated)



*Moi, je ne peux pas dire non, parce que si moi je dis ça, on va dire mais c'est toi la femme, non? C'est comme ça, qu'on parle à son mari ? (...). Il peut agir comme ça, tout simplement parce qu'on dit que c'est lui qui est le chef de la famille et que c'est lui qui a le dernier mot. Donc (...), il peut agir avec sa rigueur et toi tu ne dis rien, mais le jour toi tu vas réagir comme ça, on va dire que tu as mal parlé à ton mari. (...) [O]n parle avec son mari avec la douceur. (...). Même si tu es énervée là, il faut trouver les mots nécessaires pour lui dire ça doucement<sup>82</sup>.” (emphasis added; ibid., second part, [00 :01 :04]).*

Here again, when you do not agree with your husband's opinion you remain silent, she says. One day when he is in good mood, she would seize the opportunity and tell him what she did not appreciate last time. This time he would thus understand more easily. By contrast, when a woman gets angry as a reaction to her husband's decision and she shows that openly, according to Lucie “you're going to destroy everything, but the children are here” (ibid.). Hence, she perceives it as very important to control her emotions in such situations of conflict, contrary to the man who can express them unfiltered.

*“[C]’est un peu difficile à accepter, mais à un moment donné, on est obligé d’accepter, parce qu’il faut que quelqu’un finalement tranche et la loi reconnait que c’est l’homme. (...) C’est ça parce que telle que la société est conçue, on n’a pas de choix. Si on essaie de dépasser ça et d’affirmer en tant que femme notre tour, on est mal vu. On va te traiter de femme qui n’a pas reçu une bonne éducation. Elle est mal élevée, celle là ne peut pas rester chez un mari. (...). Elle peut même influencer d’autres femmes. (...). [Ou bien] celle là n’a pas de mari, c’est pour ça qu’elle fait ça<sup>83</sup>” (emphasis added; ibid., second part [00:07:21]).*

Lucie also confirmed that it took her a while to accept that while already being married and that she was very angry at a given point of time which lead to ongoing disputes at home. Subsequently, she had been talking to colleagues and friends who told her that it was the same in their relationship and that it was like that in Benin. Finally, she decided to accept the situation both for the well-being of her children and because she thinks that “the couples in which both are Beninese, in which it works, these are the couples in which the woman makes the effort to pass certain decisions and make concessions” (ibid., second part [00:14:19], freely translated).

Despite the fact that a dominant idea of the man being the head of the family seems to exist in Benin, Sylvie specified that she needs to be able to contradict her partner when he

<sup>82</sup> “In a discussion he can say no, I don't want to, he is angry, (...) , full stop. And the discussion is over like that. (...). You don't agree, but you say nothing and you let him (...). I can't say no, because if I say that, they'll say, but you're the woman, right? That's how you talk to your husband? (...). **He can act like that, simply because we say he's the head of the family and that he has the last word. So (...), he can act with his rigor and you say nothing, but the day you react like that, they will say that you spoke badly to your husband. [...] One talks to one's husband with softness.(...).** Even if you're angry now, you have to find the right words to say it softly.” (freely translated)

<sup>83</sup> “It's a bit difficult to accept, but at some point you have to accept it, because someone has to make a final decision and the law recognizes that it's the man. (...) That's because the way the society is conceived, we have no choice. **If we try to go beyond that and assert our turn as women, we are frowned upon. They'll call you a woman who hasn't received a good education. She's ill-bred, this one can't stay with a husband. (...). She can even influence other women. (...).[Or] that one doesn't have a husband, that's why she does this.**” (freely translated)

is wrong (Sylvie [00:19:41]). Being currently in a relationship, she stated with regard to her previous relationships that most of the time man and woman were equal, whereas some of them expected her to have automatically full respect towards them.

*“Un respect mutuel oui, mais pas absolu, si t'es en tort, je dois être capable de te dire, tu as tort. Mais pas voilà, t'as tort, je me tais, j'encaisse, non (...). (...) à un moment, il y avait un avec qui j'étais qui m'a carrément dit, toi [...] si on se pose, tu bosseras pas pour quelqu'un. Moi, c'est pas mon intention moi même, mais je vois pas pourquoi un homme m'interdirait de travailler<sup>84</sup>.”* (emphasis added; ibid.)

In general, Chloé underlined that many women in Benin who are not comfortable within their marriage anymore, stay with their men because they want to stay “Madame” (Mrs., Chloé [00:09:48]). By contrast, she herself stated that she does not need the title, so if she no longer felt at ease, she would just go. At the same time, she specified that there are tasks that simply do not concern men.

*“Je pense que dans le monde entier, une femme active elle doit gérer et son travail, et ses enfants et son ménage de toutes les façons. (...). [M]ais il y a des tâches qui ne concernent pas les hommes. La cuisine et l'éducation des enfants, ça concerne pas les hommes au Bénin. (...). Les mamans doivent [...] faire - on doit faire le ménage, on doit gérer le foyer, on doit gérer la maison, on doit gérer les enfants et en plus on doit travailler oui. Oui même moi (...) je sens ça parce que (?), je gère les devoirs des enfants, c'est pas trop ça, mais je pense qu'en générale, il y a des tâches, que les femmes arrivent à faire plus facilement que les hommes [hmh, comme quoi?]. La cuisine. (...). mais la femme, fin, c'est inné (?) déjà pour que la femme cuisine et puis gérer un ménage c'est à dire faire les courses de la maison, la gestion du quotidien, le ménage, (...), même si on a du personnel pour faire le ménage il faut bien que la femme achète des produits. Bon ça, mon mari n'a jamais fait ça par contre. (...). [O]ui, ça c'est moi qui fais ça, aller faire les courses, aller au marché, oui ça c'est moi. [Mais là vous êtes d'accord sur ce plan?]. Oui, bien sur<sup>85</sup>.”* (emphasis added; Chloé [00:13:25])

Hence, Chloé has a perception of feminine and masculine tasks within a couple or a marriage. When I asked her what her husband was accomplishing, she answered that he would pay bills she does not pay, e.g. water, electricity. In her eyes sharing the responsibilities equally in a couple would emasculate the man. “In fact, if a woman does everything halfway with her husband, he's no longer a man in quotes. One needs to feel

<sup>84</sup> “Mutual respect yes, but not absolute, if you're wrong, I must be able to tell you, you're wrong. (...) at one point, there was someone I was with who told me, you [...] if we settle down, you won't work for anyone. It's not my intention myself, but I don't see why a man would forbid me to work.” (freely translated)

<sup>85</sup> “I think all over the world an active woman has to manage both her work and her children and her household. (...). [...] But there are tasks that don't concern men. Cooking and bringing up children are not men's business in Benin. (...). Moms have to [...] do [...] - we have to clean, we have to manage the household, we have to manage the house, we have to manage the children and we have to work, yes. Yes, even I experience that because [...], I manage the children's homework, that's not too much, but I think that in general, there are tasks that women manage to do more easily than men [hmh, like what?]. The kitchen. (...). but women are innate (...) already so that women can cook and then manage a household, that is to say, do the house shopping, the daily management, the cleaning, because even if we have staff to do the cleaning, the woman has to buy products. Well, my husband never did that, on the other hand. (...). Yes, that's me doing it, going shopping, going to the market, yes that's me. [But now you agree on that plan?]. Yes, of course I do.” (freely translated)

that manly side, that masculine side. That's how I see it, because if a woman does everything, she won't respect her husband anymore" (ibid. [00:15:08], freely translated).

### Professional level

And finally, another subcategory, namely "professional level" allowed to assign specific transcription parts to expressions of gender socialisation along the professional career of the interviewees.

Catherine in particular can look back on an extraordinary *herstory*, being the first woman within a state-owned enterprise, leading to a fully fledged career that enabled her to become CEO afterwards. "I think the reason I'm here today is that at some point I had the possibility to make a contribution to the education of my life" (Catherine, [00:05:33], freely translated). Catherine expresses here clearly that at a certain point her further pathway depended strongly on her engagement, on her power to act towards what she wanted to achieve. Thus, she has the belief and the confidence that she was at the core of forming who she is today. Furthermore, this self-confidence allowed her to work in a very male dominated working environment as an engineer for 30 years.

*"C'est vrai que le fait d'avoir pris un métier d'homme et le fait d'avoir travaillé, de pouvoir s'affirmer au sein des hommes, ça a fait que, ça a réveillé en moi un instinct tel que, je me dis, la vie, ça veut dire que, la vie c'est une lutte. Si tu veux gagner, il faut lutter. Il faut, il faut se battre. Donc chaque fois je pense, je veux entreprendre quelque chose, j'attends toujours qu'au bout du jour que ça soit la victoire. Je me bats, je ne veux pas lutter pour ne pas gagner, je veux lutter pour être sûre de gagner, donc j'y mets tous les moyens. Et je crois que, c'est vrai que, le fait d'avoir quand même, d'être restée dans un milieu d'homme, ça m'a beaucoup édifié et ça m'a donné vraiment la joie de vivre, la joie de me battre, la joie de m'ouvrir vraiment au monde entier quand même<sup>86</sup>" (Catherine, [00:05:33]).*

She was the first female engineer entering the enterprise in the eighties despite not having been accepted by the CEO at the very beginning. In fact, he did not perceive women as capable for this job:

*"[E]n ce moment vous savez c'était le régime marxiste donc dès que vous rentrez en tant que cadre vous vous mettez à la disposition d'une structure ou d'une société, donc toute suite j'avais été mise à la disposition de [cette entreprise]. Mais au départ le directeur général qui était là, ne voulait pas d'une femme, parce qu'il dit bah une femme dans ce milieu à ce poste, qu'est-ce qu'elle peut faire. Il ne croyait pas du tout en ma capacité de pouvoir vraiment faire le travail.(...). J'ai passé encore six mois à la maison et un jour, (...), le ministre a voulu quand même chercher à (?). Donc c'est là où j'ai essayé d'expliquer que*

---

<sup>86</sup> "It's true that the fact of having taken up a man's profession and the fact of having worked, of being able to assert oneself among men, has awakened in me a certain instinct, I tell myself, life is a struggle. If you want to win, you have to fight. You have to, you have to fight. So every time I think that I want to do something, I always expect it to be victory at the end of the day. I'm fighting, I don't want to fight without winning, I want to fight to make sure I win, so I'm doing everything I can. And I think it's true that the fact of having stayed in a male environment has edified me a lot and has given me a real joy of life, the joy of fighting, the joy of opening myself up to the whole world." (freely translated)

*le directeur général ne voulait pas. (...). Donc, il avait mis le directeur général en demeure de me prendre et je commence à travailler<sup>87</sup>.“ (emphasis added, ibid.)*

Once she started to take over the job, she found herself tested on many levels. She was supposed to start as an intern and in the end this internship lasted one and a half years. Moreover, this internship required a lot of flexibility as she had to constantly travel through the country. Hence, she was obliged to leave her six months old daughter with her mother. One day she was unexpectedly appointed head of department by the managing director — from an intern to the first female head of department. She got this promotion because of her demonstrated skills, but the pressure was high since the managing director told her right away that if she fails, she will close the doors for all the women that will want to follow:

*“Lui partout où je suis passée, lui il m’a suivi et que mon comportement tel que ça s’est passé dans les, tous les départements, c’est ça qui a fait que, il a pensé que j’étais capable de prendre cette responsabilité là. Et lui il a dit, je prends le risque de te nommer directrice départementale, mais je vais te dire si jamais tu échoues, c’est que tu fermes la voie à toutes les femmes qui vont rentrer dans la maison. [...] [D]onc il me dit ça tout de suite, je veux vous voir faire et je saurai s’il faut faire confiance à d’autres femmes ou pas<sup>88</sup>.“ (emphasis added, ibid.)*

From that moment on she said, she was forced to “to really put myself [...] in this man's role and do the work of fighting (...), the taste for work, (...) it's this managing director who gave it to me “ (ibid., freely translated). Therefore, she remains grateful towards her former superior who allowed her to be prepared to cope with numerous difficulties which otherwise could have been obstacles along her personal development.

Lucie's perspective here goes in a same direction when she states that “I've given more of myself to my work because I'm a woman, because I want to prove to my environment that I'm capable” (ibid., fourth part, [00:02:24], freely translated). She wants that those comments regarding successful women and the prejudices that they have progressed only with the help another man, fade away. “I don't want anyone to say that about me, so everywhere I go, I tell myself that I have to impose myself through my work

---

<sup>87</sup> “At the moment, you know, it was the Marxist regime, so as soon as you come in as an executive you put yourself at the disposal of a structure or a company, so I was immediately put at the disposal of [this company]. **But in the beginning the managing director who was there didn't want a woman, because he said, well, a woman in this environment in this position, what can she do? He didn't believe at all in my ability to really do the job [...].** I spent another six months at home and one day, (...), the minister wanted to find out what was going on, why the lady wasn't taking over. So that's where I tried to explain that the director general didn't want to. (...). So, he had put the managing director on notice to take me on and I started to work.” (freely translated)

<sup>88</sup> “Wherever I went, he followed me and that my behaviour in all the departments, that's what made him think that I was capable of taking this responsibility. **And he said, I'll take the risk of appointing you head of department, but I'll tell you this, if you ever fail, you'll be closing the door to all the women who will come into the house. [...]** So he tells me that right away, I want to see doing it and I'll know whether to trust other women or not.” (freely translated)

and (...), and they don't have a choice, they have to respect me because I'm doing my job" (ibid., freely translated).

The two female entrepreneurs, Chloé and Sylvie, both shared their difficulties of being the leader of men. When Chloé came back to Benin 23 years ago and wanted to give an order to her male employees, it was not easily accepted among some of them. "But I tell them, you're in the office here, so the orders you give at home are at home. When you get here, you're under my orders" (Chloé [00:05:33], freely translated).

Sylvie pointed out that she was lucky having parents that supported her much and did not set her any limits in life (Sylvie [00:13:16]). Even today they work together within her two companies. She further underlines that her parents' support is crucial because being a woman and young, especially craftsmen often do not take her seriously. This is when, as she said, "[t]here's got to be someone who can make some noise at times and everything, so my dad plays that part very well" (ibid., freely translated). According to her experiences, when she told the craftsmen what to do, they would say "you're too young to talk to me like that" (ibid., freely translated). She interprets this as their perception based on normative gender roles and thus seeing in her primarily a woman and moreover a young woman, who should not tell them what to do. In general, she says to "prefer to work with women because it's much easier and they are more understanding (...). They understand better the pain of being a woman" (ibid., [00:16:05], freely translated). In this respect she shared that in Benin not only men, but also some women do think that women are inferior (ibid., [00:17:30]). When age is added to gender it becomes even more complicated. "They're going to tell you, but after all I'm your daddy or I'm the man, it's shocking, but it's a speech that's often, very often made" (ibid.). Sylvie sometimes reacts by answering that this is not a mentality one should have, especially when she respects them highly. "Sure, he's a man, he may be older, but still, I have something to contribute. If it's not useful, he wouldn't have come to me anyway, so they should at least (...) listen" (ibid., [00:18:28], freely translated).

Sexual harassment is equally an issue in the workplace, as Sylvie testified. On the one hand, this can happen when she is for example participating at rather technical trade fairs and thus most of the exhibitors are men. "When you're in that environment (...). You're with people who hit on you and people who think you don't belong there or who think (...) that

they're superior to you.” (ibid., [00:22:16], freely translated). On the other hand, it can happen while being in contact with her clients:

*“Quand tu as un client [...] qui veut commander un truc, mais quand il te voit, son premier truc c'est de te draguer (...). Si tu refuses tu perds le client. Il y a vraiment beaucoup de trucs comme ça. Mais maintenant avec les réseaux sociaux, [...] on va dire que c'est un peu plus facile parce que tu n'es plus tenue forcément d'entrer en contact directement avec les clients. Et donc toutes les négociations peuvent être faites et là tu livres. Même parfois tu fais même des négociations et des livraisons sans avoir vu le client. Donc, là comme ça, ça passe encore. Oui, là ça passe, sinon le reste c'est vraiment choquant<sup>89</sup>.”* (ibid., [00:22:16])

Justine, too, is confronted to sexual harassment in the workplace, additionally to precarious working conditions. She is employed by French employers that refuse to give her a formal contract up to now and expect her to work up to 15 hours a day. “I'm in it all the time and I don't live anymore. (...). They'll suck me to the bone. I give my whole body” (Justine, second part [00:00:02], freely translated). Finally, Justine names a lack of appreciation from her employers and several incidents of sexual harassment since when things got even worse because she rejected their advances.

Regarding the manifestation of gender socialisation at work, Celine shares challenging experiences with both men and women. According to her, men think that they do naturally know what is to do and need to say what is to do.

*“Ils pensent que eux ils ont eu les meilleures expériences les plus significatives. Donc il faut s'imposer et encore s'imposer avec tact pour ne pas blesser leur ego parce que malheureusement la plupart des postes de lead sont occupés par des hommes. Donc tu es obligé de manager leur ego si tu veux pouvoir vivre en toute inquiétude<sup>90</sup>.”* (Celine [00:26:09])

With regard to women she observes a certain competition among them where every woman tries to keep her piece of power. Additionally, Celine sometimes feels debased because of her young age. People want to “play coach. (...). There is a big risk to find yourself belittled beyond what you're really worth” (ibid., freely translated).

I want to conclude this section with Lucie's vision with regard to gender equality at professional level in Benin. Her vision is that

*“aussi bien les hommes que les femmes peuvent accéder à toutes les instances de prise de décision au même niveau à titre égalitaire, sans distinction, sans discrimination. (...) [O]n ne va pas regarder la femme avec un regard moqueur, un regard discriminatoire parce qu'elle est femme, parce qu'elle*

---

<sup>89</sup> “When you have a customer [...] who wants to order something, but when he sees you, his first thing is to hit on you (...). If you refuse, you lose the customer. There are a lot of things like that (J starts laughing). But now with social networks, [...] one can say it's a bit easier because you don't have to get in direct contact with customers. And so all the negotiations can be done and then you deliver. Even sometimes you even do negotiations and deliveries without having seen the client. So, like that it's working easily. Yes, there it's okay, otherwise the rest is really shocking.” (freely translated)

<sup>90</sup> “They think they had the best and most meaningful experiences. So you have to impose yourself and impose yourself again with tact so as not to hurt their ego because unfortunately most of the leadership positions are held by men. So you are obliged to manage their ego if you want to be able to live without any worries.” (freely translated)

*n'a pas le droit de parler mais qu'on lui accorde sa place. Ce serait la situation dans laquelle les stéréotypes sur les rôles des hommes et des femmes sont réduits **et où une femme peut facilement émerger sans qu'on ne lui attribue des images négatives du genre c'est parce qu'elle n'a pas de mari, du genre c'est parce qu'il y a tel homme qui l'a aidé qu'elle est là, mais que les choses deviennent vraiment naturelles et qu'on accepte vraiment la femme dans le cercle de développement de la nation***<sup>91</sup> (emphasis added, *ibid.*, fourth part [00:14:35]).

## Reconciliation of professional and private life

How can the reconciliation of both, professional and private life succeed? According to Lucie, it is important that a woman receives the support of her environment and especially of her partner, but the professional success of a woman depends first of all on her competencies and her will. She will ask for support later on and thus also needs to have a basic leadership competency (*ibid.*, second part [00:35:12]). If a woman wants to be successful in both, work and the private realm, she has to be psychologically strong, calm and decided. Additionally, whenever your husband's family disagrees with you, the right strategy to choose in Benin would be remaining silent. In Benin, Lucie clarified, they say "it's not the husband you married, it's his entire family" (Lucie, second part [00:01:04], freely translated). Accordingly, you need to respect your husband's family otherwise you will not stay married, you will not be in peace.

*"[F]aut pas chercher à les affronter, mais il faut te calmer, te taire et les laisser parler et quand ils vont partir maintenant, c'est avec ton mari tu va discuter [parce que c'est trop risqué d'en parler directement aux beaux parents ?] Oui, ils vont mal prendre ça et ils vont chercher à vous nuire, parce qu'ils vont dire que non, celle-là elle est trop impolie. Moi avec mon âge et la femme de mon fils là, va dire quoi? Et quand ça commence comme ça, ça fini très mal."*<sup>92</sup> (*ibid.*)

Once they are gone, she explained, you can talk to your husband and list the points you do not agree with. You give your point of view and you are going to find a common ground. If your husband does not agree with you, you will try to talk to him another day.

Lucie also told me about her process regarding the inner reconciliation of seemingly contradictory positions: being a female leader who is asked to take wide-reaching decisions at work on a daily basis on the one hand and a wife who has to accept that the final

---

<sup>91</sup> "Both men and women have equal access to all decision-making bodies at the same level, without distinction, without discrimination...] [O]ne will not look at a woman with a mocking look, a discriminatory look because she is a woman, because she has no right to speak but is given her place. This would be the situation in which stereotypes about the roles of men and women are reduced and **a woman can easily emerge without being attributed negative gender images because she does not have a husband, because there is a man who has helped her that she is there, but that things become really natural and that women are really accepted in the circle of development of the nation.**" (freely translated)

<sup>92</sup> "Don't try to face them, but you have to calm down, keep quiet and let them talk and when they leave now, you'll talk to your husband [because it's too risky to talk directly to the parents in law]. Yes, they'll take it badly and they'll try to harm you, because they'll say no, this one is too rude. Me at my age and my son's wife is going to say what? And when it starts like that, it ends very badly." (freely translated)

decisions shall be taken by her husband in terms of family issues on the other. At the beginning it was shocking and frustrating, she confirmed. Due to the many arguments at home, she started to accept the situation little by little and talked to many people, which finally helped her to accept the fact that her husband would have the last word (ibid., second part [00:21:49]).

Catherine underlines the importance of not putting work over family as well as having the husband's support and understanding – especially with regard to childcare:

*"Il faut d'abord respecter son ménage (...). Il faut pas négliger ça. Si vraiment vous mettez tout le poids du côté de votre travail, vous risquer de foutre en l'air votre famille et ça, la famille c'est l'éducation des enfants, surtout ça. (...). De toute façon nous, on s'arrangeait toujours pour que quelqu'un soit à cote des enfants. Même si lui il devait partir moi je suis là. Si moi je pars, lui, il est là. Et c'est très important. Et surtout que lui et moi, on (...) accordait plus ou moins nos voies. C'est à dire que il faut pas dire autre chose à tel enfant et toi tu dis encore autre chose<sup>93</sup>." (ibid., part three [00:00:08])*

She said she is lucky to have such an encouraging husband:

*"Moi j'ai peut-être eu cette chance, d'avoir un ménage, d'avoir un mari qui (...) a su apporter sa contribution avec des conseils et tout ça et puis un mari qui me laissait un peu faire, **c'est à dire que pourvu qu'au retour tu sois consciente que tu es une femme de ménage. Vous voyez, donc il faut pouvoir respecter son ménage en même temps que tu es en train de faire ce travail**<sup>94</sup>." (ibid., part two [00:00:11])*

Finally, Catherine added that her husband had been waiting for her every evening. "I can't ask all the husbands to do this (...). But it also depends on your behaviour towards your husband. It's not because of having a certain responsibility (...) that you have to come home and show off all that. In this case, it's going to be very, very difficult<sup>95</sup>" (ibid., part two [00:03:28], freely ).

#### 4.5. Reflections on my role as a researcher

"All scholars who study, Africa' should ask [sic.] themselves: How does one listen? What does one listen to? When does one listen? These are all questions to provoke and encourage scholars to develop good listening skills. The related question on how to interpret relates to how much of the culture, language, preconceived notions, socialization of the interpreter interferes with the listening, understanding and interpreting project." (Okome 1999, 19)

---

<sup>93</sup> "First of all, you have to respect your household (...). We must not neglect that. If you really put all the weight on the side of your work, you risk screwing up your family and that, family is the education of children, especially that. (...). Anyway, we always made sure that someone was next to the children. Even if he had to leave, I'm here. If I leave, he's there. And that's very important. And especially that he and I, we (...) more or less agreed on our ways. That is to say one shouldn't say something to this or that child and you say something else again." (freely translated)

<sup>94</sup> "I may have been lucky enough to have a household, to have a husband who (...) knew how to contribute with advice and all that, and a husband who gave me some freedom, that is to say, as long as you are aware that you are a married woman and thus a household manager when you return home. You see, so you have to be able to respect your household at the same time as you're doing this job." (freely translated)

<sup>95</sup> "I can't ask all the husbands to do this (...). But it also depends on your behaviour towards your husband. It's not because of having a certain responsibility (...) that you have to come home and show off all that. In this case, it's going to be very, very difficult." (freely translated)



Throughout a field study the researcher is no scientific neuter. The subjective perception and ways of listening as well as the development of interpersonal relationships within the field, influences the research findings. The collection of data is not only preceded by a necessary selection of theoretical considerations and what is to be observed by the researcher. Also while compiling these in a scientific paper another selection follows.

The fact that I knew quite well some of the interview partners, either through work or private contacts, made it very difficult to tackle some sensitive issues or to tackle them with all interviewees in an equal way. Questions regarding sexual harassment or gender based violence, both at work or at home need to be deepened in relation to privileged Beninese women. Another research interest could be the question with regard to the financial situation of Beninese couples: who contributes how much? How is it shared? Who pays what? Where and how do they save money? If the woman contributes more, what impact does this create at relationship level? Do these women have difficulties in buying land?

Furthermore, since I know the Beninese context quite well, I had to make sure to combine both, deduction and induction in a balanced way in order not to focus too much on my pre-considerations and -assumptions.

Aiming at both, reproducing neither victimization nor objectification of the interviewed women as well as letting them tell their own *herstories* in order to put them in the first place of this study, I decided to build this study on mainly narrative interviews. By this means, being conscient of the fact that I'm even more privileged as a white European woman, I was hoping to minimize possible harmful power relations that could arise throughout this field study or during the interviews. As a matter of course, while analysing the data the afore mentioned balance between deduction and induction was again crucial.

Finally, the volume of the present work does not allow a fully-fledged discussion of the relevant scientific debate nor a further detailed analysis ("Feinanalyse"; Rosenthal et al. 2000) of how the interviewees expressed themselves, analysing stylistic means, accentuations or reactions. However, this step of analysis would probably lead to further important findings.

## 5. Interpretation and research findings

### 5.1. Gender inequality and strategies to tackle them

Chapter 2.4. [The legal framework – women's rights in Benin](#) has shown the promising legal framework regarding gender equality and the promotion of women's rights in Benin. By contrast, the interviews with a sample of quite privileged Beninese women<sup>96</sup> in leadership positions revealed that they see themselves confronted with lived gender inequality at multiple levels. Simultaneously, each of them broadens her framework of action to tackle them whenever possible. Accordingly, the interviewed women have shown strong personal competencies with regard to self-confidence, persistence and professionalism. While acting straight towards gender equality at work, at private level some seem to be more willing to accept a continuity of gender inequality, even though existing law replaced the legal texts these inequalities are based on.

#### Early childhood and “I was lucky”

A strong basis of having developed the ability to tackle gender inequality at individual and also societal level (through their work) lies in the interviewees' childhood:

Many interviewees shared their gratitude towards their parent's financial and emotional support. Especially Catherine, the oldest interview partner underlined that her parents have always encouraged her, also in doing sports (Catherine, first part, [00:00:27]). Furthermore, Lucie perceives herself as “lucky” (Lucie, first part [00:20:39]; freely translated) having had the opportunity to study and parents who were even willing to take loans in order to finance their daughter's school attendance (ibid.). Finally, especially Sylvie's parents seem to have combined encouragement and far-reaching trust towards both their daughters and sons in an equal manner. Also did she grow up with parents who always took decisions together, there was no husband as the head of family, rather consensual decision-making which also implied the children, once they had a certain age. Sylvie's courage and creativity with regard to her self-employment might have grown easily in these conditions. Trust and encouragement at young age as well as the liberty to study with the parent's financial support allowed these interview partners to develop a certain confidence in their capacities and hence, to deal with significant challenges.

---

<sup>96</sup> some could be assigned to middle class, others to upper class, whereas I perceive class as very interconnected in Benin (cf. Mama 2017).

However, some of them experienced gender inequality at home, too. Lucie and Justine reported on challenges during their childhood, whereas in the case of Lucie this comprised mainly the rather strict education she had received in comparison to her brothers.<sup>97</sup> She emphasized several times the rigour she felt she was educated with and described clearly her parents fear of her getting pregnant at young age which would dishonour her but especially her family's name. The parent's strategy of preventing this event was not allowing Lucie to have a phone until high school graduation as well as a certain supervision with regard to her leisure time. Several underlying ideas probably lead her parents to this behaviour. First, a high rate of early pregnancy in Benin. Second, a lack of trust in Lucie's capability to judge and to handle situations in an adequate manner on her own. Third, a strong objectification of women and young girls as objects of desire in Beninese society (cf. Codjo 2019, 105). Finally, the parent's perception of a daughter dishonouring the family when getting pregnant as a teenager whereas the sons could not do so when impregnating other girls, reveals a significant perspective of inequality. According to Honvou, many young girls and women are forced to abandon their children in order not to be rejected by society and their family (ibid. 2016, 350). Justine's experience of physical and psychological violence through her brother after the loss of her father is tremendous and unfortunately no social institutions took charge of her at the time. Moreover, her mother's decision, telling the police to leave when Justine called them after another attack of her brother, shows that her mother could not decide in favour of protecting her daughter but rather her violent son.<sup>98</sup> Again, the wish not to dishonour the own family might have lead her mother to this decision risking the physical and psychological integrity of her daughter.

### **Professional level**

At professional level, Lucie reported on the necessity of working harder as a woman than a man in order to reduce gender specific prejudices regarding professionally successful women. These prejudices comprise for example the idea of a woman being only successful as long as not being married or because a man had helped her to evolve. A mocking or discriminatory perspective on female leaders assuming that being in the lead would not be a woman's task has also been observed by Lucie. Her strategy to overcome or avoid these

---

<sup>97</sup> The fact that the others did not mention any disadvantages as girls at young age does not necessarily mean that they were not facing some. Taking into account that the respect towards one's own parents and/or elderly people is very crucial in Benin, few will easily share negative childhood experiences (cf. Lucie, second part [00:01:04]); Sylvie [00:13:16]).

prejudices is to assert herself through the quality of her work in order to give no choice to society but to respect her in what she is doing (cf. Lucie, fourth part [00:14:35]). Moreover, her statement also reveals the pressure of being married in order to be respected at work. The wish or need of being and remaining “*Madame*” was also emphasized by Chloé ([00:09:48]). Furthermore, Celine shared during an informal conversation that the pressure of getting married and having children for a woman in Benin is actually very high. Once you are married but especially once you have children, colleagues and society will respect you more. Catherine underlined that she recommends having a family when you want to be successful at work as a woman in order to be an example and to be taken seriously (ibid., second part [00:01:13]).

Furthermore, she shared similar experiences when it comes to the need of women’s assertion at work. Stating that “life is something you have to be able to build it yourself” (ibid., first part [00:01:26], freely translated) Catherine stressed that the need to assert herself when surrounded by men, awakened in her a strong competitive spirit and a perception of life as a fight. When she sets herself a goal, she puts all her energy and effort in it in order to achieve it. Having passed 30 years in this context gave her a joy to fight, as she calls it and an openness to the entire world. Having had to assert herself for so long, Catherine was able to develop a tremendous motivation, persistence and self-confidence along her professional career, probably especially due to the help of her continuous sports activities as well as her husband’s full support.

This strong competitive spirit was equally emphasized by Celine. A competitive spirit that is mainly built upon the wish to be able to improve living conditions for her siblings, her parents and herself. This big motivator helped her to receive two scholarships as well as to be in a leading and financially stable position at the age of 28 allowing her already to support her family. The fact that she had not really received a gendered education might have strengthened her self-confidence. She has not internalized ideas of gender hierarchisation since she also claimed not to have any inferior complexes as a woman.

These insights into the listed women’s lives reflect very clearly the level of the “internalization of gender identity” and hence the action framework an individual possesses in order to modify or adapt the received gender socialisation. Depending on the individual’s motivation and will, the women could construct their own gender identity based on their own perception of who they want to be and how they want to behave and

combine it with what they judge as beneficial from what they have learned with regard to gender roles (cf. Codjo 2019, 57).

Especially the exceptional level of motivation and self-confidence among these interviewees as well as a strong internal wish for change regarding for example the normative idea expecting women to be silent or at least not in the lead, pushes them forward and allows them to make maximum use of their action framework. They know that they need to create and be themselves the change they aspire to. Gender equality at private level though, seems more difficult to achieve or aspects of gender inequality easier to accept (cf. private level). At the same time, one has to underline that they all had at least one academic among their parents, which already represents a minority in the Beninese context. Hence, they all had good starting conditions in life.<sup>99</sup>

Another difficulty for some of the interviewed women (Sylvie and Justine)<sup>100</sup> is sexual harassment at work. Sylvie, for example, shared the experience of being especially exposed to sexual harassment in very male dominated environments such as technical trade fairs (ibid., [00:22:16]). Additionally, she stated that this is also a challenge which arises with male clients. In these situations, it is always a sensitive question how to handle the situation in order to, if possible, not to lose the client either. Therefore, the strategy Sylvie applies henceforth in these cases, is the use of mainly digital communication which allows her to manage everything without having met the person. The public debate (May 2020) regarding sexual harassment in the work place in Benin gives an indication of the extent to which women in Benin are constantly exposed to SEAH at professional level (cf. Lo 2020).

### **Private level**

In comparison to the work environment, among some interviewees (Lucie, Justine, Chloé), a tendency towards accepting more gender inequality at private level can be noted.

Especially Lucie indicated having had to reconcile her far-reaching responsibility in decision-making at work with the fact that at home it was her husband who made final decisions (ibid., second part [00:07:21]). She justifies his position as head of the family with Benin's family law (*Code des personnes et de la famille*, Benin Republic 2004). Interestingly, this

---

<sup>99</sup> The increasing academisation which leads to a perceived need of having to have several bachelor and master degrees in order to be competitive enough represents another important object of research. It also adds another level with which women in management positions that often continue to study, need to reconcile the private and the professional life.

<sup>100</sup> the others weren't questioned regarding this subject because I did not perceive it as adequate in the given interview situations.

latest version does not define the husband as head of the family and final decision-maker as the previous law did. The latter consisted of both, le *Droit Coutumier de Dahomey* (customary law of Dahomey, applied for 'traditional' marriages) and the French (Napoleon) civil code ('modern' law, applied for civil marriages) which was valid in Benin since it had become a French colony (Honvou 2016, 85 ; cf. *ibid.* 28-30)<sup>101</sup>. Since they were replaced by le *Code des personnes et de la famille* in 2004, henceforth only civil marriage is accepted by law. The French civil code used to define the husband as head of the household (*ibid.*, 176) and the *Droit coutumier de Dahomey* stipulated that the wife owes obedience and fidelity to her husband (Art.122; Honvou 2016, 28-30) whereas the latter did not owe fidelity to his wife. This could be an explanation for Justine's observation regarding the contrary reaction of society with regard to a man cheating on his woman which is seen as 'normal' or a woman cheating on his man which is perceived as scandalous (Justine, first part [00:00:33]).

The fact that existing law since 2004 was conceived in accordance to Benin's constitution and thus the principle of equality between men and women (*ibid.*, 137)<sup>102</sup>, improved legal capacity of women tremendously (*ibid.*, 182). Especially young wives do make use of it according to Honvou (*ibid.*, 181). Nevertheless, the statements of some interviewees (Justine and Lucie) show very clearly to which extent they were educated by and are confronted to dominant societal expectations still defining the husband as head of family.<sup>103</sup> Actually, it was only after having talked to colleagues and friends that Lucie was willing to accept the situation. Those were underlining that this is how it would work in Benin and that it was the same in their relationships which made her accept the situation. This emphasizes again the dominance of normativity on the one hand and stresses an idea of *whether you accept it as the wife or you go* on the other hand. Finally, Lucie specified that among Beninese couples, only those where the woman is willing to "make the effort to let certain decisions go by and to make concessions"<sup>104</sup> (*ibid.*, [00:14:19]; freely translated) would work. Even though she had been struggling for a long time in order to

---

<sup>101</sup> Legal pluralism was the consequence recognizing both marriages as equally valid whereas different legal texts were applied.

<sup>102</sup> Some violations of the constitution entered into this code though: For example the fact that the husband decides on the family's residency in case of disagreement among the spouses as well as the fact that the family's name is passed in a patrilineal way.

<sup>103</sup> WILDAF/FeDDAF-Bénin called the adoption of this legal text a considerable progress regarding women's rights in Benin. Simultaneously, the challenges in order to achieve acceptance and approval of the broad society remain significant. The NGO reported on the fact that both women and men are among the opponents (WILDAF/FeDDAF-Bénin 2004, 6).

accept her husband being the one making final decisions, she stated that she will also educate her children with the idea of the man being the head of the family. She could not raise them in contradiction to the societal norms they grow up with (ibid., second part [00:20:09]). Another indication pointing towards a gender socialisation based on the idea of the man being the head of the family, is Justine's statement when she says that she agrees with the idea of a wife needing to submit to her husband. She perceives it even as her duty as a woman which comprises for example that she would be primarily responsible for making food (Justine, first part [00:00:33]).

Surprisingly, Celine calls the absence of this idea of submission in her gender socialisation even one of her biggest problems, a "handicap", a "problem of submission" (ibid., [00:19:18]; freely translated) whereas not on professional but rather on private level. Her tendency to be autonomous, to take the lead is not easily accepted or even exploited by most of the men she met. Problematising this instead of perceiving it as an exceptional feature, shows how much even she who had been socialised rather gender neutral, feels the pressure of needing to correspond to normative gender expectations.

Moreover, Chloé, as descendent of a lineage of independent women, defined feminine and masculine tasks in a household. In the beginning, she spoke in a general manner, underlining that there are tasks that do not concern men, whereas switching to use the pronoun "we" while talking about mothers' tasks. This would be, for example, cleaning, managing the household as well as the house and the children and the children's homework. All of this, of course in addition to the work women are doing in order to earn money. Moreover, fulfilling these tasks would be "innate" (Chloé [00:13:25]) for women. In her case - a privileged women having employed other women to do most of these tasks, she always does the shopping, something her husband has never done, while he pays some bills (water and electricity). Simultaneously, she does not want to change that since sharing the tasks equally would emasculate her husband in her eyes; she would not respect him anymore (ibid. [00:15:08]). Hence, sharing the tasks differently at home is nothing she aspires to. It is more important to maintain what she perceives as the masculinity of men.

To sum up, several cited aspects with regard to the masculinity do constitute non-transferable lines: Lucie's husband, "a loving husband" she said, who takes care of the children also when Lucie needs to go on a mission for work, persists on his function as head

of the family and final decision-maker. This is the red line whereas this function as head of the family seems to be closely linked to perceptions of masculinity. His parents as well as his male friends expect him to take on this role (Lucie, second part [00:17:03]). In the case of Chloé it's even her expecting her husband not to accomplish certain tasks at home in order to 'preserve' his masculinity. She would be afraid of not respecting him anymore if they shared the care work in an equal manner.

Interestingly, many women spoke about respect towards others, almost as an obligation. A woman has to respect her husband (even submit to him, Justine [00:00:33]) her household (Catherine, third part [00:00:08]), her family in law (Lucie, second part [00:01:04]) and the elderly (ibid.; Sylvie [00:13:16]) whereas rarely they spoke about mutual respect or somebody else who owes them respect. Only Sylvie pointed out her expectation of mutual respect in a relationship (Sylvie [00:19:41]).

## **5.2. "It's not that I'm a feminist" and female solidarity**

With respect to African feminism, none of the interviewees has used the word "feminism" by identifying with it. Justine even emphasized that she is not a feminist (ibid., [00:00:33]) and, hence, perceived it as important to dissociate herself from this term. At the same time, being against all types of injustice makes her by definition a feminist, since contemporary feminism implies the intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Cooper 2016).

As the scholar Amina Mama stated, African feminism in French speaking African countries took longer to emerge with an young process of creating linkages between feminist activism and research (Mama 2011, 17). There is no possibility to study "gender studies" neither "gender and development" in Benin and no feminist research institute exists yet. The main institutional actors working towards a higher gender equality in Benin are women's and donor organisations (cf. Lucie, fourth part [00:03:53]) as well as the Beninese government. The university as "site of struggle" (Mama 2014) is missing and thus a possibly strong lever for the promotion of gender equality especially through combining it with existing activism (cf. Mc Fadden 2005; Oyèwùmí 2005; Mama 2018).

The existing women's organisations (e.g. RIFONGA, WiDAF-Bénin) are mostly financed by donor organisations what the analysis of their homepages shows, which bears the risk of aligning the content of their work as well as the wording with regard to gender equality, too much with the one used within international cooperation.



In general, in relation to feminism, most of the interviewees except Chloé stated that there is a lack of female solidarity in Benin. Instead of cooperation and mutual support, they mainly reported on competition among women: Sylvie perceives this competition as a pity with regard to the huge potential female cooperation would comprise (Ibid., [00:47:19]). Catherine (third part, [00:10:43]) equally mentioned a problem of competition among women and advocates for the idea of sincere competition instead of hindering each other. A competition, which allows each woman to be rewarded according to her efforts. On a general level, Justine stated that women are not solidary in Benin (ibid. first part [00:00:33]) whereas she created her solidary network on her own being accompanied by three women, she calls “sisters” (ibid.), in her life. Finally, she emphasized that it were often the women requesting other women to submit to their husband and that women themselves accepted too much oppression in Benin. In this regard, Sylvie underlined her observation that not only men in Benin think that women are inferior but also some women (Sylvie, [00:17:30]). Nevertheless, the interviewees also shared that they were observing a change at this level during the last couple of years. Women start to assert themselves all over the country and this is what is needed, according to Catherine. Change cannot be achieved with only the adaption of legal texts without women standing up for their rights and asserting themselves (ibid. part 3 [00:03:24]). In her eyes, especially the exchange among women across different ‘classes’ is crucial since they have so much to learn from each other. Consequently, privileged women in leadership positions should try to inspire less privileged women and get inspired by them in order to follow a joint vision while acting on different levels (ibid.; cf. Mama 2017; Oyèrónké 2011, 2). This encounter must always be at eye level and could equally generate and foster an increasing linkage between African feminist activism and intellectual African feminism.

The named change, equally comprises women now having the right to share their opinion during family reunions (mostly regarding the extended family) whereas some years ago their opinion was only merely considered. Currently, in couple’s discussions or during family reunions, at least their opinion is heard and considered (Sylvie [00:36:27]). Sure, there are also extended families that have probably always done so remembering the fact that especially elderly women had played major advisory role during precolonial times (cf. Sheldon 2017, 31). It could be a huge win to reactivate that societal appreciation for women’s advice and joint decision-making, both at professional and private but also at

political level, as well as underlying that this is also part of Benin's 'tradition'. Sylvie has shown that it was possible for her parents to live that which is why she perceives it as normal and the best way to take decisions together as a couple because each person has something important to contribute which will make the final decision more sustainable and suitable for everybody. In the meantime, many women have developed strategies to influence their husband's decision in an indirect manner without crossing possibly 'borders' he or the family-in-law may have set (numerous informal conversations). This could be for example, controlling one's emotions, not to contradict when he is angry, remaining silent while waiting for the right moment to talk and then maybe talking to the husband at night in order to convince him of one's own opinion. Similarly a woman should react when she disagrees with her family-in-law: remaining silent and talking to the husband afterwards (cf. Lucie, second part, [00:01:04]).

According to Sylvie, the only thing that is missing to most of the Beninese women is self-confidence in order to assert themselves which is probably, among others, the result of the previous family law and its historical context as well as accompanying gender socialisation (ibid.). Sylvie's vision for the women in Benin is that they finally start to take each other by the hand and to support each other (ibid. [00:47:19]). This is also how self-confident women, such as all the interviewees, can share their experiences with women having internalized socialised inferior complexes and the other way round – connecting women of different income and education as well as both activists, women of different professions and hopefully scholars.

### **5.3. The mediatory position from the perspective of the interviewees**

"Cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micropolitics of context subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes" (Mohanty 2003, 501). In conclusion, one can summarize that this combination of "the micropolitics of context subjectivity and struggle" and "macropolitics" is exactly what characterizes the results of this study. Namely, that the interviewed women have not been hindered in their professional career but have, rather, mostly been encouraged and financially supported in order to obtain a university graduation. Simultaneously some are facing the following challenges with regard to their work: sexual harassment, difficulty to be taken seriously by elderly men as young women, the pressure of having to have a family

as well as needing to work harder than men in order to be respected based on work results. While acting towards increasing gender equality at work on a daily basis, gender inequality at home especially at the level of decision-making and sharing the unpaid care-work seems more difficult to change (Lucie), easier to accept or even wanted as such (Chloé). At this point the extended family, especially continuous interceptions by the family-in-law (husband's parents) as well as normative ideas of masculinity might foster the idea of the man as head of the family. Equally, these conditions impede the woman's as well as the couple's possibility to change expected gender roles within the relationship. Additionally, the example of Sylvie's parents has shown that there are certainly Beninese couples transforming gender roles towards increasing gender equality within their relationship in a significant manner.

Nevertheless, it became clear that encouragement at young age as well as a minimum support of the partner or the husband, at times going far beyond this minimum (Catherine, Lucie) is needed when a woman wants to combine both, career and family. Finally, all interview partners have a high degree of self-confidence and therefore a high capacity to assert themselves.

Consequently, named context subjectivity all too often comprises contingent or even contradictory lived realities, which are also reflected within the results of this study: when there is less impetus in order to improve gender equality at home than at work, when Celine states that she is happy not to have any inferior complexes but qualifies her leading capacity as a problem of submission as well as when Justine underlines that women accepted too much submission and equally states that she knows she has to submit to her husband. With regard to the application of a human rights based approach, the contemplation of both micro- (chapter 4) and macropolitics (chapter 2) is exactly the place in which the claim for universality of human rights unfolds its meaning in every context. This claim is also a claim against exclusion. It is where common ground and a mediatory position between liberal feminist human rights' universalism and postcolonial feminist human rights' critique can be found which also reflects my approach towards the given context; putting women's rights at the centre while trying to understand the individual micropolitics as well as the framework of action of each woman as detailed as possible. Finally, this detailed knowledge allowed me to generalize tendencies.

## 6. Conclusion

In the end, this combination of both, macro- and micro-level equally revealed the individually perceived borders between contextual gender normativity and women's rights. Even though the interviewed women are all aspiring to increasing gender equality within their society, a stronger presence of discriminatory normative gender roles at private level can be identified. This presence is hindering both men and women in improving the gender equality within their family. The fact that current family law does no longer include most of the gender attributions named gender roles are based on, can be seen as a metaphor of the contingent lived reality the interviewed women are confronted with. Even if both the *Droit coutumier de Dahomey* (customary law) and the French civil code ('modern' law) were replaced in 2004, their content regarding gender roles within couples and especially marriages in Benin continues to be part of many children's gender socialisation and maintains discriminatory gender relations especially at private level in a significant way.

The currently applied *Code des personnes et de la famille* complies largely with the principle of equality between man and woman as well as the binding international human rights frameworks. Finally, with regard to the interviewees, these international milestones which are part of macropolitics penetrated the professional level in a very visible and transformative way. It became clear, that the women make use of a broad action framework at professional level, allowing them to thrive and to assert themselves increasingly. Nevertheless, at private level, definitions of gender roles that were defined within the previous law system, giving power to men while disempowering women ("zero-sum" power relation; Read 2011, 3), continue to perpetuate the micropolitics, describing the private level as a "site of struggle" (Mama 2014) which is more restricted than the one at professional level.

Another contingent aspect can be found while comparing economic and political participation of women in Benin on the one hand and participation at work and at home on the other hand. It is as if on a financial (or professional) basis women were 'allowed' to act independently and thus have shown tremendous success since centuries especially in Benin, whereas when it comes to decision-making with regard to the community (be it the state or the (extended) family) the seemingly 'natural' and normal silence of "male privilege" (Eisenstein 2004) remains to be deconstructed.

With the present work I could contribute to what Mama (2001) describes as one strategic element of contemporary African feminism which is “describing the ways in which the contemporary patriarchies in Africa constrain women and prevent them from realising their potential beyond their traditional roles as hard-working income-generating wives and mothers” (ibid.). It appears that “challenging the status quo” (ibid.) at private level is more difficult than at professional level. In fact, this is also what made the CEDAW so relevant and revolutionary, having identified that gender inequality is often invisible but largely reproduced at home.

Furthermore, the *herstory* in Benin is also about having experienced a “double colonization” (Dhawan 2010, 374), which describes a long period of oppression and exclusion through patriarchal oppression on the one hand and colonial subordination on the other hand. The European contribution to the development of current patriarchal structures of society shall not be forgotten at that point. Hence, with regard to intersectionality the interviewed and rather privileged women are also descendants of women that were tremendously disempowered on two levels. The resulting two “sites of struggle” namely decolonization as well as “challenging the status quo” of contemporary patriarchies creates another contingent reality.

“Most educated women (feminist or otherwise)  
face the dilemma of challenging conservative patriarchal practices  
while being seen as ‘African women’,  
i.e. without being accused  
of having been ‘colonised’  
or influenced by western feminism”. (Atanga 2013, 304)

Lastly, it is also important to underline the legitimacy of individual choices made by women, where the flexibility with regard to gender roles may differ from life sphere to life sphere as well as from situation to situation. Being respected by the community and the (extended) family (cf. Lucie, second part, [00:21:49]; [00:01:04]) may be more important than ‘fighting’ for joint decision-making at home. This again is due to the contingent realities the interviewed women are confronted with.

## 7. Bibliography

- Acac, Hortensia Vicentia (2002): *Pour un développement local selon le genre : le cas des groupements de femmes de la SNV du Sud Bénin*. (Thèse de doctorat inédite). Université du Québec à Rimouski, Québec.
- Acholonu, Catherine (1995): *Motherism: the Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*. Owerri, Nigeria: Afa Publications.
- African Union (1986): *African Charter on Human and People's Rights*. Online available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011\\_african\\_charter\\_on\\_human\\_and\\_peoples\\_rights\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011_african_charter_on_human_and_peoples_rights_e.pdf) (accessed 1 July 2020)
- African Union (2020): *OAU/AU Treaties, Conventions, Protocols & Charters*. Online available at: <https://au.int/en/treaties> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- African Union (2003): *Protocol To The African Charter On Human And Peoples' Rights On The Rights Of Women In Africa (Maputo Protocol)*, Art.2.2.
- African Union (2020): *Agenda 2063. The Africa we want*. Online available at: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- African Union, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (n.d.): *Women's rights in Africa*. Online available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/working-documents/32590-wdwomensrightsinafrica\\_singlepages-1.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/working-documents/32590-wdwomensrightsinafrica_singlepages-1.pdf) (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Akindès, Francis (1996): Sociographie des nouvelles procédures de démocratisation. In *Les mirages de la démocratie en Afrique, s/lbsaharien11e francophone*. Paris: Éditions Karthala.
- Aktatsa-Bukachi, Marren (2005): *African Feminism, does it exist?* Presentation at the Tanzanian Gender Networking Programme. Kampala, Uganda.
- Amadiume, Ifi. (1987): *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*. London: Zed Books.
- Appiah, Anthony; Gates, Henry Louis (ed., 2010): *Encyclopaedia of Africa*. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press. Online available at: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195337709.001.0001/acref-780195337709> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Ashby, Ruth; Ohn, Deborah (ed., 1995): *Herstory: Women Who Changed the World*. New York, NY: Viking (A Byron Preiss book).
- Atanga, Lilian Lem (2013): *African Feminism? In Atanga Lilian Lem; Ellece, Sibonile Edith; Litosseliti, Lia and Sunderland, Jane (ed.): Gender and Language in Sub-Saharan Africa: Tradition, struggle and change*. n.p: John Benjamins Publishing Company, p. 301-314.
- Attanasso, Marie-Odile (2012): *Femmes et pouvoir politique au Bénin. Des origines dahoméennes à nos jours*. Cotonou: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Awe, Bonlanle (1991): Writing Women into History: The Nigerian Experience, In Offen, Karen; Roach Pierson, Ruth; Randell, Jane (ed., 1991): *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Banégas, Richard (1997): Retour sur une transition modèle. Les dynamiques du dedans et du dehors de la démocratisation béninoise. In Daloz, Jean-Pascal; Quantin, Patrick (ed.): *Transitions démocratiques africaines*: Éditions Karthala, p. 23–94. Online available at: <http://spire.sciencespo.fr/hdl:/2441/eo6779thqgm5r489m2uckahpg> (accessed 1 July 2020)

- Banégas, Richard (1995): *Action collective et transition politique en Afrique. La conférence nationale du Bénin*.
- Banégas, Richard (2014): Briefing BenIn Challenges For Democracy. In *African Affairs* Vol. 113, No. 452 (July 2014), pp. 449-459.
- Benin Republic (1990): *Constitution de la République du Bénin*, Online available at: [www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/cd9ad07158c52d423f4fb125ea5a539923b886.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/cd9ad07158c52d423f4fb125ea5a539923b886.pdf) (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Benin Republic, General Assembly (2004): *Loi N° 2002 – 07 portant Code des personnes et de la famille*. Cotonou.
- Benin Republic (2019): Cinquième Enquête Démographique et de Santé au Bénin (EDSB-V) 2017 2018, Cotonou.
- Benin Republic, General Assembly (2020a): *Album photo des députés*. Online available at: [https://assemblee-nationale.bj/index.php/depute/menu-liste-des-deputes/album\\_photo\\_deputes/](https://assemblee-nationale.bj/index.php/depute/menu-liste-des-deputes/album_photo_deputes/) (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Benin Republic (2020b): *Membres du gouvernement*: Online available at: <https://www.gouv.bj/membres/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Bertelsmann Stiftung (2018): *BTI 2018 Country Report - Benin*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- Bielefeldt, Heiner (2008): Menschenrechtlicher Universalismus ohne eurozentristische Verkürzung. In Nooke, Günther/Lohmann, Georg/Wahlers, Gerhard (ed.). *Gelten Menschenrechte universal? Begründungen und Infragestellungen*. Freiburg, p. 98-141.
- Bratton, Michael; van de Walle, Nicolas (1997): *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau der Heimat (BMI, 2018): *Zusätzliche Geschlechtsbezeichnung "divers" für Intersexuelle eingeführt*. Online available at: <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2018/12/drittesgeschlecht.html> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ, 2017): *Road Map 2017. Entwicklungspolitischer Aktionsplan zur Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter 2016-2020*. Bonn, Berlin.
- Butler, Judith (1988): Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. In *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 519-531.
- Butler, Judith (2004): *Undoing gender*. Transferred to digital printing. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith; Athanasiou, Athena (2013): *Dispossession. The performative in the Political*. Cambridge/Malden.
- Caballero, Karen Bähr (2011): Les féminismes du Sud : entre construction et questionnement. In: *Oxfam-magasin du monde*. Online available at: <https://www.oxfammagasinsdumonde.be/blog/2011/12/28/les-feminismes-du-sud-entre-construction-et-questionnement/#.XwrnaW5uKuk> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Civics (Monitor Tracking Civic Space, 2020): Benin. Online available at: <https://monitor.civics.org/country/benin/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Chatterjee, Indrani (2013): Monastic Governmentality, Colonial Misogyny, and Postcolonial Amnesia in South Asia. In *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 3 (1), p.57-98.
- CIA. Central Intelligence Agency (2018): *The World Factbook Benin*. Online available at: <http://bit.ly/1rvX1vJ> (accessed 1 July 2020)

- Codjo, Chantal (2019): *Un regard sur la socialisation de genre au Bénin*. n.p: Edilivre.
- Cooper, Brittney (2016): Intersectionality. In Disch, Lisa; Hawkesworth, M. E. (ed., 2016): *The Oxford handbook of feminist theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989): *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. University of Chicago Legal Forum 4, p. 139-167.
- Crenshaw, Kimberly (1991): Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. In *Stanford Law Review* 43, p. 1241-1299.
- De Silva, Nicole (2020): A Court in Crisis: African States' Increasing Resistance to Africa's Human Rights Court. In *Opinio Juris*. Online available at: [opiniojuris.org/2020/05/19/a-court-in-crisis-african-states-increasing-resistance-to-africas-human-rights-court/](https://www.opiniojuris.org/2020/05/19/a-court-in-crisis-african-states-increasing-resistance-to-africas-human-rights-court/) (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (2014): *Strengthening women's political participation*. Eschborn.
- GIZ-LIP, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, (2020): *Länder Informations-Portal*. Online available at: <http://bit.ly/2GriZc> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW, 2019a): *5 Fragen – 5 Antworten zur Weltbevölkerung*. Online available at: <https://www.dsw.org/5-fragen-5-antworten-zur-weltbevoelkerung/>.
- Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW, 2019b): *Weltbevölkerung*. Online available at: <https://www.dsw.org/weltbevoelkerung/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Dhawan, Nikita (2010): Spivak - Subalternes Schweigen und die Politik der Repräsentation. In Kuck, Hannes/Herrmann, Steffen K. (ed.): *Philosophien sprachlicher Gewalt. 21 Grundpositionen von Platon bis Butler*. Weilerswist, p. 270-386.
- Dhamoon, Rita Kaur (2013): Feminisms. In Waylen, Georgina; Ceslis, Karen; Kantola, Johanna; Weldon, S. Laurel (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*. Oxford, p. 88-110.
- Disch, Lisa; Hawkesworth, M. E. (ed., 2016): *The Oxford handbook of feminist theory*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Dosekun, Simidele (2007): *Defending African feminism*. Postamble 3(1): p. 41-47.
- Douvi, Nadège Nérta (2018): *Stratégies des associations autonomes de femmes béninoises*. Université du Québec en Outaouais.
- Dubet François, Martuccelli, Danilo (1996): Théories de la socialisation et définitions sociologiques de l'école, In *Revue française de sociologie*, n°37-4, p. 511-535.
- Eisenstein, Zillah (2003): *Women's/Human Rights and the New Imperial Globalism*. Written for the International Conference, "A Feminist Perspective on Human Rights and the New Global Order", Seoul, Korea, Ewha.
- Eisenstein, Zillah (2004): *Against Empire. Feminism, Racism, and the West*. London, New York: Zed Books Ltd.
- Eisele, Ines (2017): Viele Länder kennen drittes Geschlecht. In *Deutsche Welle*. Online available at: <https://www.dw.com/de/viele-länder-kennen-drittes-geschlecht/a-41291875> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Eisler, Riane (1987): Human Rights: Towards an Integrated Theory for Action: In *Human Rights Quarterly* 9, p. 287-308.
- Ertürk, Yakın (2007): *Intersections between culture and violence against women. Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*, A/HCR/4/34.



- European Commission (2020): Paris Agreement. Online available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/paris\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/paris_en) (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Flick, Uwe (ed., 2007): *Qualitative Sozialforschung. Eine Einführung*. Vollst. überarb. und erw. Neuausg., Orig.-Ausg. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Freedman, Estelle B. (ed., 2007): *The essential feminist reader*. New York: Modern Library.
- Gaesing, Karin; Bliss, Frank (ed., 2019): *Entwicklung, Landrecht, Gender und Bodenfruchtbarkeit in Benin*. Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden (INEF), Universität Duisburg-Essen (AVE-Studie 17/2019, Wege aus extremer Armut, Vulnerabilität und Ernährungsunsicherheit).
- García Canclini, Néstor (1995): *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis [u.a.]: University of Minnesota Press.
- Geisler, Gisela (2004): *Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa*. Upsalla: Nordisk Afrikainstitutet.
- Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (2019): *GIZ Gender Strategy. Gender reloaded: Vision needs Attitude – Attitude meets Action*.
- Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main (2018): *Amina Mama übernimmt Angela Davis Gastprofessur*: Online available at: <https://aktuelles.uni-frankfurt.de/forschung/amina-mama-uebernimmt-angela-davis-gastprofessur/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Grimes, Rachel (2019): *Exclusive interview with UNSCR 1325 as she turns 19*. Online available at: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2019/10/31/exclusive-interview-with-unscr-1325-as-she-turns-19/index.html> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Groß, Lisa (2018): *Assessing the impact of governance programmes. GIZ support to citizen participation in local governance in Benin*. Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (Discussionpaper / German Development Institute, 16/2018).
- Harding Sandra (2003): Why has the Sex/Gender System become Visible Only Now?. In Harding, Sandra; Hintikka, Merrill B.. (ed.): *Discovering Reality*. Synthese Library, vol 161. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Heath, Elizabeth (2010): Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 In Appiah, Anthony; Gates, Henry Louis (ed., 2010): *Encyclopaedia of Africa*. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press. Online available at: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195337709.001.0001/acref-780195337709> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Hobsbawm, Eric (2012). Introduction: Inventing Traditions. In Hobsbawm, Eric; Ranger, Terence (ed.): *The Invention of Tradition* (Canto Classics, pp. 1-14). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781107295636.001 (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Honvou, Simone (2016): *Le principe d'égalité en droit béninois de la famille Droit*. Université Paris Est.
- Houinsa, David (2008): *Femmes du Bénin au coeur de la dynamique sociale - le Livre Blanc*- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Hounnikpo, Mathurin C. (2001): *Determinants of Democratization in Africa; A comparative study of Benin and Togo*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.
- Hossou, Glory Cyriaque (2018): Etre adolescent et gay au Bénin, c'est vivre caché dans un monde libre. In *Le Monde Afrique*. Online available at: [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/12/25/etre-adolescent-et-gay-au-benin-c-est-vivre-cache-dans-un-monde-libre\\_5402066\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/12/25/etre-adolescent-et-gay-au-benin-c-est-vivre-cache-dans-un-monde-libre_5402066_3212.html) (accessed 1 July 2020)

- Holzleithner, Elisabeth (2016): Menschenrechte in feministischer Kritik: Aktuelle Debatten und Umsetzungskrisen. In Imke Leicht, Nadja Meisterhans, Christine Löw and Katharina Volk (ed.): *Feministische Kritiken und Menschenrechte. Reflexionen auf ein produktives Spannungsverhältnis*. Opladen, Berlin, Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich (Politik und Geschlecht, Band 27), p. 21–38.
- Human Dignity Trust (2020): *Map of Countries that Criminalise LGBT People*. Online available at: <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Ibrahim Index of African Governance (2020): *Ibrahim Index Of African Governance (IIAGg)*. Online available at: <https://iiag.online/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Ilboudo, Monique (2007): Le féminisme au Burkina Faso: mythes et réalités. In : *Recherches féministes*, 20(2), p. 163-177.
- Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique (INSAE, 2015): *RGPH4 : Que retenir des effectifs de population en 2013 ?*
- Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique (INSAE, 2016): *Principaux indicateurs socio démographiques et économiques (RGPH-4, 2013)*.
- Jeune Afrique (2019): Bénin : *le Parlement adopte un nouveau Code electoral*. Online available at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/856754/politique/benin-le-parlement-adopte-un-nouveau-code-electoral/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Kamara, Makmid (2014): HAPPENING NOW: LGBT Nigerians Jailed After Passage of New Anti-Gay Law. In *Amnesty International*. Online available at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/happening-now-lgbt-nigerians-jailed-after-passage-of-new-anti-gay-law/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Kapur, Ratna (2006): Human Rights in the 21st Century: Take a Walk on the Dark Side. In *Sydney Law Review* 28, p.665-687.
- Kärger, Caroline (2016): Die Perspektive feministischer IB-Theorien - ein Blick auf Frauenrechte und Entwicklung. In Imke Leicht, Nadja Meisterhans, Christine Löw and Katharina Volk (ed.): *Feministische Kritiken und Menschenrechte. Reflexionen auf ein produktives Spannungsverhältnis*. Opladen, Berlin, Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich (Politik und Geschlecht, Band 27), p. 113–131.
- Kelchner, Jean C. (2004): *Daughters of Eve. A herstory book*. Bloomington, IN 1st Books Library.
- Klug, Petra (2016): Die doppelte ENTGRENZung des Menschlichen. Nachdenken über Universalität und Relativität der Menschenrechte am Beispiel von Kultur und Geschlechterordnung. In: Leicht, Imke; Meisterhans, Nadja; Löw, Christine; Volk, Katharina (ed.): *Feministische Kritiken und Menschenrechte. Reflexionen auf ein produktives Spannungsverhältnis*. Opladen, Berlin, Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich (Politik und Geschlecht, Band 27), p. 59–73.
- Kruse, Jan (2015): *Qualitative Interviewforschung. Ein integrativer Ansatz*. (2., überarbeitete und ergänzte Auflage). Weinheim und Basel: Beltz Juventa.
- Lagacé, Catherine (2007): *Femmes et Politique au Bénin Un défi à relever*. Université du Québec à Montréal.
- Latourès, Aurélie (2009): Je suis presque féministe, mais... . Appropriation de la cause des femmes par des militantes maliennes au Forum Social Mondial de Nairobi (2007). In *Politique africaine*, 4(116), p. 143-163.
- Lazreg, Marnia (1994): *The Eloquence of the Silence. Algerian Women in Question*. NY: Routledge.

- Leicht, Imke; Meisterhans, Nadja; Löw, Christine; Volk, Katharina (ed., 2016): *Feministische Kritiken und Menschenrechte. Reflexionen auf ein produktives Spannungsverhältnis*. Barbara Budrich; Tagung Feministische Kritik und Menschenrechte. Opladen, Berlin, Toronto: Verlag BarbaraBudrich (Politik und Geschlecht, Band 27).
- Lewis, Desiree (2005): African gender research and post-coloniality: Legacies and challenges'. In: *African Gender Studies*, Oyeronke Oyèrónké (ed.), 381–397. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lo, Ndèye Kaddy (2020): Angéla Kpeidja et Pricile Kpogbeme: ces journalistes béninoises "victimes" de harcèlement sexuel. In *BBC News Afrique*. Online available at: <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-52547824> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Lumen (2020): *Two Views of Culture: Etic & Emic*. Online available at: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/culturalanthropology/chapter/two-views-of-culture-eticemic/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Macdonald, Fleur (2018): *The legend of the Beninese fearless female warriors*. In *BBC*. Online available at: [www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180826-the-legend-of-benins-fearless-femalewarriors](http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180826-the-legend-of-benins-fearless-femalewarriors) (accessed 1 July 2020)
- McFadden, Patricia (2005): *Becoming post colonial: African women changing the meaning of citizenship*. *Meridians* 6(1): 1–22.
- Mama, Amina (2001): Talking about feminism in Africa. In *Women's World*. Online available at: [www.wworld.org/programs/regions/africa/amina\\_mama.htm](http://www.wworld.org/programs/regions/africa/amina_mama.htm) (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Mama, Amina (2011): What does it mean to do feminist research in African contexts. In *feminist review conference proceedings*. Online available at: <https://nigs.ufsc.br/files/2017/07/fr201122a-AMINA-MAMA-Feminist-Research-in-Africa.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Mama, Amina (2014): Feminists We Love: Professor Amina Mama. In *African Studies Association*. Online available at: <https://africanstudies.org/coordinate-organizations/welcome-to-the-asa-blog/october-2014/feminists-we-love-professor-amina-mama/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Mama, Amina (2017): Know Your African Feminists: Dr. Amina Mama. In *African Feminist Forum*. Online available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77BUFAzo35U> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Mayring, Philipp (2002): *Einführung in die Qualitative Sozialforschung. Eine Anleitung zum qualitativen Denken*. 5.Auflage. Weinheim, Basel: Beltz Verlag.
- Mayring, Philipp (2010): *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken*. 11., akt. u. überarb. Aufl. Weinheim, Basel: Beltz Verlag.
- Mayring Philipp (2019): Qualitative Content Analysis: Demarcation, Varieties, Developments. In: *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Volume 20, No. 3, Art.16).
- Médénouvo, Firmin (2004): *Coutumier du Dahomey*. Présence béninoise.
- Mianda, Gertrude (1997): Féminisme africain : divergences ou convergences des discours? In: *Présence Africaine* 1997/1 (N° 155), p. 85-99.
- Mikell, Gwendolyn (ed., 1997): *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa*. In: *Présence Africaine*, 1(155), 85-99. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mernissi, Fatima (1988): *Shahrazad n'est pas marocaine : autrement elle serait salariée*. Casablanca: Editions Le Fennec.
- Merriam-Webster (2020a): *herstory*. Online available at: <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/herstory> (accessed 1 July 2020)

- Merriam-Webster (2020b): *Intersectionality*. Online available at: <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/herstory> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Ministère de la Famille et de la Solidarité Nationale (2008): *La Politique Nationale de Promotion du Genre*, Cotonou: Nouvelles Presse Industrie Graphiques.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (2003): Under Western Eyes Revisited. In *Signs* 28 (2), p. 499-535.
- Mupotsa, Danai S. (2007): *An African feminist standpoint?* Postamble 3(1):p. xi–xxiii.
- Noel, Dossou-Yovo (1999): The Experience Of Benin. In *International Journal On World Peace* Vol.XVI (No.3), p. 59–74.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. (2000): *Women and Human Development. The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge.
- Octobre, Sylvie (2014): Réflexions liminaires sur le genre et les pratiques culturelles : féminisation, socialisation et domination. In Octobre, Sylvie (ed.): *Questions de genre, questions de culture*, Ministère de la culture et de la Communication, Paris.
- Okin, Susan Moller (1998): Feminism. Women's Human Rights and Cultural Differences. In: *Hypatia* 13 (2), p. 32-52.
- Okin, Susan Moller with respondents (1999): *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton.
- Okome, M. O. (1999): *Listening to Africa, misunderstanding and misinterpreting Africa: Reformist western feminist evangelism on African women*. Paper presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of African Studies Association, Philadelphia, p. 11–14.
- Okonjo, Kamene (1994): Women and the Evolution of a Ghanaian Political Synthesis. In Nelson, Barbara and; Chowdhury, Najma (1994): *Women and Politics Worldwide*: New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 285-297.
- Oyeronke, Oyěwùmí, (1997, 2003): *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University Press of Minnesota.
- Oyeronke, Oyěwùmí (2011): *Gender Epistemologies in Africa. Gendering Traditions, Spaces, Social Institutions, and Identities*. n.p.: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Przyborski, A.; Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (2014): *Qualitative Sozialforschung. Ein Arbeitsbuch*. (4., erweiterte Auflage). München: Oldenburg Verlag.
- Reda, Lolwa (2018): *UN Resolution 1325: Significant but lacking*. Online available at: <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/2/44587/UN-Resolution-1325-Significant-but-lacking> (accessed 1 July 2020).
- Rensmann, Thilo (2006): Der Beitrag Eleanor Roosevelts zur Fortentwicklung des Völkerrechts. In: Rudolf, Beate (ed.): *Frauen und Völkerrecht. Zur Einwirkung von Frauenrechten und Fraueninteressen auf das Völkerrecht*. Baden-Baden, p. 129-144.
- Rudolf, Beate (2014): Menschenrechte und Geschlecht - eine Diskursgeschichte. In Lembke, Ulrike (ed.): *Menschenrechte und Geschlecht*. Baden-Baden, p. 24-50.
- Rushing, Andrea Benton (1996): On becoming a feminist: Learning from Africa. In Rosalyn Terborg Penn & Andrea Benton Rushing (ed., 1996): *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*. Washington DC: Howard University Press, 121–134.
- Sadiqui, Fatima (2003): *Women, Gender and Language in Morocco*. Leiden: Brill.
- Sauer, Birgit; Strasser, Sabine (ed., 2008): *Zwangsfreiheiten. Multikulturalität und Feminismus*. Wien.

- Science Encyclopedia (2020): Womanism. Online available at: <https://science.jrank.org/pages/8159/Womanism.html> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Shachar, Ayelet (2001): *Multicultural Jurisdictions. Cultural Differences and Women's Rights*. Cambridge.
- Sheldon, Kathleen E. (2017): *African Women. Early history to the 21st Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Sinder, Rike (2016): Postmoderne Freiheit. Zur Rezeption von Walter Benjamins Zur Kritik der Gewalt bei Judith Butler. In Imke Leicht, Nadja Meisterhans, Christine Löw and Katharina Volk (ed.): *Feministische Kritiken und Menschenrechte. Reflexionen auf ein produktives Spannungsverhältnis*. Opladen, Berlin, Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich (Politik und Geschlecht, Band 27), p. 39–58.
- Snyder, Margaret; Tadesse, Mary (1997): The African context: Women in the political economy. In: Nalini Visvanathan and Lynn Duggan (ed., 1997): *The Women, Gender and Development Reader*. London: Zed Books, p. 75–79.
- Smedly, Audrey (2004): *Women Creating Patrilyny: Gender and Environment in West Africa*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988). "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In Nelson, Cary; Grossberg, Lawrence (ed.). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 271-313.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, (1999): *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, London.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (2007): Feminism and Human Rights. In Shaikh, Nermeen (ed.): *The Present as History: Critical Perspectives on Global Power*. New York, p. 172-201.
- Steady, Filomina Chioma (ed., 1985): *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*. Rochester, Vermont: Schnekmann, first published in 1981.
- Suárez-Krabbe, J. (2014): The Other Side of the Story: Human rights, race and gender from a historical transatlantic perspective. In Dawan N. (ed., 2014): *Decolonizing Enlightenment: Transnational Justice, Human Rights and Democracy in a Postcolonial Worlds*, Barbara Budrich Publishers, p. 211-226.
- Toure, Abibatou; Barry, Mamadou Cellou; Diallou, Pounthioun (2003): *The two faces of African feminism*. Codresia Bulletin 1, p. 2–3.
- Towns, Ann (2009): The Status of Women as a Standard of 'Civilization. In *European Journal of International Relations*. 15 (4), p. 681-706.
- United Nations (1945): *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*. New York: United Nations, Office of Public Information.
- United Nations, General Assembly (1948): *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations, 217 (III) A, Paris, preamble. Online available at: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- United Nations (2015): *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015.
- United Nations Development Program (2014): *Gender Equality in Public Administration*. Online available at: [www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Womens%20Empowerment/GEPA%20Global%20Report%20May%202014.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Womens%20Empowerment/GEPA%20Global%20Report%20May%202014.pdf) (accessed 1 July 2020)

- United Nations Development Program (2016): *Africa Human Development Report. Accelerating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa*.
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2007): *Women in Power: Towards Democracy and Gender Equality Report*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner (2020): *Status Of Ratification Interactive Dashboard*. Online available at: <https://indicators.ohchr.org/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- United Nations Women (2020a): *Concepts and definitions*. Online available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- United Nations (2020b): *Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Vallett, G. (2009): Corps et Socialisation. In *Idées économiques et sociales*, 158, (4), p. 53-63.
- VeneKlasen, Lisa; Miller, Valerie (2007): *A new weave of people power and politics*. Practical Action Publishing.
- Vido, Arthur; Vido, Marius (2015): *Histoire des femmes du Sud-Bénin du XVII<sup>e</sup> au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Saint Denis: Edilivre.
- Volpp, Leti (2001): Feminism versus Multiculturalism. In *Columbia Law Review* 1010, p. 1181-1218.
- Walker, Alice (1984): *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Werbner, Pnina (1997): Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity. In Werbner, Pnina; Tariq Modood (eds.): *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. London: Zed, p. 1-26.
- West, Candace; Zimmerman, Don H. (1983): Doing Gender. In *Gender and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2. (Jun., 1987), p. 125-151.
- Wichterich, Christa (2020): Erfolge und ein Backlash - Die UN und die Frauenrechte. In *iz3w*, 387. Online available at: [https://www.iz3w.org/zeitschrift/ausgaben/378\\_uno\\_am\\_ende/wichterich](https://www.iz3w.org/zeitschrift/ausgaben/378_uno_am_ende/wichterich). (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Wicker, Hans-Rudolf (1997): From Complex Culture to Cultural Complexity. In Werbner, Pnina; Tariq Modood (eds.): *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. London: Zed, p. 29-45.
- WiLDAF/FEDDAF-Bénin (2004): Le code des personnes et de la famille béninois. Présentée par Mme Geneviève BOKO NADJO Coordinatrice du WiLDAF/FEDDAF-BÉNIN, Présentation pendant le Forum des ONG à Addis Abeba.
- World Atlas (2020): *What Languages are Spoken in Benin?* Online available at: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-benin.html> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- World Economic Forum (2019): *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. Cologne/Geneva. Online available at: [www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf) (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Xinhua (2019): *Le Bénin se dote d'un plan national pour la mise en œuvre de résolutions onusiennes*. Online available at: [french.xinhuanet.com/2019-08/19/c\\_138319977.htm](http://french.xinhuanet.com/2019-08/19/c_138319977.htm) (accessed 1 July 2020)

## Further literature

- Alcalde, María Cristina; Bordo, Susan; Rosenman, Ellen Bayuk (ed., 2015): *Provocations. A transnational reader in the history of feminist thought*. Oakland, California: University of California Press (Routledge / Warwick studies in globalisation, 3).
- Arndt, Susan (2002): *The dynamics of African feminism. Defining and classifying African feminist literatures*. Trenton, N.J., London: Africa World Press.
- Bendix, Daniel (2018): *Global development and colonial power. German development policy at home and abroad*. London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield International (Kilombo).
- Bierschenk, Thomas (2009): *Democratization without Development: Benin 1989-2009*. In: *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* (Vol.22, No.3), p. 337–357. Online available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25621929>
- Butler, Judith (2006) [1990]: *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith (2011): *Your Behaviour Creates Your Gender*. In *Big Think*, 06.06.2011. Online available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc> (accessed 1 July 2020)
- Daloz, Jean-Pascal; QUANTIN, Patrick (ed.): *Transitions démocratiques africaines*: Éditions Karthala.
- Debiel, Tobias (ed.) (2018): *Entwicklungspolitik in Zeiten der SDGs. Essays zum 80. Geburtstag von Franz Nuscheler. Unter Mitarbeit von Franz Nuscheler*. Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden; Universität Duisburg-Essen. Duisburg: Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden.
- Derichs, Claudia (2018): *SDGs und Gender: Tragen die Ziele wirklich zur Chancengleichheit bei?* In: Tobias Debiel (ed.): *Entwicklungspolitik in Zeiten der SDGs. Essays zum 80. Geburtstag von Franz Nuscheler. Unter Mitarbeit von Franz Nuscheler*. Duisburg: Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden, p. 22–25.
- Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (2016): *Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality*.
- Mendoza, Breny (2016): *Coloniality of Gender and Power. From Postcoloniality to Decoloniality*. In: Lisa Disch und M. E. Hawkesworth (ed., 2016): *The Oxford handbook of feminist theory*, p. 100-121.

## List of figures

Figure 1: IHDI comparisons by region.....	13
Figure 2: Women's participation in public administration and managerial positions .....	15
Figure 3: Involvement in trade union leadership positions in selected countries, by sex, 2007.....	15
Figure 4: Evolution of the indicators 4.5.1, 4.5.2 and 4.5.5 of the target 4.5. ....	16
Figure 5: International and regional legal declarations and instruments affecting women's rights 18	
Figure a: Gender equality, social institutions and women's empowerment.....	I
Figure b: Percentage of firms with female participation in ownership in selected countries, 2006-2013(%).....	II
Figure c: Gender parity index in tertiary level enrolment by sub-region.....	III

## List of empirical data

Interview with Lucie 15.11.2019: [00:35:12] first part, [00:21:49] second part, [00:16:06] third part, [00:03:53] fourth part, Cotonou.

Interview with Celine 21.11.2019: [00:30:25], Cotonou.

Interview with Justine 08.12.2019: [00:12:48] first part, [00:08:26] second part, Cotonou.

Interview with Sylvie 05.12.2019: [00:48:10]. Cotonou.

Interview with Chloé 22.11.2019: [00:16:03]. Cotonou.

Interview with Catherine 16.12.2019: [00:17:21] first part, [00:03:28] second part, [00:12:51] third part, [00:01:19] fourth part, Ouidah.



## 8. Appendix

### 8.1. Figures

#### Gender equality, social institutions and women's empowerment

	Gender Development Index	Gender Inequality Index	Social Institutions and Gender Index	Female/male GNI per capita	Maternal mortality gap	Adolescent birth rate gap	Female share of seats in parliament	Gender gap in secondary school attainment (25+)	Labour force participation gap (15+)
	Value	Value	Value	Ratio	Ratio	Ratio	%	Ratio	Ratio
	2014	2014	2014	2014	2015	2010-2015	2016	2005-2014	2015
The Gambia	0.889	0.622	0.52	0.7	3.0	2.2	9.4	0.9	0.9
Ghana	0.885	0.554	0.30	0.7	1.3	1.1	10.9	0.9	1.0
Senegal	0.883	0.528	0.20	0.6	1.3	1.8	42.7	0.8	0.6
Burkina Faso	0.881	0.631	0.28	0.7	1.6	2.2	9.4	0.9	0.8
Nigeria	0.841	—	0.39	0.6	3.4	2.3	6.1	0.8	0.8
Togo	0.831	0.588	0.19	0.8	1.5	1.8	17.6	1.0	1.0
Benin	0.823	0.614	0.28	0.7	1.7	1.8	7.2	0.9	1.0
Sierra Leone	0.814	0.650	0.37	0.8	5.7	2.0	12.4	1.0	0.9
Côte d'Ivoire	0.810	0.679	0.25	0.5	2.7	2.5	9.2	0.6	0.6
Liberia	0.789	0.651	0.38	0.7	3.0	2.3	10.5	0.9	0.9
Guinea	0.778	—	0.32	0.7	2.8	2.5	21.9	0.8	0.9
Mali	0.776	0.677	0.52	0.4	2.5	3.4	8.8	0.6	0.6
Niger	0.729	0.713	0.44	0.4	2.3	4.0	14.6	0.4	0.4
Cabo Verde	—	—	—	0.5	0.2	1.4	23.6	0.6	0.6
Guinea-Bissau	—	—	0.21	0.7	2.3	1.9	13.7	0.9	0.9
West Africa	0.825	0.628	0.33	0.6	2.4	2.2	14.5	0.53	0.8
Africa	0.871	0.548	0.28	0.6	2.1	1.7	20.8	0.7	0.8

Figure a.: Gender equality, social institutions and women's empowerment (UNDP 2016, 165)

Percentage of firms with female participation in ownership in selected countries, 2006-2013 (%)

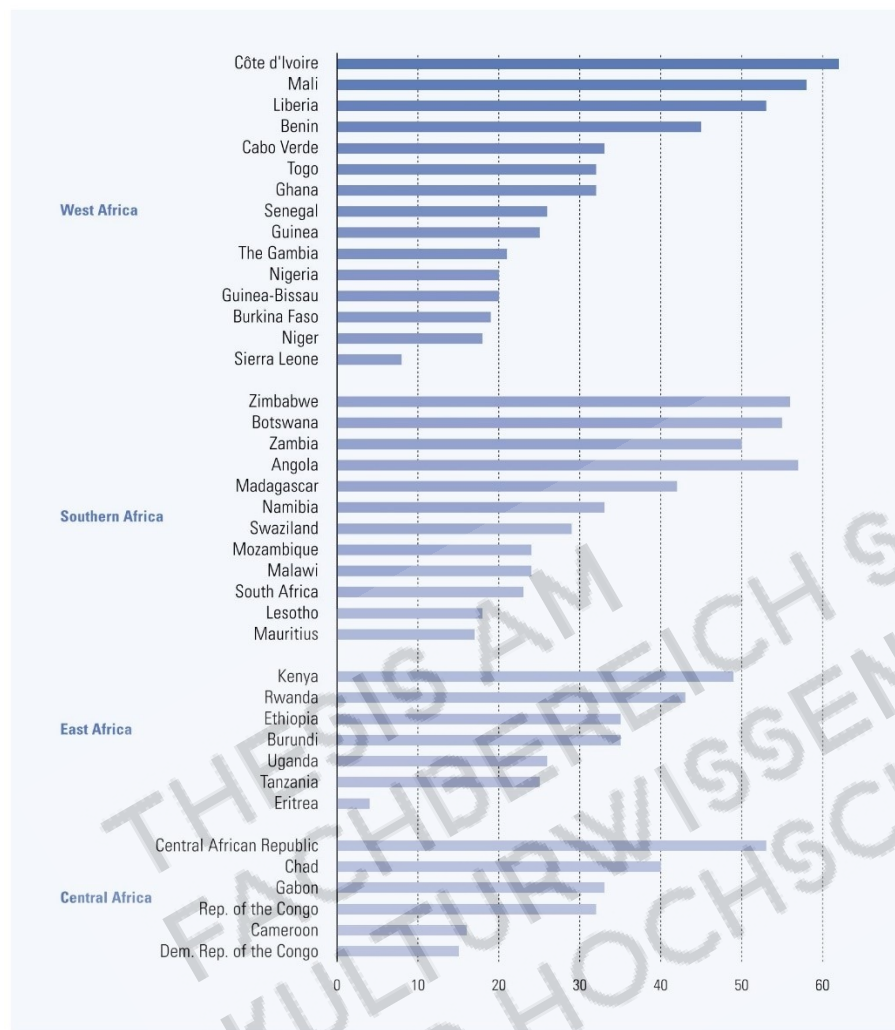


Figure b.: Percentage of firms with female participation in ownership in selected countries, 2006-2013 (%) (UNDP 2016, 69)

**Gender parity index in tertiary level enrolment by sub-region (ratio of girls to boys)**

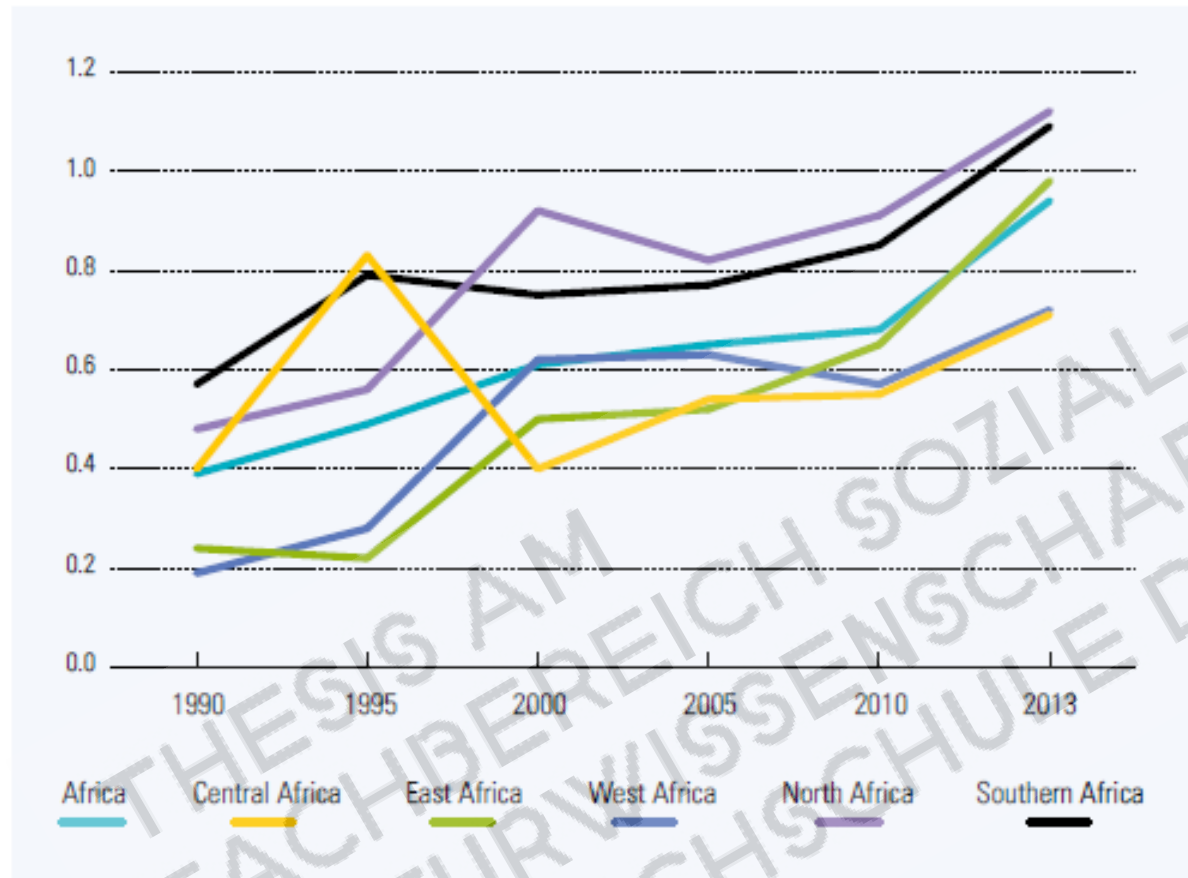


Figure c.: Gender parity index in tertiary level enrolment by sub-region (UNDP 2016, 47)

## 8.2. Interview guideline

<p>Comment est-ce que vous avez grandi et comment est-ce que vous avez été éduqué en termes de genre?</p> <p>Quels sont les aspects qui vous ont marqués en tant que fille et personne depuis le bas âge ?</p> <p>Qu'est-ce que vous croyez, pourquoi est-ce que vous êtes aujourd'hui telle que vous êtes et là où vous êtes ?</p> <p>Quel est votre trajet ces dernières années depuis au niveau familial et professionnelle ?</p> <p>Comment arrivez-vous à équilibrer les deux domaines de vie ?</p> <p>Selon vous, qu'est ce qui aurait été plus facile le long de votre parcours professionnel et privé si vous étiez un homme ?</p>	<p>biographic/narrative</p>
<p>Comment voyez-vous la situation d'égalité de genre au Bénin ?</p> <p>Quelles réalités existantes/préconditions favorisent l'égalité de genre ici au Bénin, lesquelles les freinent ?</p> <p>Selon vous, quelle serait la situation parfaite pour les femmes au Bénin ? Comment est-ce qu'on peut y arriver ?</p> <p>Qui sont les acteurs principales qui font avancer ou freine la situation d'égalité genre au Bénin?</p> <p>Y existe-il un féminisme béninois, si oui, en quoi existe-il ?</p>	<p>problem-centred</p>