

EXPLORING PLATO'S IDEA OF WOMEN IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

Gregory Ebalu OGBENIKA, Ph.D.

*Department of Philosophy, Seminary of All Saints,
Uhiele – Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.
oshokwe67@gmail.com*

Abstract:

The 21st century has been bombarded with different types of ideologies, from relativism to secularism and one of the most pressing of them today is the wave of feminism, although feminist ideology is not alien to humanity, or to the Nigerian society particularly through neo-colonialism and the advancement of social media, while Africans are intertwined with their cultural practices and traditions, which assigns to every individual their roles in the society, feminism tends to reshape their pattern of thought and history specifically in a male-dominated world, from politics to business and even religion. Hence, Plato postulates his idea of women from the background of an Athenian civilization which relegates the significance of women in the polis, as an Athenian, he argues alongside the trend of the city, by showing the difference in the nature, role and proficiency of women in the development of the society on the one hand, while on the other hand, he argues against the waves of trend on gender by endorsing a complementary society between men and women. Therefore, this paper seeks to promote the role of women in the Nigerian society, in the limelight of Plato's advocacy for gender equality and women rights, it seeks to maintain that women have a role in the

growth and development of the nation and these roles must be nurtured and not subjugated, and these tasks go hand in hand with their role in the formation of the family, aimed towards creating a peaceful family and an ordered society.

Keywords: Plato, Feminism, Women, Nigerian Society, Genital Mutilation.

Introduction

The ability of a nation to harness every facet of human resource at its disposal is an index to its growth and development, it is clear that Women in most part of the world today enjoy the freedom and rights that many dreamed of particularly in the political representation and exercise of universal adult suffrage. This is because in the past, women were relegated to the background in political representation in the world, and the outcry of some feminists, has contributed to some of the preferential treatments women enjoy today. But, there are areas where we still experience women marginalization, particularly in Africa where our culture is predicated on the premise of patriarchy and other patrilineal ideologies which has also become the bane for women's representation.

This paper, therefore, seeks to examine Plato's view of women and how women can be empowered in Nigeria, it also condemns discriminatory practices on the female gender as experienced in some tribes in Nigeria, which tend to hamper the physiological and social status of women and in the long run cripples development. It seeks to proffer a philosophy of complementarity in governance, economic and social sphere between both sexes, particularly in areas where women are neglected. It, however, warns against gender wars and struggles that seek superiority of one gender over another.

The methodological framework of this paper begins by exposing Plato's views on the origin of the sexes which gives a background of his appraisal for women as equal with men. It also questions and explicates Plato as being a Feminists due to his

contrasting views about them, after which the paper proceeds to aligns its view of women and its relevance to the Nigerian society particularly in the areas where women are marginalized and treated inhumanely. The key point of this paper is the philosophy of complementarity, which emphasizes the harmonizing role between men and women in the development of the society.

Plato's Origin of Sexes

The origin of mankind has created a perpetual divide among scholars and philosophers, while Evolution ascribes the origin of man to Apes, Christianity on the other hand, attributes the origin of mankind, from the creative power of God, who made them Male and Female. Meanwhile, Plato in his account of the origin of humanity presents a mythic account, he opines that male and female were like hermaphrodites with both sexes before the gods (Zeus) split each person in half way. There are two basic reasons why the gods cause this separation. The first reason is to moderate or restraint the excess in these hermaphrodites (the first humans) that sometimes run contrary to the will of the gods. The second, however, is to make these hermaphrodites procreate as male and female. This is clearly expressed in the symposium:

...they were dying out when in pity for them Zeus devised a new plan: he turned their genitals around to the front, for this had not always been their position, and they sowed their seed no longer, as hitherto, like grasshoppers in the ground, but inside one another; and he effected this transposition, and caused male to generate in the female, in order that their mutual embraces might be procreative, in this case of man joining woman, and that thus the race be continued,...so ancient is the desire for one another that is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, trying to make one of two and healing the state of man. Each of us, sliced in two like a flat fish, is but half of a human form

one, two. And each is looking for his other half.¹

Plato, therefore, believes that male and females are from the same source. This, therefore, gives a background to Plato's view of women and stretches to the point of the advocacy for equal treatment of both sexes against any form of discrimination and marginalization.

The Concept of Feminism

One of the most talked about issues in the world today is feminism which is rooted in the belief that women are subjugated, oppressed and marginalized in the society. George Ukagba expresses that feminism is both a theoretical concept and a practical movement or view of life, as a movement feminism has a history,² which can be traced to France, while as a theoretical concept popular Nigerian Novelist and feminist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, sees feminism as a belief in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes.³ In the same vein, the new International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary, defines Feminism as a doctrine which supports and encourages the equality of gender (male and female) and advocates equal social, political, religious and economical right of women.⁴

Meanwhile, feminism on one hand aims specifically at addressing issues of gender inequality. Gender inequality centers on the idea that men and women are not equal. This distinction stems from socially constructed beliefs that permeate through cultural and religious lines. On the other hand, feminism champions gender equality of which Dickson Ekpe, refers to as a situation where women and men having equal conditions for realizing their full rights and potentials, are able to contribute equally to national, political,

¹Plato, Symposium, in Benjamin Jowett (transl.) *Selected Dialogues of Plato*. New York: Modern Library Paperback Publication, 2001, 191c.d.

²George Ukagba, "Feminism in Historicism: A Critical Perspective", in George Ukagba et al. (eds.), *The Kpim of Feminism: Issues and Women in a Changing World*. Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2010, 29.

³Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We should all Be Feminists*, New York: Anchor Books, 2012, 47.

⁴*The New International Webster's comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*, Chicago: Deluxe, Encyclopedic Edition, 1971, 456.

economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results.⁵ Further, William Lawhead, exposes two categories of feminism, namely the liberal feminists and radical feminists, the former do not advocate for the elimination of the current social structures, but aims at full intellectual and political participation of women in the society, while the latter seek an abolition of the current social structure which they perceive is controlled by men.⁶

However, the categorization of feminist does not only involves the female gender, rather male individuals have indicated to be feminist, because feminism as is an embracing concept of both sexes, aims at removing the excesses of one gender over another.

Is a Plato Feminist?

Plato creates a divide in his thought on women, which generates a dispute whether he is a feminist or not, taking into cognizance his dicey views about women, whereas, same cannot be said about Aristotle, who considers women to be both biologically and intellectually inferior to men. For instance, in *the Republic*, Plato asserts “that a woman is inferior to a man.”⁷ He further stated that women can be involved in music, poetry, training and even war, but the lighter part must be assigned to them because of the weakness of their sex.⁸ Also, Plato agreed that a woman by nature is very different from a man, as a result he agreed that different work should be assigned to a man and a woman each in accordance with its nature.⁹ Plato's suggestion that a good and a brave man should have more marriages available to him and should be selected for such things more frequently than the others and that he will beget as many

⁵Dickson Ekpe, et al, “Women, Gender Equality in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis of Socio-Economic and Political Gender Issues”, in *Journal of Research in Peace, Gender and Development (JRPGD)*, 2014, Vol. 4 (1), 16.

⁶William F. Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery*. Belmont: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2002, 564.

⁷Plato, “*The Republic*”, Book V, B. Jowett (trans.), in *The Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 1, New York: Macmillan Publication, 1937, 451e

⁸Plato, “*Republic*”, 452a

⁹Plato, “*Republic*”, 453b

children as possible,¹⁰ depicts his inconsistency in his view on women.

Another major reason why the above question is imminent is his seemingly contradictory view on the origin of women. According to him,

All male-born humans who lived lives of cowardice and injustice were reborn in the second generation as women. And this explains why at that time the gods fashioned the desire for sexual union by constructing one ensouled living thing in us as well as another one in women.¹¹

But in the *Symposium*, Plato claimed that the male and female are from the same origin and that they are equal half searching for the other.¹² Placing his earlier statement on the origin of women side-by-side with the latter brings to bare the inconsistency in his view about women. For Aristotle in his *Politics*, “The relation of male to female is by nature a relation of superior to inferior and ruler to ruled”.¹³ In contrast to this Aristotelian view, Plato in the *Republic*, Book V, has strong feminist views about women as evident from his educational theory where he advocated equality between men and women suggesting that women should be educated for their roles in the society.¹⁴

Meanwhile, this marginalization of the female gender can be beautifully traced to the Golden Age of Philosophy. The Athenian society was premised on male superiority, of which Plato made attempts to swim against the currents, As Elon VanHeerst notes, “Torn by tradition that told him women were not people by the same

¹⁰Plato, “Republic”, 468c

¹¹Plato, “Timaeus”, Book V, B. Jowett (trans.), in *The Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 1, New York: Macmillan Publication, 1937, 90e

¹²Cf. Plato, “Symposium”, Book V, B. Jowett (trans.), in *The Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 1, New York: Macmillan Publication, 1937, 190-192

¹³Aristotle, *The Politics*. Translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998, P. 1245,b12

¹⁴Plato, “Republic”, Book V, B. Jowett (trans.), in *The Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 1, New York: Macmillan Publication, 1937, 451e.

standards as men, and logic and reason that told him otherwise, Plato spoke for those who, at the time, had a very quiet voice".¹⁵ Plato juxtaposes the masculine superiority, and creates an avenue for complementarity in the affairs of the states between the sexes.

Although, Plato's position on women and his feminist philosophy is not very lucid, he argues as an Athenian, influenced by the activities of the *polis* and neglects the role of women in the open society, while also, as a philosopher, in tackling the issues prevalent in the city as regarding women and their representation gives them a bit of voice, he tends to argue in the position where other philosophers argued against, which gives him credit for his philosophical instinct. However, a clear understanding of Plato's Philosophy as evident in his *Republic* Book V, will be of great importance in ascertaining whether Plato was a feminist or not. Plato's inquiry of the nature of women is buttressed in his conversation with Glaucon; the beginning of the conversation is on what women can do. In the *Republic*, although, he is of the opinion that women are weaker physically, however, they should be given the same education as the men, since they are capable of doing the same thing as the men.¹⁶

In response to the above question that women are generally weaker in comparison with men. Plato responded to the view of Glaucon about the inferiority of women when he opined:

You are quite right, Glaucon in maintaining the general inferiority of the female sex: although many women are in many things superior to men, yet on the whole what you say is true. And if so, my friend, I said, there is no special faculty of administration in a state which a woman has because she is a woman, or which a man has by virtue of his sex, but the gifts of nature are diffused in both; all the

¹⁵Elon VanHeerst (1999), 'Feminism and Plato', <http://facstaff.elon.edu/sullivan/femplato.htm> Accessed on March, 3rd, 2019

¹⁶Plato, *Republic* (Book V), B. Jowett (trans.), in *the Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 1, 451d&e

pursuits of male are the pursuits of women also, but in all of them a woman is inferior to a man.¹⁷

This inferiority of female mentioned by Plato above is only about their physical weakness. However, this does not mean that Plato was not fully aware of the inequality that exists between men and women of his age. In fact, Plato saw this inequality as a violation of nature when he asserts.

The law which we then enacted was agreeable to nature, and therefore not impossibility or mere aspiration; and the contrary practice, which prevails present, is in reality a violation of nature.¹⁸

He also opines that women can be involved in music, poetry, physical training and even war but the lighter part must be assigned to them because of the weakness of their sex. One aspect of his view on the physical training that looks awkward was his recommendation that women should be stripped before involvement. This further shows the influence of his society on him although; he desires that both men and women should go through the same process of growth

Therefore, Alison Mary Jaggar, appraised the above position of Plato by noting that even though Plato seem sometimes inconsistencies in his representation of women; his views are ahead of his age. Also, Plato seems to be saying that the ultimate goal for any person is manliness, but it is possible for a soul in a female body to achieve it through a philosophy that is brought about by education.¹⁹ Also, looking at the appellation given to Plato by most of the feminist in contrast to Aristotle whom the writers view as an anti-feminist and a critical examination of the ontological status of Plato wanting to speak for women, one cannot just but conclude that Plato

¹⁷*Ibid*, 455d & e.

¹⁸*Ibid*, 456c.

¹⁹Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Lanham: Rowman & Allanheld Publishers, 1983, 5.

does not just have feminist tendencies but above all, feminism is found in Plato's Philosophy. In a nutshell, what is significant in Plato as against other Athenian thinkers is his advocacy for the equality of sexes in the affairs of the society, which is also encouraged in our world today. Hence, in the next section, this paper shall examine its relevance to the Nigerian society, and how women can help curb out backwardness in development if given the same opportunity and treated the same way as their male counterpart.

Plato's Views and the Nigerian Society

It is glaring that in Nigeria today, women are treated as second class citizens, they do not equal their male counterparts in the area of social and economic activities and most of all in politics. These various areas of women under-representation are detrimental to the growth of the nation. Meanwhile, what appears to be more striking are the barbaric and inhumane discrimination of women. Olu Awofeso, notes that many have unveiled the travail of the female gender humiliation, manipulation, and marginalization through a number of culturally biased norms and gender practices which have culminated into systematic institutionalization of male superiority over the female.²⁰ Consequently, this paper elaborates on the effect of Plato's philosophy on Women and how it can be beneficial in promoting the dignity of the women in Nigeria and placing them on the same pedestal with their male counterparts.

Women Empowerment and Education:

Women Empowerment is one of the most talked about issues in our contemporary era, particularly in Africa and Nigeria alike. This stems from the important and significant role empowered women have been able to contribute to the society. In Nigeria for example, women such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and her exploits as the first female finance minister of Nigeria and coordinating minister reaffirms the abilities

²⁰Olu Awofeso, et al, "Gender and Political Participation in Nigeria: A Cultural Perspective", in *Journal Research in Peace, Gender and Development (JRP GD)*. Vol 4, September, 2014, 105.

of women. Iweala went on to become the managing director of the World Bank (2007-2011) and she was also named an independent non-executive director at the Standard Chartered Plc in the United Kingdom. Dora Nkem Akunyili, who redefined the face of NAFDAC, (National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control), Prof Grace Alele Willims Mariam Ciroma, Obiageli Ezekwesili, and et cetera, have shown that women can be at the fore front of all round nation building, transformation and growth.

Many Nigerians believe that educating the Girl-Child is a waste of resources, when they will be married and their expertise not put into use, or they will become over less concerned about marriage. Adichie, wrote in *We Should All Be Feminists* that:

We say to girls, you can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful. Otherwise, you would threaten the man. Because I am female, I am expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Now marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don't teach boys the same? We raise girls to see each other as competitors not for jobs or accomplishments, which I think can be a good thing, but for the attention of men.²¹

One of the Rights to Life is the Right to Education, it is also one of the fundamental human rights of every individual, but experience has shown that some people have been infringed of this Right, therefore, they lack not just educational qualification, but also the ability to compete with their peers in major facets of mankind. This subjugation is mostly, tended towards the female gender, which has given rise to the “Education for the Girl-Child” advocacy.

Meanwhile, the whole idea of women empowerment stems

²¹Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We should all Be Feminists*, 18.

from the Education of the Girl-Child. It is appalling that in the 21st Century, there are still arguments of the Right of the Girl-Child to Education, which was an argument prevalent in the Greek City State, which Plato advocates for in his Educational Theory. Buttressing this further, Anne Dickson notes that Plato showed the fact that both men and women have the same essential nature and worth; thus, they should receive equal education.²² Education is paramount to development and growth of any sort, the educational theory of Plato is very relevant to Nigeria since it was emphasized by Plato that all citizens, irrespective of their sexes, be educated.

While Plato views that some women have the capacity to become philosophers, it is important to note that every individual including the woman has something to offer to the societal development if given good education and equal opportunities to display their potentials, as an anonymous author states “if you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation,” this indicates therefore, that women have the potentialities to develop not just their family, but the entire community which can be best realized if empowered with the sufficient aid and most importantly the opportunity to sound education.

Political Participation and Representation in Governance:

Nigerian political scene has not been gender neutral, and her politics is characterized by patriarchy which in the words of Heywood generally connotes the rule by men.²³ Therefore, Olu Awofeso, notes that although women were politically active and relatively less exclusive in decision making process in many pre-colonial societies, the advent of colonial administration with its anti-woman policies, gradually transformed a hitherto politically gender unbiased to a

²² Anne Dickson, “Anatomy and Destiny: The Role of Biology in Plato's Views of Women” as quoted in Carol C. Gould and Marx W. Wartofsky, eds., *Women and Philosophy: Toward a Theory of Liberation*. New York: Putnam's Publication, 1980, 45-46.

²³ A. Heywood, *Politics*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, 98.

predominantly male dominated political scene.²⁴ Women today are almost withdrawn to the spectatorship roles in politicking, which includes wearing of party badges, caps, uniforms, or emblems, running errands for political leaders, voting at elections, *et cetera*. In all of these activities, women have been considerably subdued in Nigeria's political affairs, therefore, several factors and strategies need to be in place to correct this anomaly. These includes funding women perception of politics in Nigeria, political violence during election, lack of self-confidence on the part of women, women's marginalization in party leadership, illiteracy and low educational status of women, as well as cultural and religious discrimination have been identified by scholars as inhibitory factors to women political representation.²⁵ As such women “have been castigated and calculatedly kept away from the course of civilization, even much farther from their roles in government”.²⁶

Also, while Plato views that “women could be equally suited to the position of guardian as their male counterparts.”²⁷ The Nigerian constitution reveals some deficiency in the electoral processes entrenched therein which are gender insensitive. Hence, Adichie succinctly expresses that in the world we live in today, as against the world in earliest times, the person more qualified to lead is not the person who is most physically strong. She notes also that the persons more qualified to lead should be the more intelligent, the more knowledgeable, the more creative, the more innovative, and there are no hormones for these attributes.²⁸ Therefore, the major strategies, that would be effective in ensuring that there is improved

²⁴Olu Awofeso, et al, “Gender and Political Participation in Nigeria: A Cultural Perspective”, 105.

²⁵A. A. Terwase, (ed.), “Women in Politics and Decision Making in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects”, in *European Journal of Business and Social Science*. Vol. 2, No. 8, November, 2013, 52.

²⁶I. A. Okpanachi, “A Philosophical Case for Proportionate Representation of Women in Governance in Africa: The Nigerian Example” in *Enwisdomization Journal*. Vol. 5, No. 3. 2013, 183-184.

²⁷M. Adair, “Plato's View of the Wandering Uterus” in *Classical Journal*, 91.2, 1995, Pp.153-164

²⁸Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We should all Be Feminists*, 10.

participation of women in politics and leadership positions in line with what Plato advocates for is to review the Nigeria constitution and revisit the electoral processes and the positions allotted to women and also removing the ills of violence that militate against women in politics.

More so, in Nigeria the overwhelming percentage of the upper hierarchical positioning in politics and the high rate of corruption is the virtual exclusion of women from key institutions of government,²⁹ coupled with the difficulties in their abilities to get into power. Hence, Eguavoen, suggests that to achieve better representation of women in Nigeria's politics. "Nigeria should consider seriously the use of quota to help integrate the women into policy/decision making process of the country. This quota system will aim at giving more powers to women",³⁰ not just in politics but also in other areas of the Nigerian society.

The Abolition of Some Gender-Specific Traditional Practices Aimed at Women:

There still exist some traditional views and customary practices, some of which are unwritten, that impedes the involvement of women in Nigeria in the social sphere and are even an infringement to their human dignity. Thus, Nigerians cannot be said to live in the 21st century and champion cultural ideas that are barbaric and inhumane, practices which are discriminatory and create marginalization, example of which is the obnoxious widowhood practices. Emeka Martins Uchendu commenting on it states the following:

There are places in the Nigerian society that take delight in seeing women suffer. You can imagine that after the demise of a man, his wife is kicked out as a chicken and everything she ever worked with her husband is taken,

²⁹I. A. Okpanachi, "A Philosophical Case for Proportionate Representation of Women in Governance in Africa: The Nigerian Example" 187-188.

³⁰Agatha Eguavoen, *Tension and Contentions in Gender Debates: Natured or Nurtured*, Ekpoma: Ambrose Alli University Press, 2017, 48.

whether she had children or not is not the issue... widows are denied of the rights of the property of their husband when the man dies. Some widows die in silence not knowing what to do or not having the wherewithal to go to court. In some areas women who lost their husband are made to mourn for a long time.³¹

Agatha Eguavoen adds that “Women are even forced to eat with the dead body of her spouse or drink the water used in washing the corpse just to prove her innocence,³² whereas, when a man loses his wife, he is not made to go through such suffering and in some cases, does not even mourn his wife for a reasonable period before contracting another marriage. Thus the act of widowhood discrimination should be jettisoned in whatever manner, the government has a role to play in curbing it from the society, by enacting laws which will protect widows and charge the traditional rulers in safeguarding such laws, such local practices impede on the dignity of the human person and women in particular.

Also, in the traditional African setting, men were made to marry so many wives and give birth to many children, indeed having a large family was seen as a blessing and it also had an agricultural advantage, whereby a large area of land can be cultivated within a short time, which will increase their agricultural output. While it was the husband's duty to provide what was needed in the family, it was the wife's (wives) duty to ensure the welfare of their children. But today, polygamy in some places in Nigeria has taken another form, women now serve as baby machines, ensure the provision of social amenities in the family and provide for their children's needs. In some polygamous families, the women work tirelessly, while the man does nothing to support the family even when they are physically able to do different jobs, but rather rely on the output of his

³¹Emeka Martin Uchedu, “Societal Discrimination against Women in the South East Zone in Nigeria”, in George Ukagba et al. (eds.), *The Kpim of Feminism: Issues and Women in a Changing World*. Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2010, 150.

³²Agatha Eguavoen, *Tension and Contentions in Gender Debates: Natured or Nurtured*. P.27

wives, with the conception that they own their wives (wife) and command them at will. Men who are involved in such act should be corrected by the society, it behooves on both the man and woman to take care of the family particularly in cases of polygamy.

One other obnoxious practice is the issue of child marriage, which many writers have considered to be pseudo marriage or rape marriage. This is widely practiced in the Northern part of Nigeria. A child is any person under the age of 18 years of age, while Child marriage is defined as any marriage to an underage girl³³ Eguavoen went on to assert that Section 29(4)(b) of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution which deems a married underage girl as an adult has not been abrogated, the consequence is that a man can marry an underage and seek refuge in that section of the law, opining that the girl is an adult.³⁴ Child marriage is not different from raping a child, it has increased the rate of Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF) in Nigeria, with most percentage in the North and also increase Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) because the physiological and phsycological make up of a child is not compatible to the hormonal changes which occurs in the body. The government need to repeal Section 29(4)(b) of the Constitution and punish those who practice such act. This also leads to the end of the education of such a child in most cases, while the decision to enter into marriage is not by consent, but by force or in some cases as gift, reward or even as means of debt servicing.

Curbing Violence against Women:

Violence is an ambiguous concept, according to Hannah Skoda, “violence encompasses an enormous range of phenomena, from subtle structural exclusion or moulding of particular groups, to verbal manipulation, to physical damage done by one human being to another”³⁵ It means the behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something. The *Cambridge*

³³*Ibid*, 70.

³⁴*Ibid*.

³⁵H. Skoda, *Medieval Violence: Physical Brutality in Northern France 1270–1330*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013, 2.

Dictionary of Philosophy, distinguishes two forms of violence: Physical and Psychological violence. Physical violence is the use of force to cause harm or destruction. Psychological violence is the causing of severe mental or emotional harm, as through humiliation or deprivation whether using force or not.³⁶

Violence against women is an issue that is prevalent in the Nigerian Society, while violence is condemned on one hand as inhumane it is also carried out simultaneously on the other hand. Men violence against woman is so common in Nigeria thus, Eguavoen explicates four ways in which violence against women takes place, which are physical, physiological, economic and social violence. Firstly, physical violence involves a physical harm on a woman such as wife battering, sexual abuse of any form, female genital mutilation rites and widowhood obnoxious practices.³⁷ Secondly, psychological violence, which affect the psyche of the woman as a result of dehumanizing act such as wife inheritance, preference of the male over female children, intimidation and trafficking of women.³⁸ Thirdly, economic violence which occurs when a woman has no means of livelihood and as such she is treated by her husband as a slave or deprived of funds particularly when she has no male (or any) child.³⁹ Lastly, social and sexual violence, which deprives women from reproductive right as men dictates the family size and makes decision.⁴⁰ Thus, these violent conducts against women should be stopped, it is not just dehumanizing but has also led to the death of many women.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is one of the most unreported crimes against women in Nigeria. The World Health Organization defines FGM as any female procedure involving partial or total removal of female genitalia or other injury to the female

³⁶R. L Holmes, "Violence", in Robert Audi (ed.), *the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 829.

³⁷Agatha Eguavoen, *Tension and Contentions in Gender Debates: Natured or Nurtured*. 27.

³⁸*Ibid*, 28.

³⁹*Ibid*, 28-29.

⁴⁰*Ibid*, 29.

genital organs for cultural, religious or other non-therapeutic reason (2008). Genital cutting according to Patrick Iroegbu, arise from social, religious and bodily point of view to preserve virginity, enhance femininity, mark ethic boundaries, and limit women excessive drive. It is regarded as a vehicle for gender indoctrination.⁴¹

While FGM is believed to curb promiscuity among females by reducing their desire for sex, nothing of such is done to reduce male sexual pleasure, therefore, this practice should be completely eradicated, for the female reproductive physiology is not appropriate for circumcision, hence, it is a mutilation and not circumcision as compared to the male organ.⁴² The person involved is also prone to contracting blood transmitted diseases. In all, FGM should be abrogated and jettisoned because it is a crime against women and it disfigures their bodily composition.

Evaluation

To understand Plato's argument on the complementary roles between male and female in the society, one needs to have a background of his origin of sexes, on which he argues that both spring from a divided unit and thus are equal, not minding their strength or biological make up. Plato further advocates for equality in education between both sexes and women as guardian in the society. The anti-feminist aspect of Plato's view on women is his argument that the brave man is to have more wives than others. This is because, Plato was influenced by the trend in his society, this anti-feminist view of Plato is today conceived as archaic in our society, although it is practiced in some cultures in Nigeria, but it is dehumanizing to present a human person as a gift, because it reduces the dignity of the person. Meanwhile, Plato's advocacy for equality of sexes is laudable particularly in

⁴¹Patrick Iroegbu, "Genital Culture and Circumcision Law: Issue of Representation in Global Centres", in George Ukagba et al. (eds.), *The Kpim of Feminism: Issues and Women in a Changing World*, Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2010, 547.

⁴²Agatha Eguavoen, *Tension and Contentions in Gender Debates: Natured or Nurtured*. 77.

Nigeria social-political and economic situation, but their functions in the state and the society should be complementary and not competitive.

This understanding that we are made to complement each other would quell to a large extent the unnecessary, gender wars that plagues society and seeks superiority. There are areas were women are better in than the men. There are also areas were men flourish more than women, for instance the area of military might where physical strength is needed. Harnessing these differences for the good of all, will be of invaluable help to national growth. The saying therefore, that the best man for the job is a woman, will therefore assume a healthy meaning when viewed through the lenses of complementarity and unity. Similarly, Arthurs Conari Dayler summarized this when he opines:

Nature made women and men very different from each other in the way they think, act, and reason. These differences were designed to be complementary and not devise... I have seen too much not to know that the impression of a woman can be more valuable than the conclusion of an analytical reasoning⁴³

Moreso, in as much as this paper advocates for the equality of both sexes, and the education of women as parallel to that of men, it does not champion the neglect of their specific duties, particularly in the area of the family. Robert Sarah expresses that many women now have access to education... it is important that women should be able to have a job that is compatible with motherhood.⁴⁴ While the duties of tending their children, performing household chores and their roles as mothers in the family are been conceived by the radical feminist as oppression of women, Elvis Imafidon, argues against that, he views that the African women in the real sense do not see these functions as oppression, rather they see it as their role in the family, which

⁴³M. Munroe, *Understanding the Purpose and Power of Women*. USA: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 2001, 143.

⁴⁴Robert Sarah, *God or Nothing: A conversation with Nicolas Diat*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015, 115.

complements the role of others in the society. He argues also that it is the Westerners that conceive it as oppression all with the aim of removing the institution of marriage and family in the society. Hence, the African woman should not jettison the beauty of complementarity in the family in performing their duties alongside that of their husbands, as this aspect of family role is also evident in Plato, who does not see the bearing of children as a problem in the education of women, nor is it a prevention to their role as guardian.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, Obioma Dies, also argues against radical feminism, he expresses that it tends to create an artificial things or situation that makes women act un-natural in order to fit well into their own society, they need no sort of liberation, what they need is a sort of recognition of what they can offer to the family, society and nation.⁴⁶ For him, women should not abandon their natural motherhood, while giving their best to development.⁴⁷ It is pertinent to restate that the obnoxious cultural practice that are detrimental to women should be abolished and laws should not just be created but enforced and whosoever is found wanting should face the consequences.

Conclusion

Issues of Gender inequality or equality will continue to be a debate if both sexes do not recognize that they are from the same source as explicated by Plato and shown in this paper. More so, the origin of humanity as Plato conceives gives a background towards the need for both sexes to complement each other. This advocacy for complementation is more pressing in our world today. This paper also advocates for the elimination of barbaric and inhumane practices imposed on women in the Nigerian society which are detrimental to the dignity of the human person, it also promotes the call for the eradication of such acts and that women be empowered politically,

⁴⁵Plato, Republic (Book V), B. Jowett (trans.), in *the Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 1, 451d &c.

⁴⁶Dies Obi, "The Role of African Women in Nation Building", in George Ukagba et al. (eds.), *The Kpim of Feminism: Issues and Women in a Changing World*. Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2010, 173.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

socially and economically, while at the center of this empowerment is the education of the Girl-Child which has the potency to curb the ills associated with women in the society. This paper subscribes to moderate feminism that creates a harmonious balance between liberal feminism and radical feminism. Moderate feminism favours complementarity and the elimination of many of the obnoxious and anachronistic practices that tend to dehumanize the status of women in the Nigerian society.

One pertinent problem faced in the society today is the incessant call by the radical feminists to create a new order in gender, which has led to some abhorrent act in the society. In as much as this paper champions the abolition of inhumane conditions on the female gender by their male counterpart, it is also important to express that this paper condemns the self-inflicted violence some females inflict on themselves. Many young girls now conceive a negative conception of the ownership of their body, it has now become as means for pleasure and livelihood, they feel that they can do whatever they want with their bodies and this has given rise to prostitution, high rate of contraceptives and abortion. They use popular phrases such as “Your money, my body” “Small girl, with a big god” etc., which promotes immorality and it is due to the unfavourable call for the emancipation of women backed by the negative conception of what feminism stand for, this emancipation should rather strive towards complementarity.

In conclusion, this paper proposes a philosophy of complementarity where the women in society complement the men by providing their own quota of intelligence, organizational skills and competence in social, economic, moral, governance and leadership sphere. The areas where women have fared and has done well must be highlighted and more women should be drafted into those positions. This philosophy of complementarity seeks to reasserts that a man is not better than a woman and a woman is not better than the man, but rather they complement each other as a result of the differences in their individual, logical, physiological and psychological structure tailored and made so that the one realizes that there is need for the other.