

Existentialist Feminism and Gender Relationships in Nigeria: A Critical Examination**Ogochukwu Agatha Okpokwasili, PhD****Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka**ao.okpokwasili@unizk.edu.ng**Abstract**

*This paper critically explores the application of existentialist feminism, particularly the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir as articulated in *The Second Sex*, to the analysis of gender relationships in contemporary Nigeria. Existentialist feminism posits that gender is not a fixed biological destiny but a socially constructed identity, shaped by lived experiences, cultural norms, and systemic power dynamics. Drawing from Beauvoir's central thesis— "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"—this study interrogates how Nigerian socio-cultural structures continue to produce and perpetuate gender roles that confine women to states of immanence, while privileging men with transcendence and agency. In Nigeria, traditional and religious ideologies remain deeply entrenched, contributing to the reification of patriarchal norms and the marginalization of women across socio-economic and political spheres. Through a combination of philosophical inquiry and socio-anthropological analysis, this paper examines how existentialist feminism can offer a framework for understanding the historical and ongoing objectification of Nigerian women as the "Other," particularly in marriage, education, labor, and leadership. The study investigates how these dynamics manifest in gendered expectations, legal systems, and public discourse, often reinforcing male dominance while limiting women's freedom and self-realization. By situating existentialist feminism within the Nigerian context, this paper highlights both the universality and the limitations of Beauvoir's framework, arguing for a culturally specific feminist praxis that addresses intersectional concerns such as colonial legacies, class, and religion. Furthermore, it critiques the ways in which Nigerian feminism has evolved, often negotiating between Western feminist ideals and indigenous realities, and explores how existentialist thought can deepen the discourse on agency, subjectivity, and liberation for Nigerian women. Ultimately, this work contributes to feminist philosophy and African gender studies by demonstrating the relevance of existentialist feminism in deconstructing oppressive gender systems and envisioning emancipatory possibilities for equitable gender relationships in Nigeria.*

Key words: *Existentialist Feminism, Gender Relationships, Patriarchy, Nigerian Society*

Introduction

Gender relations in Nigeria, as in many other postcolonial societies, are deeply influenced by a confluence of traditional customs, colonial legacies, religious doctrines, and modern socio-economic structures. These forces continue to shape a society where patriarchy not only persists but is often justified through cultural and religious narratives. Women are frequently positioned within predefined roles—primarily as wives, mothers, and caregivers—roles that limit their autonomy and reinforce systemic inequality. Despite numerous legislative and social reforms aimed at achieving gender equality, the lived realities of many Nigerian women still reflect significant disparities in power, access, and representation (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004; Nzegwu, 2006). To critically engage with this socio-cultural reality, existentialist feminism provides a particularly illuminating framework. Rooted in existential philosophy and spearheaded by thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, existentialist feminism asserts that womanhood is not a natural essence but a socially constructed identity. In her seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949/2011), de

Beauvoir famously declared, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” encapsulating the idea that gender identity is formed through lived experiences and the internalization of societal expectations. This approach challenges deterministic views of gender and emphasizes individual agency, freedom, and subjectivity—concepts that are especially pertinent in analyzing the constraints faced by women in patriarchal societies like Nigeria.

Beauvoir’s notion of the woman as “Other” is central to existentialist feminist critique. In patriarchal cultures, men are positioned as the default, the essential subject, while women are cast as the inessential, the objectified “Other” (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011). This binary opposition not only denies women full personhood but also limits their capacity to transcend the roles society imposes upon them. Within the Nigerian context, this “Othering” is evident in legal, political, and socio-economic structures. For instance, discriminatory inheritance laws, gender-based violence, underrepresentation in leadership, and restrictive cultural expectations reflect and reinforce women’s subordinated status (Makama, 2013; Aina, 2012).

Existentialism, as developed by thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, emphasizes individual freedom, responsibility, and the creation of meaning through lived experience (Sartre, 1943/2007). Simone de Beauvoir extends these concepts to feminist thought by asserting that women, like men, must strive to transcend societal limitations and assert their subjectivity (Bergoffen, 1997). While de Beauvoir’s work has been influential globally, African feminist scholars such as Oyěwùmí (1997) and Amadiume (1987) have critiqued the application of Western feminist frameworks to African contexts, arguing that they often ignore indigenous gender systems and the colonial disruption of local identities. However, rather than dismissing Western feminism entirely, this paper proposes a critical engagement—adapting existentialist ideas to fit Nigerian socio-cultural realities.

Contemporary Nigeria society has witnessed an upsurge in feminist consciousness, exemplified by movements such as #ArewaMeToo and #EndSARS, which have highlighted state violence, gendered abuse, and the silencing of women’s voices (Ibrahim, 2021). These developments underscore the urgency of rethinking gender relationships through frameworks that empower women’s agency and challenge patriarchal control.

This paper seeks to critically examine how existentialist feminist theory can be applied to understand and challenge gender relationships in Nigeria. Specifically, it explores the implications of Beauvoir’s concepts of immanence and transcendence for Nigerian women, and how social constructs of femininity and masculinity continue to shape power dynamics. Additionally, it interrogates the ways in which Nigerian feminism has emerged both in dialogue with and in resistance to Western feminist paradigms, advocating for a more contextually grounded feminist praxis that addresses the lived realities of Nigerian women.

In synthesizing philosophical theory with socio-political analysis, this study contributes to the growing body of African feminist scholarship that seeks to reclaim and redefine womanhood on its own terms. It argues that existentialist feminism—while Eurocentric in its origins—offers valuable tools for critiquing the structures that perpetuate gender inequality in Nigeria, particularly when adapted to address local specificities such as ethnicity, religion, and postcolonial identity.

Existentialist Feminism

Existentialist feminism is a philosophical and feminist framework that combines the principles of existentialism—particularly the ideas of individual freedom, agency, and the construction of self—with feminist critiques of gender-based oppression. This approach was most famously articulated by Simone de Beauvoir in her foundational work *The Second Sex* (1949/2011), where she asserts that women have historically been denied subjectivity and freedom by a patriarchal system that defines them as "the Other." In this context, woman is not seen as a self-actualizing subject but as an object relative to man, who is assumed to represent the universal human.

De Beauvoir's declaration that "*One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*" encapsulates the core tenet of existentialist feminism: that gender is not an inherent biological destiny, but a social and existential construction formed through lived experience and societal expectation (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011). Unlike essentialist feminisms that may anchor women's identity in biology or a shared universal experience, existentialist feminism emphasizes freedom, individual responsibility, and the importance of transcending oppressive norms. At its heart, existentialist feminism critiques the structural limitations—legal, cultural, and social—that confine women to states of immanence (passivity, repetition, domesticity), while men are permitted to pursue transcendence (freedom, creativity, public life) (Bergoffen, 1997). De Beauvoir argues that these imposed limitations on women are not natural but are the result of historical and cultural oppression.

Applying existentialist feminism to the Nigerian context reveals the deeply entrenched gender norms and expectations that continue to limit women's autonomy and reinforce patriarchal dominance. Nigerian society, shaped by indigenous traditions, colonial legacies, and strong religious influences, often positions women within rigid gender roles. These roles tend to emphasize obedience, domesticity, and submission, which mirror de Beauvoir's concept of immanence (Makama, 2013; Aina, 2012).

For instance, despite constitutional guarantees of equality, Nigerian women face structural barriers to political participation, economic independence, and legal protection. Cultural practices such as male primogeniture, child marriage, and limited inheritance rights exemplify how women are relegated to subordinate social positions (Nzegwu, 2006). These constraints reduce women's ability to assert their subjectivity and make autonomous choices, thereby denying them the existential freedom that de Beauvoir deems essential for authentic human existence. Moreover, the socialization of girls in many Nigerian communities reflects the very dynamics existentialist feminism seeks to challenge. From early childhood, many girls are taught that their worth is tied to their roles as future wives and mothers, rather than as autonomous agents capable of defining their own destinies (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004). This gendered conditioning perpetuates immanence and hinders the development of subjectivity.

Nevertheless, contemporary Nigerian feminism has begun to engage more critically with these dynamics. Movements such as #ArewaMeToo, #EndSARS, and the broader digital feminist

activism have demonstrated women's growing resistance to societal constraints and their desire for self-definition (Ibrahim, 2021). While not always framed explicitly in existentialist terms, these movements embody the struggle for transcendence, demanding that women be recognized not as passive recipients of identity but as active agents in constructing their lives.

Despite its Western origins, existentialist feminism offers a useful lens for examining gender oppression in Nigeria. It enables a critique of both overt and subtle forms of patriarchal control, and it promotes the idea that liberation must begin with the individual's assertion of freedom, subjectivity, and agency. At the same time, African feminist scholars such as Oyěwùmí (1997) and Amadiume (1987) caution against uncritical applications of Western feminist theory to African contexts. They emphasize the importance of considering indigenous gender systems, historical disruptions caused by colonialism, and the need for locally grounded feminist praxis.

Thus, a nuanced application of existentialist feminism in Nigeria must involve both a critique of global patriarchy and an engagement with local cultural complexities. It must support women's efforts to transcend imposed roles while also respecting the particularities of their socio-political realities. Such an approach contributes to the decolonization of feminist thought and offers a path toward gender justice that is both philosophically robust and contextually relevant.

Conceptual Analysis

Gender Relationships

Gender relationships as a term has evoked several definitions. Gender relations refer to the social relationships between men and women, which are constructed and reinforced through the distribution of power, labor, and resources.”Kabeer (1994). Kabeer emphasizes the structural nature of gender relationships, where power is not equally distributed. These dynamics are embedded in institutions like the family, the state, and the economy. Gender relations are a set of socially constructed roles and interactions that shape how men and women relate to each other in everyday life, particularly through expectations, obligations, and entitlements.”(Connell (2009). Connell sees gender relationships as both interpersonal and institutional, influenced by norms that shape behaviors and social outcomes. “Gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act... a sequence of acts, a mode of enacting relationships.” (Butler (1990). While not a direct definition, Judith Butler’s view helps frame gender relationships as a performative construct—formed through repeated interactions that create social meaning. “Gender relations refer to the distribution of rights, responsibilities, and power between men and women in any given society, often resulting in inequalities that are reproduced over time.” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). This definition situates gender relationships within the systemic reproduction of inequality, particularly in labor, politics, and domestic life. Gender relations in Africa are shaped by a combination of indigenous structures, colonial histories, and contemporary global forces, resulting in complex systems of male dominance and female resistance” (Amadiume 1987). Amadiume’s view emphasizes that gender is not universal, and African societies have unique relational systems, sometimes more flexible than Western gender binaries, yet still affected by patriarchy and

colonialism. “Gender relations are not fixed; they are continuously negotiated and reshaped through social, political, and economic change.” (March, Smyth, & Mukhopadhyay 1999). This definition reflects the fluidity of gender relationships, highlighting how they evolve in response to activism, policy, and societal shifts.

Gender relationships refer to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for individuals based on their perceived sex. These relationships are shaped by historical, cultural, religious, economic, and political factors, and they influence how individuals relate to each other in private and public life. At the core of gender relationships is the question of power and inequality, often resulting in the dominance of one gender over another, particularly in patriarchal societies where men typically hold more authority and resources (Connell, 2009; Hooks, 2000)

In sociological terms, gender is not simply a personal identity but a relational construct—it exists through interactions and is performed and reinforced through daily practices (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, gender relationships are dynamic and evolve as societal norms shift. In many parts of the world, traditional gender roles are being questioned due to increased advocacy, education, and exposure to egalitarian values. Nonetheless, in numerous contexts, gender hierarchies continue to dictate access to opportunities, rights, and responsibilities. Raewyn Connell's concept of *hegemonic masculinity* explains how certain forms of masculinity become dominant over both women and other men, sustaining systemic gender inequality (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). At the same time, feminist theorists like bell hooks have argued that gender relationships must be understood intersectionally that is, through the lens of how gender interacts with race, class, and other forms of oppression (Hooks, 2000).

In Nigeria, gender relationships are deeply embedded in traditional, religious, and colonial legacies. Patriarchy remains a dominant organizing principle of social life, reinforced by cultural practices that prioritize male authority in the family, religion, politics, and the economy (Aina, 2012; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004). Women are often assigned reproductive and caregiving roles, while men are positioned as providers and decision-makers. This gendered division of labor is reflected in educational access, political participation, inheritance rights, and property ownership, where Nigerian women are often disadvantaged. For instance, despite accounting for nearly half the population, women hold less than 10% of political positions nationally (UN Women, 2022). Such disparities are not only institutional but also interpersonal, shaping how men and women relate within households, workplaces, and communities. Furthermore, harmful practices such as child marriage, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation continue to reflect the unequal power dynamics embedded in gender relationships. These practices are often justified through religious or cultural narratives, despite their adverse effects on women's physical and mental well-being (UNICEF, 2021).

However, gender relationships in Nigeria are not static. The rise of feminist advocacy and digital activism has begun to challenge traditional roles and push for more equitable gender dynamics. Movements like #EndSARS, #ArewaMeToo, and Feminist Coalition have given voice to young

Nigerian women demanding freedom from violence, greater representation, and societal change (Ibrahim, 2021; Ogunlana, 2021) Modern gender relationships in Nigeria are thus marked by tension and negotiation. While patriarchy remains deeply rooted, there is increasing resistance among women and younger generations who challenge restrictive roles and seek more egalitarian partnerships. Education, economic empowerment, and legal reforms—such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015)—have provided some avenues for transformation, though enforcement remains inconsistent.

To reshape gender relationships, it is crucial to foster cultural change alongside policy reforms. This includes addressing the roles of media, religious institutions, and educational systems in perpetuating stereotypes, while promoting narratives of mutual respect, consent, and shared responsibility between genders.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is one of the foundational concepts in gender studies and feminist theory. It refers to a system of social organization in which men hold primary power and dominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. In patriarchal societies, gender relations are characterized by male dominance and female subordination, often justified through cultural, religious, and historical narratives. “Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” Sylvia (Walby (1990). Walby emphasizes that patriarchy is not just about individual male behavior but about institutionalized systems—such as the state, family, and workplace—that perpetuate gender inequality. “Patriarchy is a historical system of social relations in which men have been the primary holders of power and women have been systematically disadvantaged” (Lerner (1986). Lerner provides a historical dimension to patriarchy, arguing that it is not natural or biological, but a constructed system that has evolved over millennia. Patriarchal systems are marked by:

- Male dominance in decision-making at household, community, and national levels
- Socialization that assigns domestic roles to women and public roles to men
- Gender-based violence and control over female sexuality
- Unequal access to resources, education, employment, and political power
- The reinforcement of male authority through religion, culture, and law

In Nigeria, patriarchy is deeply embedded in both traditional and modern institutions. Cultural norms, customary laws, and religious interpretations often reinforce male dominance in familial, political, and economic spheres (Makama, 2013). For instance, men are commonly seen as heads of households, while women are expected to be submissive and play supportive roles. Aina (2012) argues that Nigerian patriarchy is “intersectional,” meaning it is shaped by ethnicity, religion, class, and regional factors. For example, in many parts of the country, inheritance laws privilege male children, and male primogeniture excludes women from property rights. In some Northern regions, Sharia-based interpretations may further restrict women's movement, dress, and access to

education or public office. Feminist theorists have long critiqued patriarchy as the root cause of gender oppression. According to bell hooks (2000), patriarchy is not just a male issue but a systemic ideology that everyone—regardless of gender—may internalize and reproduce. This is why feminist praxis often involves raising consciousness, challenging stereotypes, and restructuring power relations both privately and publicly.

Simone de Beauvoir also critiques patriarchy through her existentialist lens. In *The Second Sex*, she argues that patriarchy creates women as the "Other," denying them the agency and subjectivity necessary for full human freedom (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011). While patriarchy remains deeply rooted in many parts of the world, resistance movements—particularly feminist and human rights activism—have begun to challenge and dismantle its structures. In Nigeria, organizations like Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) and campaigns like #ArewaMeToo and Feminist Coalition are actively confronting gender-based violence, inequality, and exclusion. These movements demonstrate that patriarchy is not immutable—it can be questioned, contested, and ultimately transformed through education, policy change, and cultural shifts.

Nigerian society

Nigerian society is a complex, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious society characterized by rich cultural diversity, economic contrasts, and evolving political dynamics. As Africa's most populous country—with over 200 million people—Nigeria consists of over 250 ethnic groups, with the three largest being the Hausa-Fulani (North), Yoruba (Southwest), and Igbo (Southeast) (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This ethnic diversity, coupled with significant religious plurality—predominantly Islam, Christianity, and indigenous belief systems—shapes nearly every aspect of Nigerian life, including gender roles, family structures, political participation, and social expectations (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Historically, Nigerian society has been deeply hierarchical, both within and across ethnic and religious groups. Patriarchal norms are central to most Nigerian cultures, assigning leadership and authority to men, while relegating women to domestic and reproductive roles (Aina, 2012). In many traditional settings, kinship and lineage systems—especially patrilineal ones—determine inheritance rights, land ownership, and decision-making authority, often leaving women socially and economically dependent (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004).

Religious identity is another powerful force in shaping Nigerian societal norms. In the northern regions, Islamic law (Sharia) often influences legal and social structures, particularly concerning marriage, dress codes, and gender segregation. In the south, Christian doctrines and church institutions similarly affect gender expectations, emphasizing male headship and female submission within households (Salihu & Jalingo, 2015). These religious and cultural prescriptions are not monolithic—they vary between communities and are subject to negotiation and resistance.

Nonetheless, they often reinforce conservative interpretations of gender roles, making it difficult to enact reforms or advocate for gender equality.

Contemporary Nigerian society is also experiencing rapid urbanization and modernization, particularly in cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. These urban centers are sites of social transformation, where young people, women, and minority groups are increasingly exposed to global values of human rights, gender equality, and democracy. This exposure has led to shifts in family structures (e.g., nuclear families replacing extended ones), greater female participation in education and employment, and growing challenges to traditional norms (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2003). Despite signs of progress, gender inequality remains deeply rooted in Nigerian society. Women continue to face barriers in politics, education, property rights, and personal autonomy. Social norms often discourage women from pursuing leadership roles or asserting independence, while gender-based violence remains pervasive (WARD, 2018). Moreover, laws that protect women's rights—such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015)—are inconsistently implemented and face resistance from patriarchal cultural and religious institutions.

In recent years, Nigerian society has witnessed the rise of feminist and youth-led activism, driven by educated women, civil society groups, and online movements. Campaigns like #BringBackOurGirls, #EndSARS, and Feminist Coalition highlight growing awareness and resistance to authoritarianism, misogyny, and social injustice (Ibrahim, 2021; Ogunlana, 2021). While resistance to feminist thought still exists—often dismissed as "un-African"—there is a growing space for debate, advocacy, and redefinition of gender roles in Nigerian society. Nigerian society is a rich tapestry of tradition and change. It is a site where patriarchal systems continue to shape gender relationships, but also where resistance and transformation are taking root. Understanding the complexities of Nigerian society—its ethnic, religious, cultural, and historical dimensions—is essential for analyzing issues related to gender, inequality, and social justice.

Agency

Agency is a central concept in both sociology and gender studies, referring to an individual's capacity to act independently and make their own free choices. In contrast to structure (the constraints and social norms that shape behavior), agency emphasizes individual autonomy, the ability to make decisions, and the power to challenge or resist social norms.

In gender studies, agency is particularly important because it addresses how individuals, especially women and marginalized groups, assert their rights and challenge patriarchal structures. The concept of agency in this context is used to highlight the potential for resistance and social change, even within oppressive or constrained environments. "Agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently, make choices, and impose those choices on their world (Giddens 1984). Anthony Giddens defines agency as the capacity of individuals to make their own decisions and affect the outcomes of their lives, despite the constraints placed on them by social structures. For Giddens, agency is a dialectical relationship between individuals and society, where people can influence their environment, but their actions are also influenced by the structures within which they operate.

“Agency is not only about acting but about the intentionality of the action—about individuals' ability to act with a purpose and a vision, shaping the social forces around them” (Mahmood 2005). In the context of gender and religion, Saba Mahmood explores agency as something more than mere resistance or autonomy. It is about the ability of individuals, particularly women in conservative contexts, to exercise moral agency and act in ways that reflect their own desires, even if those desires align with cultural norms that may seem oppressive from an external perspective.

Gender scholars use agency to explore how individuals navigate and resist patriarchal structures. For instance, Judith Butler (1990) in her work on performativity suggests that gender is an act—a performance—which individuals have the agency to reproduce or challenge. In her view, gender identity is not something one is but something one does—through repeated performances that are constrained by societal norms but also open to negotiation. "In gender performance, individuals have agency to disrupt the patterns and norms of gender identity, thus enabling social change" (Butler (1990)). In this framework, agency involves the capacity to act in ways that defy traditional gender roles or subvert expected performances of masculinity and femininity.

In Nigeria, the concept of agency becomes particularly relevant in understanding how women and marginalized groups negotiate patriarchal and traditional gender norms. Agency in this context is not just about individual decision-making but is influenced by a range of factors including culture, religion, social expectations, and economic structures. For Nigerian women, agency is often a struggle within constraints, as they navigate deeply entrenched patriarchal traditions that limit their access to resources, decision-making power, and freedom of movement. For example, the #BringBackOurGirls movement (2014), in which Nigerian women played a central role, is an example of women exercising agency in the face of state failure, demanding justice and accountability for the kidnapping of schoolgirls by Boko Haram. This illustrates how Nigerian women have demonstrated agency even within highly restrictive contexts, using collective action to challenge state and religious patriarchal norms. "Agency is about women's ability to define and pursue their own interests, even in patriarchal societies where such pursuits are often suppressed by social structures" Nigerian Feminist Thought (Ibrahim, 2021).

Nigerian feminism has long emphasized agency as resistance against patriarchal oppression. Feminists in Nigeria have worked within local traditions while challenging dominant gender norms through activism, legal reform, and social media engagement. The Feminist Coalition, which gained prominence through its support of the #EndSARS movement, is a prime example of contemporary Nigerian feminism asserting agency in the digital age. By leveraging platforms like Twitter, Nigerian feminists have created spaces for dialogue and protest, gaining visibility and pushing for both legal and social reforms. "Nigerian feminism is about reclaiming agency through public mobilization, the use of digital tools, and advocating for systemic changes that elevate women's rights." (Ogunlana 2021).

Agency is also crucial for empowerment. Women who can act with agency are often better able to access education, employment, and political participation, which directly enhances their economic independence and social standing. For example, Nigerian women who challenge traditional gender

expectations and pursue higher education or engage in entrepreneurial ventures exemplify agency that contributes to both individual empowerment and social transformation. "Women's agency is tied to their ability to make choices that directly impact their personal and collective well-being, which in turn challenges the broader structures of power." (Aina (2012)

Agency is a central concept in understanding how individuals, particularly women and marginalized groups, can act within or against social structures. In Nigerian society, where patriarchal values still dominate, the agency of women remains a powerful tool for resistance, empowerment, and social change. Whether through digital activism, legal reforms, or personal resistance, women in Nigeria continue to assert their right to define their own lives and challenge oppressive systems. By recognizing the interplay between agency and structure, we can better understand how gender dynamics unfold in Nigerian society and beyond.

Conclusion

This study critically explored the application of existentialist feminist thought to the understanding of gender relationships in Nigeria. Drawing primarily on the works of Simone de Beauvoir and other existentialist feminists, the research interrogated how concepts such as freedom, self-definition, and the rejection of socially imposed roles can illuminate the lived experiences of Nigerian women. It became evident that while existentialist feminism provides a powerful framework for analyzing individual agency and the construction of gendered identities, it must be contextualized to be meaningful within Nigeria's complex socio-cultural and historical realities. The analysis revealed that Nigerian gender relationships are deeply influenced by patriarchal norms embedded in religious, cultural, and colonial legacies. However, Nigerian women continue to resist and redefine these roles through both subtle and overt forms of agency—mirroring the existentialist notion of asserting subjectivity in the face of constraint. At the same time, the study recognized the limitations of applying a Western philosophical lens without acknowledging the significant contributions of African feminist theories, which emphasize communal relationships, history, and indigeneity. Ultimately, the fusion of existentialist feminism with local feminist perspectives offers a more nuanced and grounded understanding of gender dynamics in Nigeria. It emphasizes that liberation must be self-defined, culturally relevant, and rooted in the lived realities of the people it seeks to empower.

Recommendations

1. Integrate African Feminist Thought: Future research and feminist activism in Nigeria should engage more deeply with indigenous feminist frameworks that center African histories, values, and social structures, to avoid the imposition of foreign epistemologies.
2. Contextual Adaptation of Existentialism: Scholars should adapt existentialist feminist principles to Nigeria's specific cultural and social context, ensuring they reflect the realities of Nigerian women across different regions, classes, religions, and ethnicities.
3. Promote Gender Education and Critical Consciousness: Building platforms for gender consciousness that include existentialist ideals of freedom and choice can empower individuals—especially young women—to question and redefine imposed roles.

4. Encourage Intersectional Approaches: Gender relationships in Nigeria cannot be examined in isolation from religion, ethnicity, class, and regional disparities. Intersectional analysis ensures that the diverse experiences of Nigerian women are not homogenized.
5. Support Empirical Research: There is a need for more empirical studies that explore how Nigerian women experience and negotiate existential agency in their daily lives—whether in marriage, politics, activism, or employment.

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