

Of Place and Space: Towards a Phenomenological Foundation for African Feminist Ethics

Victoria Openif Oluwa Akoleowo

Abstract

In this article, I explore the possibility of providing a phenomenological foundation for African feminist ethics. This approach derives from two factors. First, the inadequacies of existing ethical frameworks in addressing the specific challenges African women are confronted with, including but not limited to the challenges of colonialism and poverty. The second is contemplation on the nature and/or features of African feminist ethics as one premised on the notion of gender as a space, defined in terms of its universal gender categories characterised by affective performativity and power relations; or as a place, characterised by unique sociocultural production of roles within a specific locality. Given that phenomenology deals with subjective experiences, I argue that a phenomenological approach, rooted in the lived experiences of African women, offers a unique and valuable perspective on ethical issues relevant to their lives. In this approach, the voices, perspectives, and experiences of African women are central to understanding and addressing ethical issues, thus, ensuring the promotion of their agency, empowerment, and well-being through the recognition of their lived experiences and the development of appropriate and effective ethical frameworks that respond to the unique challenges such lived experiences generate.

Keywords: African women's experiences, ethical frameworks, gendered space, phenomenology, sociocultural ethics.

Introduction

African feminist ethics is an emerging field of research, as noted by varying calls for its development in recent times, including this issue of *Feminist Africa* dedicated solely to theorising the meaning, nature, and scope of this field. As a field of research, it is premised on the need to address the unique moral concerns and challenges faced by African women. Its aim is to investigate and address ethical issues within specific African cultural, historical, and social contexts, from African feminist perspectives (Omotoso 2018). While it shares some concerns with Western feminist ethics espoused in the ethics of care, it differs in its considerations of race, place, and socioeconomic conditions (Olojede 2020).

African feminist ethics emphasises the particularities of African women's experiences as shaped by the legacies of colonialism, systemic poverty, and patriarchal structures. Colonialism, in particular, imposed foreign value systems that disrupted indigenous African moral philosophies, which, themselves, marginalised African women (Mangena 2009). Additionally, the socioeconomic challenges that many African women face, including limited access to education, healthcare, and political representation, further complicate the application of traditional ethical theories to their lived realities.

Thus, there is a growing need to develop an ethical framework that not only recognises but also prioritises these unique experiences and perspectives of African women, making African feminist ethics a crucial area of scholarly inquiry (Mangena 2009). Such a framework would be one where lived experiences of African women, especially in the context of postcolonial and patriarchal societies, are emphasised. I argue that such a framework can be found in the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology.

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that emphasises the study of conscious experience from the first-person perspective. It focuses on lived experiences – the subjective, personal experiences of individuals – to gain insight into how people perceive and interpret their world. As such, it stands out as a viable approach to African feminist ethics and its need for a methodology that is more context-specific and culturally relevant. In this way, it offers a robust framework for understanding the complexities of African women's lives, in lieu of traditional Western feminist ethical theories that have

failed to capture the nuanced experiences and perspectives of African women (Chilisa and Ntseane 2010).

This phenomenological approach is particularly valuable for two main reasons: 1) it helps address the ethical and transformative challenges African women face in navigating and resisting patriarchal power structures; and 2) it enables African feminist approaches to construct knowledge that is deeply rooted in the social and cultural contexts of African communities, thereby filling conceptual gaps left unresolved by Western gender theories.

This work undertakes the task of developing an African feminist ethical framework in four sections. In the first, it evaluates calls for African feminist ethics as a distinct discourse. Here, it examines justifications proffered for this distinct field of ethics. The second section provides an examination of phenomenology and its philosophical underpinnings. In this section, I interrogate how phenomenology challenges the traditional objective approach to reality through its claim that reality is always perceived through the lens of individual experience and how this challenge has been variously applied, including in the field of ethics. The third section examines the concept of gender from two dominant perspectives, “space” and “place”, to argue that while the notion of gender as space provides a pivotal understanding of how power operates through gender norms, examining gender as place is essential to account for the cultural and historical specificities of gender relations that are often neglected in gender-as-space research. The final section, therefore, proffers phenomenology as a theoretical framework for African feminist ethics, grounded in its essential nature as a methodology that emphasises embodiment, situatedness, and the intrinsic sociality of subjectivity (Daly 2018).

In Pursuit of African Feminist Ethics

Historically, ethics has been dominated by androcentric perspectives that have marginalised women’s contributions and experiences (Friedman and Bolte 2007; Friedman 2020). However, the emergence of autonomous feminist moral theories, heralded by Gilligan’s 1982 seminal work, *In a Different Voice*, has challenged these androcentric attitudes and their marginalisation of female moral reasoning through upholding abstract moral principles that are

traditionally associated with male reasoning (Lloyd 1993). Gilligan's "care ethics", in particular, contrasts these traditional "ethical theories of justice/principles" with a relational ethics of care, arguing that the former falls short of its claim to universality because it overlooks the realities of everyday moral decision-making (Gilligan 1982).

In a similar vein, African philosophers who grapple with the challenge of a Eurocentric hegemony in the teaching of philosophy on the continent have called for a decolonisation/Africanisation of the philosophy discipline. However, there is no consensus on how to achieve this, partly due to the paucity of scholarly writings in the field of African philosophy (Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya 2021). This claim might seem controversial given the volume of work done by scholars like Abraham, Gyekye, Oruka, Sodipo, Mbiti and Wiredu among others. However, these writings are insufficient to teach students African philosophy. Teaching a decolonised curriculum of African philosophy in African universities demands an appreciable volume of materials (textual and oral) that students can interrogate under the varying branches of African philosophy. While significant progress has been made in publishing works in this field, it is not yet *uhuru*. This is particularly because most available research materials revolve mainly around the debate on the existence of African philosophy, rather than providing a more systematic exposition of this discipline in terms of its core branches, themes, and concepts.

One branch of African philosophy where significant scholarship discourse is evident, is African ethics, in which scholars have proposed ethical theories based on cultural philosophies. *Ubuntu* is a well-known theory within this branch, serving as an ontological and ethical framework for reflections on Afro-communitarianism, with its emphasis on the importance of community and relationships, encapsulated in the idea that "a person is a person through other persons" (Tutu 2007, 3). *Ubuntu* offers a unique perspective on moral reasoning and decision-making by prioritising actions that honour communal relationships, reduce discord, and promote harmony. It is closely related to Gilligan's care ethics through its relational nature and, as an ethics that values interdependence, fellowship, reconciliation, and harmonious relationships, is distinctively contrasted with Western ethical frameworks that prioritise individual autonomy and rights.

However, while Western feminist movements have made significant strides in developing ethical frameworks such as the ethics of care, African women still struggle to find their place and voice within the field of African ethics. Current ethical frameworks, both global and local, have fallen short in addressing the specific challenges African women face. These frameworks tend to be either too generalised, lacking sensitivity to the unique cultural and social contexts of African women, or too narrow, failing to encompass the diverse experiences within African societies. This diversity in African women's experiences derives from a multitude of factors, including ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, education, urbanisation, age, sexual identity, sexual orientation, and colonial history. As examples, regional differences mean the experiences of women in North Africa might differ compared to those in sub-Saharan Africa; urban versus rural settings affect access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, legal rights, and technology, resulting in differing experiences even within the same region; and political stability and conflict areas also influence the lives of women living in different or similar localities.

Consequently, it is easy to recognise the limitations faced by existing ethical frameworks. For instance, while efforts to promote gender equality have been significant, they frequently fail to account for the intersecting factors of race, culture, sexuality, and economic status, which are crucial to understanding African women's realities. Race, for example, while largely neglected in contemporary African feminist discourse, remains a relevant consideration, as seen in McFadden's encounter with the "blatant assumption that African women could not possibly be intellectuals" (2002, 1). In recounting this encounter at an academic conference where she had presented her paper, she notes that she was questioned on her intellectual capacity and authority to speak on African women in a scholarly gathering, a query borne out of a racist resistance to the "incursions of an African woman into the academy, a space seen to belong primarily to white men, some white women, a few black men and certain 'Others' – with the exception of radical African feminists" (McFadden 2002, 1).

Conversely, African traditional ethics, while culturally relevant, continue to marginalise African women through the patriarchal structures embedded in moral philosophies such as Ubuntu, which, while emphasising community and

collectivism, often reinforce gender hierarchies (Mangena 2009; Oyowe and Yurkivska 2014). The next section briefly considers these inadequacies.

Ubuntu and care ethics

The ethics of care is characterised by relationality, emotions, and sociality. Propounded by Gilligan, it was further developed by philosophers like Ned Noddings (1984) to satisfy the demand for inclusivity in moral philosophy. In contrast to traditional Western ethical theories which are premised on an impartial approach to moral decision-making, care ethics focuses on moral decision-making within relational contexts rather than relying on abstract principles or rules (Gilligan 1982). Emphasising the importance of care and responsibility in human relationships, it highlights that humans are inherently dependent on each other, with a natural desire to both care for and be cared for. This interdependence underscores the significance of relational care in moral decision-making. Rather than relying on abstract principles, care ethicists argue that emotions such as empathy, love, and sympathy are essential to ethical reasoning (Noddings 1984). They also aver that moral deliberations require an awareness of the complexities of moral decision-making and must therefore involve contextual and sensitive reasoning processes to unravel such complexities.

African ethics is both descriptive and normative, given its documenting of the moral beliefs and practices of African peoples and its prescription of how individuals and communities ought to live. Premised on a robust communitarian ontology, it refers to the diverse yet coherent set of moral principles that prioritise the following: a communitarian foundation, where moral value is grounded in collective welfare; relational personhood, where moral status is tied to fulfilling social obligations; virtue orientation, the focus on character cultivation; narrative moral transmission sustained through oral traditions; and the holistic integration of moral, spiritual, and cosmological concerns (Hampâté Bâ 1972; Menkiti, 1984; Gyekye, 1997; Bujo, 2001).

These moral principles define ethical behaviour in terms of obligations to foster harmony, mutual respect, and collective well-being. In so doing, they emphasise communalism and relationality, as well as collective well-being over

individualism, although scholars like Gyekye argue that the latter does not entail the erasure of individual agency. Gyekye's "moderate communitarianism" serves in this light as an attempt to reconcile communal values with individual rights, with its assertion that African ethical systems, while deeply relational, inherently recognise personal autonomy and moral responsibility within the framework of shared humanity (Gyekye 1997).

While distinct from its Western counterpart, African ethics is also comparable to it, as "moral thought in African cultures, as a reflection of communalism, has features of rationalism, naturalism, humanism and rational authoritarianism", features also found in Western notions of ethics (Ikuenobe 2006, 3). The main distinction is that these moral principles provide normative and applied responses to the question "what/how ought *we* to do?" rather than "what/how ought *I* to do?" As such, African ethics is properly situated within the framework of communalism, where morality is rooted in the interconnectedness of individuals within a community, an interconnectedness exemplified by the Ubuntu concept (Ikuenobe 2006).

Ubuntu, as an ontological and ethical concept, encapsulates the African communal belief that personhood is dependent upon the community. For Ogude, it is premised on the idea of relational personhood (2019). To be a person (*umuntu*) is to participate actively in communal life, fulfilling roles that sustain collective well-being. Imafidon defines it as "a discursive formation and relationality framework between the individual and the community that emphasises building communities, interdependence, solidarity, equilibrium, and communal harmony as great goods" (2022, 5). It is a dominant ethical framework in sub-Saharan Africa that prescribes conduct that exhibits solidarity, underpinned by values, ideals, and practices that underscore "prizing communal relationships, harmony, hospitality, social cohesion, friendliness, compassion and interdependence" (Ewuoso, Fayemi and Aramesh 2021, 2). Based on these ideals, values, and practices, Ubuntu is regarded as an inherently relational philosophy, one that is premised on the achievement of communal self-realisation through the promotion of harmony. This is the fundamental nature of Ubuntu, the humanness realised through others – that one is a person through others because of the communal nature of humanity (Tutu 2007).

Elvis Imafidon outlines four principles embedded in Ubuntu philosophy that foster solidarity and togetherness. These are the principles of interdependence, relational hermeneutics, ontological equilibrium, and the inclusion of difference (Imafidon 2022). The principle of interdependence emphasises the fundamental social nature of humans. No human is born fully formed; all humans depend on other humans in their process of becoming human. Ultimately, living a meaningful life and achieving self-fulfilment involves building meaningful relationships with others who are, in this sense, indispensable to the achievement of these goals (Imafidon 2022).

The principle of relational hermeneutics holds that identity and understanding are intersubjective – shaped through relational and contextual interactions (Imafidon 2022). This principle emphasises that a person’s self-concept is not solely self-determined but is influenced by how others perceive them. For example, one’s role as a leader or caregiver gains meaning through communal recognition. Imafidon (2022), therefore, argues that interpretation is inherently collaborative, challenging purely subjective or isolated views of identity. This aligns with Ubuntu’s focus on communal dialogue and shared meaning-making.

The ontological equilibrium principle derives from systemic inequalities that disrupt human interconnectedness, creating a moral and existential disequilibrium. As an example, colonialism dehumanised Africans by framing them as “subhuman”, severing their connection to the universal human community. This disequilibrium is readily addressed with Ubuntu’s principle of relational hermeneutics, which advocates for mutual recognition as a means of restoring the distorted balance.

The fourth principle is the inclusivity of difference principle. Diversity is central to Ubuntu’s vision of community. While humans depend on one another, their needs and contributions vary. However, this variation does not imply hierarchical distinctions (e.g. race, class), but instead, values differences as enriching the community. For example, a child’s need for care and an adult’s need for companionship are equally valid, fostering a community where unique individuals coexist without domination. Inclusion ensures that unity does not erase diversity but thrives because of it.

These four principles form the basis of Ubuntu as humanness and serve to justify the Afro-communitarian view that personhood is socially constructed and sustained through ethical communal engagement.

Care ethics, Ubuntu, and African feminist ethics

As ethical frameworks, Ubuntu and care ethics share many parallels, offering vital critiques of Western individualism through a “feminine worldview” centred on relationality, positioning them as counterpoints to patriarchal, Eurocentric moral theories (Harding 1987; Ikuenobe 2006; Mangena 2009; Cornell and Van Marle 2015). Yet, despite their emancipatory potential, uncritical adoption of either risks perpetuating the very gendered and colonial hierarchies they ostensibly oppose. Ubuntu’s communal ideals, though aspirational, frequently mask systemic gender hierarchies. In Ogude’s explication, for instance, while he acknowledges the possibility of interpreting Ubuntu to imply the erosion of individual agency, he also recognises “its embeddedness in known traditions” (2019, 17). These known traditions are often patriarchal, with women’s roles and identities circumscribed to caregiving and domestic labour, as mothers, wives, or daughters. These roles then form communal expectations that inadvertently validate systems in which women’s personhood is contingent on fulfilling gendered duties, the resultant effect – a devaluation of African women’s labour and agency.

Similarly, care ethics’ valorisation of empathy and nurture risks essentialising women as “natural” caregivers, reinforcing the same gendered burdens it seeks to critique (Wolff 2018; Ipadeola 2020; Jenkins 2020). This is compounded by the lack of support or recognition of the importance of such caregiving roles and, consequently, the societal undervaluation of caregiving roles and the exploitation of women who may be forced into caregiving roles without adequate support or recognition (Kuhse 1995; Patil 2018).

This paradox is stark in Imafidon’s concept of patriarchal opportunism: African societies celebrate women’s care labour as a communal virtue yet exploit it to sustain male dominance (2018). Even in light of the diversity of African women’s experiences, shaped by factors such as cultural traditions, economic status, and access to education, in most African societies, women are

tasked with “sustaining the community” as mothers and caregivers, but remain excluded from ethical discourse and leadership (Manyonganise 2015; Oyeleye 2018). Thus, despite Ubuntu’s layered dimensions, its relational hermeneutics, which define identity through communal recognition, become a tool of subordination when patriarchal norms dictate whose voices matter.

Both frameworks, Ubuntu and care ethics, also neglect the structural dimensions of gendered oppression. Care ethics’ focus on interpersonal relationships obscures systemic issues like economic inequality and institutionalised misogyny (Omotoso 2018). Similarly, Ubuntu’s emphasis on harmony risks silencing dissent, pressuring women to prioritise communal cohesion over challenging inequity (Kayange 2020). This mirrors critiques of care ethics’ myopia: by framing care as an individual virtue, it overlooks how neoliberal capitalism extracts unpaid care labour from women, particularly in impoverished contexts (Zou, Nie, and Fitzgerald 2020).

The coloniality of gender further complicates this. Western feminisms often universalise care ethics, erasing African women’s unique struggles against neo-colonial extractivism and religious fundamentalism (Tamale 2020). This is also evident in discourses on an Ubuntu ethics premised on conventional patriarchy where care is gendered. As Harding (1987) notes, African women remain largely absent in both care ethics and Ubuntu’s relational conception of the human, rendering their lived experiences invisible. Diouf, Dyer, Ecclesiastes, and Gilbert (2023) also elaborate on this erasure and how it ensures that Black and African women remain on the periphery as observers. In response, they advocate for reclamation of Ubuntu as a decolonial initiative where care is repositioned not as gendered duty, but as a reciprocal, liberatory, and power-aware practice, a political and collective responsibility.

In light of these criticisms, African feminist scholars have theorised the need for an African feminist ethics that transcends the limitations of both Ubuntu and care ethics. Such an ethical framework will, in a rejection of essentialism, recognise the intersectional nature of African women’s realities – borne from the convergence of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy – while reclaiming indigenous epistemologies. It is on this basis that I argue that such an African feminist ethics is best developed through an integration of phenomenological insights to arrive at a context-sensitive approach to address

the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, experiences of African women across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts (Mangena 2009; Omotoso 2018; Olojede 2020). This, I aver, would allow for the reclaiming of African women's moral agency. In the next section, I examine what phenomenology has to offer to this search for an authentic African feminist ethics.

On the Idea of Phenomenology

Announced by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century, phenomenology introduced a philosophical shift towards analysing phenomena and lived realities, moving away from abstract metaphysical debates. This approach enabled philosophers to explore varied human experiences by focusing on how phenomena appear (Cohen 1987). Described as the study of appearances, phenomenology evolved into a broader movement encompassing diverse themes, characterised “as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer” (Moran 2000, 4).

Central to phenomenology is its emphasis on lived experience as a pathway to grasping reality (Heidegger 1962). Rather than relying on external observations or abstract frameworks, it investigates how individuals perceive, interpret, and derive meaning from their interactions with the world, aiming to uncover the essence of these experiences. Contrary to Cartesian dualistic ontology, phenomenologists argue that the human body constitutes an embodied consciousness through which people perceive and interact with the world. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 94) avers, “(t)he body is the vehicle of being in the world”. This is the notion of embodied subjectivity, a rejection of the Cartesian duality of mind and body in favour of an integrated account of how perception, cognition, and intersubjective relations emerge from our situated, physical engagement with our environment. In simpler terms, one does not just live as a disembodied entity, a mind, stuck in the body. Rather, one lives as a body in the world, with all understanding of and interacting with the world occurring through one's physical being. One's bodily existence is

fundamental to how one perceives and interacts with the world; thus, it is impossible to detach fully from our embodied perspective.

This is the pivot of the phenomenological approach to investigating reality; in lieu of explaining experiences using causal or scientific frameworks, it adopts descriptive or/and interpretive approaches to capture the essence of experiences as they are lived. These approaches focus on the importance of subjective perception and the lived experience of individuals in their everyday environment. Such approaches have, in recent times, been inculcated into feminist research. As espoused in the works of de Beauvoir (1949), Butler (1993), Alcoff (2000), Young (2005), Ahmed (2006), Tamale (2020), and Diabate (2020) among others, they form a key element of theoretical insights into the lived experiences of women, particularly in African contexts.

Feminist scholars have critically adapted phenomenological embodiment theory, challenging Husserl's gender-neutral assumptions about bracketing lived experience (Oksala 2016). They reject the notion of a universal disembodied subject, arguing that traditional phenomenological accounts reflect privileged male perspectives instead. By employing phenomenological methods, these scholars examine how women specifically experience embodiment, sociality, and world-hood. In doing so, many of them have appropriated Merleau-Ponty's (1962) rejection of pure transcendental phenomenology, with its emphasis on how consciousness emerges through situated bodily practices rather than existing a priori.

At this juncture, it is necessary to briefly examine the implications of a universalist versus particularist approach to gender to understand phenomenology's embodied perspective. This perspective helps to explain how universal structures of experience are manifested in particular, bodily experiences by showing how our physical interactions with the world contribute to the synthesis of universal and particular realities.

Gender as Space and/or Place

The concept of gender has long been a cornerstone of social organisation, shaping human interactions, institutions, and cultural norms across time and space. While gender roles and identities vary significantly across cultures, the

existence of gender differentiation itself can be viewed as a universal category. Every society, regardless of its historical or geographical context, operates with some form of gendered distinctions, whether rigid or fluid. This universality suggests that gender functions as a fundamental “space” through which social life is structured. This notion of a “gendered universe” or gender as a universal social category is found in the works of scholars like Mama (2001), Bakare-Yusuf (2003), and Apusigah (2008), who argue that gender, as a social construct, operates universally, although its manifestations and specifics, its expressions, norms, and hierarchies, are deeply contingent on local contexts, reflecting what might be termed gender as place. This duality of gender as both universal space and culturally specific place forms the crux of this section.

Gender as space

Judith Butler’s (1988) *Gender Trouble* revolutionised understandings of gender by framing it as a performative act, a series of repeated gestures, behaviours, and norms that produce the illusion of a stable identity, rather than as a fixed biological or social category. For Butler, gender is a space of affective performativity, a universalising construct that transcends geographical boundaries. Even as societies differ in how they codify masculinity and femininity, the very act of codification – of creating distinctions between genders – reveals a shared human tendency to organise social life through gendered lenses. This universality does not imply uniformity but rather highlights gender’s role as a foundational axis of social structure, influencing everything from family dynamics and labour divisions to political representation and cultural symbolism. Given this article’s focus on African feminist scholarship, it is essential to note at this juncture, the debate on gender as a universal social category in African feminist scholarship. This debate, heralded by Oyěwùmí (1997), revolves around rejections and acknowledgements of the universal nature of gender by African feminist writings. It is aptly captured by Boyce-Davies (2014, 85) who weighs in by asserting that the rejection of this universal nature of gender, that is, gender as space, “is an analysis which defies basic logic regarding the nature of humankind, the ways that societies were stratified before and after colonialism”.

In this “gendered universe”, gender operates as a social space in the Lefebvrian sense. Credited with introducing the notions of space and the possible as interpretative concepts into academic discourse, Henri Lefebvre’s (1974) *The Production of Space* presented an attempt at defining “all possible spaces, whether abstract or real, mental or social” (299). For Lefebvre, space is not merely a physical container, but a socially produced construct shaped by values, practices, and meanings embedded in human relations. As a dynamic social construct shaped by power relations and social struggles, space can be understood in terms of three interconnected dimensions: perceived/spatial practices (the actual, tangible reality of space as it is experienced and perceived); conceived/representations of space (conceptualised, abstract, and mental constructs of space as represented in ideas and knowledge); and lived/representational spaces (space as it is experienced and inhabited). While perceived/spatial practices and lived/representational spaces both refer to the tangible reality of space, they differ in how space is engaged and how it is understood. Perceived/spatial practices refer specifically to the tangible, material engagement with space in everyday living, including walking down streets and working in workplaces, all habitual and measurable activities that showcase how space functions and how it is maintained through regular practices. Lived/representational spaces, on the other hand, refer to how space is felt and interpreted/imaginatively experienced. This includes symbolic and cultural meanings attached to spaces in memories, which allow for space to be meaningful beyond its physical form and the practices associated with such physical forms.

Applying this triad to gender, the universal aspect of gender as space aligns with Lefebvre’s representations of space. Gender norms are institutionalised through laws, religious doctrines, and educational systems, creating a global framework that legitimises certain roles (witness male breadwinners, female caregivers). These norms are reinforced through spatial practices, that is, everyday acts like the gendered division of labour or clothing. For example, in Maasai culture in Kenya and Tanzania, men predominantly control cattle herding, a role tied to wealth and prestige, while women’s labour involves domestic chores such as milking and childcare. Similarly, among the Igbo in Nigeria, Isi-Agu clothing, which signifies power and authority, is traditionally restricted to men (Madukasi 2018; Kereto et al. 2022). The

institutionalisation of such norms results in the universalisation of gender into binary oppositional categories (male/female) and their subsequent imposition as a global norm. Colonialism weaponised this abstraction by encoding Victorian gender roles into African legal and educational systems, thereby erasing pre-colonial fluidities. This is evident, for example, in the British colonial government's appointment of male market leaders in Yoruba markets, a measure that effectively sidelined established female leadership. Such interventions were premised on the notion of "women as Victorian models of weakness and inferiority, both in the public and private spheres, ably guided by their male 'masters'" (Akoleowo 2021, 198). The replacement of matrilineal land inheritance with patrilineal ownership, as seen in the Intestate Succession Law of Ghana, which contravened the matrilineal system of inheritance of the Akan people, is a prime example of how such binary oppositional gender norms and roles relegated women to domestic perceived spaces while men dominated the public sphere (Awusabo-Asare 1990).

Yet Butler and Lefebvre both caution against viewing universality as static. Butler's performativity underscores the instability of gender categories, while Lefebvre emphasises space as a site of contestation. Thus, the gendered universe is not a monolithic structure but a dynamic, contested space where universalising tendencies clash with localised reinterpretations.

Gender as place

In contrast, the concept of gender as place emphasises the sociocultural production of gender within specific contexts. Here, gender is not a transcendent category, but a lived reality shaped by historical, cultural, and environmental factors. For instance, the female husbands and male daughters of the Igbo people of Nigeria illustrate how gender identities and roles are negotiated within particular cultural frameworks (Amadiume 1987). This localised understanding resonates with Lefebvre's representational spaces – the lived, symbolic dimensions of space that reflect cultural meanings. Gender as place is embedded in the lifeworld of communities, where traditions, oral histories, and rituals encode gender norms. For example, in many African societies, gender roles are tied to agrarian cycles, ancestral veneration, and communal rites. Among the Igbo, the *Omu* (a female traditional leader) holds

authority in specific sociopolitical contexts. Similarly, among the Yoruba of Nigeria, women occupy significant leadership roles, including that of female *Obas*, as well as the *Iyaloja*, an experienced and respected market woman who represents the collective interests of market women and the *Iyalode*, a female chieftain who serves as an intermediary between the market women and the male-dominated political establishment. These fluid gender roles serve as examples that challenge Western notions of male-dominated leadership (Uchendu 2002). Such roles are not mere deviations from a universal norm but expressions of gender as place; rooted in specific histories and ecologies.

The particularist paradigm in African philosophy, which centres cultural worldviews (Chimakonam 2015), aligns with this localised understanding. However, as Harding (1987) warns, romanticising “place” risks essentialising African traditions by obscuring their patriarchal underpinnings. For example, as noted above, Ubuntu’s communal ethos often masks the spatial practices that burden women with unpaid care work while excluding them from ethical discourse.

The tension between gender as space (universal) and gender as place (local) raises critical questions for African feminist ethics: how can universal principles of gender justice coexist with culturally specific values? What ethical frameworks emerge when African women’s lived experiences are centred? What are the likely implications of this distinction on the possible features or nature of African feminist ethics? In light of a dual nature, what then should an African feminist ethics look like? What should be its primary concern? How should such an ethics be configured? The synthesis of these two theories is central to this discourse: Lefebvre’s triad of space and the phenomenological emphasis on embodied experience as implied in the call to centre African women’s voices and perspectives in African feminist ethics (Bakare-Yusuf 2003). While the latter derives from the recognition of the hegemonic overtones of both male-centric African ethics and Western feminist ethics in contemporary moral discourse, the former suggests a situated universalism for African feminist ethics – one that acknowledges shared struggles (e.g., patriarchy, economic marginalisation) while respecting the plurality of cultural solutions.

Towards a Phenomenological Foundation for African Feminist Ethics

Phenomenology, as briefly outlined above, has proven to be a valuable, yet controversial approach to feminist theory. It is particularly notable for its contributions to the development of feminist ethics, which seeks to address the moral dimensions of women's lived experiences in light of feminist ethics' advocacy for a more situated and context-specific understanding of morality (Mapp 2008; Daly 2018). An example of this fruitful relationship between phenomenology and feminist ethics is found in de Beauvoir's (1949) seminal book, *The Second Sex*. Here, de Beauvoir uses the phenomenological concept of embodiment to interrogate sexual difference. Most significant to this discourse is that she explicitly cites Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body is a historical rather than natural fact in developing her thesis that the "woman" is made, not born. Sara Heinämaa emphasises this when she asserts that *The Second Sex* is "a phenomenological inquiry into the constitution of the meaning of sexual difference" (Heinämaa 2003, xiii).

African feminist ethics benefits from Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodied subjectivity, the claim that the subject and object of experience are intertwined in a way that cannot be completely separated. Perception is an active, embodied process that is always partial and situated. There is no pure, detached standpoint from which to observe the world; thus, consciousness is in a state of continuous engagement with the world. In this sense, African feminist ethics can be realisable as an ethics foregrounded on the phenomenological core of women's lived experiences. This core implicates the universalist against the particularist (or vice versa) undertones of the foundation of feminist ethics within the enterprise of African philosophy. This undertone is evident in the recognition of African feminist ethics' nature as one premised on the reality of a gendered universe and also in its particularised nature as a specific local universe of gender.

The gendered universe reflects African feminist ethics' nature as one premised on a universal understanding of what it means to experience the world in an embodied way (Mann 2018). To live with such an understanding implies living in recognition of the fact of sexual difference in the first instance, devoid of material or cultural contexts. This is closely related to

phenomenology's notion of the pure ego unencumbered by facticity. However, in addition to this spatial understanding, African feminist ethics must also foreground a racialised and colonised narrative of a specific universe of gender (Bertolt 2018). Here, it is grounded in the realities of African women's lives. This platial turn signifies African feminist ethics' phenomenological concerns with explicating moral issues from an embodied perspective – as African women in an African lifeworld (Janz 2007). African feminist ethics in this manner presents as a dual-natured enterprise, one that is cognisant of both the universal nature of the gender category of women (spatial) and the distinct, particular nature of African women (platial). This nature highlights the critical role of the integration between place and space in the formation of African feminist ethics. While place refers to the sociocultural and historical context in which individuals find themselves, space represents the broader structures of power and normativity that shape gender relations. This intersection of place and space plays a significant role in shaping African feminists' moral perspectives and can be seen in how African women negotiate their gender identities within the constraints of both local cultural norms and global gender discourses (Oyěwùmí 1997; Nzegwu 2006).

African feminist ethics also benefits from Lefebvre's triadic model, which elucidates the tension between the global and the local. For African feminists, this triad reveals that gendered spaces (e.g., domestic roles, public exclusion) are not neutral but are produced through colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist systems. African women's experiences, whether navigating market spaces, performing labour or facing exclusion from political forums are both spatially and corporeally mediated. The activities of the Pelewura-led Lagos Market Women's Association during the colonial administration in Nigeria provide a historical example of this dynamic. Confronted with the reality of the conceived and lived spaces, African feminist ethics must operate as a third space, synthesising universal critiques of patriarchy with platial reclamations of indigenous knowledge. It is on this basis that I proffer a phenomenological approach to African feminist ethics that emphasises how racialised gendered experiences shape moral understanding and reveal the subtle ways in which patriarchal structures influence moral agency and decision-making.

First, an African feminist ethic must be anchored in the lived realities and sociocultural matrices specific to African women, eschewing abstract

universalisms, like the idea that there is a common understanding of gender inequality and a shared goal of women's liberation across diverse African contexts, in favour of situated ethical frameworks (du Toit and Coetzee 2017; Tamale 2020). Central to this project is a critical engagement with communitarianism and its privileging of relationality, collective well-being, and interdependent moral agency. However, this commitment demands a dialectical interrogation, for communitarian ideals, while offering counterpoints to Western individualism, risk reifying structures of gendered subordination when uncritically deployed. As Oyeleye (2018) demonstrates through her analysis of moral socialisation, cultural narratives often weaponise communitarian values to naturalise patriarchal hierarchies, inscribing gendered binaries (e.g. submission as a feminine virtue, courage as a masculine ideal) through systemic indoctrination.

Consequently, an African feminist ethic must adopt a decolonial praxis that destabilises hegemonic discourses while centring the polyvocal experiences of African women. This necessitates a twofold intervention: first, a hermeneutics of suspicion directed at institutionalised practices, from customary laws to religious norms, that codify patriarchal authority under the guise of cultural authenticity (Chilisa and Ntseane 2010); second, a reconstructive project that reimagines communitarianism through an intersectional critique of power, as Eze (2014) contends. Such an ethic transcends mere reform, demanding instead a radical reconfiguration of the epistemic and material conditions that sustain gendered oppression, thereby transforming ethical theory into a tool of emancipatory praxis.

Using the communitarian framework as an example, Telesia Musili (2024) argues that centring humanism is foundational to constructing a communitarian feminist ethical framework that resists gendered marginalisation. This principle anchors interpersonal relations in the recognition of each individual's inherent dignity, fostering ethical engagement grounded in mutual respect rather than instrumentalisation. By prioritising intrinsic human worth, such a framework challenges hierarchical power dynamics embedded in traditional communitarian models, enabling a reimagined collectivism that harmonises communal solidarity with feminist emancipatory praxis. As Musili argues:

Practice and adherence to this principle seal all avenues for discrimination, stigmatization, and exclusion, since, at the center of it all is a call to interpersonal relationships that includes all. Though communitarian, acting this form of morality invites self-introspection when deciding the action to be undertaken. The internalized values and cultivated virtues guide the subject in opting to respectfully help those in need and liberate those at the (fringes) of lack, domination, and oppression (2024, 148).

African feminist ethics must also concern itself with acknowledging the diversities prevalent within the African space, orchestrated by African societies' encounters with historical developments such as colonialism and the influence of Abrahamic religions (Bakare-Yusuf 2003). This requires a nuanced ethical framework that integrates both indigenous, pre-colonial moral systems and the diverse moralisms born from these historical interactions. Grounding ethical discussions through this phenomenological approach allows for the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems and values, leading to a more contextual and relevant ethical framework for African feminism.

Furthermore, African feminist ethics must challenge the dominant masculinities prevalent on the continent. These masculinities often valorise virility in men, even when it leads to harmful behaviours like non-consensual sex, while stigmatising women for expressing sexual agency outside traditional norms. Such ideologies perpetuate systemic marginalisation by idealising submissive women and dismissing those who assert their agency. Consequently, women are frequently portrayed as victims rather than rights holders in cases of injustice (Gouws and van Zyl 2015). African feminist ethics must deconstruct these hegemonic structures to empower women as active agents of change, rather than passive recipients of aid.

Importantly, African feminist ethics must be distinctly informed by feminist perspectives that challenge androcentric moral theorising. Historically, African feminist scholars have faced testimonial injustice, where certain moral concepts, such as care and motherhood, have been essentialised as intrinsic to women's nature (Imafidon 2018). This essentialisation can perpetuate exploitative gender roles and relations, for example, where maternal care for the community is regarded as a self-fulfilling duty for the woman, which, if done, engenders the well-being and survival of the community, and, if ignored, harms the community, regardless of what the woman wants. To counter this,

these concepts must be redefined in non-exploitative ways, fostering a shift in societal attitudes towards greater respect for the diversity of African women's experiences and contributions. In this manner, African feminist ethics emerges as a framework grounded in the lived realities of African women, with its acknowledgment of their multifaceted identities and experiences.

The issue of systemic poverty is also a pivotal concern that must be integrated into the development of a feminist ethical framework for African women. Poverty constitutes one of humanity's most pressing moral challenges, as it fundamentally undermines the values that define a minimally decent human life globally (Lötter 2007). This reality is starkly illustrated by Ngugi wa Thiong'o's portrayal of Wanja in *Petals of Blood*, which highlights that poverty often leads to moral compromise as a means of survival, rather than a result of immorality. In Africa, women are disproportionately affected by systemic poverty due to entrenched structural and cultural inequalities, which exacerbate their vulnerability to economic hardship and social exclusion. These inequalities are perpetuated by patriarchal systems and discriminatory practices that limit women's access to resources and opportunities and further compounded by the legacy of colonial capitalist economies that disrupted pre-colonial economic systems in which women held significant economic power. These structural inequalities result in the feminisation of poverty in Africa, a phenomenon where women disproportionately experience poverty (Wanjala 2021).

Addressing the feminisation of poverty requires African feminist ethics to prioritise the perspectives of poor African women. This involves tackling structural discrimination as a means to reverse the moral decay caused by poverty. Moreover, African feminist ethics should serve as a platform for advocacy, leveraging frameworks to create impactful campaigns that resonate with the specific needs and realities of African women. For instance, advocacy efforts focused on reproductive rights or economic empowerment can be strengthened by incorporating testimonies and narratives from African women, thereby highlighting the ethical dimensions of these issues (Lugones 1987). Consequently, feminist ethical responses to contemporary challenges in African societies, such as climate change, migration, and economic globalisation, must be grounded in a commitment to inclusivity and empowerment. This ensures that African women are not merely protected by

but also actively engaged in shaping the ethical landscape of their societies, fostering a transformative environment in which their voices and agency are central to decision-making.

Conclusion

This article has critically examined the limitations of traditional ethical frameworks in addressing the specific challenges faced by African women. By privileging universalised gender categories and abstract moral principles, these frameworks often overlook the intricate and context-specific realities of African women's lives, as shaped by diverse sociocultural, economic, and historical contexts. The failure of conventional ethical theories to account for these complexities results in theoretical and practical gaps, leaving African women's experiences marginalised within both feminist discourse and ethical philosophy.

In response to these shortcomings, I have proposed a phenomenological foundation for African feminist ethics, one that centres the subjective experiences of African women and situates ethical reasoning within their sociocultural contexts. This work draws on phenomenological philosophy, which prioritises individual consciousness and embodied experience to ground ethical inquiry in the concrete realities of African women's lives, such as their roles as caregivers, economic providers, or community leaders, rather than abstract ideals. With a focus on how African women perceive and navigate their worlds, this framework affirms African women as epistemic agents whose narratives, histories, and embodied knowledge are central to ethical reasoning. Thus, it is both culturally relevant and attuned to the specific needs of African women.

Through the lens of gender as space versus gender as place, this article demonstrates that African feminist ethics must account for the layered geographies of women's lived realities. In this framework, gender as space refers to gender as a universal category of social organisation, a structuring principle present across human societies that shapes roles, relationships, and distributions of power. As a form of social architecture, it defines the contours within which individuals act and interact, yet it remains open to negotiation and reconfiguration in response to shifting political, cultural, and historical

conditions. By contrast, gender as place captures the particular, localised manifestations of these organising principles, the sedimented cultural, historical, and institutional arrangements that anchor gender in specific contexts, shaping and often constraining the possibilities for action.

A phenomenological foundation allows these two dimensions to be held in productive tension, illuminating how African women navigate between the universal structuring logics of space and the culturally specific constraints of place. It reveals the moral significance of both resistance and adaptation and underscores the importance of attending to how these dynamics play out in everyday life.

This framework resists static, universalist definitions of gender, instead treating it as a lived, spatially and temporally situated phenomenon. In doing so, it reframes ethical inquiry not as the application of abstract principles to passive subjects, but as an attentive engagement with the ways African women inhabit, transform, and sometimes subvert the spaces and places that structure their lives. In making this conceptual pairing central to African feminist ethics, the article equips the field with a flexible, context-sensitive lens for ethical reasoning. It provides a generative space for imagining new ethical horizons, ones that affirm African women's agency, honour their cultural contexts, and align with the broader struggles for gender equity, decolonial justice, and the transformation of moral philosophy itself. In doing so, it not only contributes to African feminist thought but also reshapes the global discourse on feminist ethics, ensuring that the moral concerns of African women are not peripheral but foundational to the pursuit of social justice worldwide.

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Akoleowo, Victoria. 2021. "Religion, Patriarchal Construction and Gender Complementarity in Nigeria." In *Pathways to Alternative Epistemologies in Africa*, edited by Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Samuel Oloruntoba, 177–203. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60652-7_11
- Alcoff, Linda. 2000. "Phenomenology, Post-Structuralism, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience." In *Feminist Phenomenology*, edited by Linda Fisher and Lester Embree, 39–56. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Amadiume, Ifi. 1987. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Apusigah, Agnes. 2008. "Is Gender Yet Another Colonial Project? A Critique of Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí's Proposal." *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy/Revue Africaine de Philosophie* XX(1–2): 23–44.
- Awusabo-Asare, Kofi. 1990. "Matriliny and the New Intestate Succession Law of Ghana." *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 24(1): 1–16.
- Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi. 2003. "Beyond Determinism: The Phenomenology of African Female Existence." *Feminist Africa* 2: 8–24.
- Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi. 2003. "Book Review: 'Yorubas Don't Do Gender': A Critical Review of Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí's *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*." *African Identities* 1(1): 119–40.
- Bertolt, Boris. 2018. "Thinking Otherwise: Theorizing the Colonial/Modern Gender System in Africa." *African Sociological Review* 22(1): 1–17.
- Boyce-Davies, Carole. 2014. "Pan-Africanism, Transnational Black Feminism, and the Limits of Culturalist Analyses in African Gender Discourses." *Feminist Africa* 19: 78–93.

- Bujo, Bénézet. 2001. *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*. Translated by Brian McNeil. New York: Crossroad Publishing.
- Butler, Judith. 1988. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40(4): 519–31.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.
- Chilisa, Bagele and Gabo Ntseane. 2010. "Resisting Dominant Discourses: Implications of Indigenous, African Feminist Theory and Methods for Gender and Education Research." *Gender and Education* 22(6): 617–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2010.519578>
- Chimakonam, Jonathan and Lucky Ogbonnaya. 2021. *African Metaphysics, Epistemology and a New Logic: A Decolonial Approach to Philosophy*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chimakonam, Jonathan. 2015. "Conversational Philosophy as a New School of Thought in African Philosophy: A Conversation with Bruce Janz on the Concept of 'Philosophical Space'." *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophes* 3: 9–40.
- Cohen, Marlene. 1987. "A Historical Overview of the Phenomenological Movement." *IMAGE Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 19(1): 31–4. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.1987.tb00584.x>
- Cornell, Drucilla and Karin van Marle. 2015. "Ubuntu Feminism: Tentative Reflections." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36(2): 1–8.
- Daly, Anya. 2018. "A Phenomenological Grounding of Feminist Ethics." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 50(1): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2018.1487195>
- De Beauvoir, Simone. 1997. *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage.
- Diabate, Naminata. 2020. *Naked Agency: Genital Cursing and Biopolitics in Africa*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Diouf, Emilie, Unifier Dyer, Asali Ecclesiastes and Marita Gilbert. 2023. "Our Ubuntu: A Black Feminist Turn." *Agenda* 37(2): 32–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2023.2229572>

- Du Toit, Louise and Azille Coetzee. 2017. "Gendering African Philosophy, or: African Feminism as Decolonizing Force." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, edited by Adeshina Afolayan and Toyin Falola, 333–47. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ewuoso, Cornelius, Ademola Fayemi and Kiarash Aramesh. 2021. "Ubuntu Ethics and Moral Problems in Traditional Bone-healing." *Journal of Global Health Reports* 5: 1–9.
- Eze, Chielozona. 2014. "Feminism with a Big 'F': Ethics and the Rebirth of African Feminism in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*." *Research in African Literatures* 45(4): 89–103.
- Friedman, Marilyn and Angela Bolte. 2007. "Ethics and Feminism." In *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Linda Alcoff and Eva Kittay, 81–101. Carlton, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Friedman, Marilyn. 2020. "Feminism in Ethics: Conceptions of Autonomy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby, 205–24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gouws, Amanda and Mikki van Zyl. 2015. "Towards a Feminist Ethics of Ubuntu: Bridging Rights and Ubuntu." In *Care Ethics and Political Theory*, edited by Daniel Engster and Maurice Hamington, 164–86. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gyekye, Kwame. 1997. "Person and Community in African Thought." In *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, edited by Kwame Gyekye, 101–21. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hampâté Bâ, Amadou. 1972. *Aspects of African Civilization (Person, Culture, Religion)*. Translated by Susan Hunt. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Harding, Sandra. 1987. "The Curious Coincidence of Feminine and African Moralities: Challenges for Feminist Theory." In *Women and Moral*

Theory, edited by Eva Kittay and Diana Meyers, 296–315. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield.

Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row.

Heinämaa, Sara. 2003. *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Husserl, Edmund. 1977. *Phenomenological Psychology. Lectures, Summer Semester 1925*. Translated by John Scanlon. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Ikuenobe, Polycarp. 2006. *Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Imafidon, Elvis. 2018. “Is African Moral Epistemology of Care Fractured?” *Synthesis Philosophica* 65(1): 165–77.

Imafidon, Elvis. 2022. “Exploring African Relational Ethic of Ubuntu for Inclusion and Solidarity in the Humanitarian Field.” *Europe Talks Solidarity* (blog), 26 January. Accessed 9 September 2024. <https://www.talkingsolidarity.eu/publications/exploring-african-relational-ethic-of-ubuntu/>

Ipadeola, Abosede. 2020. “Women and the Project of Decolonization in Contemporary Africa: Are Gender Considerations de Rigueur?” *Culture and Dialogue* 8: 43–58.

Janz, Bruce. 2007. “African Philosophy.” In *The Edinburgh Companion to 20th Century Philosophies*, edited by Constantin Boundas, 689–702. New York: Columbia University Press.

Jenkins, Fiona. 2020. “The Ethics of Care: Valuing or Essentialising Women’s Work?” In *How Gender Can Transform the Social Sciences: Innovation and Impact*, edited by Marian Sawyer, Fiona Jenkins and Karen Downing, 19–26. Cham: Palgrave Pivot. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43236-2_2

Kayange, G. M. 2020. “Restoration of Ubuntu as an Autocentric Virtue-phronesis Theory.” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 39(1): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2019.1665817>

- Kereto, Josephat, Agnes Oywaya Nkurumwa, James Obara and Nelson Mango. 2022. "Livestock Management and Protection Using Indigenous Technical Knowledge Among the Maasai of Narok County, Kenya." *Cogent Social Sciences* 8(1): 1–24.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2040793>
- Kuhse, Helga. 1995. "Clinical Ethics and Nursing: 'Yes' to Caring, but 'No' to a Female Ethics of Care." *Bioethics* 9(3/4): 207–19.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1467-8519.1995.TB00356.X>
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. 1993. *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.
- Lötter, H. P. P. 2007. "The Moral Challenge of Poverty's Impact on Individuals." *Koers – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 72(2): 261–82.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/koers.v72i2.202>
- Lugones, María. 1987. "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2(2): 3–19.
- Madukasi, Francis. 2018. "The Symbolism of Isi-Agu Attire: Monsignor Martin Maduka in Perspective." *Nnadiesube Journal of Philosophy* 2(1): 15–35.
- Mama, Amina. 2001. "Challenging Subjects: Gender and Power in African Contexts." *African Sociological Review* 5(2): 63–73.
- Mangena, Fainos. 2009. "The Search for an African Feminist Ethic: A Zimbabwean Perspective." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11(2): 18–30.
- Mann, Bonnie. 2018. "The Difference of Feminist Phenomenology: The Case of Shame." *PUNCTA: Journal of Critical Phenomenology* 1: 41–73.
- Manyonganise, M. 2015. "Oppressive and Liberative: A Zimbabwean Woman's Reflections on Ubuntu." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36(2): 1–7.
- Mapp, Taniya. 2008. "Understanding Phenomenology: The Lived Experience." *British Journal of Midwifery* 16(5): 308–11.
<https://doi.org/10.12968/bjom.2008.16.5.29192>

- McFadden, Patricia. 2002. "Intellectual Politics and Radical Feminist Praxis." *Feminist Africa* 1: 1–4.
- Menkiti, Ifeanyi. 1984. "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought." In *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., edited by Robert Wright, 171–81. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Collin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Moran, Dermot. 2000. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge.
- Musili, Telesia. 2024. "Cultivating African Feminist Ethics of Liberation with Hannah Kinoti." In *Queen of Sheba: East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation* (Circle Jubilee Volume 2), edited by Loreen Maseno, Esther Mombo, Nagaju Muke and Veronica Kahindo, 137–53. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press.
- Noddings, Nel. 1984. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nzegwu, Nkiru. 2006. *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Ogude, James. 2019. "Introduction." In *Ubuntu and the Reconstitution of Community*, edited by James Ogude, 1–20. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Oksala, Johanna. 2016. *Feminist Experiences: Foucauldian and Phenomenological Investigations*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Olojede, Funlola O. 2020. "Toward an African Feminist Ethics and the Book of Proverbs." In *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, edited by Susanne Scholz, 129–39. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Omotoso, Sharon. 2018. "Communicating Feminist Ethics in the Age of New Media in Africa." In *Gendering Knowledge in Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Toyin Falola and Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, 64–84. London: Routledge.

- Oyeleye, Olayinka. 2018. "Ìwà l'ẹwà: Towards a Yorùbá Feminist Ethics." *Yoruba Studies Review* 3(1): 277–96.
<https://doi.org/10.32473/ysr.v3i1.129931>
- Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ́. 1997. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Oyowe, Oritsegbubemi and Olga Yurkivska. 2014. "Can a Communitarian Concept of African Personhood Be both Relational and Gender-neutral?" *South African Journal of Philosophy* 33(1): 85–99.
- Patil, Anil. 2018. "Why Caregiving needs to be 'De-feminized': How the Caregiver Role Disproportionately Burdens Women." *White Swan Foundation* (blog), 28 March. Accessed 11 April 2025.
<https://www.whiteswanfoundation.org/caregiving/how-the-role-of-caring-disproportionately-burdens-women>
- Tamale, Sylvia. 2020. *Decolonization and Afro-feminism*. Ottawa: Daraja Press.
- Tutu, Desmond. 2007. *Introduction to the Words and Inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi – PEACE*. New York: Blackwell.
- Uchendu, Egodi. 2002. "Culture: The Obstacle to Active Female Participation in Governance Among the Igbo of Nigeria." *Asian Women* 15: 73–94.
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. 1986. *Petals of Blood*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Wanjala, Bernadette. 2021. "Women, Poverty, and Empowerment in Africa." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, edited by Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola, 1,657–79. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_106
- Wolff, Jonathan. 2018. *An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Young, Iris. 2005. *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zou, Xiang, Jing-Bao Nie and Ruth Fitzgerald. 2020. "Gendered Caregiving and Structural Constraints: An Empirical Ethical Study." *Nursing Ethics* 28: 387–401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969733020912517>