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Article

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Black lives and bodywork matters: A postcolonial critique of gender and embodiment in Nigeria

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Abstract

Drawing on the theories of "Womanism" and "African feminism," this paper explores the concept of embodiment within an African context. More specifically, we focus on exploring the lived experiences of Nigerian women in male-dominated organizations (sector) to provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of how the Nigerian society marginalizes qualities and aspects of embodiment and dis-embodiment of women. Based on 39 interviews, our findings reveal that cultural and social practices significantly influence the concept of gendered embodiment in the Nigerian context. We further highlight the spatialized dynamic of the religious, ethical, and classed identity formations, and the multiplicities of violence experienced on African women's bodies every day. Using a feminist standpoint as a lens, we highlight the practice and relevance of social constructivism in understanding the concept of spatialized embodiment in a Nigerian context. We emphasize the complexity and diversity in African feminisms as we highlight the multiplicities of *difference* in understanding African experiences. Additionally, we emphasize that men are part of the social construct, and hence cannot be left out of the story, given that their influence and perceptions provide further insight into the

concept of gendered embodiment and existing marginalization of and discrimination against women.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The recent "black lives matter" movements express the need to examine racialization characteristics and processes across various social and geographic contexts. This brings to light the existing social realities and perceptions of the lived experiences of black lives. From the narratives regarding social injustice and marginalization of ethnic minority groups (Shonekan & Orejuela, 2018), to the debates concerning colonialism and its impact on the development of colonized countries (Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2012), to the studies about gender inequalities, and discrimination, the lack of inclusion, and the racialized, gendered, and classed practices that have significantly affected vulnerable women and girls (Czarniawska, 2006; Gatrell, 2011; Opara et al., 2020). It is therefore, without doubt, important to explore the narratives of the people who live, work, and experience the organization and social realities of everyday gender identities in Africa. In this paper, we strongly argue that black lives and voices from the south, and southern theories do matter (Connell, 2014). We examine the narratives beyond the discourses that primarily represent the Global North and promote a decolonial ethic that articulates African agency (Lugones, 2010; Table 1).

In acknowledging the existence of differing characteristics and various contexts that help understand the lived experiences of people who deal with the effect of colonization, discrimination, lack of inclusion, and harmful practices, we focus on the context of our study on the lived experiences of Nigerian women. We, therefore, explore the following research question: "How can the lived experiences of Nigerian women in male-dominated organizations in Nigeria, inform the concept of female embodiment?" We focus on the characteristic of female embodiment as we explore the dynamics of how the Nigerian society marginalizes qualities and aspects of embodiment associated with women. We aim to contribute to the discourse about the politics of belonging and situated positioning from the perspectives of Nigerian women in male-dominated organizations or as stated by Adisa et al. (2020), "hyper-masculine organizations."

Our paper thus argues that it is important to consider the multiplicities of embodied forms (African Feminist Institute, 2015; Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2012) and to explore bodily processes in cultural spaces like Africa, that are not referential to the Global North or colonizing imaginaries (McFadden, 2007; Mignolo, 2007). For instance, one cannot capture the sexual violence dominant culture in the Nigerian context by recourse to western experiences. Though we highlight the need to increase the number of studies examining contexts within the Global South, our study begins with reviewing western perspectives of feminism. This is because examining perspectives of feminism from the Global North gives us a background to African interpretations of feminism, and how they are now being resisted in decolonizing moves. By disconnecting from Global North trajectories, African women activists want to tell their own story, one not tainted by a neoliberal ethos. Contemporary colonial accounts in the African context, have informed the precarities in managing bodies in organizations which represent a key signifier for appreciating the positioning of women across organizations even within the Nigerian contexts (Brewis & Sinclair, 2000; Gatrell, 2011). We then progress to review feminism in Africa, how it has flourished in the last 20 years, and how this informs women's subjectivities rooted in African ethics.[1] This gives clarity regarding the two main conceptual views of feminism in Africa, which we draw from. This includes Womanism (acknowledgment and appreciation of the differences between men and women; Ogunyemi, 1995) and African feminism (cultural and religious influences on women's socially inscribed identity; Dogo, 2014). Following this, we apply the African- based theoretical perspectives that highlights the use of storytelling to capture the voices of women and men as they narrate the stories

of the women's lived experiences in the Nigerian context. Likewise, we use a western theory (Harding, 2004) to explain the lived experiences of women in male-dominated organizations in the Nigerian context. Harding (1999, 2004) acknowledges the relevance of situated knowledge, which emphasizes the need to start from the marginalized group and then progress to understanding its institutions. We thus consider this positioning relevant within the Nigerian context.

Nonetheless, we challenge this western lens by acknowledging the contributions of the story telling that captures the male voices in understanding female embodiment in the Nigerian context. This also raises a case for postcolonial contribution as we begin with a western approach and then advance this discourse beyond a Global North context, that of the Nigerian context.

We use document and narrative analysis to examine the perceptions of embodiment drawn from the stories of five female entrepreneurs who previously worked in male-dominated organizations and 10 women who live and work in male-dominated organizations in Nigeria. These organizations are within the oil and gas construction industries. We also gather stories from 24 men who live and work in these same organizations and communities as these women. We explore how women's voices have vitality and strength by resisting patriarchal and postcolonial logics, how they can be projected to eradicate forms of discrimination, violence, and all harmful practices toward women in a Nigerian context.

Our study, therefore, advances current understanding of gendered embodiment by exploring the lived experiences of women in a different geographical and cultural space that is Africa, thereby responding to the call for more research on organizational and managerial systems beyond western states (Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2012). By so doing, we unveil the differing interpretations of women "bodies" based on the cultural context and space in which they operate, thus creating an integrated understanding of gendered embodiment. Our findings further contribute to postcolonial feminist discourse by integrating Harding's theory, Womanism, and African feminism theories, and using them as a lens through which we can evaluate organizations oftentimes competing and conflicting approaches toward marginalization and gender equality.

1.1 | Feminism, gender ,and bodies

In defining embodiment, Haynes (2012) expresses in her work that embodiment 'emphasizes the lived body of a subject who knows the world through bodily perception' (p. 493), which could be affirmative or undesirable. For instance, some debates (Bryant & Garnham, 2014; Velija et al., 2013) about embodiment forms hinge on the notion that women are weak and vulnerable compared to their male counterparts (Bergerson, 2011; Butler, 1988). Haynes (2012) draws on Bourdieu's concept of embodiment as something of worth that carries symbolic importance with the ability to seek after and show power at various levels. These give insights about into the theories of human embodiment that distinguish between the various physiological and biological connections that structure bodily existence in lived experiences (Butler, 1988; Conboy et al., 1997).

Similarly, other disciplines, like anthropology, sociology, and psychology, have defined the body. Psychologists (Glenberg, 2010; Schubert & Semin, 2009) argue that embodiment contradicts cognitive psychology as developed from the 1960s to the 1980s. This has mostly focused on the construct of body appearance with the notion that embodiment should be socially, culturally, and historically constructed. Similarly, anthropologists define embodiment as the influence of culture on a person's bodily involvements or biological realities (Csordas, 1990; Metcalfe, 2008). These accounts have acknowledged that embodiment is inherently sociological and political. Social structures permeate bodies with meaning and significance, showing that less has been discussed regarding the affective component associated with those embodied struggles that are socially constructed. Therefore, myriad practices and visualities reaffirm that body, self, and culture are intertwined (Lewis & Pullen, 2018). Embodiment can also refer to how the social and historical contexts guide, unveil, and constitute how an individual understands and experiences the body (Butler, 1988; Featherstone et al., 1991; Metcalfe, 2008).

Contemporary accounts in the Global North view the body as central to the feminist analysis as this brings into perspective the differences between men, women, masculine, and feminine impressions, which helps, constitute gendered, racialized, and classed identity positioning. Similarly, there are theories by poststructuralists that show various ways in which the woman's body is culturally and historically controlled (Metcalfe, 2008). This, arguably, is part of the patriarchal practice that gives an ideology of how the feminized body is created.

We draw on the definition of embodiment by Haynes (2012), who mentions that embodiment emphasizes the lived body of a subject who knows the world through bodily perceptions which includes bodily aspects like breastfeeding, menstruation, sexualization of the body, dressing (Groutsis et al., 2019). This definition also draws on Bourdieu's concept of embodiment as something of value that has symbolic importance with the ability to seek after and show power at various levels. This means how these bodily aspects can influence one's power or the lack of it. This work significantly also uses as a lens, the arguments by psychologists Schubert and Semin (2009) and Glenberg (2010) who emphasize that embodiment has a social, cultural, and geohistorical construct.

Given the focus of this study to explore female embodiment and women subjectivity in Nigeria, we shall review African feminism to examine how feminists from the global South define embodiment. Importantly, African feminism acts as a "body-politics of knowledge" (African Feminist Institute, 2015), as it helps capture the degradation and abuse of women's bodies not countenanced in Global North movements.

1.2 | African feminism, Womanism, and violence: toward safe embodiment

In defining African feminism, it is difficult to isolate this process from the existing diversity and unpredictable geographical conditions and realities in the African region. This creates social, geographical, and political fluidity regarding "African feminism" (Lewis, 2001). African feminisms explore various means by which women address the conditions and needs of African women in and beyond the African continent. African feminism has largely been debated in the development studies (Chant, 2008) field, which has highlighted the trajectories of postcolonialism and how southern regions are drawing on their own histories. African feminism has, over the years, been described as differing from the feminist discussion arising in the Global North as it places more attention on the predicaments of African women, as it has aimed to address the more radical restructuring of governance systems in line with MDG and SDG frameworks to meet women's needs.

Most arguments focus on what it is not rather than what it is. For instance, the Global North perspective emphasizes the oppression faced by women in connection with the female body, lesbianism, and radical feminism (Lewis, 2001; Ogunyemi, 1995). In contrast, African feminist movements pay more attention to heterosexual and pronatal issues, the rights to equality at work, violence against women in the public and private realm, and political rights and quota arrangements. Rape and spousal abuse are common features in Nigerian culture, and notions of sexual harassment in organizations is not even countenanced as an issue. However, despite these issues, the African woman's movement is still concerned with maintaining the family unit (African Economic Outlook, 2018; Ogunyemi, 1995).

Not that African women do not face these concerns as in recent times, there has been a growing need to address early child marriage, female genital mutilation, and rape amongst African women, including in Nigeria (Naasin, 2016). Hence, some scholars would argue that African issues, though similar to those faced by women in the Global North, would take different approaches in dealing with dynamic discriminatory processes in Africa and how multiple differences intersect with other factors like class, culture, and religion (Lewis, 2001). Tripp (2017) mentions that even though African women have their motivations, and demands, they have contributed significantly to contemporary global understandings of women's rights, especially within the socio-political and economic setting.

Concerning the term feminism, some early African writers have prohibited using the term, as they prefer the term "*African Womanism.*" They (for instance, Ogunyemi, 1985, 1995) consider this is a way of promoting the views

of the Global South. We could argue this approach is an expression of decolonization within the feminist discourse, where feminism as a word could be considered Western and un-African. "Womanism" is a better way to describe the dynamic subjectivities of African Womanism. Ogunyemi (1985) further argues that "Womanism" as opposed to feminists does not just fight for equality or for women to be seen in the same way as men. Instead, Womanism posits the acknowledgment and appreciation of the differences between men and women, thus working in favor of each sex (Ogunyemi, 1995). Not as an essentialist dynamic, but draws out the fluidity of Womanism in African social and economic relations. Despite the logical rationale for Womanism, some criticisms highlight the fact that Womanism does not address homosexuality within the black community, which is primarily because of the cultural, political, and religious practices in the continent (Lewis, 2001; Ogunyemi, 1995).

Subsequently, other African writers identify themselves as feminists or African feminists, and they similarly argue that women's socially inscribed identities in Africa can differ from those of women in the West (Bade-kael, 2003; Bhambra, 2014; Lewis, 2001). This acknowledgment mainly takes into consideration cultural and religious influences. Similarly, even within the African continent, there are apparent differences regarding how women explore, unveil, and address transformation possibilities in their gendered, racialized, and classed experiences and subjectivity. Hence, in considering these differences from a theoretical perspective, the argument remains, how can these views be generalized, as there are apparent broad differences even across the African continent? A meaningful way to illustrate how womanist and feminist positions have been adopted and questioned is to explore the socio-material and socio-historical dynamics of multiple voices (Dogo, 2014; Drew, 1995).

Consequently, Nigerian feminist activism can be traced as far back to 1914, when women staged a protest against both indigenous and British men who they believed had ignored their ability to contribute to decision-making. Similarly, in 1925 women forcefully rejected colonial values, which led to the 1929 "Women's War," where 10,000 women took part, and a good number of these women lost their lives fighting back against the drawback of women in leadership positions. The unveiling of feminism in Nigeria is linked to the clear agenda to establish a feminist movement at the first UN meeting for women held in 1975. The Nigerian Feminist Forum, however, has replaced this and is actively engaging in transnational feminist networks. The UN women's convention in Beijing 1995 marked a radical stage in global feminism from Southern states and has helped established transnational feminist networking and has continued to unite women today (Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2012).

As with most other African feminist movements, Nigerian feminism significantly uses creative expressions like drama, plays, poetry, art, and fiction to challenge patriarchal society and the marginalization that comes with it. This significantly emphasizes the political, social, and economic oppression women face. From a political and social view, precolonial Nigeria had women in leadership positions across the various tribes. For instance, in the Yoruba and Edo kingdoms, they were known "queen mothers" (Naasin, 2016).

However, colonialism brought changes to the Nigerian leadership structures, negatively affecting women. This change further strengthened the existing patriarchal society, compelling Nigerian feminists to focus on law reforms, especially toward eradicating violence against women and barriers preventing women from entering or rising in the political and economic structure. For instance, some bills proposed by these women focused on issues concerning domestic violence, girls' education, child marriage, and sexual violence. This movement became an intense debate because of the reproductive rights it established for women.

Nigerian feminism fought for more women to be represented in politics, to have access to financial loans, property, maternal health, and jobs. Similarly, from a socio-cultural perspective, these women focused on social injustice, including rape cases, abuse in the household and work, and overall poverty, as these are features that explicitly affected women and children, and worsened ethnic conflicts, and conflicts because of motherhood, widowhood, and marriage (Naasin, 2016; Salami, 2008).

This statement highlights the realities of injustice because of women's embodiment at the national level and the impact this can have on organizational practices. The "body-politics of knowledge" has intensified as sexual harassment and violence in the public sphere has risen, illustrating the significant importance of examining embodiment in Africa, to help us understand social and political changes needed. Likewise, the positioning of

women as lesser than men brand women as having a unique form of identity within the male-dominated profession. For instance, becoming an engineer can be challenging for women in Nigeria because the identity of "an engineer" is linked to the hegemonic ideas that classify engineers as men (Chu, 2006).

The review of African feminism and embodiment shows that the definition of embodiment also emphasizes that the perceptions of bodily aspects of a woman is influenced by social, cultural, and historical construct. This social, cultural, and historical construct of embodiment also shows that the lived experiences of women in leadership and business reveal barriers are endemic in the political and economic structures because of bodily perceptions by mostly male counterparts in a male-dominated society. To examine embodiment in the Nigerian context, and to aid social and organization policy issues, we explore the lived experiences of female engineers and female entrepreneurs who worked in male-dominated organizations.

1.3 | The theoretical lens

The theoretical framework for this study brings together the derived definitions of embodiment from the global North and South. These include bodily perceptions (Haynes, 2012), Womanism, and socially inscribed identities (Dogo, 2014; Ogunyemi, 1995) and the social constructivist view that significantly draws from African-based theory, which is grounded in storytelling and practical experiences (Lewis, 2001; Naasin, 2016; Weatherall, 2020). Storytelling includes the character, theme, and voice (Lee et al., 2016). Here, the characters are the women and men, the theme is what the story is about, and the voice is the medium by which the story is told. African societies rely on storytelling to make sense of the situation and promote understanding that drives change (Lee et al., 2016). Hua (2013) describes this as forms of resistance. This creates a rationale for decolonizing forms of embodiment and contributes to theory as we highlight stories that captures the experiences of African women in male-dominated industries in Nigeria. This also illustrates geopolitics of knowledge and a body-politics of knowledge (African Feminist Institute, 2015).

Additionally, we draw on Harding's (1999, 2004) standpoint theory that explains "feminist objectivity" as "situated knowledge" (Harding, 2004, p. 84). This standpoint argues that research should start from the marginalized group and progress in studying the institutions or order of power that identify or categorize these marginalized groups. This standpoint, like others, unveils the purpose of understanding marginalized individuals to promote social reforms. We argue that the recognition of the marginalization of Nigerian women in male-dominated industries creates an avenue to begin the conversation or progress the conversation for social reform for women. Similarly, Smith (1992, cited in Harding, 2004) argues that women's experience is the foundation for feminist knowledge, which is a crucial driver for social reforms to benefit women. Although we establish the fact that feminist discourse explores reforms to benefit women, there have been previous deliberations (Buck & James, 2005) to clarify the aims and contributions of feminist studies to social reforms for women. We aim to clarify the contribution of African feminist studies and concept of Womanism to embodiment discourse, especially toward attaining social reforms in the Nigerian context. We argue that these social reforms should consider the embodiment to be practical and beneficial.

Though Harding's standpoint' strong objectivity' (Harding, 2004) is a subject of controversy, its relevance to this work hinges on her arguments about modernity and the binary tradition. She argues that studies aimed at social progress should begin with the lived experiences of women who have been marginalized (Bergeron, 2011; Intemann, 2010). She brings together concerns regarding feminism and postcolonial perspectives on gender. As Bergeron (2011), in her review of *Feminism, Postcolonialities, and Modernities* by Harding, emphasizes

> *Harding shows the ability to make adequate sense of the needs and desires of women and traditional cultures in the non-Western world, which are too often portrayed as irrational obstacles to scientific thinking and*

progress. It also relies upon notions of Western exceptionalism in which Europe and North America are viewed as the origin of all that is modern and scientific (p. 165).

In Bergeron's (2011) view, this denies the significant contributions of other perspectives of lived experiences beyond the Global North and obstructs the awareness of the appreciated resources that other perspectives show. Although Harding's arguments support the notion that these lived experiences should focus on women's lives' as organized in households' (Intemann, 2010, p. 467). We argue that women's lived experiences should include narratives from men who engage with these women in the household, the community, and the organization. Harding (2004) herself, draws on other standpoint feminist views such as those of Dorothy Smith and Nancy Hartsock who argue that the standpoint project remains marginal to the conventional "post-positivist philosophy of science" (p. 25), as it does to the field of science studies. Bergeron (2011) further stresses this point of Harding that "Modernist science has denied the scientific achievements of non-Western cultures while simultaneously anchoring imperial projects aimed at colonizing these cultures." Therefore, in seeking to understand the lived experiences of Nigerian women in male-dominated industries, we select female engineers and entrepreneurs, who narrate, "what it feels like and what it means to work in African spaces." We stress decolonizing gendered embodiment beyond the Global North. Although we acknowledge other significant definitions of embodiment like having a biological and physiological construct, we take a social constructivist view. In summary, our approach aims to capture the politics of belonging and the situated positioning (Yuval-Davis, 2015). This discounts Global North and postcolonial logics as it is the legacy of culture, identity, experiences of African locations central to decolonizing.

We also aim to contribute to Harding's standpoint theory by including the male voice, to highlight the importance of men's perspectives who live and work in the same society as these women and are most often viewed as the authoritarians.

2 | METHODOLOGY

2.1 | Data collection

The data collection comprises documentary sources and semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews were the main data collection method used. This collection method is well used in feminist research, and other qualitative processes (Kelly et al., 1994). A semistructured interview, as explained by Saunders et al. (2007), allows the researcher to be flexible with the questions. It also allows the researcher to get more information on a particular question to interpret it accurately, and to build on the response received.

Thirty-four semistructured interviews were undertaken with both female (10) and male (24) respondents working in two male-dominated multinational companies (MNC: X and Y) in Nigeria. The 10 female respondents were engineers between the ages of 30 and 50, had worked in organizations within the postcolonial era and were mostly team leaders at senior and junior management levels in the organization. Interview questions focused on their experiences as female engineers in a male-dominated industry, what challenges they faced, and if these challenges were connected to "being a woman." In addition, we asked questions about how their feminine characteristics or perception of womanhood affected their work within the organization. These questions were not limited to their experiences within the organization but also included experiences from living, studying, and working in Nigeria. To further strengthen our data and enrich our findings, we interviewed 24 men (ages ranging from 30 to 55), as we were keen to hear the male perspectives regarding the experiences of women and marginalization associated with a gendered embodiment. The narratives from the men, though not significantly highlighted within this study, produced insights concerning how being a part of the lived experiences of these women can inform the concept of embodiment.

Respondents were from a staff strength of about 1500 from MNC X and 150 from MNC Y in offices within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Each participant was interviewed in a one-to-one session. The interviews initially were aimed at examining diversity management practices and gender inequalities within the organizations, and as a male-dominated organization, it was not surprising to have significantly more men than women. However, during the process, women shared their lived experiences, which highlighted organizational marginalization because of aspects of their embodiment. This developed the interest for more understanding about marginalization and aspects of embodiment associated with women. Data were collected over a 6-month period.

The sampling technique used was purposeful sampling, as we aimed to interview women who work in male-dominated sectors. In identifying these women through a gatekeeper, we recognized that a good proportion of women who worked in male-dominated industries are now business owners. We thus decided to collect additional data from a subset of these women.

Five of these women were selected based on their availability and the validity of the documentary data and sources used. Locating these female entrepreneurs, was done through initial searching of various online sources and one-on-one contacts with three out of the five entrepreneurs. We collected narratives from documentary sources (videos). We transcribed documented interviews of these five women entrepreneurs who owned businesses across various male-dominated industries, including architecture, construction, and engineering, with ages ranging from 35 to 55 years. The parts of the interviews transcribed and analyzed in this study explored their lived experiences, growing up, living and working in the Nigerian context, the effects of being a woman, and in business within a male-dominated industry and society.

These documentary sources relay the life stories as remembered and interpreted by these women. To test the veracity of the documents, we reviewed and selected video documents of women who directly shared their stories with supporting evidence to show its validity. We also used documents produced by reliable and renowned producers, authors or presenters who had a record of accomplishment of documenting real, evidenced-based stories (Prior, 2003). Therefore, the documentary sources we selected from the public domain include video interviews with five entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The videos covered stories about their struggles and experiences in male-dominated industries and society, as entrepreneurs, experiences of marginalization because of aspects of their embodiment.

We justify the sample size of female engineers and female entrepreneurs because though having different social circumstances; they operate within a similar environment that is influenced by similar social, cultural, and historical constructs. Similarly, the women who are now entrepreneurs were previously professionals who worked in construction, engineering firms' that is male-dominated industries.

This inclusive method of women who work as engineers or previously worked and in a male-dominated society allows for a comparative and good understanding and interpretation of the lived experiences of women in the Nigerian context.

2.2 | Narrative analysis

This paper takes an interpretive approach as we aim to interpret the experiences of Nigerian women in male-dominated industries, to inform the concept of embodiment in the Nigerian context. Hence, we use narrative analysis, which focuses on documented interpretations and quotes that are based on themes derived in the linear sequence of participants' narratives (Franzosi, 1998), which include experiences/stories/events in their workplaces and Nigerian society. We analyses these themes according to the research question for this work.

This qualitative research study looks to understand how female engineers interpret gendered embodiment in the Nigerian context. The sample size, as reported here, does not look to generalize outcomes, but looks to contribute knowledge. This is comparable with other similar research work on diversity, therefore validating the sample size because of the purpose of this qualitative research.

TABLE 1 Aspects of embodiment associated with women in Nigeria (author, 2019)

Nigeria women	Aspects of embodiment associated with women in Nigeria
Female engineers	Sexuality Physical stamina
Women entrepreneurs	Motherhood Body structure/frame Personality

The reason for selecting this analytical approach is that it centers on humans and their life stories, which ultimately portrays their view of the world. Webster and Mertova (2007) state two contributions of narrative to research, including that "it provides an account of the history of human consciousness, and at the level of human consciousness, stories record personal consciousness from infancy, through youth and adulthood to old age" (p. 15). Similarly, the use of stories and storytelling has increased recently within organizational research (Saunders et al., 2007). In this research, storytelling aids in the collection of data based on the understanding, experiences, and practice toward gender equality in both multinational organizations. Saunders et al. (2007) argue that data collected as stories through interviews help to draw attention to relevant issues such as organizational politics and culture. Subsequently, themes derived from the interviews and documentary sources areas are highlighted in the table below. We identified these themes based on recurring narratives, the use of words, referring to concepts or terms that describe African feminism, womanhood, or Womanism concerning how women experience marginalization or discrimination.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Understanding embodiment in the Nigerian context

In Nigeria, masculinity culture is a social construct that draws on historical, cultural, and religious views. Though arguably viewed as progressive, it is skewed toward the negative than the positive. Some views about masculinity include it being the root cause of gender inequality and violence against women. Men are significantly recognized as the decision makers in the home, and violence against women and girls is widely tolerated. Also, the media promotes stereotypical ideas of men and women, which often positions men as the advantaged group. Likewise, there is a firm belief that men should be tough, intelligent, fearless, and responsible, while women are weak, more vulnerable, and emotionally driven. Masculinity as a cultural phenomenon in Nigeria draws on some customs that positioned men as the advantaged group, and this historically has been passed down from one generation to another (Olawoye et al., 2004). In examining body structure, physical stamina and sexuality, personality, and male influences as part of the social construct for understanding the concept of embodiment in the Nigerian context, we recognize the effect of the masculinity culture.

3.2 | Body structure, physical stamina, and sexuality

In sharing their experiences, female engineers recount the feeling of being conscious of their physiological characteristics to fit into the masculine culture. This most often includes showing less emotion in the workplace and being more aggressive to have a physical presence. Similarly, Newton (1981) highlighted the "traditional view of engineering as being heavy, dirty and masculine, while a woman who would succeed in the field had to be tough, aggressive and masculine." In reflecting these thoughts, a respondent highlights her experience:

I remember management seeking engineers to carry out specific responsibilities, and I was not considered as someone mentioned. They all agreed that as a woman, I am not expected to do that kind of job....I most often have to act tough to fit in. (R10)

Haynes ([2012](#)) also highlights similar kinds of experiences of women in professional services firms who were conscious of how they utilized their bodies to fit into the masculine culture. This indicates gendered embodiment involves meeting expectations against one's feeling of self-representation. Paradoxically, some female engineers described representation of masculinity as being proactive and responding to the expectations to meet organizational objectives and that this should be expected if one aims to excel on the job.

Female engineers also recounted feelings of neglect and enforced masculinity. For instance, an account revealed that female engineers had to wear overalls that were male tailored. This shows the lack of consideration of female engineers who would have to wear these outfits offshore or within areas requiring them to wear these overalls. This also shows one problem of having a few women working in these fields, one of which is the lack of a collective voice, the lack of significant representation to push for equal rights to their male counterparts. There have been instances where women in these sectors used their voices to insist on equality. One woman narrated that being the only female engineer in her firm, she was not supposed to have the same medical facilities as her male counterparts; "*I was furious and voiced out my frustration about this, and it was changed*" (I2). There were also instances where some other women had different views or struggled with expressing their frustrations about existing inequalities between male and female engineers:

For someone who has complained about not being able to voice my opinion for fear of being dealt with unfairly... (R2)

... I am aware that the uniforms are more geared towards male engineers, but I ignore these issues and do not let it bother me....I am here for the job. (R5)

3.3 | Personality types and male influences

An embodiment also includes personality type, which explains why and how women act in specific ways, and long-term experiences, culture, and religious beliefs can shape this. There is evidence that personality types and having a positive male influence have affected how women engineers and entrepreneurs view gendered embodiment in Nigeria. Some women narrate personal experiences explaining the relationship they had with their fathers and male leaders in the workplace and how these relationships have shaped the way they see themselves in society. One woman emphasized the role of a father as being critical in building confidence in the female child who they are and what they can achieve. *The presence of a father figure makes you confident, powerful and more assertive*, she highlights, and this builds your trust for authority and gives you the freedom to speak and challenge situations when contrary to what is perceived as socially just, ethical and moral. Her story about her relationship with her father extrapolates these facts as she narrates how these relationships positioned her as one of the top architects who has successfully delivered excellent projects recognized globally. We highlight other views about positive male influences:

Growing up as an only girl amongst boys, my father valued and treated me equal as the boys. So I was raised not to think of myself as less'.......' having a career counsellor helped guide me into studying civil engineering. (I2)

I got the encouragement from my dad when I was young, when I told him I wanted to study engineering, he was like, great, he really encouraged me. (R6)

Some women mentioned that having a supportive male leader affirms their ability as a female engineer and gives them the confidence to venture into and grow within a male-dominated industry. This also captures having male sponsors and mentors as either an engineer or a businessperson in a male-dominated sector, or where a male dominates the leadership that affects your business process. The masculinity associated with engineering or a male-dominated society where women entrepreneurs operate remains a powerful barrier and reason for fewer women in the sector. Although we can argue that there has been a rise in women entrepreneurs, we can connect this to various reasons, including institutional support, women empowerment programs, and networks. We highlight that the perception of what is ambition in a man becomes cold and calculating when ascribed to an entrepreneurial woman. She is described as loud and aggressive, while the male counterpart is affirmative and assertive. Similarly, there is the perception that a woman in business who is focused and excellent must also be nasty.

Correspondingly, some female engineers feel a sense of loss concerning their personality once they become engineers working in a male-dominated industry or society, and this is a scare for these women. Women who feel this way face problematic situations that threaten their personality and values. These personalities, considered feminine, refer to a less aggressive approach, loyal, being soft-spoken, agreeable to decisions made, and mostly internalizing reactions. Using personality types (Eysenck et al., 1977), there is evidence that most of the Nigerian women have lower neuroticism scores, are emotionally stable, and, even though they worry, they deal well with stress. They are also agreeable, which shows having a high trust, being kind, affectionate, empathetic, and corporative. Therefore, when women are goal-oriented, outspoken, and confident, they are considered loud, aggressive, and offensive. Concerning values, some women narrate cases where male colleagues have made unwanted advances, and this sometimes threatens their career progression as men in authority also make these advances. Equally, this threatens their moral values as women and puts them in compromising situations if they conform. Some narratives from women are:

> You will always have advances every now and again because of your womanhood, and it's mostly from men in authority. (I2)

> A confident woman who values her sexuality refuses to allow false attractions from the opposite sex to validate her personality. (I1)

Some female engineers mentioned that they consider the possibility of losing this perceived feminine personality a sacrifice they will make to survive in the industry. This mindset results in cases where women have mentioned that some women have used being a woman or being feminist as a way of hiding inefficiency, and this should not be condoned. Therefore, women should be efficient at work and address whatever challenges they face, regardless of the terrain.

Some respondents highlight the feeling of being showcased as sexualized success stories for capitalism (Matos-Rodriguez & Delgado, 2015). A good number of the male respondent re-echoed the story of a particular female engineer who was exceptional and joined senior management before leaving. These stories emphasized her ability to negotiate professional demeanor and succeed at it even in a male-dominated terrain. We could link this to personality types as some women were seen to be more objective and categorized as "thinking like a man." In contrast, others were seen to be more emotional, family-oriented, and inefficient at technical roles. Hence, these women were classed as less driven and unable to keep up with the conspicuous demands in a male-dominated profession or patriarchal society that promotes men over women.

4 | PATRIARCHAL INFLUENCE

A patriarchal society creates a sense of gendered embodiment. From the literature on African feminism, we identify the challenge of a patriarchal society as one of the critical factors informing embodiment. This is because, in

creating a sense of gendered embodiment, women are given less control because of their feminine identity. Historically, Nigeria, a country with diverse cultural structures, has different factors influencing its cultural construct. These factors include ethnic and religious beliefs. For instance, Christianity was introduced in Nigeria in the 15th century by the activities of European missionaries. It had ever since spread throughout the country with an overwhelming influence on the behavioral patterns and constitutional laws of the country. Likewise, historically, Muslim women possessed individual legal and economic identity.

Their inheritance under the Islamic legal system is limited because of men having more control, giving rise to inequality (Udoh et al., 2020). These ethnic and religious beliefs emanate from a patriarchal cultural practice. Osezua and Agholor (2019), in their study on the Patriarchy, Cultural Prejudices in Nigeria, define the term "patriarchal" from an anthropologist's view, which hinges on the rule of the father or where men rule. They also explore other definitions that show patriarchy as a system of male authority, which oppresses women through the social, political, and economic institutions.

Drawing from the lived experiences of Nigerian women in male-dominated industries, respondents narrated stories of how male individuals in society have reacted to getting a job as an engineer:

> ....do you want to be an engineer as a woman? You will struggle to find a man to marry you ...

> You are supposed to be in the kitchen ...

Similarly, one woman tells the story about an incident in Northern Nigeria, where she was treated less because she was a woman:

> The perception of being a woman is a disability––the expression I received when I went to the Northern part of Nigeria indicated that men are being taught that a woman is not on the same level as a man.

This is because society has taught women to see the man as the meal ticket, the price to get, and this becomes a reason for the high value placed on marriage where the woman is assigned the role of being a wife to the man (the price). This arguably has cultural implications, where women are groomed for marriage and motherhood. Hence, being a female engineer could be interpreted as being overly ambitious and reducing the chances of being married and being a mother. This might be termed a misconception or traditional view and is a patriarchal way of thinking, especially within rural communities in Nigeria (Dogo, 2014).

Equally, the society's cultural and dominant religious expectations play a significant role in the perceptions of embodiment in the Nigerian context. The distinction between individual, organizational, or national culture is relevant, as Hofstede (1991) agrees that there could be a difference between an organizational and national culture where the national culture is the beliefs, customs, and values shared by the people within a state. In addition, this again supports the literature (Akobo, 2016, 2017) that shared values in Nigeria can be because of gender, ethnic or religious factors. Hence, organizational culture is likely to depend on the cultural background of the people. Therefore, some respondents, both male and female engineers, mention instances where individual cultural views influence the perceptions of gendered embodiment.

The patriarchal influence, even in the organizational context, can be linked to concerns at the national level. For instance, Badekale (2003) points out that during introducing formal education in Nigeria, efforts were made to ensure women did not attend formal school. "It was considered a waste, as girls would eventually be married off and stay home as homemakers" (p. 1). There were high rates of withdrawal for early marriages, and this was common in the northern part of the country where religious beliefs significantly influence work and family practices. There are instances where parents ensured their children, especially their daughters, got a formal education. Correspondingly, a respondent credits her parents, especially her father, for who she has become.

Drawing from the narratives, we link a good number of these problematic situations to cultural and religious ideas that firmly hold on to the patriarchal and hierarchical structure in favor of men over women and women having to prove themselves to break through the structure. This also brought to light the need for more role models and networks that allowed for women supporting one another as opposed to being competitors. In addition, exploring the lived experiences of these female engineers raises questions regarding how factors external to the organization, but very much part of their lived experiences, continue to contribute significantly to the perceived discrimination or marginalization faced.

5 | MALE PERSPECTIVES

Most of the men interviewed shared their views, highlighting that female engineers are the minority. Hence, there is a need to increase the number of women in STEM-related fields, which will increase the representation and ultimately strengthen women's voices in the sector. A male engineer highlights that men supporting the need for more female engineers could influence the drive to increase women in STEM-related fields to break the barriers of lesser women in male-dominated organizations. Another narrative from a male engineer emphasized how culture can negatively influence how men view women, hence unconsciously creating bias and discriminatory attitudes toward female engineers. This is sometimes subtle and may not be classed as a discriminatory act but more as a cultural opinion. In his narrative, he highlighted an incident where another male colleague was happy to leave the organization rather than have a woman leader, and there was clear evidence of men struggling with having female bosses. This was not always the case as the attitudes would change when the women consistently proved them-selves to be good leaders. However, it was much easier for a man to lead men without having to prove himself consistently. This attitude was linked to perceptions of gender roles and sexuality. However, it was also showed that organizations had created ways of dealing with these kinds of social conflicts:

> ... except on personal cultural values, but we tend to have respect for one another...

In recent times, there have been many stories about women who have had sexual advances made towards them across different sectors and levels of the society, and the organizations where these female engineers work are not exempt from these issues. Because of this negligence, a male counterpart highlights, they are more likely to be ignored, or privately dealt with by the relevant departments. The response would depend on factors like how often it would have occurred, who it happened to, and if they were willing to make a case out of it. Women, and men, are sponsoring most women's organizations in Nigeria that are fighting against sexual-related abuse of women (Afolabi, 2019).

6 | MOTHERHOOD

This significantly hinges on the idea that gender roles are considered the critical factor for forms of inequality that exist. One of the female engineers emphasized that most female engineers who are mothers face the challenge of making sacrifices because of motherhood. This could imply half salary, exemption from specific responsibilities, and approved weeks of leave before and after delivery, which affect appraisals for career progression. Hence, a good number of women were perceived as underperforming, or they had to overperform to prove themselves as capable regardless of the status of being a new mother. Also, women were exempt from specific roles. Although this was not officially stated, it was perceived that these roles required longer hours on-site, and women who had family or caring commitments could not handle such tasks. Alternatively, they had to prove they were able to meet the demands regardless of their family/career responsibilities. Some women relied on external or family support such as siblings, parents, or a paid crèche to help with motherhood roles. In this context, one organization supports new

mums as they have a crèche within the building to ensure new mothers can come back to work and still be close to their babies. Female engineers within these organizations consider this good support from leadership, and this helps their ability to be mothers *and* professionals.

There were different perceptions around the effect of motherhood on job responsibilities. One of the female engineers mentioned that she considered it "responsible" to prioritize work over family, especially during work hours. Therefore, she would not engage with family matters, even in urgent situations, until after work hours. She related this attitude to her ability to have trustworthy external support, her stamina, and her position within the organization. For female entrepreneurs, there is evidence of a bit more flexibility with work hours, work responsibilities, and motherhood. There is evidence of reliance on flexible work patterns and dependence on extended family members to support the home front.

6.1 | Discussion and theoretical contribution to gender work and organization

From the findings and review in this study, culture significantly influences the concept of gendered embodiment in the Nigerian context. Which in this case, is an intersection of religious and historical ethnic beliefs, as individuals adhere to values and beliefs primarily affiliated with their cultural and religious roots, precolonial and in the postcolonial era. This understanding of gendered embodiment also includes practices imposed during the colonial era that has become part of the Nigerian culture. Hence, organizations reflect these practices as they unconsciously adapt to societal practices.

Nwegbu et al. (2011) define culture as socially transmitted customs, values, knowledge, material objects, and behavior of a group of people. They further stipulate that culture in Nigeria as defined by the government; include symbols, institutional, historical, and creative aspects of different ethnic groups represented within the Nigerian society. Likewise, lifestyles, social structures, and behavioral patterns inform ones cultural identity, which is usually passed on from one generation to another. From this understanding of culture, it is no wonder Nigerian women use culture, which is also considered as a weapon of oppression to foster the needed change (Naasin, 2016).

We argue that this is like Harding's (1999, 2004) standpoint that highlights the need for exploring the lived experiences of women, in situated spatial knowledge, as the marginalized group to bring about the needed change. We go beyond examining the narratives of women by also drawing narratives from men who are part of the social construct and lived experiences of these women. Likewise, they are part of the institutions that foster the notion of gendered embodiment and organizational marginalization. This brings us back to African feminists' insights, acknowledging the works of notable African female activists backed by men who have worked hard and continue to work hard at promoting a more inclusive society that fosters women's empowerment and justice for women. These are attempts to decolonize perceptions of gendered embodiment.

The exploration of the Global South has had very different responses to feminism and equality agendas. For example, colonization itself can be considered as a gendered act, carried out by imperial workforces, overwhelmingly men, drawn from masculinized occupations (Mendoza, 2015, pp. 100–121). Lugones (2010) argues that decolonial feminism deconstructs western gender concepts that have become normalized and seek to recover indigenous worldviews, and construct new geopolitics of knowledge. Harding views the Global North as a world view (see also Connell, 2014). Decoloniality differs from postcolonialism because it unsettles the concept of colonization in the first place. Decolonization is an active ongoing struggle for social justice in every sense, incorporating economic, political, cultural, racial, and gender, and so forth at every level in every arena. Decolonization offers the possibility of new creative and innovative approaches to contemporary problems and is nicely phrased as a new "geopolitics of knowledge" (Connell, 2014; Mendoza, 2015, pp. 100–121; Mignilo, 2007). Decolonization is not just a withdrawal from Empire, but an active grassroots movement at the social, economic, cultural, and political levels initiating alternate cultures and solidarities.

We believe that understanding African feminism or "womanism" requires a contextual study beyond post-colonialism because it does not just focus on equality but on the social realities of black women and acknowledges and appreciates differences between men and women. This significantly emphasizes the focus on socio-economic and political empowerment, especially since women in Nigeria were involved in leadership and political positions in the precolonial era (Drew, 1995). We would argue that colonial rule weakened the social, economic, and political rights of women as its definition relied on the othering of the South against the differences of the West, thereby forging a hierarchical relationship that was central to postcolonial critiques. Female representation in the public sphere became deficient even though women achieved voting rights in southern Nigeria in the 1950s and the 1980s in the north (Afolabi, 2019).

The focus on diverse forms of African feminism, as mentioned above, highlights the existence of marginalization or discrimination against women concerning gendered embodiment. This includes the social construct of a woman's bodily aspects. The body politics of knowledge is a crucial signifier of space, place, and positioning within a particular time and history in Nigeria. Discriminatory processes include rape, domestic violence, male superiority, and female inferiority, sex-stereotyped roles and expectations, female genital mutilation as practiced in some cultures, child marriages, and inheritance law favoring men over women (Naasin, 2016). Hence, regardless of the lack of, or the minimal use of, the phrase *gendered embodiment* in the African context, we argue that this is existing practice, and discrimination systems reflect the body politics of knowledge in Nigeria, that talks back. Although some of these forms of discrimination can be identified at the societal level, it takes a more subtle approach at the social and organizational level.

We believe that the theoretical contribution of this study is strengthened by the analysis of the data, which shows how the concept of gendered embodiment is constructed in the Nigerian context, and how the coloniality of power is challenged. This concept is socio-historically constructed as it explores the spatialized dynamic of the religious, ethical, ethics, classed formations, cultural beliefs, and the multitudes of violence experienced by African women bodies every day. Using a feminist standpoint as a lens, we highlight the practice and relevance of social constructivism in understanding the concept of spatialized embodiment from a Nigerian context. We emphasize the complexity and diversity in African feminisms as we highlight the multiplicities of *difference* in understanding African experiences (Bouilly et al., 2016).

We further emphasize that men are part of the social construct. Hence, they cannot be left out of the story. Also, their influence and perceptions provide insight into the concept of gendered embodiment and existing marginalization of and discrimination against women. As Black African women, we are aware of how homogenous ideas of inequality and discrimination are communicated and represented by western modes of logic and organization. Our writing this paper is in itself a decolonial act and is a tactic to underscore the body politics of knowledge of African women. As Black African women, we write to disengage and engage with our lives and subjectivities. African feminism and Womanism negates a postcolonial ethic. Black bodies matter and are nurturing a decolonial strategy to talk back and write about gendered embodiment in organizations via African heritage and legacy.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTE

[1] It is important to note as there is not sufficient room in the paper, that African Feminisms, and African feminist organization have been prevalent since 1890s/1900s, and have tended to be more radical than Global North feminist movements. In the UN various Decades for Movement 1975, 1985, 1995, and the formation of MDGs in 2000, and the SDGs in 2015, African women's activism has consistently argued for regime change (Conway, 2012).

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