

Whether patriarchy is the leading cause of gender inequality?

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“ Patriarchy as a system is historical” Since the dawn of time men have stood at the helm of most social institution that an organized life had to offer, while women played a more subordinate role.

The male gender was deemed to hold a higher status than that of a female. Historian Joan Scott expressed in her studies that gender must be taken seriously to understand why it is so firmly rooted not only in our past but also in relationships present today in order to fully understand the imbalance it created in our society. “ Gender became a way of denoting ‘ cultural constructions’, the entire social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men. It is a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women. Gender is, in this definition, a social category imposed on a sexed body”. This is a major point for Scott’s theory she goes on to further describe gender as a ‘ constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, essentially gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power’. Gender may be then perceived as a fundamental field within which power is expressed. Make no mistake this does not mean that power orbits around gender nor is it established for the sole purpose of creating gender imbalances, it is merely a single avenue in which power manifests itself. However in light of this Scott believes that gender forms a significant basis to the construction of patriarchal power. Scott uncovers that gender differences are used to sustain social relations in society once this is achieved sexuality is used to justify and legitimize social imbalance and gender inequalities.

Scott concludes her piece by stating that including gender when analysing history will not only provide new perspective to answering new and old questions but it will also feature women as an active part in our socio-economic and political development. Gender may go on further to enlighten society on the aim of the feminist movement and their thinking, and in that same breathe Scott quotes that “ gender must be refined and structured in connection with a vision of political and social equality that includes not only sex, but class and race”.

The family is the most basic institution in society through which patriarchy is most potent. Here the Man is the leader of the household demonstrating authority over the other members of the house. Gerner Lerner in her studies noted that this is where the first lesson of patriarchy is learnt and subsequently embroidered upon and reproduced by the generation to follow, creating a continuously looping hierarchy. Lerner further advances that “ the ‘ creation of patriarchy’ was not a single event but a process developing for over 2500 years”. It was believed that women lacked the ability to hold positions of authority and power due to them being susceptible to their emotion and nurturing obligations

Lerner believed that gender was not merely a biological construct but one deeply embedded in society, as patriarchy’s basis of strength was mainly ideological to say the least. She posits that patriarchy may be observed in many societies around the world stemming from a time long before the modern era. For example women belonging to certain cultural backgrounds are restricted from working certain jobs or holding certain positions within

their society. An additional example would be the practise of kings having many wives in the medieval era while on the other hand a queen could never dare to indulge in such a practise. These may be viewed as male dominance over the female gender.

Lerner concludes her chapter with an analogy. She compares the power struggle between men and women to a drama piece. Provided that a male constructed the play; wrote the script and assigned the parts etc., no matter how significant the role a woman is given, she will never direct the play itself until she constructs a script of her own. This analogy is a profound way of demonstrating to the reader that women will never be seen as equal to men, unless they discover their ' voices' and create a history for themselves.

Lucinda Finley makes it noteworthy that the legal voice of reason is predominantly male defined, as the language and process of reasoning is built on male understanding of the world and of people " other" than themselves. Finley puts forward that the law shaped by men have excluded or marginalized the voices of these " others" and by others she refers to women. She went on further to state that it is an imperative task for feminist jurisprudence and lawyers alike to pay critical attention to the nature of legal reasoning and the language in which it is expressed.

A great deal of the article speaks to women being silenced by law and how its language is constructed. An example given is the of the family structure, a man is required to be at the head of the family for it to be regarded as ideal and any derogation from this ideal is considered to be abnormal. A

woman could not be considered as the head of a family and to a great extent the purpose of the 'discipline of family law' was to preserve this. Another example of women being silenced by the language of patriarchal law involved the concept of rape and how consent was given herein. It is "the male's view of whether the woman consented that is determinative of consent" these examples provide evidence to show that the language of the law is faulty and problematic. How is it then that law largely shaped by men to be impartial and unbiased, be fit to comprehend adequately and properly rectify harmful situations faced by a woman in the midst of a patriarchal society such as this?

She concludes this discussion by encouraging feminist legal theorists to indulge themselves into the nature of the law itself, to understand the extent to which it is exclusive to the male gender, to the point where the language and process of reasoning as mentioned before are skewed and centred around what males deem to be problematic or troublesome. To create a change in the legal language, women must first become cognisant of the inequalities brought about by the patriarchal language of the law, this should then lead to the birth of an equal legal system.

Like Lerner, Eudine Barriteau examines gender effects on society economically, politically and socially within states. Unlike scholars like Scott before her, Barriteau's discussion sways from from a neo classical standpoint as opposed to a Marxist perspective. Barriteau's arguments focus on patriarchy being the main influence for the unequal gender divides causing socio-economic pressures against women, condemning women as second-

class citizens. She advances that the term 'gender' is frequently misused and perplexed by the word 'sex' and this misconception is more common than not. Sex is defined by your biological make up, while gender refers to our identity and conduct; neatly defined it is a social construct. Barriteau's definition of gender expresses that it is a "complex systems of personal and social relations through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to, or are allocated, status, power, and material resources within society"

For Barriteau, analysing gender may be divided into two models, namely: the material and the ideological dimensions. Material relations of gender according to her notes, involve access to power, status and resources. This dimension is particular to the distribution of economic and also political authority and resources. Conversely the ideological relation involves the gender social construct. Like Lerner, Barriteau analyses the subordination of women in the early 1900s as an era where "ideologically women's gender role was limited to that of a housekeeper, caregiver and reproducer of the work force". These gender ideologies shape the expectations of both genders, creating 'socially constructed' boundaries providing guidelines that each gender ought to abide by. Barriteau advances that these boundaries involve their own rewards and consequences, different outcomes for both men and women who infringe them.

Despite this she however acknowledges the efforts made by Caribbean government both individually and collectively to erect effective measures to facilitate the protection of women. In her notes she mentions the ratification

and implementation of various frameworks such as the United Nations Convention to eliminate all forms of Discrimination against women by most CARICOM state governments.

Linette Vassell in her article centres the arguments of her discussion from a political point of view focusing on Caribbean women and the limitations placed on them in the political arena. Vassell suggests that women should be freely able to participate in major roles in politics to stimulate changes in gender imbalances and inequalities present in our society. Like Barriteau, Vassell has acknowledged that CARICOM state governments have ratified and implemented various international conventions, treaties and strategic frameworks to combat the inequality of sexes, however there is still much to be desired. These policies were institutionalized to stimulate a positive change in gender inequalities despite these changes, women subordination in Caribbean states in particular their direct involvement in political decision making process, is still largely prevalent.

Vassell however mentions of some factors that may have challenged the development process such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, extent of gender based violence, education constraints, male backlash amongst others. One noteworthy factor mentioned was “ male backlash”. This is where men feel as if women are “ taking over” their control on society. She goes on further to discuss the limitations placed on women’s political participation in Caribbean countries and the relationship it shares with gender inequality and its effects on the legal and political silence of women.

Similar to Finley, Vassell essentially speaks to a lack of legal voice possessed by women, for Vassell this is particular in the political arena. Also like Hooks, she believes that advancements may be made to stimulate a positive change in the political involvement of women when both genders male and female equally strive towards the change they want to achieve.

Bell Hooks defines feminism a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression. Hooks is also keen to point out what is not. It is a wide spread myth that feminism is a band of angry females who want to be equal to men in everyway and seek to over throw men as the leaders of society. It is not. Its goal is not to allow a privileged, upper class women to enjoy its benefits, rather it seeks to improve the quality of living for both men and women on a societal level, feminism is not synonymous with lesbianism, eradicating the negativity of the patriarchal system will improve the quality of life for gay or straight, men or women. Hooks' definition received particular traction and admiration amongst feminist because it does not imply that men are the enemy and the root of the problem but places sexism in the heart of the problem. Like Barriteau, Hooks believes that women are globally treated as the subordinate species, much owed to the ignorance of this patriarchal society.

“ The fact of the matter is that gender systems are extremely dynamic and fluid and even as driving forces are exerted to improve the rights and self-esteem of women, opposing restraining forces operate to maintain the status quo and ensure that the project of patriarchy is not significantly disrupted. The high levels of violence against women.... particularly sexual violence is a

strong expression of hegemonic masculinity and the power imbalance in gender relations.”

Feminist movements were inspired by the belief of a ‘ patriarchy free society’ where sexist ideologies would be non-existent. However as the movement developed, females began to bear sexist thoughts as well altering the focus of the feminist movement towards seeking gender justice. Hooks believed that to truly vanquish the sexist ideology, there had to be unity between genders, both men and women had to fight to achieve the feminist cause. Hooks posits that the power of patriarchy draws its strength from common relations such as the power of a man over a woman; boss over underling; parent over a child. “ Relationships built on this uneven turf are doomed to fail, in order to achieve societal transformation, everyone must learn to think in a non-sexist fashion”. Activist Hooks emphasizes on the point that infant boys and girls should receive equivalent education on sexism. Only then will they be able to naturally develop the ability to think and perceive in an anti sexist manner.