



Katherine Bartlett's Consciousness-Raising and Patriarchal Mentality: Towards Effective Feminist Struggle In Nigeria

Abstract

This study entitled "Katherine Bartlett's Consciousness-Raising and Patriarchal Mentality: Towards Effective Feminist Struggle in Nigeria", is an effort to change patriarchal mentality of Nigerians for effective feminist struggle in the country. The method adopted for this research is qualitative. Consequently, relevant literary materials on Bartlett's "consciousness-raising", patriarchal mentality and feminist struggle in Nigeria, are analyzed and critically evaluated. The paper is anchored on the theory of radical feminism which argues that the difference between men and women inherent in the patriarchal nature of society does not necessary purport inequalities or discriminations. Based on this theory, this paper argues that gender inequality and the associated discrimination perceived by feminists, especially, liberal feminists, owes to patriarchal mentality and not patriarchy as such. The paper demonstrates that feminism in Nigeria is still affected by patriarchal mentality which it sees as a clog to effective feminism in the country. It sees the idea of sharing of women experiences advocated by Bartlett's consciousness-raising as capable of helping to eliminate patriarchal mentality among Nigerians. Hence, it recommends consciousness-raising for effective feminist struggle in Nigeria based on its tendency for inclusive sharing of women experiences; as it makes room for all categories of women and men participating in the sharing of women experiences. It is therefore, the position of this paper that if Bartlett's idea of sharing women experiences is embraced by Nigerians, they will be able to jettison patriarchal mentality and develop feminist awareness that can enhance the feminist struggle in Nigeria.

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1. Introduction

Patriarchal mentality is what reinforces the ills attributed to patriarchy such as sexuality, objectification and subjugation of women. It is a hindrance

to effective feminism. While patriarchy as such may not be adverse to women emancipation, patriarchal mentality inhibits the drive to pursue women liberation. The huge success achieved by Western countries through feminism

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could be said to result to their ability to jettison patriarchal mentality and not by efforts to eliminate patriarchy. On the contrary, the slow pace of the feminist struggle in Nigeria, it could be shown, is because Nigerians have embraced and seem to be cherishing patriarchal mentality. The low representation of women in politics, women unable to participate favourably with men in education and the economy, are not caused by patriarchy itself, but by patriarchal mentality. In articulating how patriarchal mentality could be abandoned by Nigerians, this paper anchors on the feminist position of Katherine Bartlett, a Western feminist in the second wave of the feminist struggle.

Bartlett, through her idea of feminist legal methods, proposes what she calls 'consciousness-raising' as a measure for creating mental awareness about the possible anti-feminist outcomes of a society already structured along patriarchal lines. The attraction for this paper being to contribute to eliminating patriarchal mentality among Nigerians so as to enhance feminist struggle in the country, the choice of Bartlett's consciousness-raising is considered apt. Not only that it stands to expose ways in which patriarchal mentality arises and operates, it can also help in articulating ways of eliminating it and redressing the damage it has already caused the society. The paper therefore adopts the method of qualitative analysis to textually analyze and critically evaluate how Bartlett's consciousness-raising downplays patriarchal mentality and to relate her views to achieving effective feminist struggle in Nigeria.

This paper is divided into five sections. Section one is the ongoing introduction. In section two the Bartlett's consciousness-raising is exposed and analyzed. Section three explores the concept of patriarchal mentality, exposing the ills that spring from it and explaining how such ills form a clog to effective feminism in Nigeria. In section four, attempt will be made to explain how explain how Bartlett's consciousness-raising can help eliminate patriarchal mentality in Nigeria and enhance effective feminist struggle in the country. What will follow is the conclusion which serves as the section five.

Katherine Bartlett's Consciousness-Raising

Feminist jurisprudence understood largely as scholarship on issues pertaining to gender equality launched in the 1970s, has as its subfield, 'feminist legal theory'. Feminist legal theory arose due to an attempt to fashion a broad based theoretical account of the relationship of law in liberal legal regimes to women's subordination. Focal issues discussed by feminist legal theorists include patriarchy, gender and sexual inequality, (Mackinnon, 1987). Feminist legal theory matured in the 1990s and it reflected the political and the legal struggles of second-wave feminism; the critical theory schools that were, to varying degrees, present or thriving in the 1970s and 1980s; and, the differences in women's experience of those schools. These three factors inform the defining claims of feminist legal theory, namely, 'critical-feminist

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claim' and 'feminist-aspirational claim'. The first claim aims at critiquing the law and exposing its patriarchal nature while the second claim aspires to laying bare the law's promise for achieving feminist perspectives. Legal awareness is created when these claims are given effect through feminist legal methods. According to Robin West:

What came to be called feminist legal theory thus generally shared liberal legalism's defining faith in law's redemptive potential, it's compromised, but nevertheless essential relation to justice, and its necessity to the achievement of any meaningful progress toward a decent life for all the world's inhabitants, (2018, p.984).

Thus, the critical and aspirational commitment of feminist legal theory is what feminist legal methods are designed to achieve. Bartlett's feminist legal methods are designed as the weapon with which feminists can reconstruct the law and the society. According to her, in addition to the traditional legal methods, namely, deduction, induction and analogy, feminists adopt other methods which though not unique to feminists, reveal features of a legal issue, which the traditional methods intend to overlook or suppress. The features of a legal issue contemplated by Bartlett are those that concern the subjugation and subordination of women. Singer once noted that, feminists cannot ignore method because, if they seek to challenge existing structure of power with the same methods that have defined what counts within those structure, they may instead "recreate the

illegitimate power structure, that they are trying to identify and undermine", (1989, p.1752). Articulating distinct methods for feminism therefore matters a lot because without them, feminist claims in the law will not be perceived as legitimate or correct. As feminists articulate their legal methods, they influence the traditional ways of doing law.

Bartlett's consciousness-raising shares in the two defining claims of feminist legal theory. She argues this method requires women upholding gender differences by sharing ugly experiences they have because of them, and, also using means, such as arts, the popular media and litigation in critiquing and exposing the promises of law for feminism, to motivate other women who undergo similar experiences, (Bartlett, 1990, pp.849-855). According to Bartlett, consciousness-raising gives room for asking the woman question which in effect raise facts to be tackled by the adoption of feminist practical reasoning. Thus she argues that:

Consciousness-raising provides a substructure for other feminist methods - including the woman question and feminist practical reasoning - by enabling feminists to draw insights and perceptions from their own experiences and those of other women and use these insights to challenge dominant versions of social reality (p.866).

While consciousness-raising in itself, gears towards achieving the critical legal claim of legal theory, the other two

methods build on consciousness-raising to render justiceable matters arising from acts of subordination of women thereby achieving the aspirational claim of legal theory. The methods are therefore predicated on the belief that legal facts should be contextual and contingent, what Bartlett refers to as 'positionality'. According to her, "Central to the concept of positionality is the assumption that although partial positivity is possible, it is transitional, and therefore must be continually subject to the effort to reappraise, deconstruct, and transform" (p.887).

Consciousness-raising advocates women sharing rather than airing their experiences in order to expose the effects of those experiences not only on women but also on the society at large. In this spirit of sharing of experiences, consciousness-raising is behind the efforts of women like, Susan Estrich, Lynne Henderson, Susan Brison, Michelle Anderson, Robin West (2018), and scores of others who wrote of their own experiences of sexual assault. They did this in order to connect with readers who had similar and unacknowledged experiences, to heighten understanding, to trigger empathy, and to underscore the sexuality of the violence as well as the violence at the heart of the act of rape.

3. Patriarchal Mentality

One of the factors usually seen as militating against feminism is patriarchy. Patriarchy is the belief that the male gender is superior to the female gender in all ramifications. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, patriarchy means a system or country

ruled by men, to be patriarchal is to be governed by men, or to give power and importance only to men' (Hornby, 2008, p.855). Patriarchy is understood generally by feminists in relation to power mechanisms in the society which sees men as power bearers as against women. Feminists see the attitude of being patriarchal as manifesting in such beliefs as male-chauvinism, male-centeredness, sexuality and misogyny (Gupta, 2023). Right from the ancient period, patriarchy seemed to have dominated societal structuring by creating gender roles both in the public and private spheres and defining the participation of men and women in all spheres of life. Whenever issues of chauvinism and gender are raised, attention is drawn to the conceived role of women in the society compared to that of their male counterparts. Thus, chauvinism as used here boils down to 'male chauvinism', which is the feeling, usually expressed by men, that the women or the female gender is inferior to men or the male gender. Every human society has a social organization, that is, it has its *modus vivendi* (mode of living/culture) and *modus operandi* (mode of operation) by which the task necessarily for its continuing existence is distributed among its members. Men and women comprise the human society (Hornby, 2008, p.1692). As such, men and women are assigned different roles, responsibilities, obligation, rights, and so on, according to their ages, classes, sexes, creeds, local customs, traditions and mental capacities.

Patriarchy becomes a mentality when because biologically, women are different from men, society through

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culture practices, tradition and religion sees women as interiorized, subsumed, subordinated to men and relegated to the background. Women are then seen as the weaker sex; physically, mentally, sexually, spiritually and otherwise. Aristotle, for instance, is of the view that the male gender is superior to the female gender when considered both in terms of public and family roles. In terms of public roles the male gender is the one that participates in policy-making or in politics, and in safeguarding the city (state) that is in military as well as trade, that is economic ventures. In the family of course the male gender performs the role of the owner or head of the family, with the wife and children being subject to him (Aristotle, 1994, pp.185-197). Aristotle further compares a woman to a slave and an amoral child. In his words, "for the slave has no deliberate faculty at all, the woman has but it is without authority and the child has, but it is immature" (1954bl-c). This position dominated Western thinking till in the modern times. In the Holy Bible, patriarchy seems to be highlighted by the fact of God creating woman by utilizing some material element from man supporting the saying that 'woman is the weaker sex' (Genesis ch.1). Various myths accounting for the origin of societies present the male gender as the founder of races, tribes and clans. Almost all modern societal structures are patriarchal and are constructed in such a way that male dominance is viewed as a normal. Though accounts of matriarchal arrangements were recorded in some parts of Nigeria prior to the colonial era, colonization and

imperialism by Europeans erased the vestiges of such arrangements. It is also argued that such arrangements were ultimately anchored on patriarchal structures. As an instance, where a woman is said to be a leader (queen, princes, etc.), it is either because she married or is born by a man who happens to be a leader. As Jones Johnson Lewis (2021) has it:

Part of the cultural erasures perpetrated by imperialism involved eliminating the many existing matrilineal societies across the world and instituting Western patriarchy instead (p.13).

In patriarchal societies, men are expected to be the commanders, standing tall and allowing their physical presence to represent their role in society, while women are expected to be quieter and more subservient. Under such societal conventions, women are not supposed to take up much space at the table, and most certainly, they should not be seen as a distraction to the men around them.

Patriarchy as the structure of almost every society is not natural but a mental construct. Hence one can talk of patriarchal mentality. Patriarchal mentality is derogatory and is a mindset rooted in a system characterized by devaluation of feminine traits and prioritizing masculine ones. It marks the way of thinking of any group that sees patriarchy as natural and an eternal future of the society which cannot be changed but rather managed. A society with patriarchal mentality is usually

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characterized by systemic discrimination between the female and male genders. Women are disfavoured as they suffer limited education, low political representation, increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation which are rooted in tradition, culture and religion. Patriarchal mentality is regarded as anti-feminist disposition. Catharine Mackinnon (1987) states that:

The core of discrimination is that systematically, time after time after time, differences between men and women, whether real or perceived, are turned, as a result of social practices, into advantages for men and disadvantages for women (p.33).

Mackinnon's statement here could be interpreted to mean that patriarchy as such could be divested of discrimination if the inherent gender inequality is not entrenched into social practices like tradition, culture and religion. Thus, patriarchal mentality ensues when members of a society make the discriminatory tendencies of patriarchy the core of their awareness. The Nigerian society today is an example of a society with patriarchal mentality. Even women tend to perpetuate the discriminatory tendencies more than men.

Patriarchal mentality affects the feminist struggle in Nigeria in many ways. Feminist struggle in Nigeria came to fore from vast literary works of women writers. Flora Nwapa (1981), for instance, advocated rugged

spinsterhood and single parenthood as opposed to the original philosophies of early proponents of feminism. This is achieved through the ideas of presenting female protagonists in her novels as heroines, who are independent of men in all ramifications. Here Nwapa, rather than projecting the feminist idea of women liberation, tries to make feminism a fight for female dominance. She then seems to think that eliminating patriarchy is the goal of feminism. It could be noted that she was affected by patriarchal mentality into advocating for the direct opposite of patriarchy, matriarchal mentality, could be better for women. Unlike the Western feminists, she failed to see that patriarchy itself is like enduring structure of the society. Thus, Western feminists could be said to understand that there could be patriarchy as such without patriarchal mentality. Patriarchy as such could be seen in Stubbs' (1981) argument that:

The true function of women is to educate not only children but men, to train to higher civilization not the rising generation but the actual society. And to do this by diffusing the spirit of affection, fidelity, and purity - as mother, as wife, as sister, as daughter, as friend, as nurse, as counsellor, as purifier, as example in a word - as woman (p.7).

With the functions of women as enumerated by Stubbs here, nothing shows that these functions imply that women are inferior to men. The functions are simply seen as a given just

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as those of men are also seen as given. It is patriarchal mentality that engenders conceiving women's performance of the functions that make them inferior to men. Thus, radical feminists understand that the difference in functions between men and women does not create inequality but rather calls for recognition such that what they call 'women experiences' would be identified and interpreted culturally and legally without subduing them under men's experiences which have hitherto been given recognition both in culture and in the law.

The feminist struggle depicted by the likes of Nwapa and Emecheta, is behind the misconception of feminism as a struggle against the male gender perpetuated by women who are unfortunate because they are either unmarried or divorced. Echezona Ifejiroka says that some Nigerian writers through literary and artistic works present feminism as anti-chauvinistic chauvinism or anti-racist racism, referring to their efforts as amounting to what she tags 'myth of feminine superiority' (2021, pp.88-92). She recommends that feminism as a socio-political movement, should be geared towards the recognition of the potentials of women as human beings. Recognizing women as human beings implies seeing them as ontologically placed just like their male counterparts who also exist in the same world. The essence of each gender is marked by the defining characteristics manifest in their character, not mainly in their biological differences. That is why Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex*, (1949), argues that gender is a social

construct such that whoever sex assumes exhibit the characters essential to any of the genders, could be categorized as belonging to the particular gender. Thus, the wife of a gay marriage, the husband of a lesbian marriage, and transgendered individuals, are all gendered human beings. The emphasis is not on biological differences but on character traits which are function-based. Hence, men and women may not be expected to perform the exact functions. What is important is that whatever the nature of their functions, they stand on equal pedestal as human beings and this gives them equal basis to pursue and realize their aspirations.

In the contemporary Nigerian society, feminist struggle is still affected by patriarchal mentality as majority of women are perpetuating the ills that spring from it. They uncritically adhere to stereotyping norms and practices that emerge as a result of what Mackinnon has defined as the 'core of discrimination' (p.33). Nigerian women tend to blur the difference between male and female gender by placing the male child above the female child thereby rendering the women's experiences insignificance. Women view the birth of a male child as what places a seal on their marriage. They see as taboo, a woman paying bride price or proposing openly to a man. Even when the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria entrenched the fundamental rights thereby abhorring discrimination of all kinds, women in particular, spread the idea of male dominance. Thus, patriarchal mentality of Nigerian women manifests in upholding certain stereotyping norms,

in shying away from competing with their male counterparts even when the opportunity has been created, and persecuting their fellow women who dare to question the stereotyping norms. Contemporary feminists in Nigeria like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2006) and others continue to expose the patriarchal mentality of Nigerians with the view to strengthen the feminist struggle in the country. Yet, only a measure like Bartlett's consciousness-raising is capable of motivating Nigerians to utilize the differences between men and women, such as, 'goal-getting' and 'care giving'; 'ego-driven' and 'empathy-driven'; and, 'might, power' and 'tenderness'. All these already inherent in the patriarchal nature of the universe, explain and interpret women experiences, such as domestic violence, rape, conjugal rights, and others, which stereotyping norms and the legal system tend to overshadow or pay little attention to.

4. Effective Feminist Struggle in Nigeria

Although Bartlett's consciousness-raising is expounded in the Western society where for centuries, social consciousness and legal awareness have reached considerable level, it is not just for such society. Its emphasis on sharing rather than airing women experiences makes it germane for effective feminist struggle in Nigeria. Sharing an experience implies exposing it, not only for the hearer to know that such experience exists, but also for the sharer to join forces with the hearer to seek means of ensuring that such experience occurs if desirable, or not reoccur if

repugnant. However, since for feminists, women experiences are the ill effects of patriarchal mentality, they are always repugnant and sharing them should ultimately result in seeking measures to avert their recurrence. Airing of women experiences on the other hand implies exposing it for others to know that such experience has occurred. It could be argued of Western women, that, in sharing the woman experiences, they are already poised to take legal action to prevent such experiences from reoccurring. This could not be said of the Nigerian women, who, owing to stereotyping norms, may not even share but only air their own experiences. The importance of the interpretation given to consciousness-raising for the purpose of this paper, becomes glaring when we recall that even Nigerian women have in one way or the other attempted sharing their woman experiences but their efforts hardly boasted effective feminist struggle in the country. The famous literary works of Buchi Emecheta (*Second Class Citizen*, 1983), Flora Nwapa, (*One is Enough*, 1981), and lots of other women who in one way or the other have shared their woman experiences, never gave rise to litigations, and little or no conclusively decided cases exist on the woman experiences shared in the Nigerian context. This is in utter contradiction to the situation in Western countries where almost every of such experiences shared automatically lead to litigation.

It is also worthy of note that Bartlett seems not to have contemplated recent developments in area of gender. One may ask if the wife of a guy marriage can have woman experience. Likewise,

it could be asked, 'what kind of woman question could be asked concerning the husband of lesbian marriage?' It could also be asked whether a transgender female can have the woman experience. Notwithstanding Bartlett's silence on these issues, this paper maintains that anybody, male or female, who is subjected to the woman experience, can share such experience. After all, it is no longer in doubt whether men could be raped and whether they could be victims of domestic violence. Perhaps when Bartlett articulated her feminist stands, victims of rape and domestic violence were predominantly women. Hence, experiences of rape and domestic violence were usually categorized by feminists as 'woman experiences'. That men are also subjected to such experiences, however, does not change their status as woman experiences, rather, the situation calls for a synergy between both genders, in order to eliminate the experiences. Consciousness-raising, in advocating for sharing of woman experiences, provides the synergy.

There are facts to show that a patriarchal society without patriarchal mentality could be free from the ills of patriarchy. Plato, for instance, noted that there is nothing significant in the male gender that makes it superior to the female gender. Hence, for him women can also attain the status of the philosopher kings, the highest status in the society, if given equal opportunity of intellectual development with males ((*Republic V*, 459d-e)). Plato's position is attested to given the pace at which Western societies, which are accused of transporting patriarchy to other

societies through colonialism and imperialism, have since been free from the ill effects of patriarchy by embracing effective feminism.

In Western countries, feminists, especially, women in the legal profession have shown that patriarchy could just be a label and could only remain relevant to societies that have formed patriarchal mentality. Legal awareness engenders understanding the double aspects of law in feminism, namely, the patriarchal nature of law and the promise of law in eliminating patriarchal mentality. The attainment of the feminist agenda in other parts of the world, it could be shown, owes much to the legal awareness of women. Though, women's legal *awareness* became significant when women started becoming lawyers and judges, it was the articulation of feminist legal methods and their application by feminists that boosted the legal awareness of women in those parts of the world which today are regarded as developed owing to the high level of gender equity they have achieved (Aja 2021: pp.75-80). The theme of affirmative action reverberates in Nigeria but the consciousness of Nigerian women still remains in support of the *status quo*.

Feminism in Nigeria at this stage, should take the form of a diplomatic movement aimed at creating awareness and full consciousness for women to regain confidence in themselves, believe in their potentials and their indispensable roles as partners to men. It should also aim at deflating and erasing in men, the god-like ego which religion, like Christianity (creation story in the

Christian Bible) and most world cultures have bestowed on them. This can be achieved if Nigerian feminists will, like their feminist counterparts, articulate feminists legal methods that will suit the Nigerian traditional context. Katherine Bartlett, for instance, contributed immensely to effective feminist struggle in her society through her feminist method of 'consciousness-raising' which advocates women sharing rather than airing the women experiences. The African women are very unique by their culture and location on the continent. Their experience and understanding about life and equality will necessarily be different from American women, or say European women. So when an African woman expresses a strong opinion or share her perspective within the feminism curve, such opinion might be extreme or moderate depending on the story behind it. As Mariam Abdul et al (2011), observe concerning Nigeria:

The feminist's movement after taking the initiative to become a recognized body in Nigeria, there are still concerns about the negative press and societal orientation against feminists. Based on the traditional and cultural stereotypes on the roles of women women especially those who identify as feminists are considered rebels and dissident due to the feminist ideologies that challenge the patriarchal status quo (p.22).

Mariam Abdul et al's observation clearly depicts the fear of Nigerian women, feminists and non-feminists, in fully identifying with the feminist struggle. They may even be penalized for doing so and as a result, the best they could do

was air their women experiences. Thus, changing the Nigerian woman's patriarchal mentality will definitely require methods unique to Nigeria's social contexts. Bartlett's consciousness-raising contemplates the Nigerian society, in that in emphasizing sharing of experiences, it does not limit the avenue or media through which such experiences are to be shared. Most efforts at addressing patriarchal mentality tend to assert that only the education of women can help them do away with such mentality. This may not be effective in a communal society like Nigeria where relationships with numerous uneducated folks make tremendous impact in one's life. Consciousness-raising, though not explicitly, calls for any medium one, the sharer of women experiences may be disposed to deploy. Thus, both the educated and non-educated have the opportunity to share their women experiences.

5. Conclusion

This paper has evaluated Bartlett's feminist method of consciousness-raising, articulating its tendency to eliminate patriarchal mentality and how it can foster effective feminist struggle. It recognizes as important, consciousness-raising emphasizing sharing rather than airing women experiences. The paper depicts patriarchal mentality as a clog to effective feminist struggle in Nigeria because such mentality clouds women experiences by extolling the discriminating tendencies of patriarchy. Sharing of women experiences not only exposes such tendencies but also

ensures that decisive actions, such as policy formulation and litigations are carried out to address damages resulting from the experiences and to prevent their reoccurrence.

Consciousness-raising is recommended for eliminating patriarchal mentality in Nigeria owing to the fact that it creates no boundaries in terms of categorizing women as educated and non-educated in the sharing women experiences. This enhances effective participation of women in the feminist struggle as both educated and non-educated women can effectively share their women experiences. They can adopt any medium they think effective for sharing. Again, in sharing their women experiences, they will be active participants in seeking measures for averting them, thereby jettisoning patriarchal mentality and engaging in effective feminist struggle.

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