



Neo-patriarchy, Feminism and Dialog Theory in Nigeria

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Abstract: This work interrogates a triangulate dialogic space featuring *neo-patriarchy* and *feminism* - both with arguments contextualized in *patriarchy*. Feminism theorizes the equality of the socio-economic and political rights of the sexes. Neo-patriarchy, the marginal but increasingly visible aspect of the political discourses *championed by women*, is not opposed to women's empowerment, but emphasizes the preference for men as politically imperative. It deconstructs feminism and asserts that patriarchy still operates a significant knowledge production and distribution center. Using the dialog theory within the framework of the neoliberal epistemic structures, the premises of the two arguments, their sequence of argumentation and conclusions are discussed in the Nigerian context. A focus on the strength of the arguments shows a higher burden of proof on the side of the female neo-patriarchs. Moreover, their goals, rules of procedure, dialog tactics, commitments and their institutional backings are not discernible unlike those of the feminists. Ad hominem trace is seen when the neo-patriarchy's argument for women's empowerment and the dialogists' interests are juxtaposed.

Keywords: Patriarchy, neo-patriarchy, Dialog Theory, Gender, Politics, *ad hominem*, Nigeria.

Introduction

Political discourses constitute a vital aspect of national life in Nigeria. They would normally reach a crescendo few days to the voting day. Discourses usually focus on personalities and their ethnic cleavages, much unlike stronger neoliberal democracies where they are issue-based. Nigeria, as a neoliberal democratic youngster, shares with most countries of the global north the dominance of men in active politics. The preponderance in many countries is the consequence of the historical patriarchy. But civic vitality has improved over the years, resulting in the emergence of the perspectives that challenge the status quo. Prominent is feminism, which also faces deconstruction from neo-patriarchy on an argument that men still operate the best knowledge production. This argument is attractive, not simply because it deconstructs feminism, but the fact that its visible proponents are women.

Patriarchy, an age-long culture controls the polity through dialogic lockdown that allows only a very few opportunities for the subaltern, especially women. The epistemic structure of patriarchy, driven by its hegemonic orientation to regulate ideas, imagination and conduct of those under its control, has produced a critical outcome of feminism with

the basic argument that women can be as good as men who occupy political offices. But unlike feminism, does neo-patriarchy argument have a future? Can it be reliably or reasonably justified for being open to criticism?

The Feminist Thesis

While the patriarchy dialog reifies and supports the dominant power structure by limiting the range of possibilities open to other voices, feminism has evolved to challenge it and sensitize men to the psychology of gender equality in politics. This perspective has been corroborated by feats women have achieved in various Nigerian cultures. Often cited are the cases of Moremi and Madam Tinubu, two powerful Nigerian women of Yoruba extraction who were feared by men during their time.

The feminist basic thesis is that the epistemology that domiciles political sagacity in men is fragile as most cases of political instability and turbulence have been caused by men operating through their political configurations. The feminist argument has been institutionalized over the years and championed by governments, organizations, multilateral establishments and advocacy groups. The United Nations plays a major role in this regard. One classic example was the fourth World Conference on

Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace convened in September 1995 in Beijing, China (third was in Kenya and first in Mexico City, 1975). One landmark resolution of the Beijing conference was the call on government in each country to reserve up to 35 per cent of all political offices to women. Some countries have tried to adhere to this target.

The Neo-patriarchy Argument

The neo-patriarchy argument deifies men as political rulers but is not opposed to women's empowerment. The line of argument, though at its peripheral stage, presents the agenda that debunks the unquestionable ability of women. To the feminists, the source, intention and character of this perspective sound dubious and look spurious but to the adherents of the school, it does not. One reason for this is that, at least, the existence of the argument has widened the dialogic space which is an essential ingredient to make democracy survive. While the feminist thesis is a reaction to a hegemonic system, the neo-patriarchy argument reinforces the traditional paternalistic hegemony via its assertion that the traditional neoliberal epistemic structures do not realistically encourage women's participation.

Active and Passive Neo-patriarchs and Premises of their Arguments

Two neo-patriarch variants are identified – passive and active. The passive argument encourages women's empowerment but supports the continued men's incumbency owing to women's lack of capacity (physiological, psychological, financial, etc). They are hardly seen participating in politics while access to the political media is limited (Ajala, 2014, 65-70, Aririguzoh, 2014,33; Omojola, 2014, 22). The active neo-patriarchy argues in favor of women's visibility in politics, but advocates that all energy should be channeled to either enthroning or perpetuating men in power. The following points encapsulate the position of the active and passive neo-patriarchy thesis.

- Feminism has not worked as it is being portrayed. A young law graduate opines in an article titled *Feminine Mistake* that it has effectively robbed women of their happiness which hinges on the existence of men. (Charen, 1984, p.24.). Its support of the right of women to abortion is the cause of the deaths of countless number of unborn children (Hooper, 1990, p. 17A).
- Only men truly have the resources to call the political tunes
- Men control the prevalent epistemic and cultural structures that support the dialogic process in the public space. They therefore determine the boundaries for

conversations within the subsisting communicative frameworks of the environment.

- A reason why men are more suited to rule is demonstrated in the American political democracy which has *never* produced a female president in over two hundred years of democracy. Keen observers have opined that Hilary Clinton, the most promising of all the women hoping to become the first female President of the United States may not succeed because the American society is not conducive yet for female presidency.
- Even the United Kingdom, another country with long democratic tradition, has only produced one woman as prime minister in her 300 years of democracy.
- A great deal of roguery is associated with politics which has claimed several lives. Most of the lives lost are men. Therefore, seeking equality in the political space may have similar consequences for women.
- Even women prefer to vote for men than for women! This is aptly demonstrated during the 2011 primaries of the Peoples Democratic Party of Nigeria where women formed nearly one-fourth of the nearly 20,000 delegates. The only woman (Sarah Jubril) present during that delegates' conference, in spite of her lofty manifestoes, scored only one vote!

Evaluation of Neo-paternalism: Evidence in Dialogue

Evidence to show that the proponents of neo-patriarchy are committed to their argument is needed in order to justify its relevance. Feminism single-mindedly opposes patriarchy, but neo-patriarchy has two postures - *dispute* to the feminism and *negotiation* with patriarchy. Negotiation is interest-driven to enable the contributor gain the deal that serves his or her interest most, while dispute can be reworded as opposition.

A dialogue is characterized by the existence of two sides but other proof to justify its relevance is needed. The rules of engagement constitute a vital evidence to prove the sincerity of an argument. The feminists' dialogic tactics in engaging patriarchy are clear and the style of discourse is in accordance with its goals that they are trying to achieve. The rules and procedures that characterize feminism are visible because of the organizational and institutional backings it has recorded over the years. The neo-patriarchy's argument does not portend these privileges yet, owing to the freshness of their proposition and probably as a result of their tent-pitching with patriarchy.

Neo-paternalists' Goals and Commitments

The goals of the neo-patriarchy are not easily discernible. A good number of the feminists and patriarchy's arguments have been transposed into policies and laws, a privilege the neo-patriarchy does not enjoy. Nevertheless, patriarchy enhances democratic vitality through the enlargement of the dialogic space which is vital to democracy.

The passive neo-patriarchy's argument concedes the ship of state to men and explores other means of livelihood outside politics. The active patriarchs also concede but maintain a visible presence. This signals differences in the goals and commitments of the two categories. For neo-patriarchal passivism, politics is not the only way of contributing to the development. Arguing this way follows a procedural rule of dialogue which identifies the similarities and differences in dialogic positions and reaches an understanding that can elicit the resolution. The procedural rules of dialogue typically define the locution types and the extent of proponent's arguments in the face of those of opposition and vice versa. It also determines the level of commitment and the extent to which the goal of argument can be reached.

Unlike the neo-patriarchic passivism, the active agenda is advanced by

dialogists who are close to incumbencies. Patience, the wife of former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan extolled the virtues of her husband and asserted that he had the ace of solving Nigerian problems and it was better if the ship of state remained in his hands for another term of four years. Four years earlier, when the husband was freshly contesting in the primaries, Mrs. Jonathan had no single word of encouragement for the only woman – Mrs Sarah Jubril - who contested in the election and lost on only one vote! This was in spite of the Mrs Jonathan's claim that women should be empowered.

The argument for incumbency's impeccability and not giving attention to women is not limited to Nigeria. In spite of her purported support for women's development, the wife of President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Grace, demonstrated her neo-patriarchic attitude by fiercely criticizing the Vice President Mrs Joyce Mujuru who was eventually sacked. Mrs Mugabe ended up becoming the head of women's league in Mugabe's party and a member of the party's politburo (Mambo and Gagare, 2014). Grace had maintained her support for the incumbency and claimed she was not interested in becoming the country's leader (Shabalala, 2015).

Neo-paternalism and the *Argumentum ad Hominem*

Critics have established a prima facie case of circumstantial *ad hominem* (Walton, 2000, p. 101) in the case of neo-patriarchy as the premise of its argument is overtly at variance with the personal conduct of dialogists. The fallacy reaches an abusive level (Johnson, 2009, p. 253) as the dialogists' character is taken as an index of their personal conduct. "One cannot argue against an opponent's reasoning or facts so he is attacked personally" (Nottebart Jr., 1982, p. 180); which is tantamount to character assassination-the claim that the attackee's character is somehow inconsistent with his assertions and hence renders them suspect (Johnstone, Jr., 1987. p. 70). But according to Hinman (1982, p. 339),

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ad hominem criticism should not be easily discountenanced because if the veracity of an argument can not be determined owing to inadequate evidence, transposition to character in search for information becomes inevitable.

Conclusion

The patriarchy system has been around for ages. Its impact has eased but is still universal. On the other hand, feminists are gaining prominence by the day. The neo-patriarchs hardly enjoy the institutional perks that have kept the feminism and the patriarchy sustained overtime, but they can not be dismissed as a loser in the dialogic space. Their argument is infantile, with a growth possibility.

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