

Gender Parity in Plato's Ideal State: A Critical Appraisal

Dr. Innocent B. Barikor

Senior Lecturer, Department Political and Administrative Studies
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Email: innocent.barikor@uniport.edu.ng

Dr. I.U. Gwunireama

Department of Philosophy, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

&

Tamunosiki Victor Ogan, Ph.D

Department of Philosophy, University of Port Harcourt,
Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract

The problem of gender inequality is indeed a signature issue in social ethics, philosophical jurisprudence, philosophy of Human, rights, Philosophy of the Social Science, and of, course, Philosophical Anthropology. This paper critically examines the concept of gender parity in Plato's Ideal State. It adopts qualitative research method, in which case, it is highly analytical and philosophical. It also employs the method of hermeneutics in its exploration and interpretation of Plato's analysis and understanding of gender equality. It also employs the method of hermeneutics in its exploration and interpretation of Plato's analysis and understanding of gender equality. It serves as a theoretical construct or framework in addressing the lingering and looming issue of gender disparity which translates to social inequality in the civil society. It posits, in conclusion, that Plato's thesis in favour of gender equality is plausible and valid. It recommends the practice of gender equality in contemporary Nigerian society.

Keywords: Gender, Parity, Plato, Ideal, State, Critical, Appraisal.

DOI: [URL:https://doi.org/10.36758/ijpamr/v7n1.2021/05](https://doi.org/10.36758/ijpamr/v7n1.2021/05)

Introduction

The crux or main thrust of this paper is the centrality of gender parity in Plato's social and political philosophy. Women constitute half of the world's population and have contributed significantly to the well-being of the human race. In Nigeria, for instance, women, have always played five key roles-mother, producer, home manager, community organizer, and socio-cultural and political activist. It is pathetic to note with total dismay and utter dissatisfaction that despite their large number and crucial functions, the division of roles between the male and female sexes, as prescribed by most cultures, assign the subordinate position to women. As a consequence, women have for long suffered various forms of discrimination, inequality, exclusion, and violence (Enemuo 226).

It is interesting to note that there is great debate or moral divide in philosophy regarding the status of women. Thus, philosophical debates have occasioned the imperative need to improve the level of *gender awareness* in society, for policy-makers to become *gender sensitive*, for social analysts to employ *gender constructs*, for the political process to be *genderised* (Ekweke 21-22). Making sense of the term gender will constitute the point of departure.

The Meaning of Gender

Etymologically, the term gender is derived from the Latin word *Genus*- meaning 'kind' or 'group'; Until recently the term was used mainly as a grammatical concept to classify words into masculine, feminine and neuter. The concept is currently applied to a wide range of socio-cultural phenomena in relation to men and women or boys and girls.

Specifically, gender is now used to designate the culturally defined, socially formed identities of men and women that are highly variable across cultures and are continually subject to change (Chiegboka 77). Thus, it denotes the different and unequal perceptions, views, roles and relevance, rewards, etc; which a society assigns to men and women through its culture or social conventions (Ukwuegbu 89-90).

It simply refers to the socially constructed inequality between women and men. Suffice it to say that gender roles are neither natural nor immutable. They are constructed and invented by society. Furthermore, it is worthy of note to emphasize that gender differences are created and sustained by society through its traditions, customs, conventions, mores, and regulations (Idowu 126). Commenting on gender as a product of human contrivance, Kenneth Amasiatu writes that the gender notions about male and female include:

Traditional stereotypes that characterize women as submissive, illogical, passive, talkative, emotional, easily moved to tears, etc. men on the other hand are assumed to be competent, logical, independent. These stereotypes tend to reflect men and women as belonging to opposite ends of bipolar adjectives in which men have desirable qualities while women have undesirable ones (114-115).

The import of the above remark is that societal norms and stereotypes also function as a traditional ideology that relegates women to the background as playing house wife roles while promoting men as actors, providers and final authority. Thus, character portraits of male and female are not determined by nature but have been constructed by society.

In view of this, most contemporary societies are male-dominated. In varying degrees, they harbor beliefs, mores and practices which objectively permit or promote the economic exploitation of women and their political marginalization. At the same, women also suffer various forms of injustice, humiliation and violence just because they are women. All these are manifestations of gender relations and role allocation.

Plato on Gender Parity in the Ideal State

Plato is a staunch, uncompromising and unrepentant advocate of gender equality. He argues that beyond the physical distinctions, there are no fundamental differences between both sexes in talents and skills i.e. aptitude. In his philosophy of education, both boys and girls are to receive the same quality of education (instruction or training). His determination to set the pace for an ideal state anchors and hinges on the following questions: Who is a philosopher? Who should rule? Why should philosophers rule? These constitute the major preoccupations that coloured and shaped Plato's flow of ideas and stream of consciousness in his social and political philosophy. For him:

a philosopher is one who loves wisdom, has a passion for knowledge, and always curious and eager to learn... one who loves Truth... A Philosopher by his grasp of the Idea Good is best qualified to rule... he will be able to administer justice and act for the good of the community. He will have a good character, a calm disposition and a sound mind. He will have the qualities of a ruler, namely truthfulness, high-

mindfulness, discipline and courage. Undaunted by death, and being a lover of truth, he will be honest and forthright. He will not be petty or mean, being above physical and material pleasures. Devoid of emotional ties and economic considerations, he will be public-spirited and wise (Plato qtd in Mukherjee and Ramaswamy 60-61).

Plato's general understanding of political leadership is not predicated on sex or gender. He affirms his belief in gender equality by saying that whoever possesses the attributes or essential qualities highlighted above is qualified to rule irrespective of sex. He is, at any rate, a crusader of gender equality and equal political participation. Thus, women can as well perform similar functions as men do with same degree of rigor and vigor. In the *Republic*, Plato wittingly writes that:

Then there is no way of life concerned with the management of the city that belongs to a woman because she's a woman or to a man because he is a man, but that the various natures are distributed in the same way in both creatures. Women share by nature in every way just as men (BK. V, 1.2a)

The import of the above point of view is that Plato assigns administrative functions in his ideal state on the basis of merits, not gender. He dismisses the argument that there exists a natural distinction between both sexes as being baseless and flawed. For him, if a man satisfies the preconditions or prerequisites for becoming a political leader by way of rigorous education of a guardian, then he is qualified to rule likewise a woman. His understanding of who should rule rests squarely on the myth of metal and of earth-born which corresponds to his notion of the soul.

It is, however, important to note that there are a good number of fundamental areas of disagreement between Plato and Aristotle in Perspectives regarding the moral status of women vis-à-vis political participation. Whereas Plato makes a strong case for gender equality in politics and governance; Aristotle, on the other hand, advances rational justification for the subordination of, and discrimination against, women on grounds of biological and natural differences between them and their male folks. He (Aristotle) opines that, "The male being superior, stronger and better, should rule over the female—a defective, incomplete male. Though the husband and wife are interdependent, they are not equal" (Aristotle *Politics* BK. IV, 3.5b). he insinuates that in a husband-wife relationship, the former is endowed with a natural gift of command while the latter for obedience (Nwoko 116). It is on the strength of the foregoing discriminatory view against women that some stereotyped apologists hold tenaciously to the view that a woman's rightful place is in her house i.e. kitchen. Thus, women are to be excluded from politics due to the fact that their deliberative faculties are inconclusive. In other words, they were not able to complete the process of *potentiality* to *actuality* (Act and Potency) in Aristotelian metaphysics. He also argues that women have obsession for luxury and material things which are capable of distorting their sense of judgement which is an essential element of a political leader.

Further more, Aristotle believes that a woman's rightful place is her home. His contention stems from the fact that a woman, having being burdened by household chores, does not have sufficient time for politics, philosophy, art, or science (Ajodo 82-83). In what follows, the stereotyped image of a woman is that she is excessively emotional, irrational, and sensual weakly who needs the guidance or superintendence of a male folk. This point of view, however, translates to mean lopsided male domination, which is tantamount to bias and prejudice.

Lessons for Contemporary Nigeria

In the political landscape and historical trajectory of Nigeria as a social formation, women have made historic and landmark contributions to the course of nation-building, national integration and, of course, assertion of her sovereignty. The legacies of Queen Amina of Zaria speak volume of her in the pre-colonial history of Nigeria. What is more, the pivotal roles of Lady Margaret Ekpo-leader of the Aba women riot of 1929 is another case in point. All the same, the drive to rebranding Nigeria through social transformation and the administrative reforms in NAFDAC are evident demonstrations of the roles of women in politics as evidenced in the initiatives of Professor Dora Nkechi Akunyili (of blessed memory) and the innovations of Dr. Ngozi Iweala-Okonjo towards revamping Nigerian economy through prudent financial management. All these are indicative and suggestive of the fact that what a man can do, a woman can also do better or even more better.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined Plato's concept of gender parity in the ideal state and its implications for politics and governance in Nigeria. It is established in this discourse that Girl-child education be made compulsory and that women be given equal opportunity to participate in governance. While some cultural practices that denigrates and depraves women such as Female genital Mutilation (FGM) i.e. female circumcision, early marriage, exclusion from the public realm, widowhood, the *sira* syndrome (as obtainable in Ogoni society), sexual abuse, etc.; should be constitutionally discouraged as they to subjugate women to a state of perpetual servitude and subordinate status. Women should be given proportional representation in political participation either through elections or appointments for them to contribute meaningfully to the course of national development using their talent.

Works Cited

- Ajodo, Samuel A. *Fundamentals of Political Philosophy*. Anyigba: Kogi State Univeristy Press, 2017.
- Amasiatu, Kenneth C. *Practical Christianity: The Challenge of our Time*. Orlu: Chimasin Production Nig. Ltd; 2004.
- Amaudiume, Innocent. "Gender, Political System and Social Movement: A West African Experience". *African Studies in Social Movement and Democracy* Dakar: CODESRIA, 2002.
- Aristotle. *Politics*. Trans. S.A. Sinclair. London: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Ekweke, Evaristus E. *Ethics and Society*. Aba: Everyday Publishers Ltd; 2017.
- Enemuo, Francis C. "Gender and Women Empowerment", in Anifowose, Remi and Enemuo Francis C. (eds). *Elements of Politics* Revised edition. Lagos: Same Iroanusi Publications, 2008.
- Ibezim, Helen C. *Feminism and Literature*. Aba: Three Stars Press, 2017.
- Idowu, Abiodun B. *Contemporary Socio-Ethical Issues in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Seminary of SS Peter and Paul Press, 2011.
- Mukherjee, Subrata and Ramaswamy, Sushila. *A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, 2007.
- Nwoko, Matthew. *Foundation of Political theories*. Nekede: Claretian Institute of Philosophy, 1988.
- Okafor, Vincent C. *Women in Pre-colonial Africa*. Ibadan: Macmillan Press, 2019.
- Plato *Republic*. Trans. J.A. Wilcox. London: Penguin Books, 1975.
- Ukaegbu, Chioma F. *Themes in Feminist Jurisprudence*. Onitsha: Godday Publishers Ltd; 2016.
- Ukwuegbu, Bernard. *Understanding Philosophical Anthropology*. Owerri: Seat of Wisdom Major Seminary Press, 2015.
- Wollstonecraft, W.F. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Toronto: Clarendon Press, 1952.