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REVIEW ARTICLE

WOMEN'S FORCED OBEDIENCE AND DEPENDABILITY TO MEN IN PNG: SCENARIO IS ANALOGOUS TO DOMESTIC SLAVERY

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ABSTRACT

Ever enduring supremacy of tribal chiefs and presumably the patriarchal authority of men over women in Papua New Guinea (PNG) have still been persisting. This persuasive nature of male dominance in all aspects of family lives in PNG got its primordial values indoctrinated to women's relegation at all times. The Melanesian society sanctioned this unsolicited female domestic slavery usurped for centuries. Global expansionism and consumerist economic exercises in postmodern states could hardly make any impact on the traditional condiments of customary tribal practices in PNG. Although, there are ample instances of women's domestic slavery in many other societies even with the least or absence of inelegant tribal family traits of 'male dictate' over the female folks. The extreme form of gender discrimination has been prevailing in PNG incongruent to the usual trend of liberal attitudes towards women in the developed world. This paper attempts to critically appraise the women's pecuniary as well as sociocultural status in PNG society alongside tribal specificity. This research is determined based on selected ethnographic accounts covering major provinces/regions of PNG. Basic information enduringly associated with PNG women's extreme forms of compliance to men are collected through intensive interviews utilizing structured and open-ended questions.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike many developing and underdeveloped countries, the noticeable submissive nature of women for their male counterparts in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is unique in itself. This specific feature of women's psychic state can be interpreted as comparable to native captivity given the forced obedience to male folks as supposedly a necessary condition for household safety issues. A sense of female dependence on males are naturally observable in vast tribal set up of PNG considering men's physical strengths, male-controlled roles of tribal chiefs, power of big men, the usual display of male arrogance to females as contrary to universal family norms, and the economic authority acknowledged to the male populace to a great extent (Sahlin, 1963; Godelier, 1982). The ever lower social status of women in the primordial tribal structure in PNG reflects an extreme form of gender discrimination too; hardly one could have such evidence elsewhere (Herdt, 2003). For example, in any matters of decision-making including family, politics, community affairs or even religious indictments of the sort, women in PNG have scarcely any say. Against the ongoing women's liberation movements for gender balance facilitated through the spate of postmodernism, the non- inspirational condition of PNG women will be researched (Godelier, 1982; Herdt, 2003; Saffu, 2003).

This study introduces to explore the overall conditions of PNG women utilizing an appropriate method of specific case studies undertaken as ethnographic sources gained from a number of provinces and regions of PNG. The women under study represent a variety of age-groups ranging from 25 years down to 62 years. It is an anticipated expectation of the researchers that this variance of age-brackets (25-35, 36-46, 47-57, and 58-62) would provide relatively more reliable information contesting the variability of questions and queries on the subject concerned. Because of the confidentiality, inaccessibility to remote tribal enclaves and sensitive issues facing PNG womenfolk, a limited number of respondents are interviewed with possible intensive modes for obtaining reliable information.

Standing of PNG Women in Family and Household: From our preceding deliberations about the unconfident status of women, we can be able to deduce the existent scenario with regard to PNG women's standing in the family and society. We have gathered information about the social position of women through in-depth interviewing from eight provinces which represent the three of the four regions of the country. The following Table (1) shows and indicates presumably the actualities of women positions:

Region/Province	No. of participants	Age	Statements
Morobe	4	46	Both male and female
		35	Most men out of respect
		34	Few women do speak
		28	Women mostly keep silent
Madang	2	62	Women are managers
		26	Husband is the decision maker
East Sepik	2	41	Women are not allowed to oppose men's decision
		37	Women adore even expired male leadership
Eastern Highlands	3	36	Male domination is respected and preferred
		34	Some male members are reasonable, so women feel secure
		25	To show respect respect to male is our culture
East New Britain	1	40	Males are only treated as head of families
West New Britain	1	62	Males sometimes seek advise from women
AROB	1	50	Males sometimes seek advise from women
Simbu	1	45	Men are strong and detrimed
Total	15		

It is apparent from the Table (1) that in the family decision making, the supremacy lies with the males only regardless of provincial/regional representativeness. Insignificantly, a very few opinions are recorded in which a bit of similar importance of male and female in family decision making are signposted. But these views are mostly pronounced by the elderly women only. These arguments are similar to those of early studies (Barker and Ietjen, 1990; Godelier and Strathern, 1991) which specified the male dominance in family decision-making process as primary. Men in most tribes are more privileged and hence they are unquestionably acceptable than their women counterparts for any family matters. Despite cultural variability and customary parameters, in any given society irrespective of urban, rural or tribal, the family maintenance and overall household activities are principally destined to economic sources. To substantiate the PNG women's limited access to economic resources or materials, the solvency issue is in question. The following Table (2) demonstrates the facts of women's vulnerable economic conditions in the family and community:

Region/Province	No. of participants	Age	Opinions		
			Yes	No	Not sure
Morobe	4	46		√	
		35			√
		34	√		
		28	√		
Madang	2	62	√		
		26	√		
East Sepik	2	41	√		
		37			√
Eastern Highlands	3	36	√		
		34			√
		25			√
East New Britain	1	40	√		
West New Britain	1	62	√		
AROB	1	50	√		
Simbu	1	45			√
Total	15				

It is evident that sixty percent of the women in our study indicated that they are able to freely venture into economic activities without any interference by men. This simply reflected the women's involvement in small to medium

enterprise (SME) sector or informal market. Thirty three percent of the women are unsure about their participatory roles in economic accomplishments. Whilst seven percent of the women state that they hardly take part in economic activities. This implies that males have less dominance over women's decisions to participate in economic undertakings in their communities. It reveals women's substantial economic contributions to family and community although they are socioeconomically repressed under traditional tribal patriarchal system evidenced in PNG. When we ponder family as a social institution, our prime emphasis should be to discuss the effectiveness of married/partnered life of the couples under study. In our current research, we have collected information on the aspects of possible endurance of family partnership and found the following results as shown in this Table (3) below:

Region/Province	No. of participants	Age	Different views		
			Fully Satisfied	Relatively Satisfied	Never Satisfied
Morobe	4	46	√		
		35		√	
		34			√
		28			√
Madang	2	62	√		
		26	√		
East Sepik	2	41			√
		37		√	
Eastern Highlands	3	36		√	
		34			√
		25		√	
East New Britain	1	40			√
West New Britain	1	62	√		
AROB	1	50	√		
Simbu	1	45	√		
Total	15				

Table-3 shows that on the average forty (40) percent of women indicated full satisfaction in their married lives. They also pointed out about long-lasting experience and relationships with their husbands. Another thirty three (33) percent women felt they were never satisfied with their marriage relationships. This could mean they experienced marriages break-ups (either husbands deserting wives or to some extent wives leave husbands). In most cases, PNG women out of recognizable fearful respects for their husbands, seldom disclose any dissatisfaction to others but tended to continue living relationships safeguarding the tribal norms of male hegemony. Such observable marriage/partner relationships between tribal males and females with factual explanations called for understandings of the ethos of family patriarchy. The fundamental tenets of men's power over women are literally attributed to the reflection of hegemonic patriarchal establishments.

Patriarchal acts and tribal dominance: It is a commonplace that the system of patriarchy has been prevailing in PNG from time immemorial (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997; Herdt, 2003; Ambang, 2007). The nature of patriarchy in our society is particularly designed and designated through the age-old ordain of primitive tribal culture of Melanesian society (Epstein, 1968; Finney, 1973; Morauta, 1983). The following Table (4) will show the specific nature of patriarchal system in which the exercise of absolute control and rights of men over women are existent in a tribal set up:

Region/Province	No. of participants	Age	Varied opinions		
			Angry Incidences	Patriarchal Mentality	Clanish Attitude
Morobe	4	46			√
		35		√	
		34			√
		28		√	
Madang	2	62	√		
		26		√	
East Sepik	2	41		√	
		37	√		
Eastern Highlands	3	36		√	
		34	√		
		25		√	
East New Britain	1	40	√		
West New Britain	1	62	√		
AROB	1	50	√		
Simbu	1	45			√
Total	15				

Table-4 shows a clear picture on the male's attitudes towards females wherein the categories of 'angry incidences' and 'patriarchal mentality' represent the majority of the respondents' views reflected as truly glorifying patriarchal norms across major provinces of PNG. The 'clannish attitudes' for absolute male control which represent insignificantly as compared to two other categories of patriarchal authorities mentioned above. But nevertheless, clannish attitudes also fall under the patriarchal hegemony in its contents and applications though in a restricted sense.

While appreciating the domineering roles of the tribal chiefs/bigmen, we gathered information from PNG women as to what they think and view about the tribal chiefs/bigmen. The main purpose of collecting this information was to apprehend the self-status of the women, they presented themselves. Also it would indicate the tribal leaders' attitudes towards them. The following Table (5) will portray their views:

Region/Province	No. of participants	Age	Women's opinions		
			Bigman	Strong & determined	Domineering
Morobe	4	46		√	
		35	√		
		34	√		
		28	√		
Madang	2	62			√
		26		√	
East Sepik	2	41		√	
		37		√	
Eastern Highlands	3	36		√	
		34		√	
		25		√	
East New Britain	1	40		√	
West New Britain	1	62		√	
AROB	1	50		√	
Simbu	1	45			√
Total	15				

As shown in Table (5), majority of the women (60) percent stated that tribal chief dominance was strongly evident in their societies. Twenty percent of the women in this study indicated bigmen dominance was common throughout the society whilst

thirteen percent indicated tribal chief dominance as their least dominance.

Theoretical Perspective: The continuity of women's liberation movement together with the wave of globalization and consumerist expansionism which allegedly negated the patriarchal authority, but nevertheless, it seemed to appear as an impasse when we observe the female status in PNG. Taking into account the relative absence of economic freedom and consequent dependence on men made womenfolk non-wage earners compared to that of women in the modern world who are involved in feminist movement exercising their rights to wage earnings besides domestic household works. As a matter of fact, caretaking and house works are still primary for the women in most families (Becker, 1999; Silbaugh, 2016). There are no dearth of academic write-ups on the issues of gender discrimination, male authoritarianism and their aggressiveness towards women. The detail theoretical illustrations with the concurrent trends like patriarchal aptitude and inhumanity against women reflected on the exercise of power, dominance and gender biases adhered to certain social conditions critically appraised (Hunnicut, 2009). However, a plausible development of theory in augmenting the basics for the self-determination and individuality of women is yet to be mounted in societies. The degree of variance in establishing women's rights against absolute male control could be perceived in developed and underdeveloped nations. When we tend to trace the origin of patriarchy, the views of the traditionalists reveal that men are born to dominate and women are meant to be subjugated. This perception is maintained by many thinkers in many different ways. Mitchell, a celebrated feminist psychologist who uses the term 'patriarchy' referring to a kinship system where men exchange women (Mitchell, 1971). Again, Walby (1990) explains the system of patriarchy in a social structure wherein men dominate, exploit and oppress women. The theme of patriarchy can also be regarded as the institutionalized system of male dominance legitimizing social relationships as the hierarchical norms in establishing social solidarity among men for their justification of domination over women (Jagger and Rosenberg, 1984). Even, the system of patriarchy exist in institution like academy, church, and family and the like as a means to justify women's subordination to men through their religious and normative disciplines (Millet, 1977). It is seemingly factual that women are thoroughly powerless and are deprived of civil rights and relative lack of access to resources (Lerner, 1989), the fact that holds true for the PNG women too. The exercise of patriarchy and male oppression over women is man-made. Philosophers and social thinkers like Aristotle and Engels also opine about the determining roles of men and women in society. Aristotle advocated that males are active while females are passive, the biological inferiority or weakness of women makes them inferior even to make decision-making and ability to reasoning like that of men. In this context, the courage of men could be considered commanding and women could be obeying the command (Lerner, 1989). In contrast, the views of Engels (1940) on the origin of patriarchy supposed that women's subordination began with the development of private property and since then the historical defeat of female sex took place with division of classes, social hierarchy and gender imbalance. Over and above, the hierarchy of power and authority, for all practical purposes pass through from men to women which has been continuing in societies since the inception of human civilization. The social structure of PNG is quite different from many other cultures. Foregoing

discussions authenticated the unique traditional cultural norms revealing women's natural subservience to men in all manners.

Conclusion

Based on the primary data and information intensively collected through in-depth interviewing of 15 respondents in different regions of PNG, the researchers came to an assertions about the PNG women's status and position in society and family. To note that the prevailing situations of women in PNG in the context of safety, security, social existence, access to economic resources, political participation and even in community engagements are not at all favorable. Although women constitute nearly half of the population of the country (percent to be mentioned), their substantial lack of educational attainments (provide data), constraints to health services and powerlessness in family, community and political arena should be deemed as the sociologically under-dogged, under-privileged sections of the populace of this country. Lest we consider the gender equity issues, the extreme nature of women's subservience and forced obedience to men are tantamount to no more than their status as similar to domestic slavery. It is apparently factual to regard women as domestic labor forces, when they are intuitively owned, controlled and regulated in all aspects of their lives by the males only. Therefore, gender balance is a modern concept for the women's liberation movement around the world; this particular ethos cannot be applied to the situations of women in PNG for they are still striving to survive in the stereotypical Melanesian social structure.

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