

GENDER, CULTURE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF COLLECTIVE ACTION PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

The concept of gender is a systematic way of understanding men and women socially and the associating relationships between them. To understand the philosophy of gender is to have an understanding of the sociology of gender- the classification of male and female. Women's social role is dependent on their religion, culture and geographical environment. Nigerian society is a patriarchal society where men are the dominant members in the society. Patriarchy leads to gender inequality and subordination of women. The family structure has the man/husband as the head of the family and the wife/wives and the children succumb to his authority. There are cultural limitations that have hindered Nigeria women from maximizing their potentials, culturally, economically, socially and politically. The aim of this paper is to identify the prevailing cultural limitations hindering

Nigerian women from contributing to the Nigerian society and to determine the impact these continues to have on them. Thus, the objective is set at evaluating the influence of culture on the role and contributions of women to society through collective action, using play text to analyze this phenomenon. For the purpose of clarifications, this research chooses to use 'women' as a comprehensive term to address the limiting conditions all women experience. The theory of gender performativity is used in this discourse and the generic term 'woman' is focused on due to the fact that its meaning conceptualizes- all biological females and not transgender females.

Keywords: Gender, Culture, Women, Patriarchy, Collective Action, Drama

Introduction

In early societies it was difficult for women to be accepted as key players in the affairs of the society. Culture has for most of these communities become the determinant as to: why women must be restricted in civic duties, how women must be controlled, when women should comment/ react, where women should function and what women must engage in doing. Hence in the past, Nigerian women were mothers, sisters, daughters and wives; very few were visible stakeholders in the formal sector of public administration, civil service or political governance.

In 21st century today, most women have been marginalized, stereotyped, derided, ridiculed, objectified, or rigidly categorized and humiliated in various ways resulting in negative impacts on them.

There are cultural limitations that have hindered Nigeria women from maximizing their potentials, culturally, economically, socially and politically. The aim of this paper is to identify the prevailing cultural limitations hindering Nigerian women from contributing to the Nigerian society and to determine the impact these continues to have on them. Thus, the objective is set at evaluating the influence of culture on the role and

contributions of women to society through collective action.

For the purpose of clarifications, this research chooses to use 'women' as a comprehensive term to address the limiting conditions all women experience. The generic term 'woman' is focused on due to the fact that its meaning conceptualizes- all biological females and not transgender females. Consequently, before the intellectualization of women as a concept called feminism, women witnessed common outstanding problems.

Cultural Philosophy of Gender

The nobility of identifying women as the single gender stems from Marinella's assertion that, "embedded in the philosophical and medical theories of the ancient Greeks were perceptions of the female as inferior to male in both mind and body"(viii). These theories have and continue to contribute to the cultural philosophy of how gender as a social construct is modelled in society. Buckingham alludes that gender is, "that package of expectation which society associates with each sex" (Buckingham 4). On the other hand, Ityavyar (1982) refers to gender as the social roles assigned to men and women and the relations of power, authority and influence that arise out of these roles. By default, the term gender is related to gender roles, and Adelakun (1990), explains that gender roles are learnt behavior, influenced by culture, geographical location, history and religion.

Generally, gender explains the differences between

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men and women in social terms. As men- what a man can do; as women- what a woman can or cannot do. Simply put, gender is an analytical category that is socially constructed to differentiate the biological difference between men and women. The term gender is also used to describe the differences in behavior between men and women which are described as 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

According to Jill Matthews, "the concept of gender gives recognition to the fact that every known society distinguishes between women and men" (Matthews 4). Therefore, the concept of gender is a systematic way of understanding men and women socially and the associating relationships between them.

Psychologist, anthropologist, behaviorist and sociologist have for most part of the 20th century put the question of men and women construction to a greater or lesser clarified position. Studies on this path presuppose that differences in the social construction of men and women are dictated by the ideologies of Francis Galton, who originated the nature versus nurture (1874) controversy. It accentuates the differences that exist from nature- an innate behavior as against nurture- a learned social conditioning.

Allan and Barbara Pease's research shows that; men and women are more a product of their biology than victims of social stereotypes (Pease 10). In furtherance to this, science beckons on society to reason that the difference between men and women is because the brain by nature is wired to process differently. What this means is that, both genders perceive the world in different ways. Unfortunately, this scientific position does not resolve on the issue as to how the brain of men or women views every political construct or every social construct internally or externally. Given this approach, it will be affirming to state Ellen R. Klein's assertion that, the problems of women are not all from within, but largely externally imposed (Klein 10). Imposition from processes of socialization deprives women of equal economic independence, equal political power and equal professional abilities.

Therefore, if society wants to place women within the same margin as men, it has to fortify the male mind by enlarging it through the way it treats women.

Patriarchy

The concept of gender roles is an important term that is produced through the prism of patriarchy. Patriarchy helps in the study of social interactions occurring within society. It has characterized much of human history and aids in fostering the gender norms practiced globally. Patriarchy helps to study the differences between men

and women as social constructions within communities. Ann Oakley explores the term gender and writes that "considering the roles of men and women helps to support and maintain the patriarchal society" (Oakley 13).

In defining patriarchy and male dominance, Lionel Tiger conceives it as "the function of a bonding instinct inherent in the male" (Tiger 210). From this definition and Oakley's position, one finds it hard not to agree that the conduct of the man in human affairs has produced culturally conditioned traits that have set polarity socially as well as politically. In Nigeria, patriarchy as a dominant culture upholds masculinity as supreme. This status not only bequeaths visibility to men but equally defends their leadership in politics and decision making.

The consideration in this article is that the culture of any society is the key determinant of how women are valued or devalued. Nigerian society is a multi-ethnic society with varied cultural practices and traits. Culture is bound to ethnic identity, and according to Angya Charity, for different societies, there is a different meaning attached to being man or woman. (Angya 298).

To understand the philosophy of gender is to have an understanding of the sociology of gender- the classification of male and female. Women's social role is dependent on their religion, culture and geographical environment. Nigerian society is a patriarchal society where men are the dominant members in the society. Patriarchy leads to gender inequality and subordination of women. The family structure has the man/husband as the head of the family and the wife/wives and the children succumb to his authority.

Historizing Women in Society's Growth

Varying opinions and beliefs have been expressed about the 'person' of the woman. The fervor in theorizing womanhood sprouts from the stables of literary scholars like Akachi Ezeigbo, who conceptualized feminism as an ideology which beckons on society to recognize claims of women for their rights, be it- legal, political, social and economic, and that their rights be equal to those possessed by men (Ezeigbo 1). The fact that each person is unique in physical body and demonstrates mental capacity (reasonable thinking and empathy) simply means that women are different from men. While the body of both man and woman experience natural limitations, women's bodies are however profiled with additional limitation. The woman bears the role of a procreator, and this phenomenon makes her a completely different species of being from man. All over the world, women have embraced this additional restriction with joy and pain. Joy because they have the gift of birthing a

human, pain because the society expects of them to do so even when certain medical complexities arise.

While men hardly need to have their sex (biology) or gender (social construct) conceptualized in a discourse that attracts critical views and reviews, society has had to be drawn into a rationale of debates relating to the issue of legitimizing women as a necessary and visible factor in the development process.

Approaches to emphasizing the roles of men and women in society are formed by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants (Whitehead 1979). However, if these determinants specify the similarities and differences between men and women, why this checklist is not read based on equality of experience rather it is used as a division of subordination.

This base line division exemplifies the facade treatment and unsatisfactory intervention towards women. The conceptual assumptions and opinions whether public or private as to the participation of women in political structures and their involvement in leadership, have long been very problematic. From Asia to Africa, women were part of the historical growth and sometimes the moving force behind the victories of the long traditions of society's wars and revolutions.

Among the data that is replete with the actions of women as "history molders", is the example compiled by contributors about women in Philippine. In a specific account by Atoy M. Navarro (1988 55-72), the author details the heroism of Filipino women during the Philippine Revolution in 1896-1935. In Navarro's retrieval of women's past, it is learnt that besides the daily act of heroism, there were also many patriotic women who chose to become real combatants. "Many of the women not only fought valiantly, but equally studied how to shoot and use different kinds of weapons. In addition to their gallantry and skill at handling arms, Navarro recounts that in one of the greatest, if not the biggest encounter in Kakarong de Sile, many patriotic Filipino women sacrificed their lives for their motherland" (sic).

Consequently, certain assumptions about the woman abound- Aristotle (384-322 BCE), a foremost philosopher, is thought to have expressed that -the female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities (Bressler, 1994). Humphrey points out that if Aristotle-regarded as a towering figure who made important contributions to logic, criticism, ethics, politics, biology and psychology could make such discriminatory statement about women, one wonders what exact qualities women lack, and for which, if they possess, could make them qualified and fit enough for the right to be female.

Stating his view on women, St. Thomas Aquinas says, a woman is an imperfect man; an incidental being (Bressler, 1994). Judging from Aristotle's point of view as a scholar to Aquina, it is easy to decipher the thoughts of what society imagines a woman to be- inferior to man and defective as a person. Such assessments often reflect the condescending treatment women receive whether they are; cooperate managers or housewives, rural or urban woman.

While, the experience of womanhood differs from society to society, at the end, the common determinants are the same and the outcome relatively similar. Women share a common space of being in subjugation, deprivation, violence, restriction, suppression and discrimination.

Concept of Collective Action

Batliwala sums collective action as being comprised of 'an organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action' (Batliwala, 3). To gain some idea about this, we broadly describe the assumption for collective action outcomes in this discussion using these three variables— gender involvement, themes, and status.

According to Schutz Alfred, collective action is a purposive and projective performance of an actor's consciousness (Schultz, 5). In this instance when we read, see, and hear of women participating in collective action, they do so with a significant purpose. For example, when women- mothers in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria protested nude over the absence of economic empowerment, lack of development strategy and repulsive neglect of the region despite her rich oil resource, they did so as a final resort to seek redress in provisions of social amenities. Though nudity may have no social implications to some societies, in Niger Delta a married woman cannot go nude before any man who is not her husband more so to do that in public. Such an act Osedebamen Oamen, observes is an abomination, except in exceptional cases like medical treatment, which her husband must be aware of (88). For these women going against tradition to appear nude is a strategy to project a demonstration of existential angst with the mind to effect changes in a hopeless and devastating situation. In essence this nude protest was implied to serve as 'culture shock' and in Oamen's opinion an effort towards influencing the reforms agenda of the government for the benefit of Niger Deltans (Oamen 93). While this may have happened in July 14th 2002, some years later the federal government of Nigeria succumbed to reasoning and established the ministry of the Niger Delta on 10th September 2008.

Gender Performativity and Collective Action

In her theory of gender performativity, Judith Butler (2013), proffers that "it is not culture that prescribes an individual's gender performance but the condition or situation in which the individual finds himself or herself" (Butler 584). Discussing the effect of gender in collective action, this study approaches the discussion based on Ron Eyerman's position that demonstrations, collective actions and non-violent civil disobedience have always been occasions for communicating ideas, as well as forming and displaying new identities (Eyerman 206). Assessing the issue of identity and participation leads us to examine instances where men and women have taken the opportunity to become actively involved in social activism as events unfold in Nigeria and other parts of the world. According to Ezeigbo, there is fluidity in the gender performance of men and women.

However, will or can the presence of men and their participation as a gender group in collective action successfully influence and institute change in any societal situation? In making a comparison between how the experiences of men and women vary in collective action, there is need to take into consideration the magnitude of the issue warranting the collective action between the women's experience versus men's experience within the same given situation.

Basically, it would ascertain if this can instruct the differences and similarities in both women and men's political participation and critic that experience by the interest formed through empirical observation of social events globally. As Taylor and Van Willigen state, a conceptual synthesis of culture and gender in collective action should draw attention to the goal of challenging the social construction of gender (Taylor and Van Willigen 2).

Michael Flood believes that over the last three decades, men's anti-violence activism is certified to be the most visible public efforts in support of gender equality (Flood 458). The historic documented example of men's anti-violence activism is the White Ribbon initiatives established in response to the Montreal Massacre of 1991, when a man in Canada massacred 14 women. The White Ribbon Campaign's website claims to be the world's largest collective action of men and boys working to end violence against women, having spread to over 60 countries. It combines education, outreach and institutional support in an effort to engage and inspire men toward positive change. The wearing of a white ribbon symbolizes a pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.

Men in collective action performances that are allied to feminist and women's movements argue that: 'If we

really want to make gender and women's rights an integral part of the agenda of everyone, not just women, we need to be prepared to empower others, particularly men to speak with authority about women's issues' (Atila Roque 20).

A key strategy of this activism lies on men mobilizing in solidarity with women and for agenda of women's rights. Much of this solidarity and activism thus far has focused around ending violence against women.

Equality activists in the human rights movement have argued that the concept of human rights must be flexible enough to address intersectional identities and the specific needs of different groups (Kelleher, David and Bhattacharjya, Manjima).

Women's movements may act as instigators for the birth of social movements not focused exclusively on confronting gender inequalities, or for generating popular support to tackle issues facing society. In these cases, women mobilize both as women and in the name of societal-level change on specific agendas. The political vision of equality for women is seen as being integral to the broader change being sought. There are many historical and contemporary examples of women's activism instigating broad social and political action that has resulted in both increased rights and justice for women and societal change (which later affected political change) on a particular issue. In Russia for example, the women workers gathered on International Women's Day in St. Petersburg in 1917, to protest against bread shortages. As the demonstration grew and spread, these women rallied other workers to join the collective action. This action by the women workers soon became a contributing factor in the Russian Revolution and the fall of Tsar Nicholas II.

Discussing on conflict prevention and peace building, Filomina Steady stated; women form a substantial percentage of the people involved in peace movement in Africa...they often work behind the scenes and away from the limelight of the media, which tends to focus on the activities of men in situations of conflict and in peace negotiations (Steady 165- 166).

As feminists have raised questions around gendered social norms, activist men have also developed theoretical and practical approaches to interrogating how patriarchal power affects men and boys. Advocating for the participation of men in collective action, Kaufman Michael, defends that we are constructing avenues where they can simultaneously challenge men's power and speak to men's pain. (Kaufman 14).

To be fair, the distinction between women - only collective action and men- only collective action may have been presented more as an explanation than as a

mode of classification for why men should participate in collective action. However, the implication for men to participate in collective action as a reaction to the failing systems of society rises from their cultural stereotype role as leaders. Therefore, the decision by men to articulate their demands in terms of patriarchal structures may prove advantageous, because their masculine role affords men a political space and voice not efficaciously laudable to women.

Looking historically, it is possible to trace the collective impact of women and feminist collective actions to dominant power relations. Jessica Horn accrues these changes to include; shifting attitudes, beliefs and understandings around women's and men's roles, behavior, treatment and opportunities; changing institutional practices; and changing definitions of equality, freedom and justice (Horn 39).

Basically, when men mobilize as men, and women mobilize as women, they appeal to a certain set of expectations about men's/ women's behavior which affects the widely held and commonly recognized social construct.

Nascimento Marcos thinks the big challenge lies in the 'heteronormative binary' (meaning an assumption of universal heterosexuality) view of what gender is. The presumption is that, many women who engage in collective action focus on their role as mothers, care givers and workers and so are essentially different from men. Likewise, men who take part in collective action only do so on the basis of their role as fathers, lovers and partners, thereby different from women, though within a very prescriptive heteronormative framework of the monogamous nuclear family... we all have investments in that binary system whether we are aware of it or not' (Nascimento 6).

Literary Focus of Gender and Collective Action

Drama as a cultural product and social practice reflect society's main values, ideas and beliefs. Through performance, drama portrays certain myths and stereotypes. It thus becomes a cultural site where society learns transmuted truth and expected values, conducts and behaviours. Therefore, drama does not only operate as mediums of information exchange, entertainment or education transmitters, they are also disseminators of cultural modes. Using Cultivation theory (George Gerbner, 1969) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) it is suggestive to say that drama is responsible for how society internalizes contents within the play and eventually draw up a generalized world view and also how that society learns and imitates the lifestyle, attitudes and morals that they are exposed through the drama

whether as text or as performance.

As major stake holders in socio-political awareness and change, some dramatists have focused specifically on the experiences and needs of women and girls, and creatively offer strategies to advance women's rights by incorporating those rights as part of their collective action themes. This literary focus has brought analysis and created spaces to engage the specific concerns of women and girls within context. Plays that treat some of these themes include for example;

- i. domestic discriminations- *The Wives Revolt*- John Pepper Clark
- ii. oppression and violation - *Women of Owu* – Femi Osofisan
- iii. Poverty- *Then She Said IT*- Onwueme Tess Osonye
- iv. Corruption- ... *Not Without Bones*- Johnson, Effiong
- v. Equity and Justice - *More Than Dancing*- Irene Isoken Salami
- vi. Environment and Labor- *Hard Ground*- Ahmed Yerima
- vii. Political education and democracy- *April 1421*- Tor Iorapuu

Across the world there is an active, mass-based demand for an end to injustice in all domains of our social, economic, political and cultural lives. Collective actions – populated mostly by women and sometimes spurred by women – have witnessed women being pivotal in demanding, these changes. Media reports, social network uploads and drama texts are archival proofs of these. However, when it comes to making a parallel impact on transforming society using this same strategy, there is a spatial presence of men.

In particular, playwrights have shown that subordinate group presence, particularly women and youths engage in collective action. Muwonwa Ngonidzashe (2012) in sharing about Zimbabwe's protest theatre recounts that young people's theatre began to contest, parody and challenge the constructions of Robert Mugabe as a benevolent "author" of Zimbabwean nationhood. Plays such as *Election Day* performed by a relatively young cast and *The Crocodile of Zambezi* effectively staged the President as out of touch with the day to day running of the nation (7). While plays like these have examined these groups of people, studies have yet to examine the mobilization of men surrounding the issues at stake.

Thus, given the findings of previous research this paper examined, compared to other social groups, men-only will be more likely to participate in collective action when playwrights create the possibility of that. Secondly compared to other social groups, change will be more

likely to occur when men- only participate in collective action.

We try to address this using the position of a male group called "MenEngage" in respect to the ongoing demand for the safe return of the abducted Chibok Girls and postulate this because the notion that it is desirable to involve men in the movements to stop violence against women and girls is rapidly becoming institutionalized in the philosophies and programs of international organizations. According to Flood, the Beijing platform for Action in 1995 recognized that men's group mobilizing against gender violence is a necessary ally for change (Flood 462). Though men can function as necessary allies for change, the question Pease posed is not whether men can take action but how (Pease 76).

The case in point looks at the call put forward by Remmy Shawa and David Tamba under the auspices of a group called "MenEngage". As leaders within this coalition, made up of boys and men working to engage men in promoting gender equality and women's right, this duo in an article, "#BringBackOurGirls: Men must join the call to Bring our Girls" declare; "men we appeal to your humanity as fathers, brothers, and citizens of the world to do something... at least sign the change.org petition or tweet the hash tag and join one of the solidarity days of action to echo the cries of the families and end to ensure these girls are saved". While it has been over nine years since over 200 secondary school girls were abducted in Chibok on 14th April 2014, all efforts to find these missing girls has proven unsuccessful. In contributing to the return of these girls, the "MenEngage" group put a challenge towards men's role in the campaign. The group's call stemmed from an observation which they clearly stress "while all Nigerians are being targeted, not all Nigerians are visible in the protest actions to push the government to save the girls. A few men have joined the protest, men have been relatively absent, thus far we cannot let men off the hook here and leave all the work on the albeit strong shoulders of the mothers. Men who support equality need to stand up".

Despite a proclaimed social action by a mixed group (men and women) of protesters in the #Bring Back Our Girls protest, findings reveal that the leadership drive for that diversity of collective action was headed by women structures, which quickly emerged over and above the men's degree of inclusiveness. Women moved to the Nigeria's capital city under a million-women march, defying the heavy rains, they wore red shirts, holding inscribed placards, weeping and demanding that government bring back our girls, our daughters, our sisters.

From this backdrop, what common interest should men in this instance have- one that should unite them to

take vantage positions in ensuring that these girls are finally rescued? For women what often unites them is their exclusion from political process. By their collective status as political outsiders, Lisa Baldez adduced that mobilizing as women provides a rhetorical frame that permits women with diverse substantive interest to engage in collective action to pursue their ends under the rubric of having access to political decision making (Baldez 15).

When women mobilize as women they appeal to a certain set of expectations about women's status and behaviour in the African society. In this manner the "MenEngage" outlined some relevant issues and for which we offer as a platform for men to unite in the fight for the Return of the Chibok girls. The group succinctly states; "it was men who stole these girls away in the middle of the night. Yes, it is men who are purchasing these girls as child brides. And indeed, it needs to be men joining to bring these girls home".

Therefore, in our analysis of the men-only collective action, we explore the interplay between the types of knowledge and change dramatists can develop because, "repositioning" the male gender is critical for an understanding of collective action and their relationship in the national-political order. Despite contesting a common political platform with the women, both also share a common social background.

In retrospect, dramatists in the following plays; *Aikin Mata*, *Mulkin Mata*, and *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested* which are enshrined with women's needs and feminine themes fail to leave their mark on the men- only collective action. While the role of women in collective action has been a recurring central theme, in comparison to men it has been obscure. We place this comparison in the context of contemporary playwrighting developments on collective action and particularly within its incorporation of political embodiment.

Richard J, Evans (1977) emphasizes Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel's argument that women's abilities were the same as men's but 'they are neglected, they are deliberately suppressed' (Evans14). The subjection of women occurs in both her biological state as woman who from men's point of view is considered weaker, and her socially constructed condition as wife, mother leaves her being considered domestic resource as against cooperate material.

Secondly, the demands of understanding masculinity and femininity is to aim at being objective in the meanings and implications involved and to as well, understand techniques and strategies for building a pluralistic society that accommodates women's roles as well as that of men.

Conclusion

If social action groups are forms of collective action that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands, why then do we witness a response from mostly the female constituents.

Following past antecedents and contemporary realities, there is compelling need to support the phenomenon of space inherently occupied by men to further explore its amplitude in areas of collective action's impact and social transformation.

In Nigeria today, our cultures are unfortunately still obsessed and impacted with these harmful and discriminating conjectures. How then can society make a difference towards the politics of exclusion of women?

The invocation of an equitable society is not meant to put pressure on society into just accepting women on a platter of their being "weaker vessels" but on the merits of their traditional virtues as active production managers with abilities as effective procreators, resourceful home managers, who maximize strong will to combat any limiting barriers against their family and community development.

It is equally time for men to use the various global platforms and utilize the networks of men associations to establish specialized gynocentric institutes where global women issues are ideologically taught as a viable way of closing the gap of inequality. In addition, male policymakers and philanthropists should target deprived areas of society and organize workshops, set up book and reading clubs where equitable rights for both gender is lobbied for and affirmed.

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