

Wollstonecraft on Patriarchy, the Myth of African Matriarchy and Emancipation of African Women through the SDGs

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ABSTRACT

The myth of African matriarchy militates against the feminist agenda of women emancipation and liberation in Africa. This paper adopts the textual analytical method of research in exploring the relevance of Mary Wollstonecraft's views on patriarchy to unpacking the myth of African matriarchy and how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), can help to achieve effective of emancipation of African women. An unpacking of the myth of Africa's claim to matriarchy relying on Wollstonecraft's position on patriarchy, shows that patriarchy has been a feature of African societies from time immemorial, and not a product of colonialism. This paper argues that denying the fact of precolonial African societies being patriarchal is the reason that the ills of patriarchy persists in contemporary African societies. Hence, this study maintains that unearthing the ugly consequences of patriarchy in ancient African societies can pave way for realizing the feminist agenda in the continent. It recommends concerted effort by states in the continent towards implementing the SDGs with the idea of human rights, as the key to women emancipation in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Portraying the narrative of patriarchy in Africa as a product of colonialism undermines the fact that patriarchy was a reality in pre-colonial Africa. Male dominance ruled in most kingdoms as the rule of nature before the whites walked on our continent. Not acknowledging this fact renders ineffective efforts for women's liberation in Africa, such as Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism. There is no doubt that the feminist agenda of women's liberation still suffers a huge setback on the African continent because people, especially Africans, have continued to view the feminist disgust for patriarchy expressed in Western culture as a contrast to the African's attitude to patriarchy, which is seen by the African as not portending any danger to the female folk.

The aim of this paper is to analyze Wollstonecraft's views on patriarchy, apply her views to show that the belief in matriarchy as an essential feature of ancient African societies is a myth, and explain why Wollstonecraft's views on patriarchy and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are crucial to achieving the feminist agenda in Africa. Consequently, the paper is divided into five sections. Section one is the ongoing introductory part. In Section two, Wollstonecraft's views on patriarchy will be exposed. Section three will look into the myth of matriarchy as a feature of African culture. The importance of the SDGs to achieving women's emancipation in Africa will be considered in Section four. This will be followed by the last section, the conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative research technique, which involves a textual analysis of primary and secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and other relevant publications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Wollstonecraft on Patriarchy

Before the advent of feminist movements, women were considered as the second gender. The society was using patriarchal system. As stated by Jameson and Amitage (1994), in the 1930's, the ideology that was used by families was typically patriarchal. And as Tong puts it, "Patriarchal society uses certain facts about male and female (chromosomes, anatomy, hormones) as the bases for constructing a set of masculine and feminine gender identities and behaviours that serve to empower men and disempower women" (2009:51).

Mary Wollstonecraft wages war against patriarchy. She advocates for a revolution in female manners which sought to overthrow the system of socialization that made men and women prisoners of each other's tyranny, rather than the virtuous companions whom they were meant to be. She declares her war in print by targeting - John Milton, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Edmund Burke - for promoting absurd and pernicious ideas about the innate inferiority and natural subordination of women to men. She chortled: "Indeed the word

masculine is only a bugbear" (Wollstonecraft in <https://aeon-co/Bringing-down-the-patriarchy>). She acknowledges the evident physical distinctions between men and women, including the perception of women being physically weaker. However, she contends that such differences in physicality do not necessarily imply greater disparities in intellect or moral qualities between the sexes.

The political implementation of Wollstonecraft's thesis of equal rights necessitates a change in how men and women view and interact with one another. Men would no longer view women as weak and dependent creatures, or mere toys and playthings. The dedication and introduction of Wollstonecraft's book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* lay out the first step towards bringing down the patriarchy for the betterment of all humanity.

Wollstonecraft understands the extent of change requisite to women's fulfilling significant roles in the economic, political and social systems. However, she was eager to work inside the constraints of bourgeois ideology in the expectation that reform will mean a total reorganization of society, a revolution that allows women the status asserted for "man."

Wollstonecraft does not hide her indignation of the plausible epithets which men use to soften their insults as fair defects and amiable weaknesses. Women are made to be loved, and must not aim at respect, "lest they should be hunted out of society as masculine" (Wollstonecraft, 2014, p. 60). Wollstonecraft emphasizes that after examining the history of women, she concurs with the harshest critic, recognizing femininity as the most vulnerable and oppressed portion of humanity. She poses the question of what history reveals other than signs of inferiority, with only a few women managing to free themselves from the oppressive control of men. She laments that men have perpetuated women's inferiority to the point where they are nearly stripped of their rational capabilities. Wollstonecraft believes that women's innocence, euphemistically referred to as ignorance, is safeguarded by concealing the truth from them and forcing them to adopt an artificial persona before their minds have matured. From infancy, they are taught that beauty is a woman's most important attribute, causing their minds to conform to their physical appearance and revolve around their superficial roles. While men have various occupations and interests that shape their developing minds, women are confined to a single role, with their thoughts predominantly focused on the most trivial aspects of their existence, rarely expanding their horizons beyond immediate triumphs. Wollstonecraft asserts that women, fragile in every aspect, are forced to depend on men for their every comfort. Even in the slightest danger, they cling to their male protectors with parasitic persistence, seeking assistance and security. She questions the necessity of such dependency. Wollstonecraft further argues that

polygamy is another form of degradation, and she presents a compelling case by pointing out the well-documented fact that in societies where polygamy is practiced, there is a higher female-to-male birth ratio (Wollstonecraft, 2014, p. 89). This, according to her, seems to be a natural indication that must be considered when contemplating the reasoning behind polygamy. She concludes that if polygamy is deemed necessary, it implies that women are inherently inferior to men and exist solely for their benefit.

Wollstonecraft expressed the view that many of life's problems stem from an excessive pursuit of immediate gratification, and she believed that the submissiveness expected of women within the institution of marriage falls into this category. She argued that when the mind relies solely on external authority, its own faculties are naturally weakened and stifled. Consequently, women who obediently conform to this role find themselves transformed into feeble and inactive mothers. Wollstonecraft emphasizes the constant pressure exerted by one social class on another, as all strive to gain respect based on their wealth. Once wealth is acquired, it becomes the basis for respect, overshadowing the value of talent and virtue. She further argues that men often neglect their responsibilities as human beings, yet they are still revered like demigods. Religion, too, is separated from morality by superficial rituals, leading to a world that is filled with dishonest and oppressive individuals (Wollstonecraft, 2014, p. 170). Wollstonecraft believes that many of the follies exhibited by women can be traced back to the tyranny of men, and the cunning that is now a part of their character is a result of oppression. She extends her argument by asserting that women should have equal rights to men in the public sphere and criticizes the structural inequalities present in marriage.

In her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she responds to these inequalities and reveals the systematic inequality faced by women in various aspects of life, including the family, work, culture, economics, and the law. She challenges the ideological position that perpetuates such inequality and suggests that women's subordination was socially constructed to benefit privileged men who adhere to liberal-individualist principles. Wollstonecraft argues that women are made weak and miserable due to various factors, such as inadequate parenting, poor education, lack of property rights, exclusion from politics, and the negative influence of literary and cultural traditions that reduce women to mere creatures of sentiment. Her aim is to improve the situation of women within the existing societal structures. Wollstonecraft asserts that if women are granted equal rights, they will emulate the virtues of men and strive for perfection once they are emancipated. She calls for men of understanding to be fair and not judge women more harshly for their mistakes than they would judge the tricks of a horse or donkey. She urges them to grant

women the privileges of ignorance, which they deny them, rather than expecting virtue where understanding has not been cultivated (Wollstonecraft, 2014, p. 226). The overarching goal of liberal feminism, according to Wollstonecraft, is to create a just and compassionate society where freedom can flourish, allowing women and men to thrive equally (Tong 2009:13; Hubbard 2005:615). This entails achieving equality in economic and political realms. Wollstonecraft's arguments for women's emancipation and rights are rooted in her comprehensive theory of freedom, equality, and justice, reflecting the Enlightenment belief in reason and progress.

According to Wollstonecraft, genuine freedom can only be attained when both women and men enjoy equal freedom and fulfill their familial and societal duties responsibly. Through her commitment to republicanism, Wollstonecraft presents a radical discourse on gender equality and social justice that not only challenged prevailing beliefs but also prompted women to seriously reflect on their position and role in society as equal, free, and independent citizens. She contends that virtue holds no meaning without freedom and asserts that only individuals who enjoy freedom can truly exhibit virtuous behavior. Wollstonecraft declares that liberty is the foundation of virtue, and if women are inherently subjected to servitude and denied the opportunity to experience the invigorating air of freedom, they will perpetually languish like exotic plants and be regarded as beautiful but flawed anomalies in nature (Wollstonecraft, 2014, p. 62). Freedom is inhibited by social oppression for the same reasons as the denial of legal or political rights. During the late 18th century in Western Europe, unmarried women had limited legal safeguards, while married women forfeited their legal autonomy. Women were unable to hire legal representation, enter into contracts, inherit property, exercise voting rights, or assert control over their children. They were subjected to a system of capricious governance and were marginalized, with their interests and perspectives largely disregarded. They were described as slaves. Deprived of civil and political rights, women lacked the ability to assert themselves independently and instead relied on men. In one of his influential commentaries, Oxford Law Professor William Blackstone made a reference to the legal concept that considers the husband and wife as a single entity. According to this notion, the woman's legal existence is either temporarily suspended or merged with that of her husband, and she operates within his care, protection, and authority. Mary Wollstonecraft then causes a sensation in her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). She declares that both women and men were human beings endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Based on a fundamental principle, Wollstonecraft constructs her argument by stating that if a woman is not adequately educated to become a man's equal partner, it will impede the advancement of knowledge and virtue. She emphasizes that truth must be accessible to all individuals in order for it to have a meaningful impact on universal principles. Wollstonecraft questions how a woman can be expected to cooperate effectively unless she understands the reasons behind virtuous behavior and unless she is empowered with freedom to enhance her reasoning abilities. Only through this process can she fully comprehend her responsibilities and recognize how they are intertwined with her own well-being. Wollstonecraft's conception of women's liberation from the subjugation imposed by men's pride, sensuality, and narrow-minded desires centers around the idea of inherent natural freedom. She believes that women were to be governed by the reasonable law rather than the despotism that has characterized men's treatment denied them. And because they were not permitted to make their own decisions, they lack liberty. Wollstonecraft argues that true freedom, as defined by her, involves having the rightful ability to act based on rationality. This freedom, she asserts, is contingent upon one's social status and the absence of a controlling authority figure. For her, freedom from subjugation gives the individual a certain empowerment, or certain entitlement, with respect to other members of society (Hervish Feldman 2011:5).

The circumstances of Mary Wollstonecraft's life challenged her as a woman and writer; and this has facilitated her achievements in fashioning a feminist discourse of and for her time. She comes to understand the social conditions governing the lives of women and to demand their institutionalized repression. In this new century, one would attest to the fact that those bizarre explanations for treating women differently to men have to some extent been eradicated, particularly in the Western World.

Unpacking the Myth of African Matriarchy

Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism is a development from the Western World view in which gender parity is viewed in terms of equal rights for men and women. The African world view in the contrary does not recognize gender parity in that sense but makes provision for gender roles in accordance with the conceived capabilities of both gender. Patriarchy itself may not be inherently wrong. Even Wollstonecraft who fought it was only after the ill effects that spring from it. One would ask, what is wrong with the man being the chief decision maker in a family if by playing this role, he does not endanger the future, aspirations and welfare of his wife and children? What is wrong with the man being the bread winner if he by so doing satisfies the needs of his family members? Would the situation be different were women to play these

functions? Would, the feminist wish that the table turns such that men would be at the receiving end of what they refer as women experiences? Definitely no? It then means that if there is any culture in which what liberal feminism of Wollstonecraft's leaning dictates as undesirable for the female gender is absent, patriarchy would not be a gender impartial arrangement. However, if liberal feminism insists that patriarchy is inherently gender impartial, providing examples that show otherwise casts aspersions on liberal feminism.

The myth of African matriarchy follows from the fact that certain features of ancient African social, political and economic structures tended to portray African societies as devoid of the ills of patriarchy that are well understood in Western culture. Thus, some Africans would see the issues of patriarchy as alien to African culture and blame the intrusion of Western culture for distorting what they may call the peaceful arrangement of the African societies. We can see competing theories about the cause of gender inequality in Africa rooting it in slavery and colonialism. Some argue that colonialism led to the erosion of traditional customs and rights that had previously granted women equal status and respect, while also introducing new forms of gender inequality, including disparities in education, economics, and political underrepresentation (Bertolt 2018:5). This argument has engineered the existence of theoretical frameworks like coloniality of power and coloniality of gender, used to explain the colonial roots of gender inequality in Africa. The concept of coloniality of power, coined by Anibal Quijano, argues that patriarchy was not Africa's system of political and social organization prior to colonialism (Quijano 2007:173). According to this theoretical framework, the existence of matrilineal arrangements in ancient African societies proved that patriarchy was alien to African culture. Likewise, the concept of coloniality of gender argues that gender is inseparable from colonialism. It was advanced by Maria Lugones to explain how colonialism helped in enacting Eurocentric gender structures in America. Applied to Africa, this framework exhumes a deeper consideration of gender and race. Thus, it explains how Europeans' understanding of supplanted pre-existing notions of sex and gender in Africa and how colonial authorities viewed African families as places of tradition and custom that needed to be changed through colonial intervention (Lugones 2008:6).

There is no doubt that in ancient Africa, there were patriarchal societies as well as matrilineal societies. Even in the patriarchal societies, matriarchs occasionally arise as it was in Egypt. Instances of patriarchal systems, such as the Akan people in Ancient Ghana or the Pabir Kingdom in Northeast Nigeria, are often referred to when discussing societies from ancient times. However, does the existence of matrilineal societies in some parts of Africa diffuse the

concept of patriarchy? Patriarchy understood as an ideology or political system where men direct women on what roles they shall or shall not play in society, and women are thought of as inferior to men, according to Oyeronkẹ Oyewumi, was never a feature of African culture (1998:880). This line of thought distorts reality in the sense that it dissolves the idea of status. In the identified matrilineal kingdoms in Africa, only women born into royal and aristocratic families ever tested rulership. Therefore, their status as offsprings of rulers positioned them to become leaders at one point or the other. It is a far cry from the situation whereby male and female of any breed can freely ascend to the throne as feminist's contest. For instance, among the Akan people of Southern Ghana, the queen mothers or women chiefs, known as *Oheemas* in Akan language, ruled alongside the kings (Stoeltje 2021). The chance to become the Chieftess was not available to every woman, as it required being born into a lineage of rulers or chiefs. Even in the Pabir Kingdom in Northeast of Nigeria, only daughters of kings were eligible for the position of the female monarch, known as *maigira*, whose role is also restricted to handling domestic issues.

Even in the matrilineal African kingdoms, we see that the women leaders or rulers are designated to handle only domestic issues while the men leaders handle tough issues like issues concerning politics, trade and war. Seth Asiama argues that patriarchal norms confine women to domestic responsibilities, whereas men are considered natural leaders who possess the ability to handle even the most difficult problems. He highlights that in societies like the Akan Kingdom, it is difficult to accept the fact that older males held dominance while also acknowledging the importance of inclusive representation and voices from all sections of society (1997:217).

The absence of critical analysis undermines the argument for matriarchy based on the existence of matrilineal societies. It is important to distinguish between the definitions of "matriarchy" and "matrilineal descent." Matriarchy refers to a social structure where women hold power, while matrilineal descent is an anthropological concept that describes a specific inheritance system in which property is passed down through the female line. It is crucial to recognize that in matrilineal societies, property is not transferred directly between women but rather through male descendants of a female ancestor. And that was another way men were dominating women. Again, it should be noted that what is at issue is not in whose hands power lies but the outcome of the use of power with respect to gender parity. Wollstonecraft expressed her primary intention as a desire to shed light on the unique suffering and oppression experienced by women due to the biased laws and societal customs. Her aim was to unveil the injustices faced by various groups of women, all of whom encounter equally oppressive circumstances. (Wollstonecraft, 1798). Thus, no

matter the gender that wields power, ones the outcome becomes oppressive towards the other gender, injustice arises and that needs to be addressed.

One could note that in post-colonial Africa, male chiefs engaged in negotiations with European colonial administrations regarding tax collection and governance responsibilities. As the Nigerian economy increasingly relied on cash crops for exports, the distribution of rubber, cocoa, groundnuts (peanuts), and palm oil was predominantly controlled by Nigerian men and European firms (Sudarkasa 1986:93). The argument is that this formal engagement of the male gender pushed women into the background where they were forced into the informal economy. However, ancient African societies, just like ancient Western societies were essentially characterized by women handling affairs in the informal sector. Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism is the harbinger of the activities of the suffragettes during the rise of civilization in Britain and in America. The suffragettes aim at bringing women out of the private sphere to participate in the public sphere where the law operates as well as advocating for the law's intrusion into the private realm, where women have remained facilitators and care-givers from time immemorial. It is actually a distortion of reality to think that ancient African societies were significantly different from ancient societies of other parts of the globe. The argument that there existed the custom of land-tenure systems in pre-colonial African societies, that once provided women with access to land and which was exchanged for land commercialization which favored those with access to wealth earned from the sale of cash crops is baseless. In the precolonial African societies, women had access to land as a result of marriage. There is no historical account of women being bestowed with the right to ownership of land whether as a wife or a daughter. Accounts of women being land owners occur as a result of a dutiful daughter being honoured by an appreciative father giving her a piece of land, mostly, as a marriage gift. It used to be a privilege, never a right. Landlords, slavemasters, are common words that echo from world historical archives. In Nigeria, for instance, the case of *Ukaeje v. Ukaeje*, in which the court delivered judgement in favour of right to land inheritance extending to the female gender has continued to be a groundbreaking case and in fact, a precedent in the Nigerian legal system. Denying that ancient African societies never witness such situations as described by William Shakespeare's *The Mayo of Castabridge*, will not help matters in terms of pursuing women emancipation in Africa.

The attack on patriarchy is founded on the fact that the society right from its origin, has been structured in line with patriarchy and that structure has remained oppressive to the female gender. If society is inherently patriarchal in nature, even matriarchal features of the society must be founded on patriarchy

as is the case with African societies. If the matriarchal and matrilineal feature of African societies have helped to mitigate the oppressive nature of patriarchy towards the female gender, then, the feminist agenda, especially, for Africa, should gear towards retaining that feature and advocating that other parts of the world emulate the African arrangement. Highlighting the prevalent flaws of patriarchal systems, Tarikhu Farrar expresses his dismay over the existence of slavery, women's oppression, class inequalities, and aggressive imperialism within ancient African kingdoms. He emphasizes that male dominance was ingrained in most of these kingdoms long before the arrival of foreigners to the continent (Farrar, 1997:582). While ancient Egyptian queens are widely celebrated and revered for their strength, their stories also reveal a larger patriarchal agenda. It is necessary for us to confront the truth and recognize that many queens were part of a patriarchal structure. The tales of powerful queens like Cleopatra and Nefertiti have led us to envision Ancient Egypt as a feminist utopia, but various historical sources contradict this notion. Ancient Egypt was highly patriarchal, and this system was upheld by both men and women. The recorded ruling queens of ancient Egypt, who held the title of Pharaoh, often served as temporary figureheads to maintain the power circle until a male heir could assume control. Their role was primarily to protect the patriarchy in times of crisis or when the succession of power between men encountered difficulties. Once a male heir became available, these queens were swiftly replaced (Farrar, 1997:591). Another unfortunate reality is that while upper-class women enjoyed nearly equal rights to men, these rights were not extended to women of lower social classes. This statement shows that lack of freedom and gender equality, which characterized the patriarchal societies of the West and which Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism arose to fight were manifest in ancient African societies despite the cloak of matriarchy.

Therefore, the so-called new inequalities alleged to have been introduced in Africa by colonialism, are reproduced from the patriarchal nature of ancient African societies. Unlike in Western culture, where honest acknowledgement of the fact of their existence has contributed to minimizing them to a great extent, in Africa, they persist because Africans are ignorant in recognizing their origin and dealing with them accordingly.

Emancipation of African Women through the SDGs

The undue emphasis on the nature of ancient African societies as 'paradise lost' has remained a clog to women liberation in Africa. As the world aims at realizing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), come 2030, Africa may still remain backward in terms of feminist agenda if in our effort to decolonize, we fail to root women subjugation in African indigenous cultural practices which have been there from the ancient times. According to Ann Abelenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) not only include a dedicated goal (Goal 5) specifically addressing gender and women's rights, but

they also incorporate gender considerations into several other goals, most notably Goals 4 and 8. This demonstrates the United Nations' attempt to acknowledge the comprehensive and interconnected nature of gender, as well as the gendered impacts of environmental, social, and economic issues (2014:119). Goal 5 of the SDGs covers various matters that hold significant importance to feminist advocacy. These include the cessation of violence against women and girls, the recognition and appreciation of unpaid care and domestic work, the promotion of women's equal participation and leadership, and the assurance of access to reproductive rights. The SDGs are praised by some feminist groups like the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO), among many others (Gabizon 2016, 104). They are seen as a great improvement on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), for not reducing gender equality to equal access to primary and secondary education and to improving maternal health.

Elisabeth Prugl expresses that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody a political dimension wherein patriarchal structures are acknowledged as issues, and women are transformed from passive recipients to empowered individuals with inherent rights. Significantly, the SDGs have a universal applicability, extending beyond solely low- and middle-income nations. Consequently, they provide activists, both in developed and developing countries, with a tool to demand accountability from their respective governments on a wide range of matters, such as combating discrimination and safeguarding the labor rights of migrant women (2016). Unfortunately, the MDGs target concerning gender equality which was to have been realized since 2015, is yet to be realized in most countries of Africa. Even when we now have majority of girl children enrolled in schools in some African countries like Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, the girl-children are predisposed that the essence of them obtaining formal education is to be eligible for marrying educated and rich or descent men. Thus, the patriarchal nature of ancient African societies is perpetuated.

Systemic inequalities persist, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa today because as analysts and scholars contend, the global movements created to improve the livelihood of women in the West, and those living in urban cities, have not benefitted women in this global divide. Based on published accounts, it is reported that Sub-Saharan Africa ranks among the regions with the highest levels of gender inequality globally. The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), and Post-2015 Women's Coalition reports that "perceptions, attitudes, and historic gender roles" prevent women from accessing health care and education and contributes to disproportionate levels of family responsibility, job segregation, and sexual violence (2017). Women in Africa experience the

greatest levels of discriminatory practices. In addition to facing However, it would amount to obscuring reality if this backwardness is continually blamed on colonialism. To close the gender gap in Africa, the issues African women face must become part of the global discussions (Bakibinga *et al* 2022:148). In terms of structural barriers regarding educational and economic inequalities, women in Africa face major obstacles in being political representatives. The rectification of numerous present-day inequalities becomes challenging in the absence of sufficient representation for women. The difficulty in women becoming political representatives in Africa stems from the fact that contrary to arguments for matriarchal and matrilineal structure of African societies, women never became authentic political representatives in ancient African societies as their leadership roles were usually premised on male-ascendency. It happened mostly as a result of a male suitable for the position not yet ready to take it up.

Therefore, instead of blaming the backward status of African women in terms women emancipation on coloniality of power and coloniality of gender (if there was any), we should acknowledge the huge effort needed by Africans, females and males, towards demystifying the structure of ancient African societies to allow positive change. The emphasis on decolonizing Africa is actually unnecessary when it comes to women liberation. Those factors subjugating the female gender are deeply rooted in African indigenous cultural practices. Hence, the difficulty in uprooting them. Even as feminists in the advanced countries of the world question the authenticity of the SDGs for the feminist agenda, African countries should make moves for their implementation because they are still at a stage implementing the goals will make way for African women coming out of the enclave of patriarchy with its ills. In criticizing Goal 5 of the SDGs, emphasis is laid on three issues, namely, the concern for political participation, the concern for economic empowerment, and the language choice of the word 'empowerment'. Regarding political participation, there are two issues with the way Goal 5 encourages women's political participation. One assumption is that political empowerment for women is synonymous with their inclusion in decision-making processes, presuming that an increased presence of women in politics will inherently benefit all women. However, a greater number of women in office does not necessarily equate to substantive representation. Additionally, as noted by Valeria Esquivel, the complete and effective involvement and leadership of women rely not only on their individual efforts and desire to engage in national and international discussions, having equal opportunities to men, but also on their access to necessary resources that serve as prerequisites for participation, such as financial means, time, confidence, and education. Furthermore, it depends on the existence of specific mechanisms aimed at fostering women's

involvement. Goal 5 proposes the adoption and reinforcement of sound policies and enforceable laws to promote gender equality. However, it lacks specificity when it comes to outlining tangible strategies for dismantling the barriers that hinder women's political participation.

The inclusion of the economic empowerment target in Goal 5 is regarded as problematic because it erroneously conflates gender equality with equality of economic opportunities between women and men. This approach essentially places women within the confines of the traditional economic model, which serves as the underlying cause of numerous gender-based economic disparities. This idea implies that women economic empowerment can only be achieved through backward-looking affirmative action that will involve limiting men's economic participation until equal number men and women participates economically. It negates women's over-representation among informal workers, pervasive gender wage gaps, and occupational segregation. Finally, many feminist analysts take issue with the way the word 'empowerment' is used, as well as the broader context under which it is used in development discourse. In his critique, Michael Denney questions the female empowerment agenda and its emphasis on economic empowerment within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He argues that by placing educational and economic objectives at the forefront of the female empowerment agenda, it oversimplifies empowerment and disregards the deeper structural issues that women encounter. Additionally, Denney asserts that this approach prioritizes the promotion of a prosperous capitalist economy over the genuine empowerment of women, relegating empowerment to a secondary position (Denney, 2015:1). Nevertheless, Deepta Chopra and Catherine Müller offer a critical comparison between the utilization of the term "empowerment" in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its original concept rooted in emancipation. In their words "...the focus on economic growth in the SDGs rather than redistribution of resources, and the inability to recognise reproductive and sexual health and rights in their entirety, is problematic for the holistic realisation of the empowerment agenda" (Chopra and Müller 2016:8).

Harnessing the above criticisms of the SDGs and taking good implementation strategies that can mitigate the negative effects of the shortcomings noted would bring huge success to the quest for African women's political and economic emancipation. According to Katja Freistein and Bettina Mahlert, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that have been recently adopted cover a range of explicit and implicit objectives aimed at addressing inequality. While the specific details and objectives may lack clarity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) surpass previous development targets

by acknowledging inequality as a prominent concern. According to Araujo et al. (2016:43), there is a pertinent recommendation for adopting a human rights approach in implementing Goal 5. This suggestion advocates for a departure from current international institution policies that reinforce inequalities through neoliberal reforms, impeding countries from achieving their sustainable development goals. Araujo et al. further assert that advancing towards a more equitable future necessitates bolstering a human rights-based approach in sustainable development processes. This entails a heightened acknowledgment of state responsibilities to uphold, safeguard, and actively promote women's human rights and gender equality. The scholars recommend clear regulations to ensure that economic interests are not allowed to override the greater aim of respecting human rights and promoting sustainable development (2017).

We should recall that the human rights approach is also advocated by Wollstonecraft who maintains that women ought to be treated not as different entities to be discriminated upon, but as human beings that they are. In the area of women's human rights to be free from gender-specific abuses, she embraced laws, economic policies and deep cultural reforms that would prevent the exploitation of women. She defends these human rights so that future generations of females would not be "born only to procreate and rot" (Wollstonecraft, 2014, p. 7). The concept of gender equality itself is rooted in the concept of human right, which emphasized inalienable rights every human being is unconditionally entitled to. With the idea of human right, gender equality will be recognized as an end in itself. Thus, inequalities springing from the patriarchal structure of the society, Africa inclusive, would be eliminated by the collective efforts of both the male and female genders.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Owing to the tenacious hold on the existing patriarchal structure of African societies, the inequalities said to have been introduced by colonialism persist in Africa. It is pertinent to note that the fact that even in matrilineal African societies, patriarchy reigned explains why, in post-colonial African societies and in contemporary times, it is difficult to mitigate, let alone erode, the ills of patriarchy in Africa. Suffice it to say that it is the reason that the feminist struggle in Africa has remained at a backward stage. Many Africans are still basking in the euphoria of ancient African societies being organized beyond any evil of patriarchy, or that what are termed the evils of patriarchy are normal, healthy experiences every society should crave for.

Through the lens of Wollstonecraft's views on patriarchy, this study carried out an unpacking of the myth of Africa's claim to matriarchy as the structure of most ancient African societies. The findings of this study provide sufficient proof of the fact that patriarchy has been a feature of African societies from time immemorial and not a product of colonization. Invariably, denying this fact poses difficulty for women's emancipation in Africa. Nonetheless, the

study recommends concerted efforts by States on the continent towards implementing the SDGs with the idea of human rights as the key to women's emancipation in Africa. It also recommends the unearthing and gradual elimination of the ugly consequences of patriarchy to pave the way for realizing the feminist agenda on the continent.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This research still has limitations so that further research is still needed on this topic.

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