

Propertied Women and Inheritance in South West Nigeria: What has changed?

Nurudeen Alliyu

Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Nigeria

The low status of women the world over has received attention from scholars and professionals in the field of development studies. Gradual changes have been recorded in some areas of life across nations. The changes have however not covered a majority of the women folks in many nations of the world especially the third world countries. The paper examined propertied women in South West Nigeria in relation to how they manage, control and transfer their properties with the intention of tracking the overall effect of the acquired properties on the women folks (Young and old). About 195 out of 225 sampled propertied women who owned properties ranging from land, houses, and small scale industries were selected along the divide of indigenous and foreign(modern) properties from both Lagos and Ogun state. The paper argues that the propertied women in the study area have actually experienced a remarkable change in their status as a result of property acquired over time. The effect of this new status is noticeable in the management, control and transfer of properties from older women to younger ones. Profound change in line with equal access to landed property is however common in the South and South East Yoruba ethnic group. It is therefore concluded that the factors that changed the propertied women's mental set will slowly but surely continue to enhance further changes given the sustenance of the current dynamics.

Introduction

Attitude may be defined as a well-established mental set that shapes and influences one's opinions and feelings, which are exhibited about or towards something. It is not based on single situation but rather on a person's accumulated experiences over time within any social formation. Indeed, human being is a consequence of the social formation he/she grew in. Women, in this regard, are, as a social category, which have experienced all sorts of domination in almost all aspects of life in their relationship with men (Taylor 2012; Isariyawonge (2013). Interestingly however, some women have been able to free themselves from some of the domineering tendencies of men within the society (Taylor 2012). This is particularly true of the Nigerian society, which is highly patriarchal in nature.

Even though patriarchal authority is the rule in Nigeria, Oyeneye(1997) noted that:

In the modern times, this type of authority has declined because of the twin processes of modernization and industrialization. (And) owing to the expansion of commercial activities in the country, some women have become wealthy, built houses and have, in some cases, assumed the headship of their families
(Oyeneye, 1997: 267)

And indeed Cathy Young (2013) in her paper 'Yes, Patriarchy is Dead' citing Rosin's essay recently argued

that the fortune of women is rising by the day through their ascendance in various aspect of life. For instance, 'women control 60 percent of wealth in the United States of America' argued Young in her review of Rosin's essay titled 'The End of Men'.

These women must have developed a well-established mental set that helped them or predispose them to evaluate situation to their advantage in a male dominated society. The attitude of these women is very germane in that, despite all odds against women in a patriarchal society, they have, some how, been able to be in the forefront.

PATRIARCHAL ATTITUDE, ORIGIN AND PERVASIVENESS

Patriarchy, for Gray (1982), is 'a great conceptual trap' - great trap that is the root of many other traps. It is embedded in subtle and not-so-subtle networks connecting material conditions of life, powerful social controls and ideologies (Giddens, 1993). It is a culture that is slanted so that men are valued a lot and women are valued less, or in which men's prestige is up and women's prestige is down (if at all they are accorded any) (Gray, 1982). According to Mead (1975), "in every known human society, the male" needs for achievement can be recognised. Men may cook, or weave or dress dolls or hunt hummingbirds, but if such activities are appropriate occupation of men, then the whole society, men and women alike, vote them important. When the same occupations are performed by women, they are regarded as less important". (pp.152). Mead's position was also supported, with slight modification recently, by Isariyawonge 2013 where it was argued that typically, the man is the strong "knight in shining armor"; the woman is the delicate, helpless "damsel in distress". Also, men are almost always portrayed as people in positions of power, whereas women are shown holding positions of lower power.

The scenario painted by Mead is commonplace in feminist literature - all emphasizing the dominant position of men over women who are dominated

(Harris, 1984; Figes, 1986; Gray, 1982; Brysen, 1992; Pearson, 1992). This relation of male superiority and female subordination has been taken for granted. Over the years, it has remained unnoticed, unchallenged and defined as natural. In so far as scientific research will remain an inconclusive event or phenomenon, things will not remain or maintain a status quo. Scientific research, in the recent past, has tended to point in other direction concerning male-female relations in society (a direction in favour of 'nurture' rather than 'nature') in the explanation of the relation of superiority and inferiority between men and women (; Oakley, 1974; Mies, 1988; Connel, 1984; Alliyu, 1995). Scholars such as Kevin Harris in her book "Sex, Ideology and Religion" and Elizabeth Dodson Gray in her book: "Patriarchy as a Conceptual Trap" have been able to demonstrate how patriarchy originated, is perpetuated, institutionalised, developed and transmitted from generation to generation as "natural".

For Rosaldo, "culture comes from men" (and not from women). Mead also posits that "customs are given (by men) as external norms before given rise to internal sentiments, and these non-sentiment norms determine the sentiments of individuals as well as the circumstances in which they may or must, be displayed" (cited in Figes, 1986, p.14). Premised on Mead's assertion, Figes (1986) and Isariyawongse (2013) posit that "over feelings on the love between men and women, on marriage and parenthood, on the family and on ourselves as fathers, wives and mothers, are largely conditioned by the society which produced us, more so than we realise. The type of women that our society has produced in the past, the roles they have played or failed to play, spring from the dictates and expectations of men" (Ibid., p.15). In short, women have been largely man-made. Succinctly put by Figes:

Women, presented with an image in a mirror, have danced to that image in a hypnotic trance. And because she thought the image was herself, it became just that. (Ibid., p.15)

In an attempt to unravel how women are nurtured into this subservient position or status, Gray made an incursion into the past and posits "patriarchy has been with us from the beginning". The fact is that humanity has been trapped and become insensitive to these issues. She drew her reference from Judeo-Christian tradition into which she was born and established how the seed of a Male Fertility Cult was sown, nurtured, reaped and fruits institutionalised and passed from one generation to another. Although other scholars have argued that matriarchy had existed before patriarchy (Davis, 1972; Stones, 1978), Gray however, posits that women were never in control of those myths / symbol systems that control either matriarchy or patriarchy. It is often men who were/are in charge of the social and religious construction of reality. In Hinduism for instance, "the goddesses offer a very favourable portrait of women's sexual energies, yet Hinduism is still a myth system totally organised from the view point of the male". The reference given to female fertility by the earliest mythologies was even finally eroded in the overturn of the gods as it was experienced within Judeo-Christian tradition, which is prevalent today.

In Judaism, according to Gray, sacred space was held to be contaminated by women who had been menstruating or had given birth (see also Harris, 1984; Schildkrout, 1983). This view is still commonplace and highly held by people today as 'natural' in almost all religion - Islam, Christianity, even indigenous African religion. The implication of this is that female blood contaminates and male blood does not. Thus a degree of separation and segregation between male and female is entrenched at religious levels. Through this, male ideologies are developed which thereafter, permeates other structures of the society where women are trapped. Ideas, feelings and attitudes also emanate out of this ideology that is male oriented. Thus, men feel and think superior and women admits the inferiority status unquestionably. But ... "this ... faith-tradition is flawed by a serious distortion and that distortion is its patriarchal character or shape" (Gray, 1982, p.27).

Yet premised on Judeo-Christian tradition, Gray quoting Rosaldo says - "Put quite simply, men have no single commitment as enduring, time-consuming and emotionally compelling - as close to seeming necessary and natural - as the relation of a woman to her infant child; and so men are free to form those broader associations that we call "society, universalistic system of order, meaning and commitment that link particular mother-child groups (Gray, 1986, p.34).

Rosaldo's statement above, according to Gray, is rooted in the biblical account of the virtuous wife in Proverbs 31.

The verses recorded the attributes of virtuous women and her role, which is merely supportive of the males. The role of the male is recorded in Proverbs 31:23 "her husband is known in the gates, when he sits with the elders of the land". It was here that men (in Rosaldo's term) 'form these broader associations that we call 'society'. Consequently, women in biblical times were workers and men were lawmakers at the gates.

Just as women working for about 18 hours per day in the third world today, without adequate or no remuneration at all, men are fully in charge of culture, administration and control of the entire social formation.

It is no wonder then that since the economy is the infrastructure upon which the other super-structures (like religion, education, politics, philosophy, etc.) of the society are erected, men are found dominating and controlling. The control of the economy therefore facilitates control of the super-structures of the society. Property or means of production in any economy or society that is patriarchal in character is, therefore, most likely to be acquired, owned and controlled by men. The instances described above are what are referred to as the beginning of ideological foundation (rooted in religious beliefs) for the superiority of the

male over female by Alliyu 2006. He however concluded that knowledge has proved that the status quo can change for both sexes for the development of the society.

It is therefore the focus of this paper to measure the degree of transformation in the relationship between men and women in a male dominated society concerning access to property as a major means of production.

Selection of Research Respondents

A total sample of 225 modern and indigenous propertied women was drawn from the population of study. Out of the 225, only 195 were adjudged useful for the purpose of the analysis. The 195 propertied women cut across women who reside in both Lagos and Ogun States areas of the study. They own properties ranging from land, houses, and small-scale businesses and manufacturing industries. Land/house, and commercial properties were the targets in Ogun State area of the study population. On the other hand, manufacturing industries, commercial and financial properties were the focus in the Lagos area.

The researcher was able to locate 32 women who actually own lands/houses for the survey through some Community Based Organisations (CBO) like, Thrift & Credit Societies. This was done with the assistance of the CBO executives who were familiar with the socio-economic statuses of their members. The chances of sampling were limited here. Hence propertied women purposively identified by the CBO executives for the study were surveyed. Contrarywise, a sample of 67 women was drawn from a population of propertied women dealing with indigenous items such as timber and planks. Since they were well organised into stalls, the systematic random sampling was used to arrive at the sample population of 67. In all, a total number of 99 indigenous propertied women were gotten.

For the Lagos area, a total of 20 women who own small-scale industries were gotten through the services of Market Facts Limited a research and marketing firm operating in Lagos. The firm has first-hand contact with manufacturers of diverse products

for purposes of marketing research. From a list of their clients, another list of industries owned by women was compiled, out of which a sample of 20 was drawn.

Women who trade in modern or foreign items abound in Lagos. However, the study sample was limited to areas where they are most concentrated hence Lagos Island and Ikeja Local Government Areas of Lagos State were used. From both locations, a total of 76 commercial propertied women in the Lagos area were gotten at their market stalls using, also systematic random sampling method. In all, a total of 96 modern propertied women were drawn. The total of both the Lagos and Ogun respondents amounted to the 195 respondents sampled and selected for the study.

In addition to the questionnaire, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Semi Structured Interview (SSI) were also used to 'get behind the scene' of some of the responses in the questionnaire. This became necessary in order to gain insight into some issues that need further and/or wider explanations or clarifications. A total of four FGDs sessions were held for all the respondents in Ogun State and twelve SSI sessions were held for respondents in Lagos State. The data was processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The same package was used to arrive at various frequency tables and cross tabulations in the study. This was followed by qualitative analysis that revealed the underlining social processes and realities. Specifically, the qualitative data were analysed by a manual content analysis taken into consideration the detail process in QDA.

Findings and Discussion

It has been documented in the literature that women are regarded as properties in some cultures (Hirschen 1984, Imoagene, 1990; Olutayo, 2000; Taylor 2012). For example Taylor wrote:

Until recent times, women throughout Europe, the Middle East and Asia were unable to have any influence over the political, religious or cultural lives of their societies. They couldn't own property or inherit land and wealth, and were frequently treated as mere property themselves. In some

countries they could be confiscated by money lenders or tax collectors to help settle debts; in ancient Assyria, the *punishment* for rape was the handing over of the rapist's wife to the husband of his victim, to use as he desired. Most gruesomely of all, some cultures practised what anthropologists have called ritual widow murder (or ritual widow *suicide*), when women would be killed (or kill themselves) shortly after the deaths of their husbands. This was common throughout India and China until the twentieth century, and there are still occasional cases nowadays.

Indeed, Olutayo (2000:69) states that:

In most communities in Nigeria, women are treated as properties. They are to be bought by their male counterparts through the payment of what is known as the "bride-price" the amount of the price varies from one culture to the other. In almost all however, no matter how small the amount is, it is a significant determinant of who owns who.

From the foregoing, it is deducible that the idea of 'who owns who' may also determine 'who gives out what/who' as the case may be. If men own women just as

any other properties such as land, cars, business ventures, houses, etc., it then follows that men can give out women in form of inheritance to whoever they wish. This is the practice among some communities in Yoruba land (Adebowale, 1997). However, for clarity purpose the discussion of findings shall be done under two major sections i.e A and B:

Section A: General Knowledge of the Respondents on the Nature of Inheritance

Premised on the above, an examination of the knowledge of the respondents on the nature of inheritance in their community was conducted. Thus it was asked: Does your custom or tradition specify who should inherit the family wealth/property when the household head (husband) dies? About 32.3% claimed that they do not know if their custom is specific on the issue. About 15.4% claimed that their custom or tradition does not specify who should inherit. However, a majority of the respondents (i.e. 52.3%) claimed that their custom or tradition specified who should inherit the family property at the death of the household head (husband).

From the above, one can say that about 67.7% of the respondents have some knowledge about inheritance in their community. Most important to this part of the study however the 52.3% is whose custom specifies who should inherit family property.

Section B: Specific Knowledge of the Respondents about Inheritors of Property

Below is the detailed presentation:

Table 1: RESPONDENTS' VIEW ON WHO SHOULD INHERIT FAMILY PROPERTY

	Likely Beneficiaries/Inheritors										Total
	Son		Daughter		Both		Wife		Others		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Land	36	35.3	00	00	59	57.8	00	00	07	6.9	102
Houses	53	51.9	00	00	38	37.3	02	02	09	8.8	102
Vehicles	23	22.5	01	1.0	61	59.8	05	4.9	12	11.8	102
Titles	83	81.4	00	00	11	10.7	01	1.0	07	6.9	102
Money	08	7.8	01	1.0	65	63.7	13	12.8	15	14.7	102
Family Headship	73	71.6	00	00	08	7.8	16	15.7	05	4.9	102

Source: Field Returns

On the Issue of Land

Common to all respondents is the fact that land is an important productive property. Concerning land therefore, it is evident from table 1 above that the daughters are not considered as inheritors of land. The implication of this is that women are not prepared for productive life even though they 'reproduce' the labour who in turn produce wealth. While "productive life" is economically rewarding, "reproductive life" is not. However, Mies (1988) felt contrary and she argued that, human body historically, is the first means of production to be exploited before nature (e.g. Land). Being the producer of other human beings and the nurturers, therefore, women were the "first producers of the daily food" for labour being "produced" (Olutayo, 2000). By locating 'reproduction' therefore in the sphere of 'production', there is a tendency towards instituting economic reward also for reproduction as society changes.

Contrariwise, 35.3% of the respondents felt that sons are most customarily qualified as inheritors of land following after the patrilineal nature of the Nigerian society. This opinion is corroborated by Imoagene (1990) in his 'Know Your Country Series – Handbook of Nigeria's Culture areas'. Below are some cases in point:

Since agricultural activity... was largely a preserve of the men, land, a most important item of property had necessarily to pass through the male line". (Imoagene, 1990, Vol. 1: 48)

— a man was obliged to share out to all his sons part of his farmland when they became adults. Anyone of them who married was also expected to get his own share of his father's

household. (Imoagene, 1990, Vol. 3: 50)

The majority of the respondents, i.e. about (57.8%) of the women in Table 1 above are of the view that both sons and daughters could inherit land. This may be true particularly of the South and South-east Yoruba ethnic group. This had earlier been substantiated by the works of Fadipe (1970). However, it may not be so among the northern Yoruba who, for instance, assert through a Yoruba proverb that: "***There must be no man in the 'idle' for a woman to inherit the cutlass***". This places a sort of restriction on women regarding inheritance among the northern Yoruba (Imoagene, 1990).

Among the Igbo, one of the three basic principles that govern land tenure is 'that no individual shall be without land (Jones, 1949 cited in Imoagene, 1990). Obviously, in practice, women are not considered as such individual in this matter as both houseland and farmland are passed down directly to only male descendants, excluding females. The case is not different in other ethnic groups such as the Hausa and Idoma peoples in Benue State.

The argument therefore is that the 57.8% of the respondent who felt both sexes could inherit land, being a major factor of production, might have been made up of Yoruba from South and Southwest. The tradition of inheritance among this group is generally more relaxed to favour both sexes rather than one over another. Moreover, the tendency towards an egalitarian family system is more pronounced among them as well than in any other region in Nigeria.

The fate of the wife is not different from the daughter since both are female sexes after all. None of the respondents argued for a wife being an inheritor of land. She may even be considered as part of the inheritance as the cases are in many communities in Nigeria. For example, among the Idoma in Benue State:

They regarded property which a wife or wives accumulated while they were married to their husband(s) as the latter's property

*The figure (102) in the Total Column gave us the 52.3% of the respondents whose custom specify who to inherit what.

*which may be inherited by his sons
or, in the absence of sons, brothers
(Imoagene, 1990: 76)*

This is a clear case of '*eni to leru loleru*' a Yoruba saying; meaning '*one who owns a slave owns the slave's property*'. The tendency by widows to challenge the practice of disinheritance of their dead husband's property especially by relatives, often leads to tensions and conflicts among many families in Yorubaland. However, part of the emerging theme in the qualitative studies is that the status of the widow is a crucial factor to consider during asset/property sharing (inheritance). Indeed, some of the propertied women narrated their experience thus:

Me, for example when my husband died, my husband's younger brother could not approach me for such inheritance because he knows 'his power' cannot carry me. I am not 'his property' at all (Emi kii se eru re rara). Even before my husband died, I used to give him money so, such man cannot be bold enough to approach me for inheritance.

It is instructive therefore that the higher the status of a woman the lower the chances of her being inherited.

Lastly, about 6.9% of the respondents said that other people within the family also could inherit land apart from the immediate beneficiaries. However, it is customary in most communities in Nigeria that other beneficiaries are often male and it is usually the junior brother of the deceased man. Indeed, for 'most West African peoples, there was a marked preference for a younger brother inheriting from an older brother' (Imoagene, 1990).

On House

Closely linked to land is house. It is considered part of land as a factor of production in pure economic sense. Much more than that however, it is a symbol of achievement or success particularly in the study areas. It is also a means of generating capital, particularly in the urban areas like Lagos. For example, many of the respondents who engage in commercial activities in Lagos also have houses they let out for economic purpose while they reside in their husbands' houses to keep their families together.

Under the house column in table 1, it is indicated that about 51.9% of women claimed that sons are the sex customarily likely to inherit houses. Daughters are most likely not to be favoured by custom to inherit houses because the respondents expressed their negative feeling on the likelihood of a daughter inheriting a house. This might not be unconnected with the fact that women will some day leave her parent's house for another man's house who must, as a matter of custom, provide accommodation for her.

It is therefore felt that sons need houses to accommodate their wives at marriage and daughters do not. This custom might affect women negatively especially where houses have multiple functions apart from mere accommodating the owners. A good number of the respondents however felt differently when about 37.3% of them pinpointed that both sexes could inherit houses customarily. As said earlier, this seems to reflect the case among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria where regulations guiding inheritance is more relaxed and favourable to women more than any other ethnic group.

It must be noted again that, this practice does not cut across all Yoruba sub-ethnic groups as documented by Imoagene (1990). About 2% equally said that there are occasions when wives do inherit houses. Part of the emerging theme in the qualitative analysis shows that the family plays a significant role in the administration of estate sharing at the death of the owner. The family sometimes plays overriding roles especially where there is no 'WILL' and there is a lot to share. Where there is little or nothing to share,

their role is often limited to words of advice to the deceased children. According to some of the respondents what sometimes determine the fate of a widow when the husband dies in terms of inheritance depends on how good or bad the family is.

On Vehicular Property

The third item of property in Table 1 is the vehicle. This is not a property indigenous to Africa. It is not as common as land and houses but it is equally prestigious and symbolic of success. About 59.8% of the respondents confirm that both sexes should inherit vehicles. This percentage can be explained in terms of the dominant presence of the Yoruba among the

The Role of Family in Will Administration

Box 1: THE GOOD AND THE BAD FAMILY

Good Family	Bad Family
<p>In a good family when a man dies, they will take care of the deceased children and even stand by the wife. Any property he might have acquired would be kept for the children and the wife if the children were still young. Their mother would use this for the upkeep of the children.</p>	<p>In a bad family the wife or widow may be having problems with the family. They might even seize the man's properties and send her away from home.</p>

What seems to limit the role of a family in estate sharing administration now is the tendency for propertied man and woman to always prepare their WILL before they die. In a situation where this is done, the lawyer often administers the estate sharing among all the inheritors. However, it must be noted that this does not really rule out completely, the possibility of crisis where some inheritors feel cheated by what they get from the 'WILL'.

Owing to the extended nature of African family system, it is observed that 8.8% of the respondents claimed that there are situations where other people inherit houses apart from the immediate family members and these could be brothers, sisters or even parents. This figure is even higher than those who said that wives should inherit houses. It is a clear indication here that being a girl, a wife or woman, in a patriarchal society, is somehow disadvantageous.

respondents. The Yoruba ethnic groups are resident traditionally in Southwestern Nigeria where there seems to be the large number of vehicles.

Despite the views of the 59.8 percent of the respondents above, another 22.5 percent said that sons could inherit vehicles while only 1% felt daughters could inherit vehicles. This is yet another reflection of the structures that favour men over women in terms of property in a male dominated society. The situation of a wife is therefore instructive from that of a daughter as only 4.9% of the respondents argued that wives could inherit vehicles (probably if she is not to be inherited herself by a man). Lastly, 11.8% of the respondents agreed that apart from the immediate household members, other people could also benefit from vehicle inheritance. It is also instructive that going by the fate of daughters and wives with regards to inheritance, in a patriarchal society, females are not likely to be included among the other inheritors represented in the views of 11.8% of the respondents.

Titles as Property

Titles are official positions held by people in the society. It could be hereditary and it could be non-hereditary. Succession to titles in a patriarchal society is often mostly through male line (although cases of Regents are noticeable in Yoruba Palaces) and its rules are not as flexible as inheritance laws – among most non-industrial peoples. Among the Hausa peoples of Northern Nigeria, Imoagene (1990) noted that:

Titles and ritual offices were vested in the position of family head held by the most senior male. At death the title passed down to the next younger male in his generation. Under this arrangement called adelphic succession, titles ran through all the males in one generation before passing down the most senior male in the next lower generation. (Imoagene, 1990: 40)

Consideration is not given to the other sex (i.e. female) at all. However, this is not the case in all patriarchal societies as it is discovered that among the Yoruba, which is also patriarchal in nature, women do occupy some positions such as IYALODE and ERELU. The former is a chieftaincy title exclusively reserved for women to attend to women's affairs in the society. The latter is a title reserved for a female member of the Ogboni/Oshugbo secret society popular among the Egba and Ijebu-Yoruba. This is very limited when one considers the number of titles available in these societies. It is indeed not very significant to bring about a gender-balanced representation in such societies.

The figures under titles in table 1 seem to give some empirical strength to the above viewpoint as about 81.4% of the respondents affirm that it is the son that could inherit titles in their communities. This is quite overwhelming and not surprising as the study was

conducted in a male dominated society. Daughters, on the other hand, could not inherit titles as none of the respondents (0%) felt it is not cultural for a woman to occupy title office. However, about 10.7% of the respondents said that both could inherit titles. This might be a reflection of societies where females are still given some consideration to occupy titles as noted earlier. Cases of a wife inheriting a title are also very few as only 1% of the respondent agreed that wives could inherit. Lastly 6.9% reported that other people are considered in title succession and these other people are as good as other males in the society and not females.

'Title' has a close link with 'status' - meaning a position in a social system involving designated rights and obligations (Merton, 1957; Mercadante 2009). Closely related to 'status' is another concept i.e. 'role' meaning social expectations attached to particular statuses or social positions (Marshall, 1994; Mercadante 2009). In fact, status and role 'connect culturally defined expectations with the patterned conduct and relationships which make up a social structure' (Merton, 1957).

This perhaps suggests that the reservation of titles for men in the society places them in a position of continuous advantage over and above women in almost all societal conduct and relationship (including property relations) within the social structure. Women are excluded from participating in almost every area that matter in the society. Since the occupation of a particular title (status) is a condition to role performance in a social system, it is therefore instructive that where women's access to titles (or influential statuses) are limited and/or restricted, women are likely to be excluded from performing roles that could improve their life – or enhance their contribution to development.

Money Property

Apart from lands, houses, vehicles and titles, money was also listed among items that are transferable to likely inheritors. The majority of the respondents (63.7%) agreed that money could be inherited by both sexes. However, it is obvious from the above table

that despite this claim, sons are still likely to be favoured over females. About 7.8% of the respondents claimed that sons could inherit money and only 1.0% claimed that daughter could inherit money. The percentages presented here are still skewed in favour of sons over daughters.

The cases of wives are not too different from daughters as only 12.8% of the women-respondents agreed that wives could inherit money. However this seems to be higher than other percentages of respondents' views about wives chances of inheriting items as land (0%); houses (2%); vehicles (4.9%) titles (1%). Since no amount was given as options to the respondents, it is not unlikely that, owing to the dominant nature of men over resources (including money) and attitudes of 'bad family' as noted earlier (including women) where the amount for inheritance is very large, wives are not likely to be favoured as men. Below are two cases in point to demonstrate the reality of the predicament of wives and/or widows in a patriarchal society.

'bad family'. Surprisingly, within such 'bad family' women even join to disinherit a wife of properties particularly if there are lots to share and the husband's family is poor.

T h e y believe she (the wife) is not part of them. How can she hold on to all these properties? What about we family, the mother, sister, father and brothers.

This implies that, be it deliberately or not, women might even be assisting to further oppress other women, in addition to oppression from men in a male dominated society. Indeed, they might have helped to sustain over the years, the institution of patriarchy. Yet, 14.7% of the respondents claimed that other people could also inherit money.

Box II:

THE PREDICAMENT OF WIDOWS IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

CASE A	CASE B
<p>The father of my children died about 20 years ago. I am the only parent of my children now. The family sold his land, the uncompleted houses etc. They did not give my children and me anything. They are not responsible for us at all</p>	<p>If my husband dies now, (I pray for him to live long) the family will corner me. They will ask me about his savings, the house and any other thing. I am ready to give it to them because I don't want to face any problem — because they can kill my children.</p>

Case A above represents what a wife had suffered in the past about inheritance related issues and Case 'B' represents what a wife would not want to experience in the event of the death of the husband.

The cases reflect what wives suffer immediately or potentially when husbands die in a patriarchal society. The family of the husband is often accused of perpetuating this evil, particularly if it is a

Family Headship as 'Property'

Finally, the issue of family headship was also raised and a majority of the respondents (71.6%) indicated that sons could inherit family headship and none of them (0%) agreed that daughters could inherit family headship. A respondent quite observed, "it is not in our culture for a woman to be ruling (head) a man". For her, men always like to be the head of the

family even when they are not capable economically and some have the mentality that when a woman is rich, she will be uncontrollable” (emphasis, ours). As such, some propertied women, according to the respondents, do acquire part of their property in their husbands’ name ‘just to boost the ego of the man’. However, a respondent quickly remarked that “I do not think that it is really worth it nowadays a far as I am concerned”.

However, wives could inherit family headship as about 15.7% of the respondents indicated. This indeed is the item of ‘properties’ listed that most wives could inherit. This is in consonance with literature that female-headed household is on the increase and they even tend towards poverty than male-headed households (FOS, 1999).

Since the respondents are propertied women who have lands, houses, business enterprises, vehicles etc., it was decided to find out how they are likely to transfer their estate to their children. This was asked against the background of various unfavourable experiences of women under inheritance laws and procedures in the study areas and indeed in a male dominated society.

The emerging theme in the various responses from the Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and Semi Structured Interviews (SSIs) was that, the transfer would be done on equal basis between sexes even if daughters were already married out to other families. However, propertied women are likely to transfer their business ventures to female children since women are more in the informal sector than men. Avoidance of trouble among the children also emerged as a reason why propertied women would share their estate equally between sexes. Any preference of one over another may really have negative effect on the children. It may lead to serious crisis and even assassination of one another in extreme cases. A respondent noted as follows:

I have a lot of troublesome children. I will not allow them to kill themselves. So I will do my will and share my properties

to them equally before I die irrespective of sex.

Concluding Remarks: What can still change?

The conditions, experience and status of the propertied women reported in this study clearly demonstrate a clear departure, a significant shift, a major change and a remarkable difference from the categories of women reported by Hirschen 1984, Taylor 2012 before the twentieth century China and India; the Middle East and Asia. It is equally a notable transformation of the status and roles of these women when compared with those reported by Imoagene 1990.

Indeed a fundamental change could be said to have taken place among the category of women in this study. This is so because the propertied women reported in this paper have transformed from a mere property to be shared by men in the society to property owners and sharers of property in the same society, where hitherto, some generations away, they were considered and treated as commodities

These women have had access to property, which have positively improved their social standing in their community. They have access to properties ranging from land, houses, cars, businesses etc. however the change is still predominant in some sections of the southwest i.e the South and South East; the West and Central of Yoruba ethnic group. The South and South East comprise of the Ijebu/Ondo, which has minimum hereditary restriction system. The West and Central are made up of Egba/ Ibadan that has an egalitarian system. Both are wide apart from the system of the North/ North East Yoruba group i.e Oyo/Ekiti, which has a maximum hereditary system.

For change to be experienced by other parts of the southwest, the structures that gradually influence movement from a less desirable state to a more equitable share of resources must be encouraged.

As such the tendency to transfer resources equitably to children irrespective of gender noticed among the propertied women must not only be encouraged, it must be sustained. Indeed some are

now more likely to transfer their businesses to their daughters to create a semblance of quick ascendancy.

More importantly however is the mental set of the women that has emboldened them to refuse to be inherited by any man. This mental set will slowly but surely continue and it will empower the women folk to have control over their own body and property. These are potential factors that could further engender further change first among the women folk then, the entire society.

Since writing of Will is becoming a common practice in the study area, it is more likely to improve women access to property especially as the society continues to move towards egalitarianism. The practice though still has challenges at the level of execution depending on the nature of each family member or the quality and the quantity of what to inherit. Interestingly, the propertied women seem to have got along the troubles often associated with inheritance by resolving to share major parts of their own estate among their children equitably in order to forestall trouble while they are alive.

Finally, it is apparent from the view of the propertied women that the positive change concerning the status of women can be slow as they have experienced. It can only lead to further positive changes as more women gain access to properties that will make them compete with men favorably in the society.

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Biographical Note

Nurudeen Aliyu is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Nigeria. His research interests are in the areas of Gender and Development.