The Nigerian Patriarchy: When and How

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The present Nigerian society, like most of Africa, is patriarchal in nature, with attendant unequal gender relations which cast women in a subordinate position. However, African scholars have contended and still do, that it was not always that way, but that it became patriarchal as a result of the introduction of external factors like the religions of Islam and Christianity, colonialism, education and others. They believe that most of African society, including Nigeria, was matriarchal in nature, so the claims of western writers to the contrary are wrong. This work, which is part of the writer's PhD research, attempts to trace the societal nature and gender relations pattern within the Nigerian society, from pre-colonial Nigerian society, through the colonial into the present post-colonial Nigerian society. It engages the works of early writers on the evolution of society like Fredrick Engels and African writers like Cheikh Anta Diop, who, influenced by Engels claims about society and how it portrayed Africa, carried out researches in order to refute them; and also current writings on the Nature of gender relations in post-colonial Nigerian society.

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Introduction

The consensus among contemporary writers is that the Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature. It is a society where gender roles are distinct and evident, and gender relations are informed by the dynamics of patriarchy which casts women in a subordinate role to men (Aina, 1998; Okome, 2002; Akintan, 2013; Abara, 2012; Makama, 2013).

Patriarchy as a concept has been defined and recreated by feminists, in their quest to understand and analyze the origins and situation of the domination of women by men. As such it has been used by feminists to refer to the "systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination" (Kamarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993; Aina, 1998). Ferrriera (2004) describes patriarchy as a system that is both oppressive and discriminatory. She believes that it is oppressive in all areas of society, including social, economic, political and cultural; discriminatory in its control of access to power, management of resources and benefits, and in manipulation of public and private power structures (p. 395). In Sylvia Walby's (1990) words, "It is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". Cynthia Cockburn (2004) describes it as a system, in which leadership, authority, aggressiveness and responsibility reside in men and masculinity; while nurture, compliance, passivity and dependence are the part of women and femininity. A patriarchal society is therefore one which strengthens the "masculine feminine dichotomy" by favouring and perpetuating male domination; and as such, in all areas of society, structures are manipulated to maintain and

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foster this domination of women by men. In such a system, men are regarded as the authority within the areas of society like the traditional family, clan or tribe. Powers and possessions are passed on from father to son and decent is reckoned in the male line.

Gender and Sex in Feminist Discourse

True to form as a patriarchal society, Nigerian society is one where there are clear and distinct gender roles; and individuals live life conforming to these roles. According to Azodo (2007), in traditional African societies, like Nigeria, a woman's place is seen to be in the home space, where she is confined to domestic chores, bearing and rearing of children, whereas the man roams the wild looking for adventure in work and war (p. 3). In other words, a man is the leader and head of the society, while the woman cares for and nurtures the family and the home.

From the time a child is born in the Nigerian society, he or she is cast in the role ascribed for the sexes by society. The children are therefore brought up in the awareness of societal gender roles and grow up to fulfil them. These roles confine the sexes to supposedly appropriate manners of behavior and areas of endeavor based on their biological identification of being either male or female. This is what the view supported by the theory of biological determinism postulates; that human behaviour, appearance, abilities and even long term fate, are entirely determined by an individual's genes, that is, their biological make-up. Biological determinists did not recognise, and therefore disregard, the effects of environmental variables on the expression of a given gene. They believe that everything about an individual is innate and all behaviour is in the realm of the control of the gene (Wilson, 1975). In their view, women supposedly conserve energy (being "anabolic"), and this makes them passive, conservative, sluggish, stable and uninterested in politics. Whereas, men expend their supply energy (being "katabolic") and this makes them eager, energetic, passionate, variable and thereby interested in politics and social matters (Mari, 2012). Consequently, they believed that these biological facts explain the differences in the behaviour of women and men, and also their abilities and capabilities and, therefore, justifies the social and political arrangements that existed in society.

According to Nevedita Menon (2012), this philosophy legitimises various forms of oppression as natural and inescapable because the oppression arises from supposedly natural, and therefore, unchangeable factors, and this is what feminism as a theoretical discourse has argued against. In doing this, feminists distinguished between the concepts of gender and sex, arguing that sex as a concept is biological, while gender is cultural and sociological. Masculinity and femininity are therefore, products of societal upbringing and expectations. In other words, children are born with respective biological sex as male or female, but they are brought up in society, where boys are treated and expected to exhibit attributes of manliness, like courage, strength and ambition, while girls are brought up being referred to as delicate and sensitive, and are expected to be soft and nurturing, not hard (Diamond, 2000), and in cases, where they fail to conform to this expectations, they are regarded as deviants. Presumably, children learn masculinity for boys and femininity for girls. It could be said, therefore, that from the time they are born, gender expectations are all around people and they grow up fulfilling those expectations by society; the various aspects of society, for example, culture, community, religion, upbringing, peers, media and religion, influence and shape people's understanding and view of gender. Children, therefore, grow into adults with conditioned mindsets as to what the roles or characteristics of respective genders are, what and how they should be (Prentice & Carranza, 2002, p. 269). This distinction of roles and expectations, according to Chua and Fijino (1999), functions to create and maintain unequal power

relations between people of different biological sexes and results in the domination and exploitation of women as a group.

"It is not biology, therefore, but patriarchal social institutions, interactions, and practices that limit each sex to those characteristics and activities defined as feminine and masculine" (Chua & Fijino, 1999, p. 392). Feminist believes, therefore, that gender differences between the two sexes result from cultural practices and social expectations which every individual is exposed to from childhood, and which are peculiar to respective societies. According to Haslanger (1995), genders (women and men) and gender traits (like being nurturing or ambitious) are the intended or unintended product or products of a social practice (p. 97).

However, according to Mari (2012), although the extreme view of biological determinism is no longer popular, the view that the biological make-up of women makes them unsuitable for certain kinds of endeavor remains.

In the Nigerian society, gender is associated with sex from the very time a child is born. From birth, the male child is preferred to the female. The first question usually asked when a child is born in Nigeria is "Is it a boy or a girl?" (Omoregie & Ihensekhien, 2009, p. 1). This is because it is believed that the boy will carry on the family name and also is the heir to his father's property (Omadjohwoefe, 2011; Akintan, 2013). Furthermore, as Omadjohwoefe (2011) puts it, throughout childhood and adolescence, boys and girls are treated differently, assigned different household chores and given different privileges. "The male child is allowed to wander farther, get involved in rough and tumble play, while the girl is highly restricted and closely monitored" (Omadjohwoefe, 2011, p. 69). The female child is expected to stay in the home, helping her mother with the household chores, learning how to keep a home, and helping to care for the younger siblings, while the male child accompanies his father to the farm or whatever profession his father is engaged in. He is taught to be a man and is rather sent on errands that require going outside the house, while the movement of the female child is well monitored (Akintan, 2013). As the children grow, their mindsets as regards their roles in society are already fixed, and so they instinctively fill these roles. Gender inappropriate behaviour was met with serious sanctioning which further reinforced gender role differentiations (Omadjohwoefe, 2011, p. 69). In Judith Lorber's (1994) words, gendered norms and expectations are enforced through informal sanctions of gender-inappropriate behaviour by peers and by formal punishment or threat of punishment by those in authority, and behaviour should deviate too far from socially imposed standards for women and men (p. 60). As such, parents alone did not punish inappropriate gender behaviour while children were growing up, peers and society at large ensured that these roles were observed and maintained. As regards the Nigerian male child, Chinwe Abara (2012), puts it aptly when she says "in the culture and traditional environment we find ourselves, as a male child grows, he finds out that his sex confers something extra on him" (p. 9). While in the same vein, the females are deprived their basic rights by the same tradition and culture.

Discourses on Evolution of Patriarchy

In attempting to examine the origin of male domination, the author will engage the works of writers on the emergence of patriarchy as a societal system, such as Fredrick Engels and Cheihk Anta Diop. Although the concept of patriarchy was of central focus for earlier writers in their attempt to explain emergence of present day society and societal systems as Engels did in his work; and feminists also viewed and engaged the concept as the main basis of the creation of gender inequality during the first and the beginning of the second waves of feminism, which covered the 19th century to the third quarter of the 20th century, over time, the concept lost its

centrality and importance to the debates for societal change. The focus on the concept of patriarchy and its effects on gender relations began to shift to other factors in gender relations like race, class, colonial history and others as other branches of feminism, like the post-modern feminism, came up. However, in recent times, feminists Bell Hooks (2004), Cynthia Corkburn (2004) among others, have once again began to look at the issues of patriarchy as an important aspect of the gender equality and equity discourse. For this study, however, there is a need for the writer to trace the emergence of patriarchy because his focus is an African society, Nigeria, where the concept of patriarchy is still very much alive and continues to contend with the efforts at implementing change in favor of gender equality in the society.

According to Fredrick Engels (1962), the emergence of male domination can be traced to the society in antiquity when mother-right was overthrown and patriarchy instituted in its place. His work was based on the works of Johann Jakob Bachofen and Lewis Henry Morgan; who both believed that society today evolved from a matriarchal based system. Bachofen was a Swiss antiquarian and anthropologist who, with his seminal book in 1861 titled "Mother Right: An Investigation of the Religious and Juridical Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World", strove to demonstrate that motherhood was the source of human society and religion. Morgan on the other hand was an American anthropologist who was well known for his works on Kinship and Social Evolution. His ethnographic research works on the ancient Native American tribes of the Iroquois led him to postulate that matriarchy was the earliest form of societal institution, not patriarchy.

Engels based his work on the work of these two scholars and insisted that matriarchy was the system in place in ancient society. The term "matriarchy" was used in the 19th century to refer to governance by women over family and society in the early stages of society (Sanday, 2008). Matriarchy is regarded as a form of social order, where women are in charge and the oldest females are recognized as the heads of families, with power, lineage and inheritance passing, where possible, from mothers to daughters. In this social order, therefore, the children belonged to the woman and could only inherit from her. In other words, the matriarchal society was based on mother-rights. Mother-right is the system that operates when Matriarchy is in place. Matriarchy, according to A. M. Ferriera (2007), is a society in which "maternal energy and mother love are socially cohesive forces" (p. 396). Thus, Matriarchy is a social organization focused on the power of women as mothers and on the matrilineal ownership of the home and wealth. Additionally, in the view of Peggy Sanday (2008), Matriarchy is a balanced social system, in which, although females ruled, both sexes played key roles founded on maternal principles. She believes that

> "Women in their roles as mothers and senior women ensured the performance of practices that authenticated, regenerated and nurtured the family. Their leadership was therefore not one of subjugation of subjects, but that of responsibility to conjugate—to knit and regenerate social ties in the here and now and in the here-after, through their leadership in upholding tradition" (Sanday, 2008, p. 1).

Fredrick Engels (1962), however, claims that in the prehistoric society, the matriarchal system was operational with the institution of mother right, where the descent of offspring and inheritance by children was also only along the maternal line. According to Engels (1962), the society was characterized by "barbarism" and "promiscuity" (p. 35). This was because, in this society, there did not exist any distinction of who was anyone's wife or husband. The man did not know his children because he had no ties with any woman in particular. Every man, according to Engels (1962), was the husband of every woman in his extended family, and every woman was the wife of all the men in the family and only the woman knew her children. In other

words, children could only be identified through the matrilineal line. However, as the institution of family evolved further, according to Engels, and the members of families narrowed down to include only close blood relatives; and also the system of marriage evolved from previously general husbands and wives to the pairing marriage, where a man and a woman were paired up by their mothers and, thereby the woman now had one man as her husband and who also was the father of her children, beside her, mother-right became threatened. This was because unlike when the man was a general husband to many and did not know his children, he now knew and was in proximity to his children.

Engels further explains that, according to the division of labor within the family at that time, it was the man's duty to provide the food and also acquire the instruments of labour necessary for the purpose. These instruments of labour, therefore, belonged to him, and in the event of husband and wife separating, he took them with him, while the wife retained her household goods. Furthermore, the social custom of the time also dictated that the man was also the owner of the new source of subsistence which was the cattle, and later, of the new instruments of labor, the slaves. But according to the custom of the same society, his children could not inherit from him, because inheritance was from the maternal line. The Children still belonged to the woman as mother-right was in place. In the event of the death of the man, therefore, his wealth passed on to his nearest blood relations on the mother side.

Therefore, according to Engels (1962),

> "On the one hand, in proportion as wealth increased, it made the man's position in the family more important than the woman's, and on the other hand, created an impulse to exploit this strengthened position in order to overthrow, in favor of his children, the traditional order of inheritance" (p. 58).

This, however, was impossible so long as the children belonged to the woman and descent was reckoned according to mother-right. It became imperative that mother-right was overthrown, and so it was. "The reckoning of descent in the female line and the matriarchal law of inheritance were thereby overthrown, and the male line of descent and the paternal law of inheritance were substituted for them" and so patriarchy was instituted.

He puts it this way:

> "The overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children" (Engels, 1962, p. 59).

This, according to Engels (1962), was the beginning of Patriarchy which favors the supremacy and domination of the female by the male sex. Patriarchy as a system is what operates in the Nigerian society, and its feature of male domination is clearly depicted in institutions of endeavor; especially an institution like the military which is clearly male dominated.

Engels' work is useful for the writer in the tracing of the evolution of patriarchy, as the writer attempts to look at the holistic picture of the debate of patriarchy as an evolution from the defeat of Matriarchal societal system in antiquity. This is an important aspect of the writer's work as some African writers like Diop, Oyewunmi and Amadiume, among others, argue differently for the African society; that it was rather matriarchal in nature in early times, but still concedes that most African society today is intensely patriarchal, including Nigeria.

The early scholars who worked on the evolution of society, J. J. Bachofen, Morgan and Engels, as earlier

mentioned, claimed that society evolved from a Matriarchal system to a patriarchal one. Their analysis of the evolution of society presupposes that Patriarchy brought order and organization to an otherwise chaotic situation, and therefore, that patriarchy is a superior system to matriarchy. In Engels' (1962) words, "...The result was hopeless confusion, which could only be remedied and to a certain extent was remedied by the transition to father-right".

Engels, however, did not depict exactly how this overthrow of mother right and the transition to patriarchy happened. He insisted that it could have been by a decree or any other way, but it happened and patriarchy took its place in society. This argument is inadequate and has been criticized and referred to as a myth by scholars like Wendy James (1978), and Ify Amadiume (1997). Engels also used as his examples, the ancient societies of Greece and Rome to represent all societies in antiquity, and made his conclusions about society at that time based on the study of these specific societies. This could not have been a good representation because it did not depict other societies, like the African societies. Was the situation the same in ancient African societies? Nothing in Engels' work depicts Africa. His work and claims were premised on the notion of a homogeneous classical society and his conclusions were, therefore, generalized for all society. His work, however, influenced the study of Cheikh Anta Diop, who based on his disagreement with Engels' claims of a homogeneous patriarchal society in antiquity, embarked on his research to prove that societies did not have a similar history in classical antiquity; specifically, that black Africa had a different experience from the postulations of Engels.

Cheikh Anta Diop refutes Engels' claims in his book, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity*. Diop (1989) disagrees with Engels, Bachofen, and Morgan in their view that matriarchy preceded and was replaced by patriarchy. He disagrees and disputes the claim that matriarchy was universal. In other words, it was the system that was in place in every society in antiquity and that the change to patriarchy took place at the same time across all societies (p. 15). Rather, he believes that matriarchy was specific, which is specific to particular societies in antiquity. In refuting Engel's claim, Diop (1989) postulates that patriarchy and matriarchy were two antithetical social systems that originated in different parts of the world. He argues that there were two zones, which he referred to as the North and the South Cradles (p. 17). The South, he illustrates using Africa which he claimed was agricultural in nature, which was where matriarchy originated. The North, he claims comprised of the nations of the western world which was nomadic and was where patriarchy originated. He claims that the middle belt comprised of the Mediterranean; and here, matriarchy preceded patriarchy. However, in western Asia, Diop (1989) adds that the two systems were superimposed on each other .

According to Diop (1989), Africa, which represented the southern cradle, was a place where "the matriarchal family, territorial state, emancipation of women in domestic life, the ideal of peace and justice, goodness and optimism were valued". (p. 16). While in the patriarchal north, "exemplified by the cultures of Aryan Greece and Rome, the patriarchal family, the city-state, moral and material solitude were valued" (Diop, 1989, p. 16). He went further to compare the North and South cultures based on the status of women within these two. He showed that in the North,

> "The women were denied their rights and were subjugated under the private institution of the patriarchal family. In this system, the Northern patriarchs had women under their armpits, confining them to the home and denying them a public role and power" (Amadiume, 1989, p. 12).

He goes on further to say that in this system, a husband or father had the right of life and death over a

woman (Diop, 1989, p. 23). In the South, however, Diop (1989) claims that the culture, which was matriarchal, was typified by respect for women.

> "The wives were mistresses of the house and keepers of the food. Women were the agriculturalists while men were the hunters; and the woman's power was based on her economic role. This society was characterized by the sacredness of the mother and her unlimited authority" (p. 13).

The coming of patriarchy, he believes and changed this.

Diop believes in the theory of external factor in social change. He insists that the primary catalyst for social change is the introduction of external factors. Therefore, in consistence with this belief, he argues that Patriarchy came to Africa with the coming of Islam in the 10th century. Even then, he argues, it remained on the surface level and did not penetrate the deep basic matriarchal systems of the society. He believed that patriarchy got further entrenched by the coming and introduction of Christianity and the secular presence of Europe in Africa through colonisation which was attendant by "colonial legislations, land rights, naming after father, monogamy and the class of western elites and moral contact with the West" (Amaduime, 1989, p. 19). The coming of patriarchy to Africa, therefore, also brought its attendant characteristics, the subjugation of women and specific gender roles. In his analysis of the matriarchal status of the African society, Diop fails to make clear how this reflected on the relationship of the two sexes. If women were in leadership and were in charge of economic and political power, did this not depict the existence gender boundaries, thereby reflecting of an unequal gender relationship? He also does not address the issue of happens in the event of breach of these boundaries. Although, in clarifying Matriarchy as a concept, Diop (1989) describes it as

> "not an absolute and cynical triumph over men, but a harmonious dualism, an association accepted by both sexes, the better to build a sedentary society where each and every one could fully develop by following the activity best suited to his physiological nature. A matriarchal regime, far from being imposed on the man by circumstances independent of his will, is accepted and defended by him" (p. 108).

Diop still however failed toclarify the nature of power relations of the genders within this societal system. Amadume (1989) identifies this when she said that what was needed of Diop's work was not a legacy of warrior queens, but a thorough analysis of the primary system of social organization around the matricentic cultural units and a gender free or flexible gender linguistic system to depict the legacy of the African Matriarchy (p. 16).

A yet divergent and more recent view on the origin of the patriarchal societal system and, subsequently, gender inequality, postulates that the emergence of patriarchy and gender inequalities can be traced to the consequences of the biology of human reproduction (Murdock, 1949; Parson, 1959; Firestone, 1962; Oakley, 1974; Tiger & Fox, 1992; Omodjhowoefe, 2011). According to Omodjhowoefe (2011), the biology of human reproduction is responsible for the unequal relationship between the male and female sex. It is believed that in early human history, there was high mortality rate for humans because of diseases, malnutrition and bad conditions of living. This was worse for children, so that about 50% of them died before they were five years old. So in order to combat this situation, there had to be an increase in child birth to make up for the dying numbers and reproduce the human group (Friedil, 1996). Since it was only women who could get pregnant and bear children, this duty of replacing the number of the dying children fell to them. These frequent pregnancies tied them down to the home. Furthermore, when the children were born, they stayed back in the home to care for them until they were grown enough. Consequently, the women become tied up with having and taking care

of the children and the household for most part of her life. According to Omodjhowoefe (2011), women became physically encumbered, and their activities restricted to the home and child care and this made them to become dependent on the men.

> "With this dependence, man had to take on the role of provider and as such took to hunting, building houses and meeting all the other survival needs of the woman. Thus, the role men play became, not only valued, but also prestigious. In contrast, little prestige and values was given to ordinary routine, taken for granted activities of women. This marked the genesis of female minority status in society'' (p. 68).

Firestone (1962) quoted in Omodjhoefe, expanded further by saying:

> "Women are disadvantaged by their biology; menstruation, childbirth and menopause are all physical burdens for women, but pregnancy and breast feeding have the most serious social consequences … when women are pregnant or nursing babies, they are dependent on males whether husband, lover, brother, etc. for physical survival. Women's dependence on men is protracted by the long period during which human infants are dependent on their mothers compared to the infants of other species… This dependence on men is universal and it produced unequal power relationship" (p. 29).

However, unlike Diop, who believed that patriarchy as a system replaced matriarchy in Africa as a result of its introduction by external factors which included Islam, Christianity, colonisation and its corresponding factors, Omodjhowoefe did not clarify if this situation only existed in Africa, or if like Engels, Bachofen and Morgan, he believes that this was the universal state in antiquity. Although he quotes Firestone who claims that the dependence of women on men, which was produced by their protracted pregnancies and period of caring for their young, was universal, his claims of this relationship and arrangement as the genesis of gender inequality does not state if this was peculiar to Africa or if it was universal. Furthermore, Omodjhowefe did not clearly state which system was in place before patriarchy, became dominant as a result of women's biological role in replenishing the number of the human race. Was it a society where matriarchy ruled and subsequently, patriarchy took over, or was it always the fact that patriarchy was the order of the day?

Oyeronke Oyewunmi (1997) claims that it is not right to believe that patriarchy was always present in the African society. Her work is based on the assumption that cultures and societies are different and distinct from each other. She believes that western scholars by their work make universal assumptions about societies, which may be wrong in regards to other societies. She states that the western body of knowledge assumes that gender is a fundamental organising principle in all societies and is therefore salient; that gender is everywhere, in all societies. They also believe, according to Oyewunmi, that the subordination of women is universal. She points out that these assumptions by western writers were based on the fact that in western societies, "physical bodies" are also "social bodies", and as a result there is really no difference between sex and gender, despite many attempts of feminists to distinguish the two (Oyewunmi, 1997, p. 19). She believes that this is because the European culture distinguished between the "mind" and "body".

> "The body is regarded as the site of irrationality, passion and moral corruption. The mind, on the other hand is the seat of reason and restraint. This dualism enabled the association of certain groups with the body and bodily functions, and others with reason and spirit. "The woman was seen as embodied while the man was regarded as a walking mind".

These two categories of "man of reason" (the thinker) and "woman of body", according to Oyewunmi (1997), were oppositional. Those conceived as irrefutably embodied (the woman) were visibly marked out for enslavement, oppression and cultural manipulation (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p. 122). Based on this therefore, Oyewunmi attributes the biologising of difference to the primacy of vision in European intellectual history. She

concludes that the whole body of knowledge of the West bases its categories and hierarchies on visual modes and binary distinctions as in: male and female, white and black, homosexual and heterosexual, and so on. In their view, therefore, the physical body is always linked to the social mind (Oyewunmi, 1997, p. 12). She categorically posits that this is not so in all societies. She rejects any claims that such visual mechanism was at work in African societies. She believes that "unlike Europe, African cultures are not, and have not been historically ordered according to the logic of vision, but rather through other senses. (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p. 122)

Oyewunmi's Study focuses on the Oyo-Yoruba society in western Nigeria. She argues that in the Oyo-Yoruba culture, social divisions, structures and hierarchies like gender, sexuality, race and class are not determined by visual logic or perception of bodies; rather, it is the concept of "seniority" which orders and divides the society (Oyewunmi, 1997). "Seniority" here refers to chronological age difference. However, it could also refer to a person's position within the kinship structure. Oyewunmi (1997) explains that an older person by birth occupies a higher position in the kinship structure of hierarchy; while a person from outside the kin, marries into the family, although older by birth, submits to the seniority of the younger members of the kin who were already born before the marriage. In other words "an insider, i.e., relation by blood, is always senior to an outsider, who is marrying into the family" (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p. 123). Those born after the marriage may not claim this seniority, however. Seniority is, therefore, always relative and context dependent: No one is permanently in a senior or junior position; it all depends on who is present in any given situation (Oyewunmi, 1997; Bakare-Yusuf, 2003). In the Yoruba context, however, seniority operates in terms of a patrilineal system.

The central claim of Oyewunmi's paper, therefore, is that there is no concept of gender in the Yoruba culture, and that the concept of seniority is the basic organising principle of the Yoruba society. She bases this claim on the fact that the Yoruba language has no gender markers, whereas seniority is linguistically marked and is an essential component of identity. Oyewunmi justifies this claim on the Yoruba language by arguing that language represents major sources of information in constituting world-sense, mapping historical changes, and interpreting the social structure and as such it is central to the formation of social identity (Oyewunmi, 1997; Bakare-Yusuf, 2003). Furthermore, she claims that the Yoruba social institutions and practices do not make social distinctions based on sex, however, the third person pronoun "you" in English translated in Youruba to "o" and "won", distinguishes between older and younger in social relation (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p. 123).

Oyewunmi (1997) observes that the Yoruba language has no word for "woman". Just one word in the language, "obirin", denotes female, while "okurin" denotes male. Furthermore, "obirin" does not derive from "okurin", the way that "woman" derives from "man" (p. 33). According to her, Obirin is not in any way inferior to okurin, and there are no markers in the language that distinguish names, occupation, profession, status and so on in terms of gender. The language has no gender-specific words for son, daughter, brother or sister (Oyewunmi, 1997; Bakare-Yusuf, 2003).

Oyewunmi's claims are aimed at insisting that the view of western writers is not justified in their generalisations, regarding non-western societies. Specifically, the claim of the existence of gender roles in society, which cast women in subordination to men, has not always been operational in African societies. Although she attempts to make clarifications at the beginning of her book that her claims may not be applicable to all African societies, her work is aimed at refuting the existence of Patriarchy in African societies, prior to colonisation, just like Diop and Amadiume. Much as the writer agrees that the African society is different from

the West, and there are no justifications for generalising claims over ancient societies to include it with the West, Oyewunmi's claim based on only the Oyo-Yoruba society and language is not enough grounds to make the conclusion that Patriarchy and gender distinction were absent in pre-colonial African societies. The Nigerian society is well done for its cultural diversity and pluralistic nature in terms of the practices and ways of its peoples. Nigeria as a nation consists of 250 ethnic groups and 521 languages. Each ethnic group has its own distinct culture, and sometimes more than one language. This statistic is for Nigeria alone, not the whole of Africa. How then is it justifiable to make claims about these several cultures from studying only one of them? Also, Oyewunmi does not account for the fact that the present day Yoruba society in Nigeria is a patriarchal one where the distinction of gender roles in the society is very present.

Other Nigerian scholars, like Mojubaolu O. Okome (2002), concerning the issue of gendered roles and patriarchy in Nigerian society, believe that there was a gendered division of labour in the pre-colonial Nigerian society, but the nature and implication of such divisions of labour are often misinterpreted. She says that while male dominance was built into the social system of most Nigerian ethnic groups, women played a significant and vital role in all aspects of the life in their community (Okome, 2002, p. 35). She goes further to say that although the division of labour in pre-colonial Nigeria was based on gender distinctions; social definitions of men's and women's work varied by community or society and their roles complemented each other's. In the same vein as Oyewunmi (1992), she claims, however, that maleness did not necessarily determine status within the family in pre-colonial Nigerian societies, but seniority played a most vital role, as evident in the Yoruba society. Okome (2002) further goes on to say that "today there are concrete examples of men that act 'patriarchally', which is a clear reflection that male privilege is entrenched in social, economic and political relations" (p. 39). She concludes that these examples reflect the present situation, rather than a reflection of the past.

Colonialism and Creation of Nigerian Patriarchy

It is important to understand the present nature of gender relations in Nigerian society and how it links and relates to the past; and also how it is a product of the process of history. This is why the writer has taken the time to look into the nature of the societal system that operated in the pre-colonial Nigerian society. This enables the study to authenticate the claim of the present Nigerian society being patriarchal in nature. The writer's position is that the Nigerian society, past and present, was and is patriarchal based, although this may not have been in the same way or form for the two periods of time. In other words, the nature of patriarchy, or male dominating system that existed in the pre-colonial and colonial times in Nigeria was different from the form that exists today. The writer believes that Nigerian society was male dominated, but the females had their own sphere of jurisdiction which was recognized and respected. It has to be kept in perspective, however, the Nigerian society is made up of a large number of cultural groups with different cultures and practices and as such the forms of social structure and relationships that existed in each respective society may not have been exactly the same as others. Rojas (1994) states that, the position of women in pre-colonial Nigeria obviously differed in the vast number of ethnic groups. According to her, the difference depended on the kinship structure and the role of women within the economic structure of the individual ethnic group and societies. She goes on to say that the common factors among the Nigerian women in the pre-colonial society, irrespective of the ethnic group, however, was "the domestically oriented jobs and the range of economic activities that the society reserved for women" (Rojas, 1994). These jobs included the care of the home and family, and for economic

activities, farming to feed the family and selling of the surplus. Therefore, although variations may have existed, the important factor here is that the Nigerian society as an entity has always been male dominated. In agreement with this view, Rojas (1994) opines that women in pre-colonial Nigerian societies held a complementary position to the men, although patrilineal and patriarchal kinship structures predominated the Nigerian society.

Before the era of colonialism, women in the southern part of Nigeria, which is made up of the Igbo and Yoruba communities, were reputed to have been more politically aware and active than those in the northern part of the country. In fact, according to Okonjo (1997) and Derrickson (2002), women were not unimportant or trivial in the male dominated Igbo society. Derrickson (2002) posits that:

> "While men's labor was widely considered to be more prestigious than women's labor, and while the practice of polygamy and patrilocal domicile (married women dwelling in their husbands' villages rather than in their own) secured men's power over women in general, Ibo women still wielded considerable influence both within their marriages and within the larger community".

The Ibo women were well known for their prowess in the area of agriculture within the community. They planted their own crops, sold their crop surplus, and also that of their husbands. They also exercised exclusive control over the management and activities of the village market, which was the commercial center of the community. Okonjo (2002) goes on to say that women in the Igbo and Yoruba societies had political roles within "dual-sex systems", which is how she describes the operational societal system of that time; women were part of associations and groups that were based on trade, age and kinship. Through these associations they collectively defended their complementary sphere of authority within the extended family and wider community (Okonjo, 1997, p. 45). In pre-colonial Yoruba society, women were also known to occupy certain positions among the king makers and among the council of elders who helped the Oba to rule (Akintan, 2013). In the north, on the other hand, however, because of the early Islamisation of northern Nigeria between the 15th and 18th centuries, and the resultant introduction of the shari's law which advocates the practice of pudah and consequently, the isolation of women from public life and activities (Bergstrom, 2002), women did not participate much in public activities. Historical facts, however, do show that women monarchs ruled at points in time in the Hausa society. There are the examples of Queen Amina of Zazzau (Zaria) in the 16th century and Tawa of Gobir in the 18th century (Bergstrom, 2002). Bergstrom also notes that historical studies on Kano society in northern Nigeria showed that women acted as tax collectors, market administrators and religious leaders through the famous Bori spirit possession cult. The Bori spirit possession cult was formerly regarded as a state religion in parts of Hausaland before the advent of Islam and colonialism; although there are still traces of it today, it is no longer as popular as it used to be (Dunber, 1991; Masquelier, 2001; Bergstrom, 2002). The entrenchment of Islam in northern Nigeria, therefore, ensured a deeply rooted patriarchal system which was further strengthened with the advent of colonialism.

However, it is clear that the activities of women within these societies in pre-colonial Nigeria were within recognized gender boundaries in a gender relations structure that perpetuated and legitimized male domination. According to Roja (1994), Okonjo (1997), and Okome (2002) and Derrickson (2002), among others, women's place was complementary to the men's. The nature of gender relations that existed was more of a division of labour. This division of labour was therefore a gendered one which still saw the man as the dominating gender and leader of the family and society, who ultimately took decisions, while the woman was a subordinate partner,

fulfilling her societal roles. This reflects in the different roles that the women play. In the Yoruba society for example, there was only one woman in the council of kingmakers known as the "Erelu"; and also among the council of elders, the "iyalode" was the only female; and their roles were not autonomous in anyway, but in conformity with the decisions of the council to which they belonged, which was mainly male (Akintan, 2013). While in the Ibo society, also, the women area of jurisdiction was mainly over the market place and within their women's and age group organizations. In the words of Derrickson (2002), it would be incorrect to assert that the status of women in pre-colonial Ibo society matched the status of men.

With the advent of colonization, the nature of gender relations changed in the Nigerian society. The introduction of cash crop farming as a way of meeting the demand for raw materials being shipped abroad by the colonialists, caused a change in the economic structures. Men dominated the farming of cash crops which were needed for the international market and were therefore of more importance and focus than other crops, while women were confined to the growing of food crops which attracted little returns. According to Rojas (1994), by focusing on men who constituted the cash crop farmers, bureaucratic efforts to improve agriculture further encouraged the separation of economic roles of men and women that had earlier complemented each other. Derrickson (2002) quotes Mullings (1976) as saying that the shift from subsistence based societies to money, based ones through the introduction of cash crop farming, which upset the power balance that existed between the sexes in the society. Furthermore, the introduction of western education and Christianity further changed the role of women in society. Okome (2002) believes that the colonial education emphasized preparing women for domestic rather than leadership roles within society. Christian missionaries and the colonial administrators were therefore believed to have introduced the assumptions of European patriarchy into Nigerian society through their form of education and beliefs. According to Rojas (1994), their idea of the "appropriate social role for women which included the assumption that women belonged in the home engaged in child rearing, an exclusively female responsibility, and other domestic chores" helped to change the place of women in Nigerian societies to a subordinate one.

Consequently, as a result of the displacement of women, economically, and their relegation to production of food crops in the new capitalist system, and in addition, a new religion that taught the subordination of the woman to men, and also an educational system that also fostered male dominance, which more men had the opportunity to obtain than women; the system of gender relations changed in the Nigerian society from a complementary one to a female subordinating one. The colonial Nigerian society was therefore a patriarchal one and even with the demise of colonialism, the society remained patriarchal as it is today.

Conclusion

Nigeria today is a modern developing third world society. It has evolved from a history of diverse cultures and a common colonial experience. However, in spite of modernization and the effects of globalization, it has remained a patriarchal society. The nature of the patriarchal system that operates in Nigeria today is obviously different from the form that existed in pre-colonial and colonial times, as a result of modernization and its consequent characteristics of increased education of the people, internationalization as a result of relationships and interactions with other nations of the world and also being member of the international community as a member of the UN, and the awareness and enlightenment that these bring. As such, there are more women engaged in work outside the home, more females are venturing into fields of endeavor that were erstwhile believed to be solely male like the military, engineering, politics and others. Yet, patriarchy as a system is still

the Nigerian way, and it is a force that still contends with the efforts of change in the various sectors of the Nigerian society. This is because the mindset of the Nigerian people is still molded from the onset to view things through the lens of gender.

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