Maternity Leave, Leadership and Masculinity in the Context of Gender Relations and Cultural Diplomacy

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Abstract

Women had long been accorded due recognition for their role as child bearers in African traditional societies. The transformed African institutions and policies which were in tune with the European values and culture confined the women to the home front. This further sharpened such roles in the colonial and postcolonial era. By granting maternity leave to them rather than paternity leave to the men, women as mothers were perceived as those who ensure the socialisation of children into the society. In other words, culture seems to be reproduced in the recognition of women until recently. The new paternity leave being recently granted to men traverses or goes beyond the feminist boundary which seems to be subordinated for the recognition of masculinity. By further implication, women as those who are mostly responsible for the socialisation of children reduce such function by including men. This paper discusses this new phenomenon and its implications for the female gender in the newly emerging gender relations. It posits that patriarchal leadership seems to be responsible for this new phenomenon such that gender issues, which used to be perceived as female and women issues are now expanded in the new gender relations.

Introduction

A relatively new policy of granting male civil servants paternity leave like their female counterparts by the government of both Lagos and Enugu states in Nigeria may appear strange to the Nigerian culture. Even though it is commendable, it seems to contradict the general run of play and deserves a better understanding of all who care about the family. There is no denying the fact that many women endure more than a fair share of hardship after childbirth as a result of lack of minimal adequate support or a helping hand from their partners. However, the idea of paternity leave in the Nigerian society is both foreign and relatively new to her culture. It is, in many respects, a form of cultural diplomacy since it attempts to develop, establish and sustain a new way of cultural assimilation. Consequently, culture which is seen as comprising a collection of acquired and learned behaviours that characterise or

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define each society or social group including its beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas commonly shared by people in the society as Olaoba (2002) posits, is thus widened. Culture is also a proactive process of external projection in which a nation's institutions, value system and unique cultural personality are promoted at bilateral and multilateral level(s) (Ngcono, 1983).

The idea of promoting culture or value is translated in gender roles in this paper, refers mainly to that societal conception of female and male roles and the extent to which both genders relate with each other. Through cultural diplomacy, roles assigned to both men and women become a question that transcends culture in every society. Thus, women who used to be encumbered with the naturally assigned roles of child bearing and rearing and sustained by culture through the social system, also take care of men and make them subordinate to male authority.

In most African societies, especially Nigerian traditional societies, procreation is highly emphasised in marriage due to the high value attached to children. Child bearing is a sacred duty that had to be carried out because of the life involved (Andrea, 2004). A woman's status in such a society was determined by the children she bore and her entire life was created on them, thus traditionally, she looked after the homestead. In addition to this, women also work on the farm to ensure sufficient material resources for the family. In spite of the seeming unequal treatment meted on women in their performance of these roles of child bearing and mothering, they continue, virtually without questioning, to bear and nurture children (Kimberly, 1996).

In most societies, women as mothers were perceived as those who ensure the socialisation of children into the society. In other words, culture seems to be reproduced in the recognition of women until recently.

The new paternity leave being advocated for men in Nigeria traverses the feminist boundary which seems to be subordinated for the recognition of masculinity. By further implication, women as those who are solely responsible for the socialisation of children reduce such function by including men. The thrust of this paper is that the roles assigned to gender, that is male and female are in accordance with accepted African indigenous culture, that is the way of life inherent in the society. This paper, therefore, discusses the new phenomenon and its implication for the female gender in the newly emerging relations. It posits that patriarchal leadership seems to be responsible for this new phenomenon such that gender issues. As a result, what used to be perceived as strictly female and women issues are now expanded in the new gender relations

Definition of Key Concepts

Maternity Leave

In this paper, maternity leave refers to a period of paid absence from work to which a woman is legally entitled during the months immediately before and after childbirth.

Masculinity

By masculinity, we mean a set of attributes, behaviours and roles generally associated with boys and men. It is a combination of socially-defined and biological factors.

Leadership

As used in this paper, leadership refers to the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the society.

Conceptualising Cultural Diplomacy through Cultural Assimilation

Defined as the total way of life of group of people, culture encompasses every aspect of the lives of its citizenry. Culture is an acquired and transmitted pattern of shared meaning, feeling and behaviour that constitutes a distinctive human group. Thus, cultural diplomacy is almost un-understandable without an in-depth knowledge of culture. To Oke, (2006), the concept of culture was developed out of the need for an objective term to characterise the similarities and wide differences between groups of people. The usage of the concept has spread to other fields of social thoughts. In the context of his paper, culture encompasses the means of making a living, and the arrangement of family life. Culture puts a control on human's drive, influences displays of emotion and sexual behaviour, provides for reproduction or care-rearing, care of new members and patterns of child-rearing. Each human group has its own unique culture. Culture, in the social sciences, is everything in human society which is socially rather than biologically transmitted. While culture may be enriched endogenously, relationships with other nations outside its boundaries also help, in a way, to enrich culture. Deliberately, such relationship may be cultivated for relevance or otherwise. This is what gives birth to cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy may be described as

course of actions, which are based on and utilise the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and other aspects of culture of identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-political and economic cooperation or promote national interests. Cultural diplomacy can be practised both in the public-sector, private sector or civil society (Mark, 2009). It is a two-way avenue such that while trying to nurture a favourable perception of a country's national ideals and policies with foreign audiences; it would never fail to recognise the cultural identity of the target nation. This includes psychology, mentality and way of life, customs, traditions and history. The success of cultural diplomacy is dependent on the intercultural dialogue and mutual respect (Louis, 1999:679).

Cultural diplomacy is also a type of public diplomacy and soft power that includes the "exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (U.S. Dept. of State, 2005:6). The purpose of cultural diplomacy is for people of a foreign nation to develop an understanding of the nation's ideals and institutions in an effort to build broad support for economic and political goals. In essence, cultural diplomacy reveals the soul of a nation. Culture is an acquired and transmitted pattern of shared meaning, feeling, and behaviour that constitute a distinctive human group. Though often overlooked, beyond the definition of culture, cultural diplomacy can and does play an important role in achieving national security aims. Cultural diplomacy therefore, is the way societies conduct everyday interaction with diplomacy. Thus, it does not

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always involve outside intervention.

When instituted within the society, it is a way by which people are not directly exposed to criticisms, yet made to conform to societal norms. In relations with other nations, diplomatic culture, as it may also be interpreted, helps to appreciate other cultures without explicit criticism. Thus, cultural diplomacy has been able to unite African countries with other countries of the world. This unity is not without cultural contact and relations where-in Africans have borrowed lots of foreign cultures. The borrowed culture does not exclude the newly mentioned paternity leave policy in Nigeria but has been implemented and adopted in most developed nations of the world. To ensure this, those in leadership positions, either as educated, political and business elite, have been instrumental in enhancing cultures.

Leadership, Patriarchy, Maternity Leave and Public Policy

Leadership remains the fulcrum of any human society, be it organised or unorganised, from time immemorial. It transcends all societies and at all levels in the various institutions. Leadership is the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the society. Leaders in most societies are in positions to formulate public policies in line with the culture and needs of the people they are governing. As such, public policy is a purposive and consistent course of action produced as a result of a perceived problem of a constituency formulated by a specific political process, and adapted, implemented and enforced by a public agency.

Leadership however may also help to shape the relationship between men and women. Thus, this recent policy on paternity leave seems to be moving beyond the fact that sex and gender shape such relationship (Parker, 2005).

Leadership in Nigeria is patriarchal in nature like other African societies. That is, it is a system of social structures and practices in which men and women participate in but promote men's privileges by being male dominated, male identified and male centred (Walby, 2007). Thus, as obtainable in Nigerian cultures, leadership is dependent on male-values giving credence to male domination over values whose monopoly is not for male dominance. Families are the first in which masculinities are negotiated and contested (Martin, 2000:25). While fathers are the first role models for their sons' masculinities, and take active part in shaping their construction of masculinity, outcomes are negotiated and contested thereby theorising focuses on oppositional categories of masculinity or femininity, father's or mother's identification or rejection (Connel, 2005:17). This theoretical position, it seems, informs the granting of maternal leaves to women.

However, lived experience transcends these oppositional categories. It suggests that mothering has greater importance. It supports the arguments of Chodorow (1999) on mothers' significance in the integration of emotion in the self and its relations to structure rather than that of fathers'. The importance of mother, to her, especially in the process of identity formation, should be acknowledged rather than dismissed.

In addition, changes have also been

occurring in the expected roles of women and men in families in most societies. Women are still the main providers of care at home even as they assume greater work responsibilities outside their homes. Men especially in developed nations have been confronted with demands that they become more engaged in performing family responsibilities. Although men are still seen mostly as breadwinners, who have to go out to make a living for their immediate family and to some extent, extended families, they are also disciplinarians and protectors within their families. Furthermore, they are increasingly taking on new responsibilities, including care giving, and providing emotional support to children, offering guidance so as to enable children to connect with their extended family and community members and participating in a variety of household activities.

This broadening of paternal roles, according to Ortner (1974), has given room for a greater attention being paid to the effects to men's involvement on the well-being of their families. This has made policy-makers recognise the need for effective public policy that is supportive of men's involvement in their families. Historically, most public policies that are social related do reflect a somewhat invisible men's contribution to family life, focusing on them mainly as economic providers. Moreover, many policies unintentionally presumed men to be deficient with regard to the discharging of their family responsibilities, which resulted in their exclusion from policy considerations. Governmental policy often attempt to deal with problems in such a way as to ensure the perpetuation of the very construction of

masculinity that had produced those problems in the first place. Notwithstanding those difficulties, new policies facilitating gender involvement in the lives of their families have been implemented, in particular in the area of reproduction related issues such as family planning, and other important health issues. Therefore, governments of many developed countries, in recognising the importance of fathers in the upbringing and socialisation of their children, introduced paternity leave to encourage men's participation. In granting such leave, the importance of fathers in the family is being recognised. In addition, their various cultures do recognise and accept the fact that the attainment of gender equality requires examining men's and women's participation, roles and inequalities of power in various dimensions of political, social, and family life-ranging from the home to the public. It entails redressing inequalities in out-of-home labour market as well as achieving change in social expectations regarding men's roles in families which frequently refers exclusively to women and girls and the disadvantages they face (International Centre for Research on Women and Institute Promundo, 2010). Gender inequality globally is the unequal work-life divide which stems from the fact that men are generally expected to be providers and breadwinners (who work mostly outside the home) and women and girls are generally expected to provide care to be chiefly responsible for reproductive aspects of family life.

Masculinity, Paternity Leave and Public Policy

This paper is located within the context of

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masculinities, a concept through which one can understand how men are socialised, how men's role are socially constructed in constant interaction with women's roles and how these roles change over the lifecycle and in different social contexts (Connell, 1994). According to Robinson and Hockey (2011:11), masculinity is the 'approved way of being an adult male in any given society'. Masculinity in terms of definition in most societies share similar ways, meaning that biological differences in some form influence the cultural definition adopted. The concept of masculinities however, also enjoins us to examine the diversity of men and the pressures they may feel to adhere to specific versions of manhood, particularly the version shaped by widespread belief that being a man means being a provider and bread-winner or having stable employment and to understand how such roles change historically and by social context, and within the various domains where social meanings of gender are constructed (Resser, 2010:8).

Literature over the years have argued that men and women, in all societies, do have assigned roles they play in relation to the totality of the way of life in the society as well as roles that are ascribed by nature without each sex encroaching on the traditional preserve of the other (Hays, 1996). A woman's anatomy and its function places her in social roles that in turn are considered to be at a lower order of the cultural process than men's (Ortner, 1974).

Childbearing and childrearing are part of the roles which nature, perpetuated by society, has been assigned to women. However, when a woman puts to bed, she is expected to rest for some time so she might regain strength.

In African societies in general, and specifically, Nigeria, the need to *regain* strength after the delivery of the child has been inherent in the culture even in the traditional society, but was never termed 'maternity leave'. In such traditional African societies, a woman does not engage in her day to day activities until she is delivered of her baby.

In exceptional circumstances, however, if the woman is being incapacitated to continue with her 'informal work' due to illness, she would have to take a rest even before delivery. As soon as she is delivered of her baby, she is temporarily disengaged from her activities and allowed to rest from engaging in work for a specified period of time.

In the formal sector of the economy, through modernisation which emerged since colonisation, maternity leave is the time a mother takes off from work for the birth or adoption of a child. Maternity leave is also described as the time a pregnant woman takes off from work to take care of her baby during or after pregnancy. Maternity, world-wide, is an exclusive preserve of women due to the fact that they bear the brunt of pregnancy and child rearing which requires a time of rejuvenation for the body. While some organisations offer paid maternity leave, some do not.

As alluded to above however, in developed countries like the United States of America, there is a law that was passed in 1993 by the US department of labour's Employ-ment Standard Administration in view of Maternity/Paternity leave known as "The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)". The law specifies the terms and conditions under which an eligible employee becomes entitle to job

leave. This law applies to employers of all levels of government agencies, schools and private companies who employ 50 people for 20 weeks or more of the calendar year and in some ways involved in commerce. The law only covers mother for 12 weeks of unpaid leave with guaranteed job security, but does not secure jobs at smaller organisation. This law offer comparatively little to mothers and fathers trying to balance work and parenthood.

In Sweden however, a mother is eligible to proceed for!6 months of parental leave split between herself and her partner, while receiving 80 percent of her pay. In the United States of America, certain states offer more comprehensive maternity leave option than others. California, for example was one of the few states which offer paid leave (about 55 percent of your pay for 6 weeks) while some 20 states offer varying degree of job protection maternity leave.

Maternity leave usually becomes quite effective from about a week from date of delivery to its expiration; and this often depends on the type of coverage the woman possesses. Some programs will offer six weeks of paid leave while some others can offer up to eight weeks if there are complications due to caesarean section or the need to be bedridden. These laws and policies are quite informed by their way of life.

Paternity leave on the other hand, refers to a period of time when a father is allowed to be away from work after the birth of his child. It is a sort of parental or family leave that provides paid time off work to care for a child. Paternity leave policies vary considerably among various countries and may be influenced by such factors as whether it is paid

or unpaid, as well as the length and flexibility of the job. In most European countries, parental leave, also known as family-based parental leave, is a statutory right available to either parent (Drew, 2004). This is quite distinct from individual leave which is generally added on to family leave and cannot be transferred. For example, Finland has a six month quota for the father, Norway, four weeks of paternal leave and Sweden, two months reserved for each parent. In Iceland, the parental leave is divided into three parts: three months for the father, three months for the father and three months that both can share. Some countries outside Scandinavia also have special paternity leave. Belgium, France, The Netherland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom for example, all offer paternity leave of 2-11 days. In the United Nations, though in the Family Leave Act, a father is entitled to 12 weeks of paternity without pay. But due to economic implications, organisations allow for 2 weeks.

Paternity Leave in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the Lagos and Enugu States governments' paternity leave policies give a father 10 days. This idea is good enough in that it would give men the opportunity to get closer to their families as well as reduce tensions. However, this in reality is quite alien to the Nigerian culture. More so, men are breadwinners finding way to meet ends by providing for their families. The state governments formulated this policy to foster bond between the father and the child and support the mother. It would also foster gender equality and promote the father taking up family responsibilities. The inability of

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parents to adequately fulfil their parental roles, to a large extent, accounts for many social ills in the society. In addition, the paper is of the view that though maternity leave is a fact, paternity leave, on the other hand, is a matter of opinion.

Conclusion

Public policies are never static but dynamic. This has been demonstrated in this paper by showing maternity leave, founded on the assumption that women who are the child bearers, deserve a time of rejuvenation and recovering after child delivery. Through a change in public and, in our contention, informed by masculinity and cultural diplomacy, paternity leave is now granted to men in the developed world. Even though this is alien to the Nigerian social structure, the Lagos and Enugu state governments have lapped onto this new dynamics. This seems, however, to be informed more by the need to be like other nations of the world, often referred to as cultural diplomacy, and the continued patriarchal nature of Nigeria than any re-appraisal of men's roles in the society. Our position is informed by the lack of the expected fundamental change in the ways children are socialised. Among others, the toys children still play with at home are gender biased; and teachers assign gender biased professions to children at school (Olutayo, 2014). One then wonders how the boys would grow up to perceive themselves as home makers who deserve paternity leave. Perhaps, with time, there shall be reasons for this new policy but, for now, its relevance seems unfounded.

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