



The Tensions  
Between Culture  
and Human Rights

EMANCIPATORY SOCIAL WORK AND  
AFROCENTRICITY IN A GLOBAL WORLD



EDITED BY  
Vishanthie Sewpaul,  
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# Nigerian Marital Cultural Practices and Implications for Human Rights

*Augusta Yetunde Olaore, Julie Drolet, and Israel Bamidele Olaore*

The universality of family is coloured in Africa by unique sets of values, principles, and practices that are significantly different from those of the Western world. The African world view is informed by a web of relationships between humans, animals, plants, natural forces, spirits, and land-forms. Family systems and practices in the African setting are therefore heavily influenced by a cultural ontology of spirits or non-human persons who are believed to have the capacity for animating the world (Kirmayer, 2012). Sometimes these world views may be perceived as oppressive and harmful and sometimes they are helpful and enhance the well-being of people. “In Africa, tradition drives household relations, its possibilities and challenges” (Ayodele, 2016, p. 116). The chapter presents and examines underlying principles and values of marital cultural practices in Nigeria informed by a study funded by the Social Work in Nigeria Project (SWIN-P) and the Government of Canada. The marital cultural practices largely reflect the indigenous knowledge and beliefs of the local context. The chapter discusses three themes arising from the analysis of the study findings—(1) widowhood cultural practices, (2) inheritance and property rights, and (3) cultural responses to marital infidelity—along with their implications for human rights and social work practice.

## The Nigerian Context

Marriage and family life is a celebrated aspect of the social system in Nigeria. Nigeria is one of the largest countries in Africa, with a population of 183 million in 2017 (National Population Commission, 2017). Africa in general and Nigeria in particular are culturally diverse, and there is no simplistic “African” culture per se. Cultural and ethnic diversity in Nigeria is represented by the Hausa-Fulani, the Yorubas, and the Igbos, who together make up about 70 percent of the population, and more than 300 smaller ethnic groups that account for the remainder of the population (Moscardino et al., 2006). The National Gender Policy formulated by Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2006) states that

Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women’s lives. Women are in a subordinate position (particularly at the community and household levels), and male children are preferred over the female. The influence of the mother and the father is particularly significant in shaping and perpetuating patriarchy. The mother provides the role model for daughters, while the father demonstrates to sons what it means to ‘be a man’. (Section 1.2, p. 6)

Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2014) found that most Nigerian communities are typically patriarchal, with beliefs that perpetuate unequal treatment of women, as so poignantly discussed by other authors in this volume, with Boateng and Sottie in chapter 5 also discussing issues related to widowhood rites in relation to Ghana. Makama (2013) states that patriarchy stratifies people based on gender and upholds male dominance. Para-Mallam (2010) posits that culture socializes males and females to internalize societal values, acquire a self-concept, and see themselves as members of their respective gender groups. In Nigeria, the pronatalist culture socializes citizens into the belief that the ultimate goal for any individual is to get married and have children. Childlessness has major psychological and social implications for affected persons, including a multitude of adverse consequences (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2013). Beyond the

issue of having children is the preference for sons over daughters. Male child preference is also informed by the inheritance practices in marital culture. Male children not only inherit directly from their fathers, they are also the means by which their mothers may have access to their father's property when he dies (Alewo & Olong, 2012). Nigeria is extremely religious, with a majority of the population being either Muslim or Christian. According to Pew-Templeton Research Center (2016), 49.3 percent of Nigerians are Christians and 48.8 percent are Muslims. African traditional religion and others make up 1.9 percent. The African traditional religion is mainly practised in the southern regions of the country. All three religions strongly influence cultural marital practices. A customary marriage is one where the spouses are married in terms of customs as opposed to the laws of the country, usually referred to as a civil marriage registered with the government (Theron, 2017). The death of a wife of a customary marriage automatically brings the marriage to an end. However, the death of a husband does not end the marriage. The wife is inherited within the family and is expected to continue to perform matrimonial roles whether she likes it or not (Alewo & Olong, 2012).

The practice of widow transfer or "wife inheritance" is condemnable, for although it represents a traditional way of providing widows a little economic and social protection, their rights of choice are violated (Ayodele, 2016). Widowhood practices are performed among the Yoruba of South West Nigeria to protect the woman from being harmed by the spirit of the husband, for the woman to prove innocence of the death of her husband, and for the husband's family to ascertain if the woman was pregnant at the time the husband died so that they can claim responsibility and care for the woman among other reasons (Akinbi, 2015). Widowhood rituals are done to mourn the deceased husband and to ensure that the link between the dead and the living is intact (Durojaye, 2013). The grieving period involves a series of traditional activities and rituals that show respect for the dead. That period may range from seven days to a year across all religions (Oyeniyim & Ayodeji, 2010).

Widows undergo humiliating rituals following the death of their husbands, and are routinely subjected to painful, dehumanizing public treatment as a result of the continued application of discriminatory laws and practices in Nigeria (Ewelukwa, 2002). Widowhood burial rites include

isolation, confinement, and hair shaving, among others. Such rites are modified for widows who are educated, have an active career life, or live in urban areas (Genyi, 2013). For such women, the rule for extended seclusion is adjusted to accommodate the need to return to work. However, the rules are strictly enforced for women who are uneducated or live in the rural areas where there are people who are predisposed to customary practices.

Another cultural element within the Nigerian marriage system involves inheritance practices. The brothers-in law of the deceased husband, under the widow inheritance practices, go on to assume personal relations with the wife, and her refusal may complicate her problems (Akinbi, 2015). The effects of inheritance hijacking practices in Nigeria on widows' well-being result in a culturally disapproved harmful practice that destabilizes the social and economic security of widows based on gender status (Ayodele, 2016). It has been described as unjust and cruel property grabbing by overzealous brothers-in-law who will drive widows out of their matrimonial homes and deprive them of their late husband's properties including furniture and bedding, thus completely disinheriting widows (Alewo & Olong, 2012; Cooper, 2010).

Given the cultural and religious diversity, and patriarchy, in Nigeria, this chapter presents norms and practices from a variety of tribal clusters included in the study.

## Research Study

A qualitative research project was undertaken to better understand how indigenous social care practices contribute to child and family well-being in Nigeria. The study was funded by the Social Work in Nigeria Project (SWIN-P) and the Government of Canada. The overarching research question guiding the study was: "What indigenous knowledge, beliefs and cultural practices are valued with respect to care of children and the family in Nigeria?" The study had three objectives: (1) to document and analyze Nigerian indigenous cultural practices for children and families; (2) to integrate indigenous cultural practices for children and families into social work education, policy, and practice; and (3) to raise awareness of the value of Nigerian indigenous cultural practices for children and families, locally and internationally.

This study was conducted in five culturally diverse community sites in Nigeria: Aiyepe (West), Akure (South West), Enugu (East), Ibibio (South East), and Sokoto (North West). These sites represent the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, which are the Igbos, Hausas, and Yorubas. Participants for the semi-structured interviews were selected through referrals from the community, while the focus group participants responded to general community announcements made at gatherings such as church services and town hall meetings. Some key community members such as health care workers and social workers were personally invited. Fifteen community leaders participated in semi-structured interviews, and 78 community members participated in focus group discussions in their communities. Consent forms were administered to all the participants before the interview and focus groups, and university research ethics approval was obtained at Thompson Rivers University in Canada in 2012, prior to data collection. Audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and translated verbatim for the purposes of data analysis.

The narratives were systematically analyzed by identifying emergent themes, patterns, interconnections, and consistency, for a full understanding of the meanings of the data (Olaore & Drolet, 2016). The oral traditions and storytelling narratives were analyzed within their cultural context, and recurrent themes or concepts relating to cultural practices were identified (Olaore & Drolet, 2016). Responses were analyzed using a grounded theory and thematic analysis approach. A grounded theory approach was used to guide analyses and interpretations using open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for categories and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Verbatim quotations were used to illustrate the community responses on relevant themes. All data were coded by the authors and a graduate-level research assistant. In case of disagreement, original transcripts were re-examined and discussed until coding agreement was reached. Student research assistants were involved in data collection in Nigeria, as well as in the process of transcribing interviews and focus groups, and data analysis. The chapter will focus on cultural practices within the context of marriage, and implications for human rights and social work practice.

## Widowhood Cultural Practices

There are marital cultural practices and beliefs that inform widowhood practices in Nigeria, and this section deals with widow transfer, widow burial rites, and inheritance and property rights discussed by participants in the study as well as secondary data from the literature.

### *Widow transfer*

The care of widows is seen as the responsibility of the kin of the deceased husband. One of the study participants expressed the sentiments that in the Yoruba culture, the husband never dies.

There is a tricky question to prospective groom's family. That is "Do husbands die in this family?" The intent is to find out if the family will continue to perform the role of the husband after the husband dies. (Interview participant, Community Leader from Ibadan)

The care usually takes the form of widow inheritance or widow transfer. In this practice, the younger brother of the deceased man marries the surviving widow and is expected to care for her.

The family will not allow the woman to go because we believe that the brother to the deceased should be able take care of the late brother's family, if the woman chooses anyone in the family then he will be in charge of the woman and protect all what the brother has so no one intrudes and take[s] anything away from the woman. (Focus group participant, Ibibio Focus Group)

The widow is sometimes prohibited from remarrying outside the deceased husband's family, as discussed by an interview participant:

If the woman stays in the family, she can either marry the younger brother of the man or remain single in the house. However, as a rule, a widow must not get pregnant from

another man outside the husband's family. (Interview participant, Aiyepé Traditional Ruler)

The intention of the widow transfer or inheritance is to provide social security and support for the wife and children of the deceased within the context of the husband's family of origin. This patrilocal system comes along with the assumption that once the bride price has been paid, the wife belongs to the husband's family for care, protection, and matrimonial duties.

The care of and sympathy for the widow are also dependent upon whether the husband's family sees her as being worthy of their care due to her good behaviour while her husband was alive or if the husband was in good standing in the community. Both the focus group and community leader in Akure attested to this finding in the study:

Decision as to whether she will be cared for will depend on the widow's behavior when the deceased was alive. She may be cared for depending on her behavior. (Interview participant, Akure Traditional Ruler)

### *Widow burial rites*

After a husband dies, traditionally, the wife is expected to perform some rituals. The details of the expected activities vary between the different Nigerian tribes; however, there is a consensus that the family and community have expectations of what the widow is supposed to do.

Participants in the study conveyed several widow burial rites influenced by the sociocultural context in their community. One example is explained here:

If she is young she is to stay indoors for five months to see if she is pregnant so that she bears the child for the deceased. Her husband's people give her money to take care of herself and her children after fulfilling the death rite such as scraping her hair, staying indoors for four market days. [Approximately a month, as the market days may be every five to

eight days.] (Interview participant, Head of market women in Aiyepe)

### *Inheritance and property rights*

It is common knowledge in Nigeria that the native law and customs of some people prohibit a wife from inheriting her husband's properties. This practice cuts across all ethnic groups and religions. She is seen as a commodity to be inherited by her husband's kinsmen. However, the issue of children and the gender of the children puts a slant on property inheritance practices and beliefs.

When a man dies his first son takes his main house called the *Obi* and the rest of the property is shared among other children including the first son. In the case of a man with many wives the remaining property apart from the *Obi* is shared according to the wives with male child. Male children are always given priority in Igbo Land. A woman without a male child has no share in the family but can stay in the family until she dies. (Focus group participant, Enugu)

According to one interview participant, inheritance of property differs in a childless marriage or where there is no male child:

The brothers of the man will share everything the man has. His property will be shared among his children but if he had no male child, the brother of the man would also have some of the property. (Interview participant, Sokoto Community Leader)

While a woman is subjected to gruesome burial rites at the loss of her husband, she also must deal with the possible loss of shelter and property if all she can lay claim to is within the context of her marriage.

## Cultural Responses to Marital infidelity

The data from the focus groups and interviews concerning marital infidelity found that men are accorded greater permissiveness than women with respect to engaging in extramarital affairs. It is the general belief that polygamy makes allowance for infidelity among men with no grievous sanction when compared to the consequences of infidelity by a married woman.

Men being polygamous in nature have no law preventing them from being promiscuous. But women, in my own locality, she is prohibited from cooking for the husband if she is caught until she undergoes [a thorough] cleansing. Men are only frowned at if he goes out with another man's wife. Apart from that he's free to live his life as it pleases him, but women are forbidden from extramarital relationship. (Interview participant, Enugu Leader)

"The punishment for a woman, if caught, will be more than if it was a man." (Interview participant, Akure Traditional Ruler)

According to participants in a focus group, polygamy may be justified for economic benefits:

If I'm a farmer and I'm planting on a large portion of land, if I marry one wife she might produce three or four children but if I marry up to four or five wives they will bear a lot of children so that when the children enter the farm work will be fast. (Focus group participant, Ibibio)

In a focus group, participants expressed the belief that ancestral spirits punish the women but not the men:

Culturally in Delta State until the present, when a woman goes out (has an extra-marital affair) the ancestors will

deal with the woman. Before you know what is happening her legs will start to swell or the face will begin to swell or in some cases the children will begin to die; later it will be discovered that the woman has gone out for extramarital affair, so the woman will confess and after that she will be asked to buy drinks and something's for sacrifice to stop the death of the children. But such a thing will not happen to a man. (Focus group participant, Aiyepe)

The community is also involved in infidelity cases:

According to our law such a person will be brought to the public, the person will be sent out of the community. Most of the time the punishment of the woman is more than that of the man. In our community if a woman is caught in another man's house, she will be sent out of the community. Some people are asked to swear and most time[s] that leads to death. (Focus group participant, Akure)

The act of swearing is intended to make the accused person say the absolute truth by invoking a curse upon oneself if there is a lie.

Focus group participants confirmed the horrific treatment of women in terms of marital infidelity:

“They will naked the woman at the market.” (Focus group participant, Enugu)

The research data presented a gender bias when dealing with the issue of infidelity in marriage. All respondents, with a few exceptions, said that consequences of infidelity in marriage are more lenient for men than women. Since polygamy is an acceptable marital option practised in Nigeria, across both Christianity (while polygamy is frowned upon in Catholicism, it does not deter its practice) and Islam, a man having sexual partners outside of marriage is treated lightly. However, a woman having a sexual partner outside of marriage is prohibited with grievous sanctions, sometimes meted out by the gods.

In my family that is called “the spirit that takes care of a fornicator,” this is how it works, if I have a wife and my wife fornicates with someone when she becomes pregnant that spirit will harm the woman and spirit will not allow the woman to deliver until she confesses; if she has slept with five men she must mention the names of the men that have slept with her. (Focus group participant, Ibibio)

Gender biases were also identified by interview participants in the study:

Families decide. A woman who is suspected of infidelity is made to swear [To the gods]. If found guilty, the woman will be inflicted with a disease. A man is free to marry many wives and can be bold in infidelity. (Interview participant, Aiyepe Ruler)

A participant mentioned that fellow women enforce disciplinary sanctions on a woman alleged of marital infidelity.

The women that are born and raised in that family [Umudaa], some of them are married outside the community. The women will come to your house and bring out your luggage and bags for you and beat you up as the means of punishment. They say the woman want to bring shame to their family. . . . Wrappers [women's traditional attire] might be seized along with some other belongings. (Focus group participant, Enugu)

In summary, marital cultural practices in response to infidelity are shown to vary by gender and community context, and are mediated through perceived economic benefits of polygamy, ancestral spirits, and community involvement.

## Human Rights Implications

The social work profession aims to advance human rights at the local, national, and international levels. Indigenous social care practices that affect the well-being of children and families can be considered using a human rights perspective, particularly for women.

### *Widowhood rites and property inheritance*

Widowhood cultural practices infringe on women's rights to dignity, non-discrimination, equality, health, and life (Durojaye, 2010). They vary from tribe to tribe, but there are commonalities of culturally imposed self-abnegation: women being made to sleep with the dead body of their spouse or drink the corpse purification water, mandatory wailings, and uncomfortable living conditions during seclusions, to name a few. Some cultures accuse the wife as a suspect in the husband's death and are made to face a series of dehumanizing treatments from the in-laws in order to establish their innocence (Akinbi, 2015). These are demeaning and degrading practices that violate the human rights of women. The African Charter (Organization of African Unity, 1981, Article 5) also prohibits all forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment against any human being.

Men are not required to go through widower cultural rites, while women are expected to mourn their husbands in traditionally prescribed ways. Making a woman go through widow rites just because she is a woman disrespects her person and is a gross violation of women's fundamental rights and freedoms, which perpetuates gender inequality (Makama, 2013; Nyanzi, et al., 2009; Sossou, 2002).

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights [ACHPR], 2003, Article 21) provides that widows shall have the right to an equitable share in the inheritance of the property of their husbands. A widow shall have the right to continue to live in the matrimonial house. In case of remarriage, she shall retain this right if the house belongs to her or if she has inherited it. Cooper (2010) has suggested that property grabbing by patrilocal kinsmen is often the reason why statutory laws meant to protect women are ignored with impunity:

There is indeed growing evidence that traditions of widows being cared for amongst the kin of a deceased husband are being manipulated to justify the disinheritance of women. The families of men have been reported to manipulate the custom of taking care of a deceased brothers or son's wife, children and property by claiming the property by not upholding the accompanying responsibilities of caring for the deceased man's family. (Cooper, 2010, p. 12)

The bias in property inheritance practices is undergirded by the notion that the bride price makes a wife more or less part of the property of the husband. This perception was upheld in a court ruling in *Suberu v. Summonu* (1957) (as cited in Alewo & Olong, 2012), where it was stated that under the native law and custom of the Yoruba people, a wife could not inherit her husband's property since she is like a chattel, to be inherited by a relative of her husband.

### *Marital cultural responses to infidelity*

Generally, marital infidelity has been found to be culturally unacceptable. However, responses from study participants do not indicate that due process is followed in investigations to substantiate an allegation of marital infidelity by women. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) states that "everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him" (Article 10) and that all are presumed innocent until proven guilty (Article 11). Sanctions against marital infidelity by a woman are determined by the collective wisdom of elders from the husband's kinsman and the entire village (Enwereji, 2008), which is not an impartial tribunal as stipulated in Article 10.

Smith (2010) observes that extramarital relations among southeastern Nigerian men are common and justified as an innate male predisposition for multiple sexual partners and condoned by the culturally acceptable polygamous marital option. Women, however, are subjected to demeaning punishments even at the point of suspicion. Women may not probe their husband's extramarital activity because if they do so they may be

divorced after being stripped of resources, including custody of children (Enwereji, 2008).

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa stipulates that "every woman shall have the right to dignity inherent in a human being and to the recognition and protection of her human and legal rights" (ACHPR, 2003, Article 3). "Every woman shall have the right to respect as a person and to the free development of her personality" (Article 3). Study participants confirmed that women accused of marital infidelity in their localities are punished by being deprived of their personal clothing, made to go naked publicly, and afflicted with diseases or even death. These cultural practices that rob women of dignity and respect are not written down as law yet have the force of law and are enforced by existing authorities and ruling bodies. These practices do not pass the repugnancy test of law and thus contravene known legal principles (Alewo & Olong, 2012). The repugnancy test requires that cultural practices enforceable by the court shall not be repugnant (offensive, distasteful, contrary) to natural justice, equity, and good conscience. The inequality of a man divorcing his wife at will and the wife not being able to do the same has been ruled as being repugnant in some Nigerian courts and may not be enforced by the customary courts (Attoh, 2016).

In conclusion, it is a violation of human rights and a discriminatory practice against women for them to be prohibited from questioning their husband on marital infidelity issues, or from taking the initiative to dissolve a marriage, or to be punished for marital infidelity without a fair hearing according to the Nigerian Constitution (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999), which states that, "every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law" (Section 17[2]).

## Recommendations

The following recommendations address the need to eliminate the discrimination and human rights infringements inherent in the marital cultural practices discussed in this chapter.

### *Upholding the repugnancy rule*

Nigeria operates a pluralistic legal system where the customary courts and informal arbitration systems have the force of law. The repugnancy rule in law provides a guideline for denouncing the marital cultural practices that inherently discriminate against women, such as the exclusion of women in the bride price process, demeaning and inhumane burial rites, gender discrimination in spousal property inheritance, and heavily gendered responses to marital infidelity. These practices need to be consistently decried in all Nigerian courts because they are repugnant to natural justice, equity, and good conscience.

### *Cultural legitimization of human rights*

There needs to be a harmonization of universal human rights and cultural rights. Also, there is a need for dialogue between the stakeholders and gatekeepers of culture in order for the cultural legitimization of human rights to be achieved. It is therefore proposed that social workers, whose profession is undergirded by principles of human rights, social justice, and cultural diversity competencies, take the lead at the national and the local levels (Juma, 2007).

### *Education and awareness*

Social workers should collaborate with legal practitioners to provide psycho-educational services to women, informing them as to how to secure their property rights before the death of their husbands. Having proper documentation of the specific names of the wife and husband on the title deeds of real estate is helpful in securing and protecting the wife against property grabbing by the kinsmen of a deceased husband.

Community leaders need to be educated about the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its derivatives such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (UN, 1979). Education and raising awareness of human rights provisions in the context of the community are vital for the eradication of cultural practices that infringe on human rights. It speaks to the world view of collective well-being in African communities that says “*Ubuntu*,” which means “I am because we are.”

### *Support for women empowerment organizations*

Organizations such as the International Federation of Women Lawyers, Nigeria (FIDA), Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON), International Human Rights Law Group in Nigeria (IHRLG), and others advocating for enforcing human and women's rights laws are essential to the process of achieving success. Social workers are encouraged to become involved in the activities of these organizations to promote the visibility of women in politics, education, and economics. Having women in positions of authority fosters a reduction in discriminatory, disrespectful, and demeaning cultural practices.

### *General systemic overhauling of gender inequality in Nigeria*

Issues of gender inequality need to be addressed holistically in the system. Para-Mallam (2010) highlighted the use of gender-neutral language such as chairperson, police officer, and others in daily discourse. Androgenic language should be discouraged in official publications and textbooks. We observed that the language of the human rights declarations and the Nigerian constitution are masculine, and indigenous communication tools should be designed to address folklores that perpetuate gender stereotypes. Nigerian female artists and playwrights are encouraged to produce plays and movies that reinforce gender equality.

### *Governmental responsibility*

The Nigerian government should take decisive steps to address cultural practices that infringe on women's rights as urged by CEDAW. This includes customary laws and practices.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter purposefully confronts the marital cultural practices of selected Nigerian communities that directly impinge on the human rights of women in society. Customary practices such as widow transfer and inheritance in many parts of Nigeria are oppressive to women, and the right to private ownership of property is denied the female gender. Some cultural practices against women are contrary to the doctrine of equity and the prevailing domestic and international laws. The marital cultural practices

examined in this chapter included the communal nature of customary marriages, the practice of bride price (dowry), widowhood practices and cultural response to marital infidelity. The patriarchal continuities and contradictions from colonial to contemporary socio-cultural influences impact the marital cultural practices presented in this chapter. While culture is dynamic and yields to modernization, both the primary and reviewed literature of this study attest to the currency of the cultural practices considered. Modern realities, such as the education of women, only affect the degree of expectations. For example, an educated and corporately engaged widow is still required to perform the widow rituals, but the time for isolation is reduced. Ewelukwa (2002) states that “tensions exist between tradition and modernity; between individual autonomy and group solidarity; and between individual rights and duties” (p. 430). The positive aspects of these cultural practices manifest a deliberate desire and design for indigenous social care, yet the negative aspects marginalize women and subject them to inhumane situations that deprive them of their basic human rights.

The experiences of widows in particular reveal the painful position of women as both the defenders and the victims of culture, and their agency both in perpetuating practices dehumanizing to them and in overturning entrenched customary and religious practices (Ewelukwa, 2002). Extensive education and targeted advocacy aimed at altering the cultural landscape will begin to shift public opinion on these sensitive yet important subjects. In the struggle for social emancipation and women’s rights, women’s participation in higher education should empower them to be equal citizens with men rather than a subordinate group that enjoys paternal privilege only under certain conditions. The recommendations proposed in this chapter reflect the authors’ belief that consistent and persistent resistance of these inhumane practices will lead to their collapse and eventual eradication from the societies in question. Customary laws and practices constructed largely by men in positions of power are resistant to change, and in their constructed form, continue to greatly oppress women. There is a need to amend discriminatory customary laws and practices related to widowhood cultural practices, inheritance, and property and marital infidelity, in accordance with international human rights standards on equality and non-discrimination.

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