

A FEMINIST INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER RELATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract.

Man as a social animal is a being with others. As being with others, he realizes himself and form his part and destiny. In his relationship with other beings, certain factors come uo\p to inform such relationships. They at every point, intersect with each other that each category takes its identity from the other. Intersectionality as a concept is a new a tenet in feminist thinking and has transformed how gender is conceptualized, theorized and also what informs gender relations. This research work is focused on the central themes in the theory of intersectionality and also on intersectional perspective in empirical research on gender relations. Having our focus on gender relation in Nigeria and how some of these salient factors of oppression are greatly impacting negatively on gender relation. This paper, using the philosophical method of analysis, wishes to holistically look into and interpret these factors. Hoping that this interpretation will help to have a more thriving society where peace and tranquillity reigns which will in turn foster good gender relation.

Keywords: Feminism, intersectionality, gender, culture, oppression

Introduction:

Intersectionality as a concept has seen a surge of interest among feminist scholars in literature, psychology, sociology and more recently in philosophical investigations. Its genealogy, is that multiple axes of oppression cut cross each other helping in shaping our destinies and forming our identities. Scholars are of the opinion that Intersectionality has emerged over the past thirty years as an “interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the concurrent impacts of social structures, with a focus on theorizing how belonging to multiple exclusionary social categories can influence political access and equality.” This intersectional identities comes in categories of white/black, rich/poor, tall/short, weak/strong etc. these are social categories that we all partook in and from which we all derive our identities and form our relationships. Identity, such as gender or social class, may be experienced individually, but the operation of power relations among groups/people that make up that identity category is also reflected. As a concept, it first appeared first in that works of Crenshaw (1991) “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour”. In the work she recognizes women as recipients of systems of oppression. In her opinion she said that:

Over the last two decades, women have organized against the almost

routine violence that shapes their lives.¹ Drawing from the strength of shared experience, women have recognized that the political demands of millions speak more powerfully than the pleas of a few isolated voices. This politicization in turn has transformed the way we understand violence against women. For example, battering and rape, once seen as private (family matters) and aberrational (errant sexual aggression), are now largely recognized as part of a broad-scale system of domination that affects women as a class

She went further to say that:

Focusing on two dimensions of male violence against women-battering rape-I consider how the experiences of women of colour are frequently the product of inter-secting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Be-cause of their intersectional identity as both women and of colour within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of colour are marginalized within both.

Throughout history, women have stood up against discrimination, subjugation and violence that shaped their lives and forged their identities . This has put them in constant war with one another , fighting for approval from the same people that has held them bondage as noted by Hooks (2000) in “feminism is for everybody: passionate politics” when she said:

That foundation rested on our critique of what we then call "the enemy within," referring to our internalized sexism. We all knew first-hand that we had been socialized as females by patriarchal thinking to see ourselves as inferior to men, to see ourselves as always and only in competition with one another for patriarchal approval, to look upon each other with jealousy, fear, and hatred. Sexist thinking made us judge each other without compassion and punish one another harshly.

But all this came to a minimal once the concept of “sisterhood” was emphasized over and over again. I myself have heard countless times from my late mother how powerful sisterhood is and it will help us to confront our common enemy (patriarchy). This is what feminism did for us, Hooks (2000) said that “Feminist thinking helped us unlearn female self-hatred. It enabled us to break free of the hold patriarchal thinking had on our consciousness”. Women have drawn strength in sisterhood and shared experiences in fighting the forces of oppression that held them

captive. Bell hooks in her earliest towed the line of Crenshaw on how imperialism, patriarchy, and sexism combine together to form systems of institutionalized oppression for both gender. slavery, racism sexism worked symbiotically to create an overarching system of institutionalized domination and oppression for not only the black woman. Hook (1982) noting this said that:

In a retrospective examination of the black female slave experience, sexism looms as large as racism as an oppressive force in the lives of black women. Institutionalized sexism that is, patriarchy formed the base of the American social structure along with racial imperialism. Sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands, and it was to have a grave impact on the fate of enslaved black women

Aira & Pascua (2020) agreeing to this, also noted how women discrimination should not be understood as a separate category when you fail to mention other system of oppression , salient but forming intersectional webs of oppression. Going further they stressed that:

Discrimination on the grounds of sex / gender cannot be understood in isolation. To be woman is a social category that is built and experienced in constant interaction with other categories: background, social class, skin color, sexual desire, age, abilities, etc. Capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism are intertwined and act together, shaping social identities and hierarchies of power that place people and groups in different positions which condition their opportunities. Within this system, the privileges of some are sustained by the oppression of others, and it is for this reason that we require theories and methodologies that allow us to critically analyze the attendant social context

In particular, Collins (1920, 2000) maintains that “gender must be understood in the context of power relations embedded in social identities”. Intersectionality reflects the reality of everyone’s lives. Oppressional identities describe how we relate with each other and with our environment. These identities are not static and tend to change over time. As such one’s reaction to oppression in a certain location will be different in another location.

Conceptual and theoretical Analysis

Gender

UNICEF (20170, defines gender as:

A social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender-based roles and other attributes, therefore, change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. The concept of gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). This concept is useful in analyzing how commonly shared practices legitimize discrepancies between sexes.

Gender as such, is a cultural and social construct with its determinant factors inbuilt into our societal norms and traditions. It is the generally accepted roles that society expects us to play as a male or a female gender. Someone might as well ask what are these roles that society expects us to play? Amy (2003) gave us a clue when she said that: “Gender roles are the product of the interactions between individuals and their environments, and they give individuals cues about what sort of behaviour is believed to be appropriate for what sex. Appropriate gender roles are defined according to a society's beliefs about differences between the sexes”. These roles are being performed over time over time that as such it becomes the person’s identity. Butler (1990) agreeing to this argued that ‘gender is the process of embodiment which results from the repeated performance of acts of gendering’. One of Butler’s innovations was to suggest that:

Gender is constituted by action and speech-by behaviour in which general traits and dispositions are exhibited or acted out. In particular gender is not an underlying essence or nature of which gendered is the product ; it is a series of acts whose constant repetition creates the illusion that an underlying Nature exist; gender according to butler is per-formatively constituted.

As such gender roles are the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. The World Development Report (WDR 2012) “defines gender as socially constructed norms and ideologies which determine the behaviour and actions of men and women”¹². Understanding these gender relations and the

power dynamics behind them is a prerequisite for understanding individuals' access to and distribution of resources, their ability to make decisions and the ways in which women and men, boys and girls are affected by political processes and social development. The problem that arises in this distribution of powers is that women are generally marginalized and many a times kept off from participating fully in public roles by societal norms which has assigned the roles of a caregiver to them. This was what gave birth to the concept of feminism.

Feminism

Historically the term evolved from examining areas of inequality between the sexes to social and performative constructions of gender and sexuality. Hooks (2000) defined feminism as , “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression”. Feminism is an interdisciplinary (as it cuts across various discipline) approach to issues of equality and equity based on gender. Heywood (2006), noted that as a political term ”feminism’ was a twentieth century invention and became a familiar subject in the 1960’s”. In modern usage, it is linked to women’s movement and an attempt to improve on the lifestyle of women in general. Feminists ideology is anchored on the belief that women are disadvantaged in life because of their sex and also that this disadvantage should be put to a halt. Feminists are of the opinion that the relationships between the sexes are political in nature and this has led to men claiming superiority over women. it has also being noticed that many a times women also oppress each other and oppress men as well.. oppression in this sense becomes multi –faced as there must be a reason why the oppressed now became the oppressor. This is a a result of many factors of oppression coming together and intersecting with each other so as to oppress people in the society. This gave birth to the theory of intersection. The theory recognizes the many faces involved in oppression. this theory of intersection changed the way gender has been conceptualized in ancient times.

Intersectionality

The theory of Intersectional oppression was first coined in 1989 by the African-American lawyer Kimberlé W. Crenshaw in her seminar papers titled “Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of colour, who collected and systematized black feminist critiques of feminist theory which focused on women as an undifferentiated social category, something which in reality represented the interests and needs of white, middle-class women. Rosa Frassetto & Marta Ruiz Pascua (2020) defines Intersectionality as “the phenomenon through which each individual faces oppression, or holds privileges, as a result of the multiple social categories to which they belong”. For McCall (2005) Intersectionality is that: “mutually constitutive relations among social identities, has become a central tenet of feminist thinking, one that) and others have suggested is the most important contribution of feminist theory to our present understanding of gender”

If gender relation is to be understood, it should be understood in the context of an already existing factor that informs and influences such relation either in a positive way or in a negative way. We all have these oppression identities and they are; race, class, gender, sex, ethnicism, religious etc. These identities shape the way we are seen in the society and as well inform our gender relation. Our personal experiences are gotten from these identities and it is grounded in a more concrete relation that extends beyond an individual’s stream of consciousness. Intersection makes us aware of these identities and how they weave together forming a web. Each system of oppression gets its identity from other systems of oppression. These identities are embedded in our culture.

Culture

Culture has no single definition but it has been generally referred to as the people’s ways of life.

This means that in our different cultural diversities, each and every one of us got our identity. Odede (2010) sees Identity as the “collective social and cultural behaviours of a group in a given society with discernible beliefs, cultures, tastes, attitudes, myths and rituals, which define their existences”. It is the intersection between biological composition and social or environmental expectations. Chodorow (1987) said that: “individual experiences and cultural orientation or formulation contribute to the formation of the individual’s personality or what she calls “typical personalities”. Culture sure is the main defining variable on the way we see our world. Our identities that we get from our culture are the different factors of oppression which we encounter daily in our society.

Oppression

Ome (2006) in his article titled ‘Philosophy, Democracy and African Development: the Relevance of Nyerere’s Political Philosophy’ gave us a perfect picture of what an oppressed people look like when he said:

We are besieged daily on all side by apparently unstoppable degradation and it has almost become nauseating to recount Africa’s problems, political instability, ethnic conflicts, bloody war’s, permanent economic depression worsened by corruption, greed and the debt crisis added to these are natural disasters, flooding, famine and desecration our health, educational

This is the kind of situation that introduces inequalities among us which in turn produce oppression. Here there is an absence of choice as we all at the mercy of the capitalist imperialism which has held us all in bondage. Martinez (2003) noted that the different types of oppression cannot be separated... “They are all part of the same system; they are three faces of the same enemy”. These enemies are the determinant factor of every gender relation”.

Gender relation in Nigeria

Nigeria as a country has been undergoing many reform when it comes to gender issues. These reforms are aimed at establishing equality laws that will ensure good gender relation. Laws are

now in place for discriminations against women and most especially in cases of violence, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, disability and one's sexuality. The reform wave going on in so many countries of the world and not only in Nigeria, has brought to limelight feminist discourses about the "theory of intersectionality" taking note of how different inequalities intersect leading to unique forms of discrimination. Bowleg (2012) defines intersectionality as a:

theoretical framework for understanding how multiple social identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, SES [socioeconomic status], and disability intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (i.e., racism, Sexism, heterosexism, classism) at the macro social-structural level. There is need for us to have an understanding of how intersectionality works if we are to combat different level of discrimination that exists between genders.

Ekpe & John (2014) noted that: "Nigeria has joined different countries in the world in the move to bring to an end all forms of discrimination against various social groups, chief of which is gender based discrimination". A lot of groundwork has been covered, but more still need to be done. Bimbika & Markus (2018) also noted that:

many feminist scholars have argued both that women (and men) are differentiated by class, ethnicity, age, etc. and that women experience varying degrees of gender-based discrimination merely by virtue of being women in a patriarchal world. We have argued that discrimination – along with its disempowering effects – may take various forms depending on one's position in structures of race, class, caste.

Hankivsky (2014) also agreed that "Inequalities are seldom the result of a single factor, but rather "the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences". Problems of inequality, discrimination, segregation, ethnicism, sexism, patriarchy and social economic inequalities that exist between the rich and the poor etc. These are known as 'factors of oppression'. What these factors oppression has done to us is widen gender gap and

stifling of good gender relation. We have the ability to recreate our society by doing away with all these factors of oppression by recreating ourselves. Bell hooks on her own part, offered us a way out through accepting feminism. In her words, she said: “Come closer and you will see: feminism is for everybody”²⁶ (hooks:2000:1). A position which our own Chiamanda Adichie in Intersectionality in "Americanah" How Race, Gender, and Migration intersect” (2020) asked us to accept too. If these factors are not taken into consideration, the ‘concept of becoming’ will not work well in African culture. African brand of feminism must be one that suits our culture and climate.

Nigerian society like every other African society is embedded in patriarchal tradition. A position that puts men in charge of every affair in the home and outside the home. Nigeria for instance has its gender relation relation fully influenced by patriarchal traditions which our culture is fully entrenched in. Cudd and Holmstrom, (2011) noted that: Patriarchy is a social construction which promotes ideas of sex and gender that support the superiority of men and inferiority of women”. This is a typical example of gender relation in Nigeria looks like which has constantly put both gender in constant war with each other. Makama, (2013) noted that “Nigerian society is a patriarchal one and largely stratified based on gender, thereby providing advantages to men while limiting women’s roles”. Nene (2020) gave a sordid description of the relationship between genders and some religious practices against women when she said:

Women are seen as inferior to men and are expected to carry out the majority of domestic responsibilities. Additionally, male children are encouraged to be more ambitious by their families while girls are expected to get married and produce children. Furthermore, there are religious practices such as purdah (seclusion) for Muslim women and the admonition for women to submit to their husbands which have theological roots in both Islam and Christianity which limit women’s ability to develop socio-economically

Women placed under this kind of oppressed/oppressor kind of relationship sees nothing other than men as the initiator of all their problems. In Hooks (2020), Bell hooks explained it more clearly when she:

conceives of power as conditioned by existing social hierarchies, or what she refers to as “white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy.” Within this social paradigm, power is distributed unevenly and indelibly: men have power, women are powerless; whites are powerful and nonwhite peoples are powerless; rich are powerful and poor are powerless.

Nigerians are also closely connected to traditions and religious values that vary between the northern and the southern parts of Nigeria. In the north, we have Muslims and in the south and east, we have Christians. These different ethnic groups have their own peculiarities informed by their peculiar culture and this in turn inform their gender relations. Gender relation in the north is not the same in south likewise east vice versa. This is exactly where the problem lies and which prompted Freire (2000) to ask “how can one begin to question that which had existed objectively but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to ‘stand out,’ assuming the character of a problem and therefore of challenge”. We have not really questioned the cultural claims of our different cultural perspectives which has informed our notion of what gender real gender relation should be. Freire (2000) again noted that:

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

We must begin to challenge the foundations of everything we hold dear including our culture and traditions. We must begin to go deeper than what ordinary eyes can see to determine the cause of

our problems. Gauadalupe & Yancy (2009) also noted that: “Naming is a way of actively breaking through forms of imposed silence. Naming our world, naming our reality, is a mode of problem-posing, problem solving and a way of calling attention to the social world and its appearance of fixity”. Nigerians should call to bear that which has impeded on their growth and developments as a people and that which has widened gender gap amongst us. In order to trace and name Nigerians gender relation problem, we don’t need to go far. It could be traced back to the days of colonialism and white imperialists. Who came into the African culture with the overall intent to subdue. What was clearly noticeable was the influence of sexism, racism, slavery etc worked symbiotically to create a system and institutionalized system of oppression for not only the African woman but for the African man as well. This was a perfect picture of a damaged relation for men and women physically and psychologically. Fast track back to this present time where gender oppression is still increasing at alarming rate. The master –slave dialectic relationship of the slave era is now been domesticated inside our various homes. Where men wield their manliness like an iron rod on their women just like they were taught during the slave era. Hooks (1982) gave a sordid detail of the type of relationship that exist in the patriarchal era when she said:

to be an oppressor is dehumanizing and anti-human in nature, as it is to be a victim. Patriarchy forces fathers to act as monsters, encourages husbands and lovers to be rapists in disguise; it teaches our blood brothers to feel ashamed that they care for us, and denies all men the emotional life that would act as a humanizing, self-affirming force in their lives...patriarchy has become merely a sub-heading under the dominant system of imperialist capitalism, as patriarchs men do not serve their families and communities but serve the interests of the State.

Despite the fact that this kind of oppressor/oppressed relationship exist between both gender, feminist scholars has also noted that “sexism” stands out to be the main factor propelling men to behave the way they are behaving. This too has been accepted by feminist scholars like bell

hooks when she redefined feminism as a concept that should erase all kinds of sexist oppression. According to Hooks (1982),” sexism is of central concern, not because it is the arbiter of all other “oppressions,” but because “it is the practice of domination most people experience, whether their role be that of discriminator or discriminated against, exploiter or exploited.”

In Feminist theory: from margin to center, hooks proposes a new definition of feminism, one that does not simply fight for the equality of women and men (of the same class) but of a movement that fights to end sexist oppression and exploitation without neglecting other forms of oppression such as racism, classism, imperialism and others. Hooks (1984), however, noted that each of these forms of oppression are interrelated and inseparably connected to each other through interlocking webs of oppression. This is referred to as intersectionality. “Her notion of interlocking webs of oppression is connected to “intersectionality”, an important conceptualization in today’s feminist circles”. Knowing the Nigerian gender gap is occasioned by discrimination led us into looking deep within our culture to find out that which has introduced discriminations amongst us. One of the most common bases of exclusion in Nigeria historically, has been gender. Consequently, women and girls are subjected to several types of gender-based violence and discrimination and recently men face the same issues in equal measure. This is to tell us that men and boys could be discriminated against. However, women’s issue stands out since men have historically asserted power over women, structural inequalities placed women at a disadvantage in terms of access to rights and opportunities. Hook was trying to identified an underlying problem which so many feminist agitators failed to notice . Nathalia and Peter (2009) in critical perspectives with Hooks (2000) clearly understood his stance and unmasked the problem which has been the ultimate cause of bad gender relation when they said:

hooks's assessment of how black men and women embodied the effects of "patriarchal power" in slavery draws our attention to the internal and external relations of subjective identity formation within an evolving capitalist social order, where men and women's relation to one another is not immune from productive capitalist forces. Relations of domination, exploitation, and alienation germane to the capitalist order permeate all aspects of social life, including the intimate spaces of the home.

The truth is that it is not all men that are patriarchs and some of these men has witnessed first-hand the overall bad influence that white supremacist culture has on the black man and they fought against it. Hooks (2004) noting this said that: Clearly, the individual black males who strategized resistance to slavery, plotted paths to freedom, and who invented new lives for themselves and their people were working against the white-supremacist patriarchal norm. They were the men who set the stage for the black male abolitionists who supported more freedom for women".

Again globally, Globally, women and men live in abject poverty and also experiences oppression in one way or the other according to ones position and location in the society. In 'where we stand, class matters', Hooks (2004) gave an insight on what informs gender relation in every society when she said:

Everywhere we turn in our daily lives in this nation we are confronted with the widening gap between rich and poor. Whether it is the homeless person we walk by as we go about daily chores in urban areas, the beggars whose cups tinkle with the sound of a few coins, the middle-class family member or friend who faces unemployment due to cutbacks, plant closings, or relocation, or the increased cost of food and housing, we are all aware of class. Yet there is no organized class struggle, no daily in-your-face critique of capitalist greed that stimulates thought and action—critique, reform, and revolution.

On the other hand, gender is an important consideration in any nations development. It is a way of looking at how social norms and power structures impact on the lives and opportunities available to different groups of men and women. Understanding that men and women, boys and

girls experience poverty differently, and face different barriers in accessing services, economic resources and political opportunities, helps to target interventions

Conclusion

Gender relation is a very important aspect of every nation's development. An understanding of all the factors that makes or mar good gender relation will go a long way into ensuring that there is growth and development in the society. Incorporating the theory of intersection into feminist studies is an added advantage because it will aid in the fight for gender equality to become an all inclusive one.

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