

# Counter-Hegemonic Gender Discourse in Jukun Proverbs

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## Abstract

Proverbs have long functioned as repositories of cultural wisdom, reflecting the values, beliefs, and social norms of diverse communities. The domain of gender discourse remains a dynamic arena for the negotiation of societal norms, power dynamics, and resistance to prevailing ideologies. Grounded in the theoretical framework of standpoint feminism, this study adopts a lens that acknowledges the complex interplay of gender dynamics within the Jukun community. This framework provides a nuanced perspective for understanding how counter-hegemonic gender discourse emerges within the broad context of Jukun proverbs. Employing a qualitative research approach, this project conducts a comprehensive analysis of a diverse range of Jukun proverbs, exploring the cultural, historical and social contexts that have nurtured counter-hegemonic expressions among the Jukun. The proverbs are examined not only as linguistic artifacts but also as reflections of lived experiences and resistance to dominant narratives. Within this rich linguistic framework, the work uncovers the subtle yet potent expressions that challenge, subvert or redefine traditional gender norms and ideologies. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between language, culture and gender, shedding light on the evolving dynamics of gender discourse within this diverse and vibrant community. It reaffirms the importance of linguistic and cultural analysis in the pursuit

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## Introduction

Proverbs, an oral genre, have long served as repositories of wisdom, encapsulating the values, beliefs, and social norms of communities across the globe. These succinct and often poetic expressions carry the weight of tradition, offering insights

into the way societies perceive and navigate the complexities of life. The study of proverbs within African cultures has long been recognized as a rich source of insights into societal norms and values. Scholars such as Oluwadaro Jacob Oludare (147) contend that proverbs, cherished across cultures, are succinct expressions of wisdom passed down through generations. In his view, this oral genre offers universal truths and practical guidance, encapsulating

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metaphorical language that encapsulates shared life experiences and beliefs. This perhaps explains why Mider (5), Ogunjimi and Na'Allah (86) emphasize traditionality and the role of this oral genre by considering it an oral composition nurtured within cultural traditions, reflecting the philosophical and socio-cultural values of a society. This definition recognizes the deep connection between proverbs, cultural identity, and the collective wisdom of a community.

Bayo Ogunjimi and Na'Allah (85) correlate the above views by asserting that proverbs are oral compositions, drawing upon the diverse layers of African values, embracing philosophical and socio-cultural elements, and reflecting the essence of individuals, households, and collective societal patterns. They are not just linguistic expressions; they are profound reflections of cultural identity, embodying the collective wisdom of a community (Ogunjimi and Na'Allah 85).

Proverbs serve as versatile tools for describing, categorizing, and evaluating different situations. They propagate norms, principles, and moral recommendations. Nevertheless, traditional patterns of using and organizing proverbs have evolved. A proverb succinctly encapsulates a situation, passes judgment, and provides a course of action (Jegede 48–49). Proverbs also serve as markers of wisdom, enhancing discourse, guiding dialectical arguments, offering advice, rebuke, or a means of persuasion. They convey moral codes and are a means of communication for advising, reproaching, or encouraging compliance (Jegede 49).

Proverbs play significant roles in training younger members of society to become virtuous citizens who can work towards their life objectives. This is well captured by Okpewho (2003), Nkem Okoh (2008), and Adom et al. (2021), who submit that proverbial discourses encapsulate cultural knowledge, historical narratives, ethical teachings, and shrewd observations. This therefore presents proverbs as cultural tools that are instrumental in preserving cultural heritage and reflecting a society's collective experiences, struggles, philosophy, aspirations, joys, and sorrows (Okoh, 123). African proverbs are instrumental in conveying cultural values across generations. They serve as vehicles for imparting cultural values, wisdom, and social morality (Bynum & Beryl). They act as educational tools, transmitting cultural traditions and prescribing socially accepted behavior. As Fayemi and Gyan et al. observe, proverbs can be didactic, moral, philosophical, humorous, or therapeutic, effectively conveying a society's rich history and culture. This coincides with Bishwarkama's observation that proverbs are repositories of traditional knowledge, offering guidance on dealing with life's challenges and moral dilemmas.

Consequent upon their unique role in cultural discourse, Ruth Finnegan (410) foregrounds that they also facilitate social cohesion by smoothing interpersonal relations and helping individuals adjust to playing their roles in their societies. This suggests that, in the context of conflict resolution, proverbs offer subtle guidance and wisdom. Adom et al. observe that proverbs are vital for preserving indigenous knowledge systems. They encapsulate cultural wisdom, traditional beliefs, and

practical insights that might otherwise be lost due to changing environments and societal shifts. Their potential distortion according to Ryan poses a risk to cultural heritage.

The foregoing critical stances show that proverbs hold a vital place within the cultural milieu of indigenous African populations. They constitute an indispensable facet of native African culture, functioning as conduits for the elucidation and representation of the entirety of African values and belief systems. Within this framework, the wisdom encapsulated within proverbs assumes a revered status, acknowledged as a form of absolute verity.

However, there seems to be a shift from the usual form of proverbial discourses; new forms that challenge traditional norms are in use. This new form is what Aderemi Raji-Oyelade (74-75) in his *Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphemy* referred to as postproverbials. According to Raji, "...there is a radical overturning of the form of the traditional proverb; originally, its typical construction is supposed to be sacrosanct and unmalleable...", but in recent times, the age-old logic of that fixability in especially in the context of Yoruba proverb is being threatened by a new rhetorical tradition that accords the typical proverb a truly amphibian identity. In other words, the use of Yoruba proverbs in quotidian conversation has attained a problematic and intriguing status, so it would not be unusual to hear a speaker using a "supplementary" proverb in place of an "original" proverb for the same purpose but with a playful intention. This

tradition of the supplementary proverb, the product of which may be inadvertent or unintentional, is what I call the phenomenon of the postproverbial in Yoruba culture (74 -75).

This change, this new form, and this emerging status of proverb observed in the context of Yoruba culture, which Raji (75-75) calls postproverbial, also correlate with proverb usage in the Jukun culture. While the postproverbials in Yoruba culture carry within them playful intent, the new forms of proverbs found within Jukun culture reveal the speaker's intention to negotiate identity. This new form of proverb found in Jukun is what I refer to as counter-hegemonic proverbs.

Counter-hegemonic proverbs refer to proverbial narratives and expressions that resist or challenge dominant gender ideologies. It is a form of proverb that seeks to dismantle oppressive structures and advocate for alternative perspectives on gender. Within Jukun society, counter-hegemonic gender discourse manifests in proverbs that challenge gender hierarchies, question stereotypes, and offer alternative narratives. The above view corroborates Juliet Kamwendo and Kaya's (92) argument that proverbs, despite their ostensible role as repositories of general societal wisdom passed down from one generation to the next, harbour latent gender implications that ostensibly perpetuate gender inequality and the ascendancy of men.

### **The Jukun Proverbial Tradition**

The Jukun have a rich proverbial tradition that reflects their cultural values, history, and worldview. Proverbs play a significant role in Jukun oral literature and communication. Jukun proverbs often

convey the cultural values and norms of Jukun society. They provide guidance on behaviour, ethics, and morality. These proverbs are used to teach younger generations about the customs and expectations of their community. The proverb “Anyasho fa’nu apanku yo la mapi nghanah ni” (The road forsakes human counsel, which is why it is bent), for instance, expresses a cultural value in Jukun society that emphasizes the importance of respecting advice and counsel from others. The Jukun place a high value on the wisdom and experience of elders; thus, the proverb suggests that seeking advice from such individuals is a wise course of action. This proverb endorses the idea that individuals are not isolated entities but rather part of a larger community. The proverb warns that disregarding advice leads to “foolish mistakes.” This implies that Jukun society discourages arrogance and encourages humility in learning from others.

Lazarus Ahwepa Aboshi (176) observes that the proverb in Jukun society is one of the major tools for building cultural, moral and ethical values in people within the Jukun society. This suggests that proverbs in Jukun culture serve a pedagogical function. Through proverbial discourses, references to historical events, rulers, or ancestral figures are made. Jukun proverbs, in this sense, serve as a means of preserving and passing down the historical legacy of the Jukun people. For instance, the proverbial expression “*Awuhwo ma ndhandha u ye ka’ dadu.*”, which translates to “*A masquerade that is seen always, loses touch with its audience.*” This proverb emphasizes the importance of maintaining a respectable position, an act that references specific historical events.

Masquerades hold significance in Jukun culture, representing spirits or honouring ancestors. The proverb uses the concept of a frequently seen masquerade losing its special status to illustrate the importance of maintaining a dignified presence. While there’s no historical reference, the proverb highlights the cultural value Jukun society places on respect for elders and the importance of maintaining a respected position. Many Jukun proverbs are laden with wisdom and offer practical advice for various aspects of life, including farming, relationships, leadership, and decision-making.

Nahum Upah Butari (n.d.) In *An Analysis Of Flora Related Phrasemic Terms* in Jukun explains that phrasemic terms such as proverb in Jukun play numerous roles. For instance, elders may speak to the youths, using them as a way of teaching them how to unravel the mystery of life, akin to the proverb “*Azyi ma ’ngah u yi sazyi ’mopye*” which translates *The forehead is part of the head, yet it is feared by the hair that grows on the head.* This proverbial expression foregrounds Jukun identity in a couple of ways. The proverb uses the metaphor of hair being afraid of the forehead to reflect the emphasis placed on respecting elders and the established hierarchy within Jukun society. It highlights the importance of respecting those with more experience and authority. But, beyond this, the proverb talks about limitations to freedom, suggesting that even the hair, which grows freely, has a boundary (the forehead). This proverbial discourse is often deployed in the context of an argument between a man and woman. It is used to foreground the cultural norm, which places restrictions and limitations on how much a woman has to

say against a man. This concept aligns with the Jukun cultural value of understanding that even freedom of speech should not come at the expense of respect for elders and societal norms. It promotes a balanced approach to life.

Furthermore, Jukun proverbs are rich with symbolism and metaphors that convey wisdom and cultural values in a concise manner. For instance, the natural world is a frequent source of symbolism. Animals, plants, weather patterns, and other geographical features represent various aspects of human experience and appear in some Jukun proverbs. For example, in "*Anyunu yi nasho yi shindo yi be' apa wa yi sa yaga, ama u yi nasho I be apa wa sakolo,*" which translates to "*The sun seems to walk slowly for the idle hand but seems to be too hasty for the busy hand,*" the sun symbolises the passage of time and the contrast between productivity and idleness. The perception conveyed by this proverb is that time can feel slow and drag on when one is idle or not engaged in meaningful activities, while it can seem to pass quickly and feel rushed when one is busy and productive. This proverb underscores the importance of diligence, purposeful work, and the subjective nature of time perception based on one's level of activity and engagement.

Despite the effort by scholars to engage with proverbial discourses across cultures, there seems to be an absence of research examining counter-hegemonic gender discourse within Jukun proverbs. This study aims to explore the counter-hegemonic gender discourse in Jukun proverbs. By highlighting how these oral literary expressions challenge and reshape traditional gender norms and hierarchies, this research is an important contribution

towards understanding the diversity of experiences within marginalized communities. These expressions serve as a powerful tool for challenging oppressive systems, revealing new possibilities that have yet to be fully explored or understood. To examine the Jukun proverbs and their gender implications, a multi-faceted research methodology will be employed. Jukun proverbs will be collected from various sources, including oral traditions and written records. A comprehensive textual analysis will be conducted to reveal the nuances and gender-related connotations within these proverbs. To gain deeper insights and context, interviews will be conducted with native speakers. Ethnographic fieldwork will involve immersion in the Jukun community to observe the use of proverbs in daily life and the possible gender dynamics of such usage. Furthermore, existing literature on Jukun culture, proverbs, and gender roles will be reviewed to provide a historical and cultural context. This will include scholarly articles, books, and ethnographic studies related to the Jukun people. The analysis of Jukun proverbs and their gender implications will be guided by a theoretical framework rooted in standpoint theory.

### **The Feminist Standpoint Theory**

According to Elizabeth Borland, as cited in Sandra Harding, standpoint feminist theory is a critical and influential framework within feminist scholarship that has evolved and grown in prominence since its inception. This theory, which originated in the latter half of the 20th century, is rooted in the belief that people's social positions and experiences shape their perspectives and worldviews. Specifically, standpoint feminism asserts that individuals

from marginalized or oppressed social groups have unique and valuable insights into the workings of power, inequality, and social structures (Borland).

One of the foundational premises of standpoint feminist theory is the idea that dominant groups in society often hold a distorted or limited understanding of social reality (Borland). She reveals that this distortion arises because those in privileged positions do not directly experience the consequences of systemic discrimination, bias, or oppression. In contrast, individuals from marginalized groups, such as women, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and others, are said to possess a "standpoint" or viewpoint that emerges from their lived experiences of inequality.

### **Key Concepts and Principles that Characterize Standpoint Feminism**

According to the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, feminist standpoint theorists make three principal claims: (1) Knowledge is socially situated. (2) Marginalised groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of things and ask questions than it is for the non-marginalized. (3) Research, particularly that focused on power relations, should begin with the lives of the marginalised. Standpoint feminists argue that marginalized groups have an epistemic advantage, meaning they have a clearer and more accurate understanding of social dynamics and injustices. This perspective is seen as valuable for critiquing and challenging dominant ideologies. It recognizes that individuals occupy multiple social positions simultaneously (e.g., race, gender, class, sexuality). Intersectionality is crucial in understanding how different aspects of identity intersect and contribute

to a person's standpoint. Standpoint feminists emphasize the importance of giving voice to marginalized groups and elevating their perspectives in academic research, public discourse, and policymaking. More so, the theory often advocates for social change and activism based on the knowledge and insights gained from marginalized standpoints. It argues that dismantling oppressive systems requires a shift in perspective and power dynamics.

According to this theory, knowledge about the social world should be derived from an acknowledgment of "the perspectives and experiences of real women" (Smith 10). This approach seeks to centre marginalized voices while critiquing 'malestream' theorizing (Longino 29). The starting point for understanding relationships between men and women is how these groups have been oppressed historically. As such, it focuses on identifying power relations within society and making visible those that have previously not been taken into account. Moreover, it emphasizes methods such as interviews with members of disadvantaged groups as valid sources of knowledge acquisition, citing their unique experience living in disadvantageous conditions (Harding). Research using this approach can improve scientific data by enabling better representation of increasingly underrepresented populations. Aside from increased representativeness in research concerning sex and gender issues like reproductive justice or disparities among sexual identities, other areas also utilize aspects of feminism's standpoint theory that continue to inform methodologies used in human services practice-related fields. Resident Councils

pioneered participatory programming used in nursing homes and prisons are two examples where feminism's standpoint theory contributes significantly.

### Exploring Counter-Hegemonic Gender Discourse in Selected Jukun Proverbs

The data for this study (twenty proverbs) was gathered through interviews and observations and then subjected to critical analysis using feminist theory. Five members of the Wukari community—Adako Acho, Shidosam Abe, Ama Adakenjo, Agbu Angyu, and Abe Agyo—were interviewed. The standpoint feminist theory emphasizes that people's experiences and perspectives are shaped by their social locations, such as gender, race, class, and other identity factors. It asserts that marginalized or oppressed groups, including women, have unique insights and knowledge that can challenge dominant narratives. Applying this theory to the Jukun proverbs, we can analyze how they reflect or challenge traditional gender roles and empower women's perspectives.

The *Proverb* (a): "Apa wa ma mba'a 'ngo wonu u gba yi sazyi 'khe yo," which translates to: "A tree with strong roots is not afraid of the storm." Meaning: If someone has a strong foundation or support (like a son), they can face challenges and adversity with confidence.

This proverb reflects a gendered perspective by suggesting that sons are a woman's source of strength and support. (Abe, Shidosam. Personal interview). On March 20, 2022, one of the respondents observes that proverb discourse is deeply

rooted in Jukun culture. Noting that historically, sons were often seen as the ones who would carry on the family name and provide support in times of need. It's a traditional perspective that many of the young people grew up with." Another respondent, Adako, correlates Shidosam's view by acknowledging that, "Yes, it reflects the importance placed on male heirs in our society." But observes that "I think times are changing, and we should acknowledge that inner strength and resilience aren't exclusive to sons. Women in our community have shown incredible strength in various aspects of life."

On the other hand, the *counter-proverb* (a): "Afyi wa Adu'a gbankpo la gbayi sazyi a who afyu yo ni," which translates "A tree with strong roots thrives regardless of its gender. Counter meaning: A person, regardless of gender, who has a strong foundation and inner strength can face challenges and adversity with confidence." chronicles and challenges the perspective in the traditional proverb in (a) by emphasizing that inner strength and resilience are not exclusive to any gender. (Abe), one of the respondents foregrounds this in an interview when he observes that the counter-proverb is empowering. In his words, "It reminds us that both men and women can face challenges with inner strength. An oral tool that is essential for our community to recognize and appreciate the resilience of women. We've always been strong, but now it's being acknowledged more openly." In the same vein, (Angyu, Agbu. A personal interview on 10 May, 2022), supports this view by noting that "this counter-proverb reflects a more inclusive perspective, which is important as we evolve as a society. It's a reminder that

we should celebrate strength in all its forms.” The foregoing stances accentuate that counter proverb empowers women by acknowledging their capacity to face challenges independently.

Proverb (b): “Apa wa mba ango wonu yo la gba ange yi te’o ni.”

Translation: “A fortress with no guardian falls to the enemy.”

Meaning: Without male heirs to protect and defend the family or community, they are vulnerable to defeat or harm.

Counter-Proverb (b): “Nda’a anyii du aza mazyi la wa asa gbamkpo ni.”

Counter Interpretation: ‘A community with diverse protectors stands strong against its enemies.’

Meaning: Communities benefit from the collective protection and support of individuals, regardless of their gender.

The traditional proverb (b) reinforces a gendered stereotype that positions men as the sole protectors. (Abe, Shidosam. 20 March, 2022,) affirms this when she submits that “this proverb is tied to the historical role of men as protectors.” She explains that “in the past, men were often responsible for the safety of the community.” In contrast, the counter-proverb (b) challenges this notion by advocating for collective responsibility and diversity in safeguarding the community. This explains why (Shidosam) reveals that community is strongest when everyone plays a role in protection.” (Ama) finds reason in Shidosam’s position when he also observes that the traditional perspective

places a heavy burden on men within the Jukun society, but observes that in Jukun society it is obvious that women, too, have unique insights and contributions to make when it comes to safeguarding our community.” The above proverb recognises the unique insights of women and others in ensuring the community's safety.

Proverb (c): "Afundo wa ma ba’ ango wonu yo u ya yi kofindo."

Translation: "A home without a male child stands in ruins."

Meaning: In a household without male children, essential support and stability are lacking, making it feel abandoned or incomplete.

Counter-Proverb (c): "Afundo wa afyi’a ngha ‘vho la gba yi ba abenwu yo ni."

Interpretation: "A home with love and unity is a thriving sanctuary."

Meaning: In a household where family members support each other regardless of gender, there is essential stability and happiness.

The proverb (c) implies that male children are the pillars of a home, marginalizing the contributions of women and other family members. However, the counter-proverb (c) challenges this perspective by emphasizing the importance of love and unity within a family, irrespective of gender roles. It recognizes the agency and strength of women in maintaining familial stability. A point that the respondents rightly captured. They submit that this proverb reflects the



historical idea that male children are essential for the family's stability. They contend that it is vital to understand that familial stability can come from various sources, not just gender. (Abe Shidosam 20 March, 2022), foregrounds this when she captures in her words, "It's important to acknowledge the role of women in maintaining familial stability. We've often been the glue that holds families together, and this counter-proverb, "Afundo wa afyi'a ngha 'vho la gba yi ba abenwu ni," which translates "It is the house whose tree refuses to grow that lacks shelter," celebrates that.

Proverb (d): "Aga wa ma ba wonu yo u gba yi ba Aku yo."

Interpretation: "A kingdom without strong men cannot have a worthy ruler."

Meaning: A city or society relies on its men to provide leadership and protection for its people, including the king.

Counter-Proverb (d): "Aga wa ba wowa ke yo la gba hwo na angho wonu ni."

Counter Interpretation: "A kingdom thrives when all its people contribute to its worthiness."

Counter Meaning: Leadership and protection in society should not be limited by gender, and both men and women can contribute to a worthy kingdom.

The proverb (d) places the burden of leadership on men, reinforcing patriarchal

norms. In contrast, the counter-proverb (d) challenges this narrative by advocating for inclusive leadership. It recognizes the potential of women and other marginalized groups to contribute to the betterment of the kingdom, thereby promoting gender equality. (Acho, Adako. Personal interview. 15 January, 2022), explains that unlike the traditional Jukun society, the contemporary society which is influenced by modernity and provides education for both males and females alike, is one of the major occurrences that birthed the counter-hegemonic proverbs. This fact finds correlation in Raji's submission that "the emergence of postproverbials in contemporary Yoruba society is undoubtedly the effect of the interplay of orality and literacy-modernity, the critical correspondence between an older, puritanistic generation and a younger, disruptive, and somewhat banalistic generation" (75).

Proverb (e): "Azyihwe ya yi sa sena wonu, a wuzu gba yi ko'odo yo."

Interpretation: "Wisdom is the shield of a man who conquers all obstacles."

Meaning: Just like a shield protects a warrior in battle, wisdom empowers an individual to overcome life's challenges.

Counter-Proverb (e): "Ayiyi yayi awuce khe' yi be apa wa ba'o la."

Counter Interpretation: "Wisdom is the armor for anyone who conquers all obstacles."

Counter Meaning: Wisdom is not exclusive to any gender and empowers

individuals of all genders to overcome life's challenges.

The traditional proverb (e) suggests that wisdom is a masculine trait that shields individuals. In contrast, the counter-proverb (e) challenges this notion by asserting that wisdom is accessible to everyone, regardless of gender. It promotes a more inclusive and equitable view of knowledge and empowerment. Ama submits that "Historically, wisdom was often linked to men, which could be gender-biased." But notes that "Times have changed, and we now recognize that wisdom knows no gender." According to Shidosam, the counter-proverb, "Aiyiyi yayi gba yi wonu ko wowa yo" which translates, "Wisdom does not have gender" is a step towards acknowledging that wisdom is accessible to everyone. It promotes a more inclusive view of knowledge.

As a crucial part of counter-hegemonic gender proverb, the discourse invites to itself the quality of counter discourse and deconstruction of status quo. It is quite different or entirely opposed to the original Jukun proverbs. In its immediate or even literal meaning, it brings about new, fresh meaning that brings about the displacement of the original, cultural proverbial expression. It should be noted that the objective of counter-hegemonic gender proverb is the displacement and deconstruction of patriarchal system.

Proverb (f): "Ahuna wonu yi huna 'wuhwo."

Interpretation: "The voice of a man echoes divine presence."

Meaning: The wisdom and words of a male are influential and have a profound impact, often echoing the wisdom of the gods or the divine.

Counter-Proverb (f): "I ndo wanu I ba ayi wuhwo dudu."

Counter Interpretation: "Every person's voice carries the essence of their own divinity."

Meaning: The wisdom and influence of a person are not tied to their gender but reflect their unique perspective and wisdom.

The traditional proverb (f) implies that divine wisdom is predominantly associated with men's voices. Conversely, the counter-proverb (f) challenges this perspective by asserting that every individual, regardless of gender, possesses their own unique wisdom and divinity. It emphasizes the value of diverse voices and perspectives. (Adako and Shidosam) reveal that this is a viewpoint that has been prevalent for a long time, where men are expected to lead and protect. However, they believe that the society should encourage more diversity in leadership roles. In their view leadership should be based on capabilities, not just gender. The counter-proverb, "Aga wa ba wowa ke yo la gba hwo na angho wonu ni," in their opinion reminds us that anyone can contribute to the betterment of our society. Building this view this proverb asserts that everyone, regardless of gender, possesses their unique wisdom and divine essence. From a feminist standpoint, this interpretation promotes inclusivity by emphasising that wisdom and influence are not exclusive to any gender. It recognizes

that diverse perspectives enrich collective knowledge.

Counter-Proverb (g): "Wonu gba hwo myii 'gah la wowa wa azyetifyi gbahwo kwa' alape ni." interpretation: "Men build but it is women and children that provide water for the builder."

Meaning: Society is a collective effort, and both men and women contribute to creating a safe and secure environment for all.

This counter-proverb challenges the traditional proverb's notion that men alone construct the fortress of society. Instead, it advocates for collective responsibility, emphasizing that both men and women play essential roles in building a secure society. From a feminist standpoint, this interpretation acknowledges that everyone's contributions are valuable, irrespective of their gender. It promotes a more inclusive and equitable view of societal roles and responsibilities.

Counter-Proverb (h): "kapye mazyi wonu u na apye wowa la wowa kapye lo yi fu." Interpretation: "Before a woman was forced to lie behind a man, the man was once carried in the womb of a woman."

Meaning: In a partnership or marriage, both partners support and complement each other, standing together as equals.

This counter-proverb challenges the original proverb's suggestion that a woman's role is primarily one of support and complementing her husband. Instead, it emphasizes the equality and partnership between spouses, where both contribute

and support each other. From a feminist standpoint, this interpretation recognizes the importance of mutual respect and shared responsibilities in relationships, rather than reinforcing traditional gender roles. This proverb challenges the traditional assigned to men as the head and woman as subordinate.

Counter-Proverb (i): "Nda' apobyi ba shindo la mapi hwo ka abyi wa wuwa hwo ke ni wo."

Interpretation: "A person's worth is not determined by their relationship status."

Meaning: A person's value and worth are not contingent on whether they are in a relationship or not.

This counter-proverb challenges the traditional proverb's implication that a woman's worth is tied to her relationship status. Instead, it asserts that an individual's value should not be determined by whether they are in a romantic relationship. (Ama) thinks "This counter-proverb is more reflective of our changing reality." According to him, "It recognises the importance of individual unique nature." Similarly, (Adako) reveals that "This counter-proverb aligns with the idea that a strength of society is tied to the acknowledgement of individual's unique potential." He contends that "It encourages collaboration among community members, regardless of gender, which is essential for our collective well-being. From a feminist standpoint, this interpretation emphasizes that each person's worth is inherent and not defined by their relationship status or their role in a romantic partnership.

Counter-Proverb (j): "A wanda wa ge hwo hweti wuke ri la bage ba awutoto ni" Interpretation: "Every woman's worth is immeasurable, whether married or single."

Meaning: A woman's value should not be judged based on her marital status; every individual has inherent worth.

This counter-proverb challenges the traditional proverb's comparison of the worth of married and unmarried women. It asserts that every woman, regardless of her marital status, possesses immeasurable worth. From a feminist standpoint, this interpretation emphasizes that a woman's value should not be determined by her relationship status but by her intrinsic worth as an individual. These counter-proverbs reflect a feminist standpoint by challenging traditional gender roles and emphasizing equality, inclusivity, and the intrinsic worth of individuals regardless of their gender or relationship status. They promote more equitable and empowering perspectives on gender relations and human worth.

The insights from the above interview highlight the evolving perspectives within the Jukun community regarding traditional gender roles and empowerment. While some traditional views still hold significance, there is a growing awareness of the need for inclusivity and recognition of women's strengths and contributions.

### Conclusion

The research analyzed selected Jukun proverbs to uncover the counter-hegemony found in them. The study found that the traditional Jukun proverbs often reflect gendered perspectives, reinforcing traditional gender roles and marginalizing women's contributions. For instance, the

proverb "Apa wa ma mba'a 'ngo wonu u gba yi sazyi 'khe yo" emphasizes the importance of sons as the source of strength and support. However, the counter-proverbs challenge these traditional perspectives by emphasizing the importance of inner strength and resilience, regardless of gender. The counter-proverb "Afyi wa Adu'a gbamkpo la gbayi sazyi a who afyu yo ni" highlights that a person with strong roots can face challenges with confidence, regardless of gender. The research also found that the traditional Jukun proverbs often position men as the sole protectors and leaders, while women are relegated to supporting roles. However, the counter-proverbs challenge this notion by advocating for collective responsibility and diversity in safeguarding the community. For example, the counter-proverb "Nda'a anyii du aza mazyi la wa asa gbamkpo ni" emphasizes that a community with diverse protectors stands strong against its enemies. The study concludes that the counter-proverbs reflect a feminist standpoint by challenging traditional gender roles and emphasizing equality, inclusivity, and the intrinsic worth of individuals regardless of their gender or relationship status. These counter-proverbs promote more equitable and empowering perspectives on gender relations and human worth. The insights from the study highlight the evolving perspectives within the Jukun community regarding traditional gender roles and empowerment, with a growing awareness of the need for inclusivity and recognition of women's strengths and contributions.

The research findings highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to address the implications of traditional Jukun proverbs

on gender roles and promote more inclusive and empowering narratives within the community. It is recommended to encourage further research and dialogue to raise awareness about these issues, implement educational programs and advocacy initiatives that emphasize the significance of gender equality, diversity, and the value of women's contributions, support efforts to preserve and promote counter-proverbs that challenge traditional gender norms, and engage community leaders, educators, and influencers to actively promote discussions on gender equality, challenge stereotypes, and celebrate the diverse strengths and contributions of all individuals. By adopting this comprehensive approach, the Jukun community can foster a cultural shift towards more inclusive and empowering perspectives, ultimately contributing to the advancement of gender equity and the recognition of the intrinsic worth of all its members.

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