

THE DUAL NATURE OF THE FEMALE GENDER: A MODERN REFLECTION

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ABSTRACT: *The female sex has over time been regarded to be 'like a weaker vessel.' But without serious disputation to this biblical injunction, I am bothered about the clarity of the intention of the bible and the misinterpretation of its adherent, for I tend to believe that this assertion does not really capture the intrinsic nature of the women folks, in terms of their strength and versatility and what they can offer the society. This of course we will agree has a serious psychological effect from time immemorial on their disposition to the men folks. Dualistic as used in this paper focuses on the two sides of the woman, manifesting within the private space and that of the public space. The women over the years have been struggling with the challenges of being able to handle their private responsibilities and that of public space responsibilities. This paper, therefore, x-rays, the marriage of convenience between these dual responsibilities and tries to prove that it is achievable.*

KEYWORDS: Public Space, Private Space, Weaker Vessel, Responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

Centuries ago, Africans had the belief that women education is unnecessary; for it does not contribute to the good of the society. They believed all that the female child will, and would learn, would end up in the kitchen. In recent times, this belief is now unfashionable (although we cannot say that there are still no persons with this belief). Females who have been privileged to go to schools and do what it is believed to be for only the male child have risen to their feet to say "yes we can". The Western Feminist ideology is quite different from the one we have in Africa. The Western Feminist advocates for total equity without boundary, while that of Africa advocates for freedom with boundaries in their consciousness. Also, African Feminists have their cultural orientation in mind when they talk about feminist ideology.

The challenge overtime has been how the women will be able to manage and care for their homes, which is cultural binding in this part of the world. Also, harnessing their full potentials becomes an issue to be addressed. Most time the divorce syndrome becomes the final solution order for her to go forward in her pursuits in life. This forms the drive for this research. The thrust of this paper therefore, is to establish a re-orientation that both the public duties and private duties can simultaneously be managed by the woman. In doing this, we will be looking at both public and private duties of women, the origin of the private duty allocation, the feminist school of thought, the possibility of women leadership agenda and many more to drive home our arguments to a logical point.

Public Spheres and Duties

The existence of public spheres connotes that a private counterpart exists. We shall look into the notion of private spheres, side by side public spheres. Meanwhile, there is a need to first consider the meaning of dualism as it relate to this research. The adoption of dualistic nature in this work is to drive out a point that, from the conception of the human person as both physical (body) and spiritual (soul), the human person possess a dynamic and non-static nature. Man is a composite of two distinct substances, which are material and immaterial. In the view of Bewaji, “the duality of human existence personal selves and as public selves, both of which are interdependent, mutually related in the development of self, social consciousness and knowledge.”¹This conception of the human person as dualistic, using the Western argument to form the basis for complexity of the human person, in which women is not an excluded.

Private space is the world of enclosed and defined responsibility. It is in service to one’s family member, preferably the immediate family. It is simply the (living space) where family living takes place, between father, mother and children. Private space duties therefore entail care for the home, which is often regarded as women’s exclusivity. Public space on the hand, as used in this paper, refers to the world of endless human relationship. It has to do with where our involvement and duties which are meant to serve large number of people outside our immediate home. They include office place, (both private and government) business, leadership involvement, either community or political service. It is often regard as men’s world. One major characteristic of the two spheres is that “while public space functions for and on behalf of the community, the private space functions for and on behalf of the individual.”²

Private responsibilities are conceived by some tradition as the duties of the woman while the public responsibility is characterised to be that of men. Infact,there are peoples and ethnic groups in Nigeria, which do not believe in women having careers(that is, public duties)for their selves. Hence, the moment a woman begin to get herself involved in public duties, she will be regarded as neglecting her duties. This dire desire for women involvement and development in public duties forms the origin of her problem in marriage.

The problem as pointed above is linked with public duties and private duties. The public sphere exposes the woman to so many things, negative orientation that are anti-marriage flies all over in the public sphere. Public space are at times characterised by crowd, especially in an open stall outlet. People tend to naturally conform to the structure and life offered by the public space they belong to, which indirectly tells on the duties to their private space. In the view of Lawuyi “Spaces, organises and structures human relations in ways specific to its features.”³The nature of the public space we find ourselves determines our relation to it. It tells a lot about our character and behaviour. Cities such as Lagos, Abuja, and Onitsha have different identities that makes them unique. While office duties preoccupied public space in Abuja for instance, business preoccupied that of Onitsha while Lagos combined the two together. All of these interactions forms a lifestyle for any one exposed to it. This affirms the reason why the public space duties is unhealthy for any woman as argued by some advocate of a ‘Full house wife.’

Also, people strive daily to maintain a hundred percent commitment to their public duties in order to keep their bodies and souls together. No one wants to neglect the place of his income generation which makes it difficult for a woman to keep her undivided attention both for the home as a private duty and the office as a public duty. The public space is a world of vast and expressive culture, different exposure. Our day to day involvement with people leaves us with a new impression about people and the world we live in. The knowledge acquired from this

relationship oftentimes comes to play in carrying out private responsibilities, which often contribute either positively or negatively. The more reason why the woman is forced to stay indoors in order to offer proper moral training for the children.

Male domination does not find expression in private sphere only, it extends to public space. Men purposely take on the leadership of the both space. The man as the 'head' of the household, controls and direct the woman, subject her to subordination and sometimes deny her in the area of employment and politics. Some act at the extreme by turning the woman to an administrative wife and subject that she should only talk to the husband who is the lord anytime there is a need at home. The public space is quite different from what is obtainable in terms of domination from private space. Here, women are allowed to be employed and participate in other public duties. They earn a job but are restricted to some certain duties. They are indirectly positioned in such a way that their rising to power becomes limited and determined. Though, this is quite better than private space domination, but there is a need for attitudinal amendment on this.

Having made the dichotomy between private space duties and its features and that of the public space counterpart, there is a need to focus on the main agenda of this paper. The desire for women to move from just a private space worker to public space; the desire to combine the two together and be successful in them forms the problem to be addressed. The public space duties in this discourse are topmost political and managerial duties, that often characterised by high trained minds, not just the petty jobs around. Is it possible for a woman to be a successful homemaker and at the same time successful professional and celebrity? How do senior staffs in the Ministry who are women, female professors who combine teaching, research with administrative duties, female political appointees manage their homes? More critically female religious leaders?. Is the home and private duties the sole responsibility of the woman?

The argument over time has been that, the combination of these duties often results in either lack of care for the children, lack of attention for the husband, which eventually results to divorce. Does the fact that the bible refers to them as weaker vessel makes them an indoor personality that need not be exposed to the difficult test outside? Who places the position of the home maker and second staff in the family on the woman that makes them the sole owner of private duties? Should the woman kill her potential for the development of the home?

Origin of the Problem and the Feminist Response

We cannot neglect the place of religion and culture as the source of male dominance on women. Both Christianity and Islam place men on the affairs of life. In the Christian faith, the woman was conceived as the originator of sin, as a result of affinity with the serpent. Consequently, God made a verdict that place both men and women in the condition we are today. Without much recourse to the verdict on men, that of the women seems to be of much concern here. The judgement passed on the woman is clearly regarded as the reason for her subjection to her husband until date. This can be seen in Genesis 3:16, "to the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband and He shall rule over you.'"⁴ This argument/verdict has always been the standpoint of the religionist for regarding the woman as the second-in-command to the husband. The question we should ask the church leaders is that: if God says the woman's desire is to her husband, Is He saying it is not to other men in the society? Therefore, the woman is only subjected to her husband and not to every man she encounters in the office, market, churches and the likes. Otherwise, this will imply that she can compete with other men on any platform. This nevertheless does not rule out the place respect for one another. Also, does the

verdict of Yahweh on the woman rule out her chance of expressing her potentials by going beyond being a mother to someone that provides leadership? This should be a capital NO. Also, in Islam women are not allowed to lead prayers, Islamic fanatics go to the extent of making their wives cover all their body and by so doing they find themselves at home all day having no work to do, except the private space duties.

Many women see the summary it contains of their relationship with their spouses as an accurate description of their status through the ages, that is: women produce children, women are mothers and wives, women do the cooking, cleaning, sewing and washing, they take care of men and are subordinate to men's authority and are highly from high status occupations and from power.⁵ It is the product of this religion orientation that had made women defined their existence within the microscopic view of the men. Which means religion is used to reinforce men's dominance.

The black race is perhaps, the number one race that encourages women subjugation. In the western, women are granted open field to play with their male counterpart. Lawhead argues that "Plato in his republic and John Stuart Mill in the subjection often women both argued that women of superior intellect and abilities should take their place with their male peers in providing intellectual and political leadership."⁶The position of Plato and Mills stand better chance in support of this paper than of Aristotle who opined that only "male adult (free male adult) is free to rule in the society. According to him, they are the only ones invested by nature with rational capacity."⁷

Traditionally, the phenomenon of dowry might be the reason why some culture paints women as 'mere private assets' to men . They often see them as subjects; that they should not overrule their dictates, even if it is obnoxious. Can the dowry which is considered the legal tender for claiming the 'ownership' of a woman be equivalent to how much has been vested in her upbringing? This affirms the reason why most bride's family return the money given out as dowry back to the groom's family. This is to show that a wedding ceremony is not a market square where buying and selling of wives takes place.

When the argument for the masculine nature of the man and its characteristics forms the reason for their female domination, the feminist avers that the nature of masculine and feminine which is the characteristic of gender is just a societal formulation. Sex is a biological category of human. They are biologically imposed by nature while gender is both socially and psychologically imposed by humans. "Gender is a term that has psychological and cultural connotations. If the proper terms for sex are 'male' and 'female', the corresponding terms for gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine', these latter might be quite independent of biological sex."⁸ The sex is the obvious differences between the man and a woman. It is inarguably clear that the physical feature of the woman is different from that of a man: but the gender syndrome should be avoided since it is socially created. It is in this social differences that makes woman solely attached to the care of the home alone and categorised man for the care of the public. On the contrary, both male and female; husband and wife can occupy the two spaces without negative effect on their home.

There is also another argument that psychologically makes women the manager of the home. The idea that women possesses qualities that are quite needed for the care of the home. These qualities affects their approach to moral judgement, which are needed for home building. Men either do not possess these qualities or do not put them to play in moral judgement. Qualities such as care, compassion, trust, mercy, forgiveness, preventing harm, and feelings are

attributed to the female. Men possess judicial model like right, impartiality, objectivity, and logic, rather than applying feeling to situation, they adopt logic. The feminine features are often regarded as irrelevant when it comes to public space responsibilities, especially at higher positions. But on the contrary, it is a strength needed for political will power, which shall be pointed out in this paper.

The Notion of Shared Activities

The notion of shared activities connotes that responsibilities that belong to the private space - and characterised as essentially feminine-can be shared between the husband and the wife. This will enable the duo to be involved in public space duties at the same time. The questions we may ask ourselves are: what dictates who takes the position of the head of a home?. Is it the income or educational training of the man that made him the head? The woman can also possess the characteristics and training and earn same income or even more than her husband earns. It should not be a burden. It has enormous advantages. It will enable her contribute to the finance of the home. This does not automatically confer the leadership of the home on her, for this is not the position of this paper and the argument this paper purport to maintain.

When men are left with the right to work alone, it affects the income and the living condition of the family. We cannot rule out the place of finance in children upbringing. They are needed in providing educational and social needs for the children. When both parents get involved in public sphere duties, either in terms of employment or politics, the family income rate will be upturn. In Schaefer's analysis on family income, he asked and submits that:

Why has there been such a rise in the number of such dual income couples? A major factor is economic needs. In 2004, the median income for households with both partners employed was 91% more than in households in which only one person was working outside the home⁹

We must point out that the children's upbringing that makes women want to submit only to private duties cannot be achieved without adequate finance, most especially, in this dwindling world economy. The economic situation in the world does not give room for a man to over work himself by working round the clock. Homemaker' Any woman that possesses the right skills and training for a job should be allowed to pick it up and grow in it without any limitation. Then, we can talking of viable economic condition.

In addition to the above argument, the centrality of gender equality, women's empowerment and the realization of women's rights in achieving sustainable development has been increasingly recognized in recent decades. This recognition is evident in a number of international norms and agreements, including principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted in 1992, in its statement regarding the full participation of women being essential to achieving sustainable development. In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by Member States in 1995, governments were called upon to integrate gender concerns and perspectives into policies and programmes for sustainable development.¹⁰

The traditional model that affirms the husband as the 'Breadwinner' and the wife a 'Homemaker' should be rehabilitated within the African feminist ideology, in other for better application. The husband and the wife can both serve as the 'Breadwinner' and the 'Homemaker' simultaneously. It is possible for the husband to prepare breakfast for the

children, if the wife has a flight to catch up with in the early hours of the day, especially when she is a political appointee or a senior director in the ministry. It has nothing to subtract from the identity of the husband as the head of the home. Moreover, when the kids are of age, they do not need their parents to do some basic things like cooking for them again. Which makes it easier at that stage. Cooking, caring for the home, involvement in political leadership can all be a shared activity between the husband and the wife. "Among the Australian Aborigines of Tasmania, women were responsible for seal hunting, fishing and catching Opossum (tree-dwelling mammals)." ¹¹ Political position at any level can be shared by both male and female. The cases of Hilary Clinton in America, Helen Sirleaf Johnson in Liberia, Dora Akunyili, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, to mention but a few are great examples. They shared the public space duties with their male counterpart. This does not rule out the place of male sharing the space of private duties with the female counterpart too.

In the modern day jobs, we have men that work as chefs, fashion designer, hairdresser and some other jobs characterized to be feminine centuries ago. Invariably, the idea of men working as professional baby-sitter may soon be evoke. Where is the place of our cultural tradition that kicks against female utmost involvement in public duties when men began to take over public duties such as house cleaners? Modern economy is be said to be the main cause of this social change. Women therefore should be given the ground for utmost expression of any position they desire without fear of losing their homes.

The traditional belief that men have better features(masculine) for some certain jobs was rejected by Bell Hooks, when she cried thus; "look at my arm... I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head me. Aren't I a woman?. I could work as much as any man (when I could get it) and bear the lash as well and aren't I a woman." ¹²

Partnership is both the function of the father and the mother and not that of mother alone. Parental care is necessary in children's upbringing, in terms of education and moral training. Both parents might need to reduce their schedules and involvement in the office, public duties especially in politics when their kids are still young. When proper educational background and moral training are given to kids at a tender age, both parent can pursue any public responsibilities at will without any fear of how the home will look like. We cannot because of private duties rule out the place of women in higher position of governance. The society comprises of both male and female, with different features and natures. Hence, the need for the corridor of power and top technocratic positions to be occupied by both gender. "Women had also exhibited appreciable managerial and organisational skills in their roles as mother, homemaker, character builder, moulders and sustainers of humanity. Their supportive roles through engagement in pottery, weaving, spinning and other socio-economic activities were indispensable to the existence of their family and societies by extension." ¹³ In addition to that, the nature of honesty, trust emotion demonstrated by women are needed in governance, especially when they are meant to be adviser and vice to a hard, dictatorial inclined leaders.

In Nigerian, for instance; government offers opportunity for women in political participation. A good example is the administration of former president Goodluck Jonathan. Nevertheless, the distribution and participation of women in governance is without sentiment and gender biases. Professor Dora Akunyili meritoriously served as NAFDAC Director General, and Minister of Information and Communication. In spite of her unique contribution to the development of Nigeria, she lost in the election for a senatorial seat in her state. ¹⁴

In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls maintained that benefits and burdens of the state be shared equally to every member of the state. According to him, any just society/State must be such that has the principles of justice as its underlying principle. He highlighted two basic principles of justice that must be adopted.

The first principle states that each person is to have maximum basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. (Basic liberties include such things as the freedom of speech, the right to vote, and freedom from arbitrary arrest) The second principle is that social and economic inequalities be arranged in a way likely to work to everyone's advantage and that there be equality of opportunity to attain social and economic positions.¹⁵

In the view of Rawls, such social opportunities include attainment of any position in government, such as government institutions and agencies. It also includes opportunity to political power. This theory does not emphasize man's opportunity alone, but rather opportunity for all members of the State including male and female. It is until when this equality, opportunity, is given to all citizens that the State can be said to be a just State. Therefore, "if we are to have a viable political community in Nigeria, social equality, especially its principle of opportunity, should be taken more seriously."¹⁶

To push Rawls' argument further, the structure and the institution of the State should not be as Valerie Bryson maintained that it is, when she pointed out another method men used in creating their dominance. To her:

the structure and institutions of the state and the laws have been made by men and protects their interest, the under representation of women is no unfortunate and easily remedied and patriarchal nature cannot be overcome simply getting more women into political office, for political comes are structured by society-wide power relation, of by individual decision maker¹⁷

Meanwhile, it should be pointed out that whenever women seeks to attain any economic or political power, her motive should not be a 'feminist overthrow' that is 'it is our turn to rule syndrome' but rather should the right and privileges that qualifies men also qualifies female to rule.

The Divorce Syndrome and Way Forward

Human both male and female are naturally egoistic. The desire of every human to pursue his or her desire without hindrance necessitates my conviction in the above statement by Thomas Hobbes. Movie stars, musical artist, political animals desire to pursue their career to the utmost level, without gender bias and difference. If the suggestion on managing the home by both parties involved in marriage is not adhered to, it will leave the society with no option than seeing the rate of divorce increasing. Single parent households, lesbian couples will become the substitute for men's subjugation from attaining their potentials.

Religion organisation, society and traditional faithful should do more in re-orientating the people on the danger of divorce. In addition, to clarify the obnoxious notion that a woman can only attain the highest position of her endeavour only if she is out of marriage, by avoiding the burdened demand of private duties, hence this paper aims at addressing.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been able to argue for the possibility of the marriage of comfort between the private duties and public duties of a woman. It pointed out the reasons and argument for the subjugation of the female by their male counterpart, as socio-psychological originated and not natural as falsely conceived.

The paper also argued that if the private responsibility is shared by the husband and the wife in the home, it will enable them to manage their public duties well without any overlap and pressure on any of them. This therefore, will help eradicate the notion of divorce as an option to attain the peak of one's career, as a woman.

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