

A Re-Consideration of African Perspectives of Women, Gender and Development

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Abstract

The study of women as a subject or category of research is relatively a new discipline in Africa which has been bedeviled with divergent theoretical and methodological problems in an attempt to bridge the gender gap in development. The paper therefore re-examined such distortions by contextualizing the discourse within the general development of capitalist and colonial societies. We started with the definition and conceptualization of the concepts of women, gender and development according to classical and Marxist perspectives and bringing out their limitations. We observed the distortions that have arisen in applying these conceptions to African societies. We also observed that Eurocentric views of African societies has contributed to such distortions which have made the different development strategies such as WID, WAD and GAD by national and international agencies to be inappropriate in achieving equitable and sustainable development in Africa. In conclusion we advocated for a new approach that will recognize specificities of African gender relations that are gender inclusive and not exclusive, complementary and not competitive, interdependent and not individualistic, self sustaining and not dependant or exploitative.

Introduction

There have been debates on whether or not women can be taken as categories of research but today women are accepted as a revolutionary force in a revolutionary world. Afigbo and others defined women as "human beings whose physical anatomy differ from that of men"².

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² Afigbo, A.E., "Women as a Factor of Development" in Ijere, M. (ed), *Women in Nigerian History*, Acena Publishers, Enugu, 1991.

This defined women purely as biological beings. But most social scientists define women by the socially and culturally defined roles that have been accorded them by society. These socially defined roles differ from one society to another and from one epoch to another.³ Thus in every society there are certain tasks, traits and characteristics that are regarded as feminine.

Afigbo's biological view of women is based on a spiritual and natural perception, which is rational and logical within a perfect cosmos of both matter and spirit.⁴ He argued that the anatomical difference between men and women serve the purpose of guaranteeing social harmony. In essence, his position is a major attack on radical feminists who fight against the natural attributes of the woman in procreation as justification for their deviant social practice such as lesbianism as a means for women to exercise total autonomy over their bodies. But Afigbo argued that the natural laws and biological differences between men and women had with it spiritual responsibilities which should not be neglected by the individual and the society.

This belief is further strengthened with the notion of complimentary roles between the male and female sexes, which has rightly been seen as the only way to self-fulfilment, and freedom, which ensures a stable social order. Afigbo's complimentary roles between the two sexes however, is misconceived because according to him social division of labour should be based on "women contributing those things which only women can contribute and men those things they can contribute".⁵ According to this schema it is only the biological reproductive functions that fit into this definition. What Afigbo has not taken into consideration is what happens to the jobs or tasks that both men and women can perform? How should the distribution of such tasks be done both at the family and societal levels? Who should be responsible for such tasks or its re-distribution? And more importantly, how does the principle of complimentary roles affect men, women, family, community, the national economy and the overall sexual division of labour within the international economy and the implication of these on development, equity and justice at all levels? What are the factors that are responsible for the sexual division of labour historically and how has this affected the roles, position and status of women in society?

³ See for example, Mies, M. "The Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour", *Occasional Papers*, No.185, January, 1981.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

These are some of the issues that remain unanswered in Afigbo's thesis. It is as a result of such shortcomings that the category "women" have been defined within gender perspectives.

Definition of Women and Gender within Gender and Development Perspectives

The concepts of gender (genre) and women (feminine) are generally misunderstood. Gender is not just a concept or terminology that describes the two sexes male and female but it also connotes a social structure, which is dynamic. Social scientists also differentiate between sex and gender. Sex is distinguished by physiological or biological differences between men and women while gender is what is socially acceptable as the distinguishing mark between males and females i.e. the social characteristic of maleness and femaleness, which goes beyond mere differences in the biological make up of males and females.⁶

The concept of gender can be understood historically and contextually. Historically the concept of gender, i.e. what socially differentiates man and woman, is as old as history itself but at a point in the development of western societies, precisely from about the 18th century the concept of gender metamorphosed into feminism whose main concern is the formulation of the critique of the historical exclusion of women from the activities of society and the systematic devaluation of domains considered to be those of women.⁷ Presently, this informs the western conception of gender, which started with the suffragette movement and metamorphosed into women liberation and modern feminism. The role of women and their marginalization in the capitalist economy in the western capitalist countries took different forms and nature from that of women in Third World economies. Women were marginalized in the advanced capitalist societies because of the failure of the capitalist economy to employ all potential workers and at the same time its need for a reserve army of labour that can be utilised or cast aside according to the demands of capital, which resulted in the "house wifization" of women where European women were bound to the domestic/private sphere.⁸

⁶ "Gender Research in Africa", *Report on A. A. WARD's 5th General Assembly*, 19th – 24th July, 1991, *ECHO*, No.5, October, 2000.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation of World Scale Women in the International Division of Labour*, Zed Press, London, 1986.

Under capitalism, the productive functions of the family or households were taken over by factory production in which women were pushed out of production and marginalized. This resulted in the development of what most women feminist researchers call the *famine mystique* where the family in western capitalist societies was characterised by male wage earner as breadwinner supporting wife and children. Women were maintained as labour reservoir but meanwhile using their unpaid labour for the maintenance of men and the social reproduction of future generations of workers. This development is what resulted in the western conceptualisation of gender and the distinctiveness of women liberation movement in the West.

But the historical conditions of African women have not been exactly the same like her western counterpart. Neither in pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial period have African women ever been marginalized out of economic production like their western European counterparts – not even in societies that practiced the total seclusion of women from public life (*purdah*). Even *purdah* women were known to be engaged in home based production such as food processing, crafts and even trade.

Thus, the strict distinction between sex (biological) and gender (socio-cultural) is misleading in the study of African societies especially in the colonial period because at no point was the African woman restricted to purely her biological sex roles. In fact even in a general universal sense such a distinction is misleading because human nature has always been social. Sex has never been a purely biological affair confined strictly to animal instincts. Thus, the dominant views on gender in the arts and social sciences are representative of European perspectives, which differs from African perspectives. This is exemplified with the subsequent discussion of the Berom world view on women.

Therefore, while we acknowledge the current distinction made between sex and gender in most social science research on women we will use the concept of sex and gender interchangeably with the understanding that sex roles in this research go beyond the narrow confines of biological roles. Sexual division of labour will be seen as a socially mediated product, which is linked to biology but not determined by it. This will enable us to avoid distortions and confusions that are likely to arise when using concepts derived from the study of Western European societies in studying African societies.

Distortions in African Gender Perspective

Some distortions have arisen in the way social and historical analysts treat gender problems in Africa. Such distortions have also arisen due to the way African problems especially in the last two to three centuries have been analysed within the strict confines of either purely a Euro-centric or African perspectives.⁹

The Euro-centric perspectives believe that all major developments during this period were initiated as a result of external influences because Africa supposedly lacked the internal capacity for development. Consequently, the problems of Africa have been analysed from the perception, conceptualisation and understanding of western societies because the West is seen to constitute the model for world (especially African) development. On the other hand, the African perspective believes that Africans had the internal capacity and initiative for independent development and that in the actual sense, it is Europe that underdeveloped rather than developed Africa.

This view has permeated the basic assumptions underlying African studies in the social science especially after Walter Rodney's provocative book "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa."¹⁰ Underdevelopment theorists squarely put the blame of Africa's and Third World underdevelopment on colonial and imperialist exploitation of Africa resulting in African perspective that are largely uncritical and in defence of African heritage and civilization. The major distortion that has characterized such perspective is their gender bias and gender blindness that resulted in the relative neglect of the study of the roles of women in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial societies.

Thus, gender studies have also been undertaken in Africa within the theoretical framework of the two dominant views discussed above. The two perspectives represent parochial views about the general development of African societies. Our own approach acknowledges the significance of both the internal and external dynamism in the analyses of gender with the awareness that there is some African specificity that must be taken into consideration in the analysis of gender in Africa. There is therefore the need for adopting a research methodology appropriate for conceptualising and accounting for African reality.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Walter Rodney, *op.cit.*

There is also the need not only to decolonise the study on African women but also to go beyond this to evolve an alternative ideological and analytical framework that will take care of African historical specificities and development. The analysis of African women within a gender perspective is also situated within the broader perspective of Gender and Development for sustainable and equitable human development. The main goals of gender study is aptly summed up by Yassine Fall, the former Executive Secretary of Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) who stated "that women rethink history, economics, politics and challenge conventional approaches to development by questioning all their underlying assumptions and the respective roles assigned to men and women in the development process."¹¹ The concepts of woman and gender should go well beyond the grammatical and biological connotations. Whenever woman or sex category is used such as sexual or gender division of labour this encompasses both the biological, social, cultural, economic, religious and political ramifications that contribute in the definition and differentiation of tasks/roles between the two sexes.

Thus, the conception of woman changes through space and time, and relates to the position of women in different societies.¹² In spite of the seemingly versatile conception and definition of women and gender some scholars especially anthropologists, have attempted to identify certain universal characteristics peculiar to women as a social group apart from purely biological differences such as the universal subordination of women based on gendered relationships.¹³ Those who believe in this assumption differ on the origin of this subordination; whether it is rooted in biological differences or culture among others. While some believe that it is rooted in biology, others believe it is rooted in culture because all cultures regard women as subordinates and it is usually reinforced by ideological and religious beliefs. Yet others locate this in the evolution of private property and patriarchy etc.¹⁴

¹¹ *ECHO*, New Serial No.5, October, 2000

¹² Henrietta, L. Morore, *Feminism and anthropology*. Polity Press, U.K, 1994, p.13.

¹³ See for example, *Ibid*.

¹⁴ See for example, Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and the International Labour Division*, Zed Press, London, 1986; and Maria Mies, *The Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour*, occasional papers, No.185, January, 1981.

Women, Gender and Development

Women studies and development is now given extraordinary attention by governments and non-governmental organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IPDA) and the Ford Foundation. This has resulted in the expansion and proliferation of research institutes and organisations concerned primarily with women studies. The past decade has also witnessed the establishment of women regional and international research organisations such as Development Alternatives for Women in the New Era (DAWN), Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), Women Research and Documentation Centre Ibadan, (WORDOC) among others. Coupled with this is the increasing interest in research on women by individual and group researchers in and outside the universities.

With greater interest on women studies the emphasis of development strategies is on the integration of women into development. This is done based on the assumption that development has been taking place but women have not benefitted from it. The desire for women to benefit from development has been the justification for the colossal amount of money spent on women development projects especially in the Third World.

Various other reasons have been given for the great attention given to women studies and development strategies. Some give reasons based on the numerical strength of women. It is argued that statistics show that women constitute over half the world's population and 60-80% of agricultural labour in Africa and Asia and more than 40% in Latin America.¹⁵ Another reason given for the primary attention given to research on women is the steady increase in the number of women headed households within which women are at the same time breadwinners.¹⁶

Others argue that women have greatly contributed to economic development yet their role in economic production has not been socially recognised. It is believed that even where some form of recognition has been given, women are poorly remunerated for their labour resulting in their greater marginalization.

¹⁵ Asoka Baderage, "Women in Development, Liberalism, Marxism and Marxist Feminism" *Development and Change*, Vol.15, No.4, October, 1984.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.497.

It is also generally believed that women suffered most from the uneven development under colonialism and they constitute the greatest number of the poor in the world.

For the liberal bourgeois scholars,¹⁷ the primacy given to women's research is based on the fact that women have least benefitted from modern economic development especially in the Third World. More research is, therefore, needed on women to provide information on the best way to integrate them into development to put them on the same footing with men.¹⁸ The fallacy of this argument is the fact that men as a category of gender did not benefit equally from modernisation as a group neither is the position of all women the same in the present status quo.

To Marxists and liberal Marxists, the focus on women studies is justified on the grounds that women suffer double exploitation as women and as subordinate members of the society. They also argue that women have suffered most from the impact of colonialism, therefore, their struggle against sexual subordination should be integrated with the general class struggle in the society.¹⁹

However, the concept of double oppression of women does not fully explain the differing positions of women within the same mode of production.

Analysing the women question from both gender and class perspective creates some irreconcilable problems. The position that all women are exploited as women and as members of a subordinate class does not explain the fact of the existence of privileged women who also exploit both men and women. This question poses some problems and has implications for treating women as a social category for research and at the same time for revolutionary struggle. On what basic and common premise can all women organise to fight oppression and exploitation when they belong to different classes, status, race etc? In spite of many attempts that have been made to overcome these problems,²⁰ Marxists are yet to resolve the issues.

¹⁷ For a critique of the liberal, bourgeoisie and Marxist perspective of women and gender see Alahira H.A. "Women and Development: An Appraisal of the Main Perspective on the Study of Women", *Humanities Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 2, December, 2011, pp 41-45

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See, for example, Imam Ayesha, "Towards an Adequate Analysis of the Position of Women", in *Women in Nigeria Today*, Zed Press, London, 1985.

²⁰ Maria Mies *Patriarchy and International Labours Division*, Zed Press, London, 1985.

Feminists on the other hand study women because women subordination and exploitation is seen to be a universal phenomenon under both capitalist and non-capitalist societies. Women studies are therefore seen as an important means of educating women towards political struggle for the emancipation of women in both capitalist and non-capitalist societies. But the question arises of the practicability of establishing a society devoid of any form of sexual subordination. There is the possibility for such an attempt to end up in mere idealism or utopia. The current view is that there is still the need to study women because development did not and cannot take place without them but that ironically developments have been taking place against them.

The reasons for the study of women are numerous and diverse. If all the reasons given above were taken into consideration by national and international development agencies, the subordinate global economic positions of women especially in Africa would have been reversed to achieve greater accelerated development. But while everything is said to be done in the interest of women and the developing countries by development agencies, the economic conditions of women in the 21st century Africa is still below expectation.

It is therefore possible that the problems of women are being hijacked and used as a diversionary tactics to halt the struggles for equitable gender development by the oppressed peoples of Asia, Latin America and Africa.

The deepening poverty of workers and peasants increased their consciousness to fight for democracy and the socialisation of the economy for the upliftment of the lives of both men and women. This calls for radical measures to transform the society at both political and economic levels by governments and development agencies. It is their failure to do this that they seem to be using women struggle to weaken the likely formidable solidarity for mass broad-based movements against exploitation. Obsession with women problems in isolation of that of men will divert the attention of governments and development agencies from the real problems of inequality caused by some multi-nationals in collaboration with their local agents.

The full integration of women into development will undoubtedly bring about national development for women, but if done in isolation apart from men, it will strengthen the neo-colonial economy and facilitate the continued exploitation of the under developed countries. The development projects designed for women by international agencies will facilitate the release of cheap female labour which will subsidise family income and hold down wages. It will not only subsidise family income but also enlarge the scope of appropriation of surplus and capital by the multinational companies if development plans and strategies are exclusive and not inclusive of men. Balanced sustainable and equitable development can only be achieved if both genders constitute the target group for development.

Perspectives on Women Studies and Development

Women studies have assumed different perspectives overtime resulting in the adoption of different strategies of development for women. Three distinctive perspectives can be identified: Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism and Radical non-Marxist feminism.

The starting point of liberal feminists is their belief in the inherent unreliability of the capitalist system. It sees the inequalities and injustice against women within the capitalist system as aberrations that can be gradually rectified through legal procedures and attitudinal changes.²¹ Women's subordination under capitalism is seen as a deviation from the ideals of equality and justice advocated by the bourgeoisie. Liberal feminists believe that the way of solving sexual inequality is by moving away from women primary concern with domestic work and integrating them into the public sector as equals with men.

Different strategies of development have been adopted within the liberal perspectives. The most popular are the Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD). The concept of WID is an approach which calls for greater attention to women in designing development policies and projects, and emphasizes the need to integrate them into the development process.²²

²¹ Ibid, pp.13-14.

²² Jane L. Parpert, (eds) *The Oretical perspectives on gender and development*, international development research centre, Canada, 2000, P. 73.

In order to integrate women in the development process many governments set up offices for women's affairs. Similarly, international aid agencies, to prove their commitment to women's advancement, increasingly hire WID experts. This was one of the first significant steps they had taken. It is important to acknowledge that WID perspective has enhanced our understanding of women's development needs, particularly the need to improve women development projects and to provide women with more opportunities for education and employment. However, the WID approach failed to see the necessity of engaging women as target group into the planning and implementation of development programmes and projects

Women and Development approach emphasizes the idea that both women and men must be lifted from poverty and both must contribute to and benefit from development efforts. But the WAD paradigm stresses the distinctiveness of women's knowledge, work, and women's goals and responsibilities. It argues for recognition of this distinctiveness and for acknowledgement of the special roles that women have always played in the development process.²³ It therefore advocates separate development strategies for men and women. Women and Development resulted in the persistent call to recognize that women are the major participants in agricultural production in many areas of Africa, but their contribution has been systematically overlooked and marginalized. This approach call for a change in the way and manner women's contribution are sidelined.

The fact that some feminists and development theorists remained unconvinced by the WID and WAD approaches, arguing that neither addresses the fundamental factors that structure and maintain gender inequalities, made it possible for these scholars and activist to advocate for Gender and Development perspective (GAD). Gender and Development is another development framework which was developed to replace the WAD and WID strategies. The Gender and Development approach focuses on the socially constructed differences between men and women thereby placing emphasis on gender relations. The GAD perspective recognizes that women are deeply affected by the nature of patriarchal power in their societies at the international, national, community and household levels.²⁴ This means that since the roles of men in patriarchal societies supersede those of women, women's contributions to the societal development are overlooked by men.

²³ Ibid p. 75

²⁴ Ibid p.77

Thus, GAD approach adopts a two pronged approach to the study of women and development; investigating women's material conditions and class position as well as the patriarchal structures and ideas that define and maintain women's subordination. The GAD approach focuses on the relationship between women and men not on women alone as well as the exploitative nature of patriarchal societies that resulted in the subordination of women to men which have been overlooked by WID and WAD.

The main focus of GAD is on the improvement of the productive capacity of women, to provide them with resources and services through the provision of income generating activities to empower women in order to reduce their subordination to men. They hope that by so doing, women will contribute to the general development process as productive agents.²⁵ GAD perspective is also concerned with the introduction of appropriate technologies to ease the burdens and work load of women especially in the home and the informal sector. This will help to release women for more productive work in the public sector. Below are the general goals and perspectives of GAD. It attempts to:

- (i) provide equal opportunities between men and women;
- (ii) establish the fact that sexual relations stems from socially established ideas and practices, which is expressed in the economic, political and social processes;
- (iii) analyse the specific cultural forms of social organization in different societies. It also analyses specific forms of sexual inequality and hierarchy as well as the position and status of women in a given society within the international system;
- (iv) bring out three clear distinctions in the roles of women;
 - reproduction of the species
 - production of goods and services
 - Community responsibilities.
- (v) Question the sexual division of labour within both the domestic and public spheres;
- (vi) Portray men and women as active agents of modern development;
- (vii) Recognises the distinction between women as a function of socio-economic factors and their position as a function of patriarchy;
- (viii) Recognise the necessity of enhancing the authority of women in order to eliminate sexual inequality;

²⁵ Marie Louise Eteki, Review of Methodological and Conceptual Innovations in Analysis of Gender Relations, *ECHO* No.16, 1996.

The following strategies have been adopted to improve the conditions of women:-

- Equity approach – fight against sexual inequality.
- Anti-poverty approach through the provision of income generating activities for women.
- Efficiency approach through the introduction of modern technology.

The Limitations of the Women and Development Perspective

One of the basic limitations of women and development perspective is their belief in modernisation, that is the diffusion of Western values, capital and technology for women in order to develop along western model. They believe that the benefits of modern development, which has hitherto accrued to men, can now be extended to women. Thus, it is already assumed that development has taken place and the real problem now for Africa especially, is the need for equitable development along sexual lines.

They have largely ignored the pains-taking research of renowned scholars who have established the fact that the expansion of capitalism in the colonies has only resulted in the under-development of the colonies.²⁶ The liberal perspective is based on the false notion that sexual inequality has arisen because women are not sufficiently integrated into the process of modernisation; thus the false belief that greater integration of women will result in their liberation.

It has been argued that although African women are marginalized, that does not mean that they have not been integrated into the economy. It has been shown that African women in particular, have been well integrated into the colonial and post colonial economy at the lowest level, which serves the purpose and interest of capitalism.²⁷ This did not result in women's development. Thus, the attempt of WID to integrate women in development at the higher level of the economy has not and will not likely result in positive development for women. Only a handful of privileged women have benefitted from the development projects designed for women.

²⁶ See for example, Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

²⁷ Asoka, op.cit, p.498

On the whole, the projects have actually resulted in greater feminisation of poverty in the Third World and the unprecedented rise in hunger, disease, and death, and the general impoverishment of the rural population.²⁸ This has forced international organizations to adopt the basic need strategy through the introduction of food aid for the survival of poor families in the Third World.

All these measures are reformist measures that fall short of dismantling the existing structure, which is responsible for perpetuating multi-faceted forms of inequalities. Third World women are treated as passive agents of development. Research and development are initiated for Third World women without making them the agents of change.

New Approach

There is now a new approach to women, gender and development emerging based on radical feminist analysis.²⁹ The new approach is an attempt towards Marxist and radical feminist synthesis, which tries to analyse patriarchy as a historical phenomena having its full manifestation under capitalism.

These scholars like Maria Mies try to establish the historical origins of patriarchal societies and the international link between patriarchy and capitalism. But there are still more issues that are yet to be properly conceptualised by the Marxist-feminist synthesis. Radical feminists place a central role on patriarchy in the development of capitalist economy, which Marxists do not allude to. Marxists believe that patriarchy does not play a dominant role in advanced capitalist economy. It is only important in the early phase of capitalist development.

The radical feminist – Marxist synthesis, however, has been unable to reconcile the existence of sexual division and inequality in advanced countries, the Third World and in socialist countries. The theories of the new approach have been postulated based on the study and experience of European capitalism and European middle class women. This however does not address and explain the realities of the Third World situation. Poor articulation and lack of focus on the Third World have resulted in the introduction of an ineffective development strategy for Third World women.

²⁸ Ibid, p.25

²⁹ Mies, M. *Patriarchy and International Division of Labour*, Zed Press, London, 1986

Thus, research by Third World women on the Third World like this particular one, will help to throw more light on the problems highlighted above both at the theoretical and empirical levels. The new approach concerns itself with the origins of the sexual division of labour and why sexual relationship and division of labour is unequal, hierarchical and exploitative. But the major limitation of the new approach is that it has fallen into the trap of dual debate on the origin of sexual division of labour – biology or social conditioning.

Some researchers argue that the origins of sexual division of labour are biologically and naturally defined. Other scholars argue that women's dependence on men started with the concurrent division of labour between men and women because of their reproductive differences.³⁰ Reproductive and domestic activities of women are seen to be naturally and biologically determined, so that these are not recognised as work neither are they remunerated for it. Women's domestic work is seen as unplanned, unconscious and largely determined by nature.

Radical feminists argue that following Marx, biological and social roles should be recognised as work. Marxists conceived of labour and work simply to mean the appropriation of nature for the satisfaction of human needs, which also agrees with Engels who see sexual division of labour as natural phenomena. According to him, "the division of labour was an outgrowth of nature. It existed only between two sexes. The men went to war, hunted fish, and provided raw materials for food and the tools necessary for their pursuit. The women cared for the house and prepared food and clothing. They cooked, weaved and sewed. Each was master of his own field of activities."³¹

The natural division of labour has also been based on the men – the hunter hypothesis where man is conceived as the inventor of weapons and tools with which he gained sexual, economic and political control over women. Mies argues that this hypothesis has been used to legitimise the existing relations of exploitation and dominance between men and women, classes and peoples as universal, timeless and natural phenomena.

³⁰ Mies *op.cit.* p.40

³¹ Engels, F. *op.cit.*

Man's monopoly over arms is taken to be the predatory of all exploitative relationship between human beings, which is transformed into new forms under new modes of production; but the character of dominance remains essentially asymmetric and exploitative.³² Meis shows that this is what happened under capitalism when violence was used to accumulate capital. She concluded that "the various forms of asymmetric hierarchical divisions of labour under the dictates of capital accumulation are based on the social paradigm of the pre-datory hunter/warrior, who without producing himself is able by means of arms to appropriate and subordinate other producers, their productive force and their products."³³

Thus, the ideological framework of the new approach is based on the premise that patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale (imperialism) constitute the structural and ideological framework for capital accumulation and continued subordination of women.³⁴ In an attempt to introduce a radical feminist – Marxist synthesis, Mies concluded that the enemy of and origin of the subordination of women is capitalist patriarchy not just men. Sexual subordination is linked up with imperialism. In her work, Mies tried to show the link between the historical development of patriarchy and exploitation on the one hand and the oppression and subordination of women on the other.³⁵

She indicated that in a capitalist society, the dominance of patriarchy was institutionalised through marriage and under advanced capitalism; women are defined as natural breeders and rearers of heirs for the capitalist and made to be dependent on men. According to her, the proletarianization of men under capitalism was accompanied by the "housewifery" of women.³⁶ From Mies' analysis, we can conclude that violence played the key role in the establishment of patriarchal relations and accumulation and that the subordination and exploitation of women, nature and colonies are the pre-conditions for the continuation of capital accumulation.

The importance given to violence in the subordination of women made feminists to believe that debunking the model of "man the hunter" will debunk the pre-suppositions on which sexual hierarchy and inequality is based.

³² Merie Loise op.cit, p.18.

³³ Ibid, p.

³⁴ Ibid, p.21.

³⁵ Maria Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation on World scale, op.cit.

³⁶ Ibid.

The attempts that have been made to posit the universal theory of the origin of sexual oppression have created erroneous views. It has led to the erroneous conclusion that all women should come together in order to fight and abolish universal sexual oppression of women. One cannot find adequate theoretical basis for the practicability of this. It presupposes the replacement of patriarchy with "matriarchy" which has never existed in history. We only know of matrilineal societies. Universal theories of the origin of sexual subordination are idealistic.

Instead of the pre-occupation with the origin of sexual subordination, we suggest that what is needed for the moment is an articulated theory and methodology, which is derived from studies, which are historically specific because gender roles are shaped by combination of factors which are historically constituted by internal and external factors, that produces changes at various levels of both the superstructure and the economic base; and that women movements should concern themselves with fighting the specificity of gender inequality. For this to be effective, theoretical and practical links need to be established with other oppressed groups in the society.

From our discussion above, discourse on women, gender and development in Africa both at the theoretical and empirical level, should seek to be gender inclusive and not exclusive, complementary and not competitive, interdependent and not individualistic, self sustaining and not exploitative.

There is need to begin to reconsider new approaches to women, gender and development based on perspectives that reflects the general principles mentioned above because they better reflect Africa's socio-cultural world views that will make development meaningful and relevant to both men and women. Approaches based purely on Eurocentric views, will result in the creation of modern women elites whose goal and values disconnects them from the masses. It is erroneous to believe in strict compartmentalized gender division of labour in Africa on which sustainable and equitable development strategies will be successfully anchored.

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