Chapter 1
The Evolution of Gender Studies and Its Impact on the African Society in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

This study traces the evolution of gender studies from the 1970s to the 21st century. The impact of gender studies to the African society is also covered in greater detail. Gender studies includes a method to appreciate the ideologies, social patterns, and descriptions that shape our world and our lives. It raises questions about how and why a gender divide is created or preserved and also many times resisted or weakened. Gender studies explores the multiple interfaces among race, caste, class, and gender. It investigates traditional disciplines through an interdisciplinary perspective that focuses on the significance of sex as a social construct and the importance of gender and gender roles. It also advances the historical and existing portrayal of both women and men in religion, arts, literature, and many other arenas.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender Studies represent a relatively new field in the area of humanistic and social sciences. It has generated major changes in the academia and society. It is responsible, in part, for the way that the social universe looks nowadays, continuing to shape its form, drawing attention to gender inequalities and designing ways to remedy injustice. Gender studies represent, along many other disciplines in the area of social sciences, a new field, whose existence barely counts four decades. Despite their short existence, gender studies represent one of the most innovative and dynamic fields in this area. They constitute a very good example of the way in which the academic sphere has been transformed in the last half of century, through the acknowledgement of the fact that knowledge production is a historic, cultural and social phenomenon. Therefore, gender studies imposed, facing many difficulties, though, as we shall see in the present paper, the acknowledgement of gender as a category that intervenes at all levels and stages of the knowledge process, thus challenging the traditional view of knowledge production and contributing to the transformation of the traditional academic sphere. At the same time, gender studies through their contribution to a better understanding of gender construction and meaning, contributed to the transformation of social and cultural practices, thus transforming society in a durable and efficient way. Gender studies imposed, in the course of their short existence, gender as a fundamental category for the analysis of all forms and systems of human organization and social life. The purpose of this study is to analyze the evolution of gender studies and how it has impacted the African society in the 21st century.

EVOLUTION OF GENDER STUDIES

The origins of gender studies lie in women’s studies. Women’s studies came into existence out of a realization of the absence of women in academia: the lack of empirical knowledge about women, which reflected the specificities of women’s lives; the absence of concepts that women could use to understand their own experiences; the lack of importance given to women’s economic, social and political lives. Women’s studies became an important way of doing away with this invisibility and bringing the lives and experiences of women to the forefront in academia. It provided a wealth of new data about women, and also challenged the theories, concepts and methods of existing disciplines. Gaining and analyzing new knowledge about women is an important part of women’s studies. Many contributions continue to be made to existing disciplines. At the same time, the academic study of women itself has also changed, incorporating new perspectives and positions.
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