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Gender Apartheid: Re-examining the Security of the Oppressor and the Oppressed in Nigeria

Agbaje, Funmilayo Idowu

Abstract

The term gender apartheid has been used to explain the subordination of one sex over another. It is often used to describe the consequences of patriarchy and male dominance, not only on the oppressed but also, on the oppressor. While gender apartheid can take several forms in manifestation, the most commonly practised in Nigeria is embedded in the predominantly patriarchal culture among the people. The term patriarchy has been described as a system of social organization that recognizes, encourages, and reproduces the seemingly natural and necessary domination of men over women. While literature abounds on gender imbalance and its diverse consequences, especially on women ranging from sexual exploitation, disempowerment, poverty, and poor physical and mental health among several other vices, few scholarly works exist on the effects of gender apartheid on men. Also, the impacts of patriarchy and sexual domination of Nigerian men on their social, economic, health and human security, in general, have not been adequately explored in the literature. Thus, this paper is focused on reviewing extant studies to reflect the ways through which gender apartheid leads to the disempowerment and harm of individuals; both women and men in Nigerian society. The paper adopts gender schema theory to discuss the harms and downsides inherent in overt male domination in Nigeria. It established the multiple ways through which patriarchy has created a clear gender divide in Nigeria and at the same time, mentions some measures that can be put in place to bridge the chasm of gender apartheid in society.

Keywords: gender Apartheid, human security, Nigeria

Introduction

Gender apartheid has been described by scholars as practices that condemn girls and women to a separate and subordinate subexistence while ascribing to boys and men, the permanent roles of guardians, protectors, providers and superiors of females (Andrews, 2001). The term gender apartheid has been used to explain the consequences of patriarchy and male dominance, not only on the oppressed but also, on the oppressor. While gender apartheid can take several forms in manifestation, the most commonly practised in Nigeria is embedded in the predominantly patriarchal culture among the people. The term patriarchy has been described as a system of social organization that recognizes, encourages, and reproduces the seemingly natural and necessary domination of men over women (Lorber, 2005; Kimmel, 2000). In Nigeria, patriarchy is deeply ingrained in every significant societal institution, and consequently in the manner in which individuals learn to practice gender. It promotes the differential enjoyment of privileges between males and females. In other words, while the society places a lot of economic responsibilities on men, it requires women to be more morally responsible. The deconstruction of patriarchy, therefore, remains an institutional and individual quest dependent on scholarly insight and exposition. It takes a high level of commitment to justice hence the purview of this paper.

While literature abounds on gender imbalance and its diverse consequences, especially on women ranging from sexual exploitation, disempowerment, poverty, and poor physical and mental health among several other vices (Makama, 2013), few scholarly works exist on the effects of gender apartheid on men. In addition, scholars have ventured into the entrenchment of patriarchal culture in maledominated professions and how Nigerian women are finding it hard to thrive in such working environment. Some identified dilemma are the required physical strength, belief system and lack of trust. These problems are laid on patriarchal orientation and further breed and reinforce occupational gender segregation (Adisa, Gbadamosi and Adekoya, 2021). Nevertheless, the impacts of patriarchy and sexual domination of Nigerian men on their social, economic, health and human security, in general, have not been adequately explored in the literature. Thus, this paper is focused on reviewing extant studies to reflect the ways through which gender apartheid leads to the disempowerment and harm of individuals; both women and men in Nigerian society. The analysis is carried out using African feminist theory as a framework for this study while data are sourced from secondary sources that is, textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, magazines and online articles respectively.

The Evidence

Gender apartheid has also been referred to as sexual apartheid or sex apartheid by some scholars (Howland, 2001; Kazemi, 2000). It is the economic and social discrimination against individuals because of their gender or sex. It is often characterised by a system enforced by using either physical, spiritual, cultural or legal practices to relegate individuals to subordinate positions (Mayer, 2000). Since patriarchal dominance is the foremost manifestation of gender apartheid in contemporary Nigeria, scholars (Dogo, 2014) have contended with the notion of patriarchy as an original way of life in Africa but rather, as a phenomenon that came with the colonisation, westernisation and modernisation of the region through external factors such as religions and education (Agbaje, 2019; 2022). Noteworthy is the fact that the resurgence of gender awareness in Nigeria has increased civil public, and to some extent private relations between women and men, the stereotypes and discrimination reinforced by patriarchy has not changed remarkably. Thus, gender apartheid is discriminatory in a pervasive manner and it poses critical human rights issues calling for urgent responses. Its subordination of women within a system that institutionalises pseudo-citizenship of women across state political, legal, and cultural infrastructures. Germane to this discourse is Chapter IV (four) of the Nigerian constitution as amended which provides for the fundamental rights of citizens and more specifically is the Section 42 of the constitution where it was clearly stated that no citizen should be discriminated against based on their gender, ethnicity, religion or political views (Odjighoro, 2020). In a similar vein, Awhefeada (2022) appraises the regional and international instruments regarding discrimination against women in the 1999 Constitution as amended. However, even though the Nigerian constitution is the supreme law in the country, there is still gender discrimination in all stages and spheres of politics in Nigeria.

Despite the existence of legal provisions in the Nigeria law on gender-inclusive democratic governance, saddled with the responsibility of supporting the equal representation of all citizens irrespective of their sex or gender, it is worth noting that women are still either scantily represented or at times, totally excluded from decision-making. A critical observation of the status of the Nigerian men and women often portrays the women in a pseudo-citizenship when compared with the men (Para-Mallam, 2017). There are structures encompassed in hidden sociocultural and religious ideological barriers that undermine the efficacy of female's leadership either at home or in the public sphere (Popoola, Egharevba and Fayomi, 2021; Delport, 2004). Consequently, Nigerian women are directly or at times, subtly deterred through all forms of insecure strategies and processes to create fear and further reinforce patriarchy in society (Azogu, 1991; Ashiru, 2007). Considering the challenges confronting the Nigerian females in the forms of physical and psychological

violence, property rights, employment stereotypes, inadequate political representation, intimidation and harassments, it suffices to say that the discussion in this paper is apt as there is a huge gap to be filled in the areas achieving gender inclusion and parity in the country.

The United Nations (2020) emphasises gender apartheid as a phenomenon that leads not only to the social and economic disempowerment of individuals, but can also result in severe physical harm. Thus, it is worthy to note that while patriarchy fuels the majority of gender discrimination in Africa, gender apartheid can also be attributed to women. In other words, sociocultural practices such as forced marriages, breast ironing, female genital mutilation, widowhood rites, fertility-related pressures, body-shaming among several other horrendous violation performed by women against their fellow women in the belief that they are helping them (Coen, 2017). In essence, women tend to encourage patriarchy in society by their inaction in the face of some of the oppressive practices. The lack of will to change or abolish harmful cultural practices are sometimes rooted in the selfish desire to have other women have a taste of the unpalatable experiences they have had in the past. Suffice to maintain that while Nigerian men strive to maintain their privileges, the women are lagging behind in their bid to challenge patriarchy. Uchendu (2005) posits that this timid acceptance of male domination pervades the psyche of many Nigerian women and determines how they see their world and their experiences. Thus conditioned, it becomes an uphill task for women to fight patriarchal bondage (Achebe, 2005; Amadiume, 1987). Needless say at this point that while there are several vices perpetuated against women by men, there are also some vices encouraged by women (Andersen, 1997). However, the debate in this paper is neither centred around the already over-emphasised gender enslavement to the societal divisions nor the nervousness that often accompany the notion of dismantling a longstanding sociocultural practices but to illuminate the intellectuals and the society at large to the harms and downsides inherent in overt male domination in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts gender schema theory propounded by Sandra Bem in 1981. The cognitive theory claims that gender and gender development is a product of the norms of a people's culture. It posits that that people process information, in part, based on gender-typed knowledge acquired through long and constant exposure to a set of knowledge within a society (Vinney, 2021). Bem maintains that individuals' sense of adequacy may be based on their ability to live up to the appropriate gender schemas as dictated by their culture. Gender schema theory has been cautioned to be a theory of process. The theory does not account for the specific content of gender schemas, as there are differences between cultures. Instead, it focuses on the way people process and

utilize the information their culture provides about masculinity and femininity (Vinney, 2021). This theory question society's over-reliance on gender distinctions hence influencing the ways the gender roles are communicated in society as well as how this communication influences peoples' perception of their gender expectations. It further enable people to understand the social difficulties they may encounter if they fail to conform to culture's gender norms (Martin, Ruble and Szkrybaio, 2002). For example, "a man who cries at a wedding may be mocked for being less masculine, while a woman who does the same is thought to be exhibiting gender-appropriate behaviour. Meanwhile, a woman who speaks forcefully during a company meeting may be seen as bossy or too emotional by her employees, but a man who does the same is considered authoritative and in control" (Vinney, 2021;1-3).

However, this theory has been criticized for its failure to account for the way biology or social interactions impact gender development. In addition, while the theory is meant to account for the process of these schema, the content is unclear. This makes it difficult to measure schema. Cognitive schemas also possess the capacity to predict thinking, attention, and memory while it is less predictive of behaviour. In other words, an individual's behaviour may contradict the structured ways of thinking (Kendra, 2020). This theory is germane to this discourse as it exhibits the characteristics needed to analyse gender as a social construct especially, in the Nigerian context. Most Nigerian cultures are patriarchal in nature; a principle passed from one generation to another through social norms such as stories, songs, religion, maxims, proverbs, dressings, expected roles based on sex among other media. It thus becomes expedient that people grow into their expected gender roles, often dictated by sex irrespective of how uncomfortable some of these gender roles and expectations may be. It also explains the reason behind the unconscious exposure of individuals to harm due to their belief system and age-long cultural practices. The power of culture and the willingness of the practitioners to further the practice of patriarchy has led to gender apartheid in Nigeria. The consequence of this is vivid in the negligence of individuals, scholars, government and policy makers in delving into the nitty-gritty of the many ways through which patriarchy affects the people and especially, the Nigerian men.

Gender, Patriarchy and the Security of Nigerians

A lot of studies have been carried out on patriarchal structures and institutions that strictly confine Nigerian women to certain gender roles (Akpotor, 2016; Ejumudo, 2013). Related studies have also elucidated the fact that women in Nigerian society are bound by the patriarchal confines of its past (Agbaje, 2019-2020). Even though the ways in which patriarchy is being expressed differs from one context to the other based on culture, class and age, the fact remains that patriarchy subsist. For instance, while sexism may be

inherent among the local populace, the elites tend to be subtler in that regard. The crushing effects of patriarchy on women and men in today's Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. While everyone seems to be discussing this society-troubling issue, the voice of women is usually the louder (Agbaje, 2020). The reason may not be far-fetched in the fact that women are the ones bearing the brunt of patriarchal practice in Nigeria. Another reason, perhaps, is situated in the predominant ignorance of how patriarchy affects men also. The need for a shift in society's mode of combating the hard and soft power of patriarchy have prompted scholars into interrogating the dire consequences of gender imbalance on both women and men in society (Asiyanbola, 2005). The need to build a self-fulfilling individuals who can establish and sustain the emerging culture of equity irrespective of sex and gender necessitated this paper. Against this background the paper, therefore, highlights some of the ways gender apartheid reinforce insecurity in the Nigerian society.

Thus, it is convenient to mention here that patriarchy is engraved in every society to an extent. It is a rigid dichotomy of gender roles that dictate what is expected from an individual based on their sex. For example, in many contemporary Nigerian society, men are supposed to be strong, responsible, fearless, productive, protectives, unemotional, logical, affirmative, lead and confident among several other societal expectations. On the other hand, women are supposed to be attentive, submissive, nurturing, gentle, weak, subservient and dependent (Betts, 2005; Cornwall, 2005). These, gender attributes, however, contradicts the original gender identities and roles of Nigerians as a people (Awe, 1992). There may be nothing to worry about if expected gender roles do not create injustice and sense of insecurity among the populace. However, the emerging wake-up call to the several ills and insecurities caused and reinforced by patriarchal practices is creating a new consciousness of a whole human being who is free to exhibit their wholeness in both feminine and masculine ways. In other words, it may become acceptable for a woman to be strong and loving and for a man to be emotional and hardworking all at the same time.

Men and the Patriarchal System

Even though there is always news about how men use their power and influence to perpetrate all manners of vices, especially against women and girls and oftentimes, get away with it, it often falls outside the accepted gender norms to hear about women using their power against men. Nevertheless, men are also harmed by patriarchy in ways that are both obvious and more subtle (Coles, 2017). Thus, patriarchy encourages rigid gender norms and enforces toxic masculinity. The everyday interaction reminding the males of an unbending rules as to how to live (choice of jobs, hobbies and relationships) may have lasting negative effects on their self-worth, future decisions and mental health. The men thus suppress emotions and true feeling to live up to

the expectation of society hence producing toxic masculinity which perceives females as inferior and men as superior. In other words, patriarchy promotes male dominance and control over females and justifies it with the narratives of heroism and protection. This culture of male-dominance and entitlement tend to promote pretence and self-acclaim achievements since men have to exhibit competence even when it is not feasible. This can impede learning among the Nigerian male populace.

Marcotte (2016) posits that while toxic masculinity may seem as aspiring to toughness on the outside, it is, in fact, an ideology of living in fear. The fear of ever seeming soft, tender, weak, or somehow less than manly hence men are taught to suppress their emotions. This stereotype can lead to violence and pressure to act mean. Since the act of using force and control have been rationalised in getting your needs met. It creates unwarranted competition among men to fit into the expectations of society. In essence, violence has been entangled into the societal norms in guise of masculinity. For example, male victims of rape often hide their experience and suffer in silence. This problem is compounded by destructive cultural stereotypes where men are viewed as sexually dominant and women as submissive. Male victims who have been subjected to penetration risk being labelled as less manly or in some contexts, as homosexual. There is a belief that a man who is raped becomes a woman, and that only gay men are victims of rape. Many male victims prefer to suffer in silence than risk being stigmatized for speaking out (Agbaje, 2019; Carlson, 1997). This has fuelled the popular notion that women are usually the only victims of sexual violence.

Furthermore, patriarchy makes men more liable to die young. This is because men engage in more risk-taking behaviour and are likely to work in dangerous jobs leading them early death when compared with women. Moreover, men are more involved in alcohol and drugs consumption which may have dire consequences on their health. In addition, emotional repression has been linked to mental disorder and suicide among men (Dogo, 2014). This is because the society pressured men to be successful, ambitious, protective and make money to be the breadwinner. A lot of men have refused to seek help in times of crisis hence leading to a build-up of emotional conflict. Similarly, have the inability to meet up the demands of society led to feeling of inadequacies and eventual suicide. Undoubtedly, patriarchy is a huge threat to men's physical and mental health. While attention has been paid to the advantages bestowed on men by patriarchy, little knowledge exists on the harms posed by it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has established the multiple ways through which patriarchy has created a clear gender divide in Nigeria and at the same time, mentions some

measures that can be put in place to bridge the chasm. The elimination of patriarchy will avail men of the opportunity to express themselves freely. This includes all experiences and a whole range of human emotions that patriarchy had hitherto taught them to deny. For example, one of the reason gender issues do not resonate with men may not be far-fetched in the fact that men do not have reasons to complain about sexism as much as women do. However, increase in the number of men talking about gender issues will make it hard to other men to ignore. Thus, this paper recommends that:

- i. There is a need for sensitisation using all available media to reawaken the understanding of the populace about how patriarchy works. Specifically, tis the urgent need to engage more men in gender advocacy works.
- ii. There are numerous benefits that could emerge from hearing more men's voices in the conversation about gender parity that will compensate the agelong efforts of women.
- iii. Since patriarchy is grounded in dogmatic societal beliefs and practices, scholars, practitioners and policy makers should work toward establishing a way forward that will help women and men alike to understand more deeply and concretely, some of the security challenges inherent in gender apartheid,
and to arrive at an inclusive, new solutions that will address it in today's Nigerian Society.
- iv. In addition, there is a need for urgent consolidation of efforts aimed at combating patriarchy at both the personal and communal levels. Adequate support is expected from men and the society at large, for women led struggles against patriarchy at all levels. In essence, complimentary efforts is needed to eradicate the system of governance based on subordination of women across state political, legal, and cultural infrastructures.
- v. While this paper has been able to establish the manifestation of gender apartheid in the form of patriarchal dominance in Nigeria, future scholars are challenged to explore any other areas of gender apartheid inherent in the
Nigerian society

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