

## **Gender apartheid: The challenges of breaking into “man's world”**

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## **Gender Apartheid: The Challenges of Breaking into ‘Man’s World’**

### **Abstract**

Drawing on feminist/gender theory and the notion that women self-allocate to occupations with which they identify, this study examines the challenges confronted by women working in male-dominated occupations in a *highly patriarchal* setting. The findings reveal that women working in ‘male-typed’ occupations in Nigeria are ‘lone wolf’ in a marginal revolution. They experience social ostracism, impaired spousal relationships, and a lack of support from friends and family for their participation in such occupations. Furthermore, the entrenchment of patriarchal culture, the requirement of physical strength, and the lack of trust on the part of clients in these women’s professional abilities pose significant barriers to their success in male-dominated professions. These problems further breed and reinforce occupational gender segregation. The prospects of reducing occupational gender segregation and the underrepresentation of women in ‘male-typed’ occupation appear slim due to cultural belief and patriarchal orientation in the study context.

**Keywords:** Gender, Nigeria, occupational segregation, discrimination, patriarchy

## Introduction

The assumption that the nature of work is unaffected by gender has long been discarded. Researchers have argued that people judge the nature of work majorly by the social identities associated with the work (Akerloff and Kranton, 2010; Ashcraft, 2013; Charles and Grusky, 2004; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). **Gender is particularly affected by occupational segregation among other social identities (e.g., race, religion, sexual orientation and social class) where the scope of work is gender-specific (García-Mainar et al., 2018).** This perhaps is responsible for occupational gender segregation, which is the crux of this study. Occupational gender segregation is a systematic and unequal distribution of men and women among different jobs (Campos-Soria et al., 2011; Scarborough, 2020). Many scholars perceive occupational segregation (OS) as a type of gender inequality (Boyd et al., 1991; Walby, 1992) because it typically accounts for high wage differences between men and women (Bayard et al., 2003; Blau and Kahn, 2017) and the number of men and women in a given occupation and how each gender is favoured (Cohen et al., 1998). Anker (1998) points out that gender segregation has a negative effect on the male perception of women and women's perception of themselves.

Women make less money than men because they are often segregated into lowly paid predominantly female jobs (Reskin and Maroto, 2011). However, their entrance into male-dominated jobs tends to happen when the lowly paying-female jobs start to deteriorate (Stier and Yaish, 2014). Thus, the paradox of the 'contented female workers' seems to be disappearing with women changing from female-dominated to male-dominated occupations (Valet, 2018). **Despite occupational gender segregation being a global phenomenon (Blau et al., 2013; Busch, 2020), its prevalence is relatively low in egalitarian societies that promote gender equality (Bettio, 2002; Pearlman, 2019). Thus, in this article, we argue that occupational gender segregation is still much ubiquitous in Nigeria – a society with high patriarchal structures (Adisa et al., 2020), and the challenges women face in male-dominated professions**

are enormously remarkable. We examine how women push historical, cultural, and professional boundaries with their entry into male-dominated occupations. We focus on Nigeria, a historically unique African setting with a *hyper-patriarchal* orientation. Hence, this research's central question is: what challenges do women face in male-dominated professions in Nigeria? This article thus makes two important contributions. Firstly, it contributes to the broader literature on gender and work by providing critical qualitative evidence of the progress that women have made in their attempts to break into male-dominated occupations in Africa, using Nigeria as the research focus. Secondly, it contributes to the debate on how patriarchal norms have reworked the cultural understandings of femininity that affect women's access to hitherto male-dominated occupations. We argue that *hyper-patriarchal* orientation, cultural beliefs and gender stereotype are the reasons why women continue to constitute numerical minorities in male-dominated occupation in Nigeria. Therefore by examining the challenges women face in male-dominated professions in Nigeria, this study broadens our understanding of occupational gender segregation in the global South. It also contributes to the ongoing conversations of feminism and the disparate distribution of power among gender within *Gender, Work and Organization*. In achieving these objectives, the article draws on the lived experiences of women (in automobile mechanics, construction, and commercial bus driving) who have managed to break the patriarchal norms and made inroads into the traditionally male-typed occupations to achieve their professional goals. Our main motivation is to contribute to the broader understanding of the challenges confronting women in their effort to make inroad into male-dominated occupations in Africa.

### **Contextualising Occupational Gender Segregation**

Theories explaining OS have typically focused on two sides of the labour market equation: the demand side (employers' needs, preferences, and biases) and/or the supply side (workers' preferences, characteristics, and skills) (Kaufman, 2010). On the demand side, employers, in

the recruitment process, evaluate job seekers' skills, knowledge, and dispositions to determine their fit for certain jobs. In this context, OS may be due to employers' selection decisions, which either reflect the accurate assessment of human capital or are stereotypical concerning the specifications required for the occupation (Tilcsik et al., 2015). On the supply side, there is evidence to suggest that people with similar behavioural dispositions and skills are very likely to be drawn to similar occupational and employment settings (Hansen and Dik, 2004; Stern and Westphal, 2010). Furthermore, the supply-side explanations hold that women often choose specific occupations because of their feminist attributes (Stier and Yaish, 2014). According to Polachek (1976), women's dual role as caregivers and home managers might be responsible for their selection of jobs with shorter working hours and flexible work schedules in order to be able to attend to their familial responsibilities. This argument resonates with Hakim's (2002) 'preference' theory, namely, women choose jobs that allow them to maintain their preferred lifestyle.

Basically, there are three models that explicitly explain occupational segregation: (1) the human capital theory; (2) the hypothesis of feminisation of women's work due to gender roles, stereotypes or identity; and (3) discrimination (Levanon et al., 2009; Polavieja, 2008; Shauman, 2006). The human capital theory suggests that gender segregation is a product of women's preferences for some job types that allow them to combine work and family demands with minimum penalties (Polachek, 1981). Women often seek jobs that are more suited to their personal characteristics and interests (Hirsch and MacPherson, 1995; Polavieja, 2008), since they exhibit shorter and more discontinuous working lives and accumulate lower human capital. However, whilst some researchers support the argument that women prefer occupations that allow them to attend to their family responsibilities (Becker, 1985; Bender et al., 2005; Leuze and Straus, 2016; Shauman, 2006), others do not (Marini et al., 1996; Stier and Yaish, 2014). **More specifically, the human capital theory is flawed in explaining occupational gender**

segregation. For instance, the notion that childcare and domestic work barely contributes to human capital growth (especially among women) is erroneous. Such activities require and augment skills that possess marketable value (Blackburn et al., 2002). Illustratively within the study context, household care and childcare duties involve supervision, nursing, nurturing and teaching, which are desirable skills in professional jobs such as teachers, social workers, and administrative positions. More so, unlike economic capital which is monetised and realised in cash, human capital requires soft skills (e.g., organisation, social skills and communication) inherent in women's childcare and domestic duties (Blackburn et al., 2002).

A second model explaining occupational gender segregation is based on the notion that women self-allocate to occupations with which they identify (Akerlof and Kranton, 2010), or that they have internalised as feminine because of socialisation in norms, stereotypes, or gender roles (Goldin, 2006; Lips, 2013; Ochsenfeld, 2014). This means that gender differences may influence the allocation and valuation of women's work (Borghans et al., 2008). Furthermore, research have confirmed the assumption that people judge the nature of work in large part by the social identities aligned with it (Charles and Grusky, 2004; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). For instance, in Nigeria, blue-collar jobs, such as automobile mechanics, construction, and commercial bus driving, are jobs associated with men, while women are segregated from pursuing a career in the same or related jobs (Fapohunda, 2012; Jimoh, 2016). Ashcraft (2013) theorises a new glass metaphor, the glass slipper, to capture occupational identity by association. The metaphor elucidates how occupations come to appear 'naturally' possessed of features that fit certain people yet are improbable for others. For example, men are more competitive, more self-confident, more contentious, have more self-esteem, a more internal locus of control, and put a higher value on money, whereas women are more risk-averse, more conscious, more altruistic, less prone to bargain and prefer occupations that allow for

interpersonal interactions (Garcia-Mainar et al., 2018). This portrays personal traits as an important factor in the selection of occupations (Croson and Gneezy, 2009; Fortin, 2008).

The third model is discrimination. Discriminations may be responsible for the concentration of women in lower-paid occupations. This could be economic discrimination (Becker, 1985); statistical discrimination (Aigner and Cain, 1977); or crowding (Bergmann, 1974). The crux of the discrimination model is *devaluation* (England, 1992) in which women's work is perceived as less valuable and less socially esteemed because it is undertaken by women. **For instance, Nigerian women undertaking these 'masculine-specific' jobs (e.g., automobile mechanic) are often devalued with expectations that they become "stay-at-home" mothers/wives or involved in "feminine-specific" roles (e.g., tailoring and hairdressing) (Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013).** Devaluation view posits a type of employer discrimination and gender bias that values men's work and worth over women's (England, Allison and Wu, 2007; Karlin, England and Ross, 2002). However, due to the over-concentration of studies on occupational gender segregation in white-collar jobs and in the western developed countries, this study examines occupational gender segregation among blue-collar workers in the global South.

### **Theoretical Background**

Feminist/gender theory offers a more compelling explanation by explaining the seemingly enduring character of OS (Joyce and Walker, 2015). A basic premise of gender theory is that women's disadvantaged position in the labour market is caused by, and reflects, patriarchy and women's sub-ordinate position in society and the family (Anker, 1997). It suggests that segregation by gender is a consequence of a patriarchal structure that favours men over women. The structure relegates women to lower status jobs or assigns them to the realm of domestic duties (Joyce and Walker, 2015). This theory suggests that jobs become 'sex-typed', and their male or female composition tends to reinforce the gendered identities of those who occupy them. The persistence of OS has been found to be orchestrated by gender stereotypes, which is

wasteful of human resources and detrimental to women (Anker, 1997). Furthermore, it has been observed that domestic division of labour and the patriarchal ordering of society are instrumental in determining why women usually accumulate less human capital compared with men before entering the labour market. This may be the reason why some women receive less education than men and are less likely to pursue male-typed fields of study (Anker, 1997). Notably, there is a gender education gap in Nigeria, revealing the literacy rate among women (52%) and men (71%) (World Bank, 2018). This is due to patriarchy and the traditional belief that most Nigerian women eventually become stay-at-home mothers/wives and do not need education to perform in such roles (Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013).

More specifically, discussing OS along the lines of African feminism perspectives is important for this study. Similar to radical feminist perspectives, the African feminist movement was borne out of the determination to end patriarchy and demand emancipation for African women to equal rights in politics, education, economic resource distribution and freedom from gender-based violence (Simien, 2004). Radical feminism, among other types of feminism, focuses on the cause of male domination by understanding the source of power differentials and thrives on the perspective that the male and female gender are different but equal (Xaba, 2017).

Hence, radical feminists view gender as influenced by sociocultural norms and beliefs generated and imposed on women by patriarchal structures within the society needed to be eliminated (Xaba, 2017). Similarly, African feminism advocates for women to be considered first as humans instead of their traditional reproductive activities. At its core, African feminism is principally deconstructive, defiant and opposed to imperialism, patriarchy, racism, sexism, chauvinism, and homophobia (Norwood, 2013). It is a fight against systemic gender inequality and a struggle to extend liberty to African women. For instance, most African women's employment constraints in male-dominated professions hamper their prospect for advancements (Fapohunda, 2012).



In contrast, African feminism is critiqued for its overemphasis on occupational gender segregation in masculine-dominated occupations while neglecting OS in feminine-dominated occupations (Simien, 2004). However, this is not to discard the structural constraints and high-power structures in the African society that values men over women, leading to gender stereotyping and discrimination, internal segregation and exclusion (Norwood, 2013). Nevertheless, Odhiambo (2011) argues in support of the inclusive and holistic perspective of African feminism as encouraging men and women to join efforts in promoting gender equality. Furthermore, African feminism is essentially intended to reshape and reimagine power relations among African men and women and eradicate the various forms of exploitation, abuse, devaluation and oppression faced by African women (Dosekun, 2007).

Despite the feminist efforts, OS in Africa is relatively high, given that the gender employment gap is estimated at 16% (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Therefore, based on (African) feminist/gender theory, this study examines the challenges women face in male-dominated occupations in a *highly patriarchal* setting.

### **Research Setting**

Nigeria is a highly patriarchal setting in which women's jobs and roles are clearly defined. Unlike men, most Nigerian women are dominant in the informal labour sector, such as the local commodity markets and farms (Fapohunda, 2012). This is primarily predicated on patriarchal norms and traditional beliefs that women have specific household care and caregiving roles (Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013). Patriarchal beliefs prioritise male attributes and interests and discriminate against women (Ridgeway, 2011). Literally, the concept of patriarchy refers to a male-centred, male-identified, male-controlled, and male-dominated system (Johnson, 2014) that values masculinity and masculine traits over femininity and feminine traits (Becker, 1999). Walby (1990a) described it as a social structure in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. While the domination of the patriarchal phenomenon seems inevitable and

prevalent in almost every nation (Zhao and Wry, 2016), it appears to be more customarily rooted in the global South (specifically Africa) than the global north (Aderinto, 2001). It is hugely entrenched in most African settings, in norms, values, and customs, such that separating it from humanness and culture is unthinkable (Bvukutwa, 2014). Due to the nature of the control and subjugation of women, countries such as Nigeria have been described as the 'patriarchal belt' (Caldwell, 1978) and the 'belt of classic patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988).

Nigeria is a country of more than 200 million people (Worldometer, 2020), out of which 49 percent of the population are women (CIA World Fact Book, 2020). Nigerian women have significantly more limited opportunities in life than men (British Council, 2012). They are disadvantaged and sometimes excluded in terms of their access to employment opportunities and occupations (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The Nigerian labour market is gendered (Lawanson, 2008), with the formal sector being dominated by men and the informal sector being dominated by women (Fapohunda, 2012). It is a society with dominant patriarchal features, typical of most societies in the global South. All the ethnic groups in Nigeria are purely patriarchal and mostly still perpetuate unequal treatment of women, which is strengthened through the institutions of family, school, media, religion, and different social groups (Aderinto, 2001; Akpan, 2003; Aluko, 2015; Dogo, 2014; Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013). Unequal gender relations persist in marital relationships, and paid employment imposes an additional burden on women who are traditionally mandated to oversee both domestic chores and childcare responsibilities (Fuwa, 2004). However, the patriarchal system is changing as the influences of modernisation, education, the West, social media, and more are imposing significant challenges to the sustainability of old practices (Aluko, 2015). This is because more Nigerian women take breadwinning roles and navigate unusual social spaces (e.g., social media) where they learn and replicate Western ideas that challenge patriarchal imperialism (Akanle et al., 2018). Also, there are significant differences across ethnic groups

and sometimes within the same ethnic group; indeed, there are significant urban-rural differences in terms of the enforcement of widespread patriarchal practices (Aluko, 2015; Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013). Against this backdrop, this study examines the degree and success of women's inroad into male-dominated occupations in a society that is strongly patriarchal.

### **Research Methodology**

The quantitative research method has dominated the interdisciplinary literature on OS, as scholars have used it to examine how OS is related to social inequalities (see Bayard et al., 2003; Campos-Soria et al., 2011). Meanwhile, qualitative approaches are required to reveal certain aspects of OS, especially in a strongly patriarchal society such as Nigeria. Therefore, this study's exploration of the challenges of breaking into the 'man's world' is based on a qualitative exploratory study of 21 women working in occupations that are traditionally male dominated. This approach enables us to understand the personal ordeals of women in atypical environment (Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Siggelkow, 2007). The study was conducted in Lagos, Nigeria and was designed to be open-ended to allow unexpected themes to emerge. The participants are blue-collar workers: automobile mechanics (9), commercial bus drivers (6), and bricklayers (6) and they were recruited through participant referrals and snowballing (Noy, 2008). Participant were asked the following question: How would you describe your experience of working in a 'male-typed' occupation? We devised two theoretical sampling criteria (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to select our research participants. First, participants needed to have completed their job vocational training and working. Second, they needed to have been practicing for at least one year in their field. The participants trained for their jobs by means of vocational training. The participants were aged between 25 and 43 years old. It took the participants an average of 2 years to complete the vocational training for their jobs, and they reported an average of 2.5 years' job experience.

Data for the study were collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews, conducted over a 4-month period. Due to the discursive nature of practices implies that they may be captured in discourse (Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy, 2004; Tsoukas, 2005), we chose to approach our research through the elliptic gaze of '*microstorias*', a narrative turn in contemporary social theory that privileges the use of contemporaneous storylines to illuminate social life (Boje, 2001; Imas, Wilson and Weston, 2012). Microstoria are stories usually recounted by marginalised individuals located outside traditional research programmes, whose views can be harnessed to open up and theorise social orders and relationships on multiple levels (de Chadarevian, 2009; Muir, 1991). By so doing, the microstoria approach enabled us to capture the 'existential condition of [our] research subjects in a [consummately] meaningful way' (Venkatesh, 1995, p. 36), to generate relevant insights into their experiences of breaking in a 'man's world'.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face at different locations convenient for the participants. The interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. Each lasted approximately 90 minutes. Each interview began with assurances of confidentiality and the collection of relevant socio demographic data, covering the general background information about the participants. After the concept of OS and the general purpose of the research were explained to the participants, the researchers probed into the challenges confronting the participants in their daily jobs in order to understand their experiences of breaking into the 'man's world'. This approach allowed us to generate reflective data on their experiences by isolating the types of relational actions that were meaningful to them without removing them from their context (Alvesson, 2003). The researchers shared the same nationality/ethnicity with the participants, which helped to reduce the psychological distance between them. It also helped to identify recurrent discourse features necessary to extend the understanding of the

relationship between the linguistic forms of texts generated and the broader socio-cultural world in which they were produced.

**Insert Table 1 about here**

### ***Data Analysis***

The interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately following data collection, and pseudonyms were used to ensure the participants' anonymity. The data analysis then followed three steps. Firstly, following the study's theoretical basis, the initial textual analysis focused on mapping the 'doings' and 'sayings' of the participants onto the 'organising logics' of human activities, values, and beliefs; relationships; 'practical coping', and background knowledge (Schatzki, 2002), which served as our basic social processes (BSPs) (Glaser, 2005). This process involved engaging in an iterative line-by-line coding of the data to ensure the relevance of the BSP. It also gave the researchers the opportunity to identify some recurrent phrases, which were also 'analytically converted' (Strauss, 1978, p. 30) to fit into these categories. At this point, the analysis explicitly focused on the participants' experiences that have direct implication on their ability to break into the 'man's world', which were further categorised based on their similarities and analytical connections. Drawing on insights from the extant literature, the identified segments were then analysed and interpreted iteratively until common themes emerged and data saturation was achieved (Suddaby, 2006).

These themes were then sorted, reconstituted (Strauss and Corbin, 2008), and indexed to generate the analytical categories. Following this process, the final categories in the form of thematic frameworks, were applied to the entire dataset by annotating them with numerical codes, which were also supported by short descriptions of the headings. Indexing here was also about making sense of the gaps between the identified themes to develop a meaningful and more robust understanding of the data to enable subsequent interpretation and verification of meanings. Finally, drawing on Maclean et al.'s (2012) study, the data was rearranged according

to the key themes in a matrix. Typologies were generated and the causal associations between the various themes were established. Emerging patterns were then used to develop greater insight and to form descriptive explanations of the participants' experiences of breaking into the 'man's world'.

**Insert Table 2 about here**

### **Research Findings**

An analysis of the findings provides insight into the experiences of women who work in traditionally male-typed occupations. The findings reveal the interplay between the personal convictions of the women, patriarchal norms, cultural beliefs, and regimented societal perceptions, all of which reinforce occupational gender segregation, gender stereotypes, and gender inequality in Nigerian society. Five major themes emerged from the data: (1) the 'lone wolf' in a marginal revolution, (2) social ostracism, (3) patriarchal imperialism and impairment of spousal relationships, (4) the requirement of physical strength, and (5) misgivings about women's professional abilities. Each theme is characterised by internal and external tensions that reflect the multifaceted requirements of working in occupations that are conventionally understood as 'men's'. Participants drew on their experiences and there were clear indications of sexism and gender inequality, which are predicated on patriarchy and its norms in the work environment.

#### **The "lone wolf" in a marginal revolution'**

The phrase 'lone wolf' in a marginal revolution' is used here to refer to the self-desire mission of a small number of women to overturn the existing categorisation of occupations that systematically excludes them from certain occupations. We found a profound exclusion of women in the automobile mechanic, building construction, and commercial bus driving industries. This marginalisation is based on the view that 'these are men's jobs' and that women

should stay away from them, revealing occupational gender segregation. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of women stay away from these occupations, making the few determined ones in these professions lonely and rebellious:

*I felt like a rebel the first time I told my parents that I wanted to be an automobile mechanic. I will never forget my mother's comment: 'Why do you always like to challenge societal traditional status quo? ...and that is the view of the majority about me. That put me off initially, but I persisted with my ambition (Rajini, 32, automobile mechanic).*

Another participant commented:

*It is a very lonely journey, and people see me as a stubborn 'gender equality' fighter...some even call me a feminist, which many of them understand as a woman who equates herself to a man. I really feel alone because I am the only lady among hundreds of men in the garage from where my bus usually takes off. Even among family and friends, I am the only lady bus driver. I'm lonely, too, in my belief that a lady could be a bus driver (Flora, 30, bus driver).*

The participants' determination to break into and excel in an unusual environment is evident from the above extracts. The accounts of loneliness and rebellion reveal the fundamental aspects of (African) feminism recognised for its deconstruction, defiance, and opposition to systemic gender inequality and strive for women's freedom (Norwood, 2013). These findings indicate that despite being lonely in the fight against OS, the participants' involvement in these occupations suggest that they are breaking away from exclusive 'hyper-masculinity', which is revolutionary. Ashcraft (2013) theorised this in her glass-slippers view of occupational identity that some occupations are perceived to naturally possess some features that fit a particular group of people yet implausible for others. Every occupation has a social identity, which contributes to OS (García-Mainar et al., 2018). From OS perspective, as women find

themselves in unusual ‘male-dominated’ occupations, they tend to encounter internal and external intimidations, confrontations and discriminations (Stier and Yaish, 2014).

### **Social Ostracism**

Social ostracism is a significant challenge for women in male-dominated occupations in Nigeria. In this context, it refers to the participants being rejected by their neighbors, friends, and family because of their occupational choices. The participants spoke in strong terms about their family and friends' disapproval of their occupational choice as a critical challenge, especially at the start of their career journey. One participant described the treatment she received from her friends and family:

*I have always loved building construction. Whenever I said it, my mother would advise me to choose another occupation because it is not a lady's work. I defied her advice and started training for the job. My mum stopped talking to me, my friends stopped associating with me, and everybody deserted me. They have a way of mocking me with the profession's name, 'bricklayer'. But they would derogatively call me 'birikila' [a discourteous term referring to a bricklayer]. It was tough. In fact, I left the job for some time, but I was convinced that this was what I wanted to do, and I started again (Paula, 25, bricklayer).*

As Paula's narrative suggests, the persistence of occupational gender segregation is orchestrated by gender stereotypes that classify occupations based on gender (Anker, 1997). From OS perspective, the systemic nature of male preference to specific job type in this context is rooted in gender bias that values men's work and worth over women, leading to discriminations in male-dominated professions (Polavieja, 2008). More so, (African) feminism opposes such internal segregation, devaluation and exclusion of women, affecting their social identity with others (Norwood, 2013). Highlighted in our data, OS generates gender essentialism that creates occupational boundaries, augments the segregation of specialisms, and promotes female exclusion from male-dominated professions (Joyce and Walker, 2015).



Furthermore, our findings confirm that social ostracism among the participants resulted in being overwhelmed with shame and lack of confidence about the nature of their jobs, which often reinforce internal and external conflict. For instance, a participant described social rejection as ‘suicidal’:

*Literally, I was rejected; I mean, I was being treated like an outcast. At some point, I could not cope with the insult and rejection, so I relocated. My mum would not stop calling me names, my siblings and friends would abuse and make jest of me..., calling me ‘mecho’ [a derogatory way of referring to an automobile mechanic]. On many occasions, my mum would not let me attend social functions with the rest of the family just to dissuade me from being a mechanic. It’s suicidal...at the climax of it, I had to relocate to Lagos (Ada, 33, automobile mechanic).*

Linda described her experience as ‘social expulsion’:

*I discountenanced friends and family’s advices to quit my job because it is not meant for a lady. So, they stopped relating with me. I used to attend social functions with them before but not anymore. They stopped inviting me. It’s social expulsion. For example, I asked a friend why I wasn’t invited to her wedding and she said: ‘my wedding is not for ‘birikila’ (Linda, 34, bricklayer).*

The narratives suggest that the sociocultural preconceptions about certain jobs (especially male-dominated jobs) in Nigeria lead to social rejection of women and is characterised by hypermasculinity in work-based gender relations (Adisa et al., 2021). This is symptomatic of modern-day sexism and ‘anti-feminism’ rooted in patriarchal beliefs and medieval values which produce structural barriers and gender discrimination (Petersen and Saporta, 2004). These attitudes of occupational gender segregation are part of the patriarchal climate, wherein women are segregated from certain occupations because those occupations are ‘male-typed’, ignoring the blatant gender oppression and gender discrimination involved. This has been described by Fortin and Huberman (2002) as horizontal occupational sex segregation.

## **Patriarchal Imperialism and Impairment of Spousal Relationships**

The Nigerian patriarchal culture discourages women's involvement in certain occupations, such as those investigated in this study. Men dominate these occupations, and women who work or aspire to work therein are often stigmatised. This illustrates the wideness of the patriarchal cage in Nigeria. A participant commented:

*People look at me with disdain. Many people approach me and say 'a woman? Driving a passenger bus? Strange! I have never seen it', all sort of derogatory comments. It really is strange to people whose minds have been 'gender-segregationally' programmed. The majority of them are not comfortable with me driving them. They perceive me as a wayward and unruly person...the culture has actually made them think and behave in that manner (Amy, 40, bus driver).*

One participant commented about the fear and the humiliation associated with working in traditionally 'male' occupations:

*The culture makes it really difficult, because I am not doing the type of job that the culture stipulates for women...it comes with fear and humiliation. I was very afraid of what people [meaning family, friends, my partner and his friends and relations, and society at large] would think of me as a woman...and, trust me, they took it so badly. In fact, I lost my relationship because of my chosen profession (Subomi, 37, bricklayer).*

Subomi's narration agrees with Bennett's (1993) argument that patriarchy defines women's experience. Almost half (9) of the participants commented on how their choice of occupation impaired their marital relationships. Despite persuading and seeking support from their partners, most of the participants' were faced with disapproval and impairment to their relationships. Following the prevalent patriarchal structures that promote OS in related occupations, it is considered 'weird' and 'absurd' for women to elect to work in a male-

dominated occupation. The following comments are clear indications that a strong patriarchal hegemony promotes OS:

*I am still married, because the divorce process has not been concluded. For my husband, everything is wrong with a woman being a mechanic. We have been arguing about it for some time. I defied his countless 'you must stop it now' orders. He really dislikes it, and since I wouldn't stop it, he opted for divorce. It breaks my heart that my family and his support him. Would I stop the job I learnt for three years and that I have been doing for another three years for my marriage? Honestly, I'm confused right now (Koke, 31, automobile mechanic).*

*He reluctantly accepted, on the conditions that I would bear whatever comes out of it alone and that it must not affect any of my domestic duties...of course, I agreed. Even so, he sometimes gets angry about it, and I just persuade him (Folly, 39, bus driver).*

The participants' experiences demonstrate that OS is orchestrated by private patriarchy, revealing an interrelationship between patriarchal belief and occupational choice/freedom (Walby, 1990). Researchers have argued that the prevalence of strong patriarchy in the Nigerian society is repressive and grossly deprived women (especially those who push occupational boundaries) of respect (Aluko, 2015; Dogo, 2014; Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013). This social stratification and OS are based on gender and constrain women's roles and activities (Stacey, 1993). From the (African) radical feminist standpoint, patriarchy remains the fundamental cause of gender inequality and restricts women's participation in political, economic, social relationships (Simien, 2004) and more specifically, occupational gender segregation. Our data confirm that patriarchy is the main cause of OS in Nigeria. From a radicalist view, evidence of hypermasculinity in Nigeria that leads to excessive male dominance (Adisa et al., 2021) is the root cause of women exclusion from specific jobs. Its elimination remains a core agenda for the feminist movement (Odhiambo, 2011). More so, the

systemic and pervasive nature of gender stereotyping, as our data illuminates, hamper many Nigerian women's progress to build a career in the acclaimed male-dominated professions.

### **The Requirement of Physical Strength**

Simons (1987, p. 235) argues that 'as women move into less traditional jobs...they may lack the physical strength necessary to perform the work'. Similarly, Joyce and Walker (2015) suggest, there is a general assumption that men and women have distinctive qualities that could be utilised in particular professions. The participants commented on the physical strength required for certain occupations as a significant deterrent for women to participate in those occupations. This means that many women feel daunted and intimidated in their strive to break into these occupations, and the few who engage in them feel very concerned about this situation. The following comments exemplify the challenges:

*Normally, an auto mechanic requires some equipment to make the job easier. For example, a hydraulic/electric car ramp for lifting vehicles. This would enable me to work under a car conveniently. Also, an air/electric gun to loosen bolts and nuts is necessary. Only a few auto mechanics have this equipment, which means that physical strength is often used as a substitute ...a lot of women perceive such things as barriers (Koke, 34, auto mechanic).*

*More than 90 percent of this job is undertaken manually, for example, the lifting and moving of blocks, tiles, cement, and sand. All these require physical strength, and that is why construction is regarded as a 'man's job'. I think this is one of the reasons why there are few women in construction (Delly, 27, bricklayer).*

The narratives point to the institutional and systemic nature of exclusion emphasised within OS in the Nigerian context. The strenuous physical exertion required for some jobs appears to reveal the purported female weakness pervasive in our culture (Simons, 1987) and continue to play a decisive role in defining women occupational limitations. The perception of these blue-collar occupations, which are traditionally classed as a 'macho area', is predicated on the

intense confrontations and hostile behaviour associated with them. Contrastingly and in line with feminist perspectives, this situation for men might propel physical forms of essentialism, increase the possibility of a ‘power trip’ and a chance to discriminate or devalue women in male-dominated occupations where greater strength is required (Joyce and Walker, 2015; Norwood, 2013).

### **Misgivings about Women’s Professional Abilities**

This theme is evident in all participants’ accounts as a barrier to breaking into the ‘man’s world’. While the number of women in the construction, auto mechanic, and bus driving industries remains minute compared to the number of men, the participants reported that their confidence and continued stay in these occupations are further threatened by a lack of confidence among clients in their professional abilities. Our data reveal that gender stereotypes and essentialism instigate clients who doubt and sometimes question these women’s professional abilities to provide quality service. The account of the participants delineates this point:

*Just this morning, two customers left when they discovered that I was a woman. But I think it’s getting better now that I have started offering the first service at a hugely discounted price. Sometimes, I would tell customers not to pay until they are fully satisfied with the service (Ruth, 31, auto mechanic).*

*I was on a project about two months ago when the owner of the building came to inspect the project. She found me working on it, and she was so upset and said to the manager, ‘I want men who have power to work on my project and not women.’ How can you employ a woman in construction? It is odd’. The manager had to placate her and assured her of excellent service. Yet she left in doubt (Doyin, 29, bricklayer).*

While one would expect that women are more likely to support their fellow women found in these male-dominated professions, Sumaiyah’s account below, like many

others, reveal that many women express discrimination towards their counterparts in the male-dominated professions:

*Yes, people make insinuations about me. Yesterday, someone said, 'A woman?' He was really surprised. 'I hope you know which of the pedals is for the break so that you don't drive us into the river'. Another time, a woman said to me, 'Are you sure you can drive this bus? Get yourself a decent job that befits a lady and stop endangering people's lives. She alighted almost immediately and boarded another bus that was driven by a man (Sumaiyah, 40, bus driver).*

Despite the unequivocal structural constraints and high-power structures in African society (Adisa et al., 2021), Sumiyah's experience resonates with the critiques against feminism that not all women support the movement (Norwood, 2013). Thus despite being qualified professionals in their field, people harbour misgivings about women's professional abilities in male-dominated occupations in the Nigerian context. This sheer discrimination and gender bias are based on the assumption that differences exist in the productivity, skills, experience, and performance of men and women (Anker, 1997). People are traditionally accustomed to occupational stratification and differentiation that segregate jobs based on gender. The stereotypical expectations and specifications associated with these specific occupations help segregate women from these jobs and pose several undue challenges to women in this unusual professions. This conceals a pattern of occupational gender segregation that some occupations are exclusively for men (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000), which makes breaking into 'man's world' difficult for women.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This study has revealed that occupational gender segregation along with the dominant tenets of patriarchy are lynchpins for gender inequality and have made breaking into the 'man's world' difficult. This study illustrated the state of feminism in the Nigerian labour market and

the pervasiveness of patriarchy which is a *sine qua non* of male-dominance. The study explained how occupational gender segregation, underpinned by a strong patriarchal ideology, determines the occupational opportunities and choices of more than 90 million Nigerian women. There is a clear nexus between the occupational interests of women, cultural beliefs, and regimented societal perceptions of patriarchy, all of which reinforce occupational gender segregation, gender stereotypes, discrimination, and gender inequality. Weeden (1998) argued that OS is a direct measure of inequality and a precursor to other forms of inequality associated with occupational statuses. The study found that women are profoundly ostracised from automobile mechanic, building construction, and commercial bus driving jobs. This exclusion is based purely on gender and other stereotypical assumptions that those occupations are ‘men’s’.

This article describes women in these occupations as ‘lone wolf’ in a marginal revolution’ because only a few women have been found to be participating in them. In Nigeria, although data on women’s employment figures are unreliable (Fapohunda, 2012), anecdotal reports put the figure at more than 2 million auto mechanics, and, significantly, less than 1 percent of this figure constitutes females. Similarly, women constitute 0.2 percent of the total number of construction workers (Jimoh et al., 2016). Illuminating the challenges of working in male classified jobs, our findings reveal that the few women working in ‘male-typed’ occupations in Nigeria are forlorn because they are perceived as rebels who challenge the societal status quo of gender-based differentiation of occupations.

The findings further reveal that women in these professions do not enjoy the support of their friends and family as they participate because the occupations are classified as ‘men’s’. Such ascription is a clear indication of gender discrimination and gender stereotype, which both limit women’s participation in the labour market and reinforces occupational gender segregation. Anker (1997) argued that occupational gender segregation that is orchestrated by gender

stereotypes is a waste of human resources and detrimental to women. The friends and families of women desiring to work in male-dominated occupations could help in reconfiguring feminism by their unconditional support, rather than forsaking and tacitly excluding them from these jobs. Women should be supported to participate in occupations of their choice. This will reduce the clout of occupational gender segregation, gender suppression and discrimination associated with patriarchal hegemony. Our findings give tacit support to the prevalence of public patriarchy in this setting (Walby, 1990a, 1990b).

Furthering the dwindling number of women in the traditionally male-typed occupations is the Nigerian patriarchal culture. Adisa et al. (2020) described the Nigerian patriarchal culture as *hypermasculine*, which is characterised by a disproportionate and excessive male advantage and a justificatory logic based on rigidly enforced gender roles. Patriarchy is an unjust social construction that marginalises and is oppressive to women (Stacey, 1993). The culture frowns at women who walk in the 'male space', such as the professions we investigated. Consequently, men dominate these occupations, and women who work or aspire to work in these occupations are stigmatised. The culture relegates women to lower status jobs or assigns them to the realm of domestic duties (Joyce and Walker, 2015). The male-domination/patriarchal culture suggests that women and femininity should be subordinated and subjugated, while masculinity is equated with strength, power, and leadership, leading to the attribution of some occupations to specific gender. Patriarchy is a major feature of the Nigerian society and has grossly disadvantaged women in the world of work (Dogo, 2014; Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013). This study questions the continuous and stereotypical use of males as the preferred gender for certain occupations, limiting the participation of women in the labour market and shaping our thinking, attitudes, and behaviour toward inclusion of women in contemporary society (Dean, 2010; Projansky, 2001).



Additionally, the data analysis highlights the physical strength required to participate in the occupations under study as an impediment to women working in non-traditional occupations. The insights further revealed other factors such as a lack of financial capability to purchase equipment, a lack of land to install the equipment, and a lack of a constant electricity supply to operate the equipment necessitate, for example, auto mechanics and construction workers undertaking their work manually. Such work requires physical strength, which women may find difficult. Physical strength should not be a barrier to women participating in certain professions, as this amounts to ‘sexualisation of occupation’, which is inappropriate in modern societies. This article suggests that when required support is provided by appropriate authorities (such as governments and other non-governmental agencies) to support women’s professional causes, the barriers will be broken, and working in ‘men’s occupations’ could be made easier and even welcomed by the society.

The insights also revealed the lack of trust on the part of clients in women’s professional abilities. This impediment is discouraging and is evident in all the participants’ account as an obstacle. This finding demonstrates that patriarchy has subconsciously formed a significant part of conscious existence of people. The participants reported that the purported substandard associated with the quality of service provided by women working in non-traditional occupations is perpetrated by both males and females. Influenced by gender essentialism (Hollander and Howard 2000), customers have subconsciously been configured to believe that only men can provide top-quality service in these professions, leading them to cast doubt on and sometimes question the professional abilities of women in these male-dominated occupations. These beliefs and attitudes threaten the participants’ confidence and their continued stay in these occupations. Furthermore, such views fall short of the tenets of a civil and egalitarian society in which women’s rights are assured. Orchestrated by a strong

patriarchal culture and gender inequality, unfortunately, breaking into the 'man's world' for Nigerian women has been massively impeded by a rigid OS.

Thus, our study contributes to the OS theorising as it further provides empirical evidence of occupational gender segregation among workers in the global South. It suggests from the (African) feminist perspective an increasing struggle by African women to eradicate patriarchy and horizontal segregation, particularly in occupations that are male-dominated. As women push the boundaries (cultural, political and economic) reinforced by hyper-patriarchal orientations that hinder their access to male-dominated professions, we understand that cultural norms, political, legal and social institutions are the root problems of gender inequality and OS in the study context. Specifically, from the radicalist perspective, our study affirms that the patriarchal structures inherent within the study context are imposed through culturally approved and systemic discrimination against women that excludes them from particular professions. Thus, patriarchy reinforces a coercive psychological system that subjects women to adopt particular beliefs, behaviours and attitudes (Yount et al., 2016) and deprive women of their free will and abilities to partake in certain professions. Furthermore, the disparate distribution of power among gender leading to OS is reinforced by the systematic demonstration of patriarchal colonialism, subordination and occupational prerequisites (e.g., strength) often formed by cultural ideologies.

Considering these challenges, and to help women make inroads in non-traditional occupations, this study recommends an organised public mobilisation against strong and rigid patriarchal attitude and a shift to a more gender-liberal one. This would require mass education and expressly supportive policies from the government, civil society, and the general population. This will also improve the representation of women across all occupations. Furthermore, the study recommends governmental support for women trying to make a living in male-dominated

occupations in order to mitigate the challenges. Future studies may focus on other non-traditional occupations using alternative frameworks and methodologies.

Finally, this study has some limitations. While the non-western context provides us with a different and less investigated platform for studying occupational gender segregation and female experiences of breaking into the 'man's world', there are a limited number of women in non-traditional occupations in Nigeria. The selection method of the participants (referral and self-selection) further limits the generalisability of the findings, yet it jumpstarts the process of interrogating this milieu on a multilevel basis for future research. The challenges confronting women in men's occupations, specifically in the global South, are real, complex, and daunting. They form a puzzle that requires a solution if nations in the global South are to make a progress in gender segregation and inequity to engender gender equality, occupational inclusion and meaningful development.

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**Table 1 Participants' Profiles**

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Occupations	Years used to learn job	Years in Practice
Clarion	Female	36	Married	Auto mechanic	4	2
Alexis	Female	31	Single	Bus driver	1	2
Rajini	Female	32	Single	Auto mechanic	3	3
Sumaiyah	Female	40	Married	Bus driver	2	3
Laide	Female	38	Married	Bus driver	1	2
Fola	Female	34	Single	Building construction	3	2
Funke	Female	43	Married	Auto mechanic	4	8
Doyin	Female	29	Single	Building construction	3	1
Delly	Female	27	Single	Building construction	2	2
Ikem	Female	32	Single	Auto mechanic	4	2
Folly	Female	39	Married	Bus driver	1	2
Subomi	Female	37	Single	Building construction	2	2
Olly	Female	26	Single	Auto mechanic	3	2
Derby	Female	32	Single	Auto mechanic	3	2
Ada	Female	33	Single	Auto mechanic	4	3
Amy	Female	40	Married	Bus driver	1	3
Linda	Female	34	Married	Building construction	2	2
Ruth	Female	31	Single	Auto mechanic	4	4
Flora	Female	30	Single	Bus driver	1	2
Koke	Female	34	Married	Auto mechanic	3	3
Paula	Female	25	Single	Building construction	3	2

**Table 2 Key themes and associated open codes derived during the data analysis process**

Core themes	Open Codes	Aggregate Theoretical Dimension
The "lone wolf" in a marginal revolution.	'I feel alone in the world', 'it's like fighting for a cause all by myself', 'it is a very lonely journey', 'I feel alone in terms of being the only lady among a gamut of men and alone in terms of being the only lady in my family and among my friends working in a male-typed profession'.	Feminism/patriarchal imperialism/discrimination
Social ostracism	'I am casted aside', 'family don't feel proud of me and dissociate with me', 'my friends withdrew from me because of my profession', 'No more hanging out with friends or attending social functions with families', 'my parents even forsake me'.	Feminism/patriarchal imperialism/discrimination, occupational and social identities
Patriarchal imperialism and impairment of spousal relationships	'What are you doing here? It's a male job', 'A woman should not be driving commercial bus, I'm off', 'chose between me and your bricklayer job', 'I lost my marriage because of my chosen occupation'. 'This job is not lady-like, it's a man's job', ...the divorce process is on because my husband doesn't like my job and I refuse to let go'.	Feminism/patriarchal imperialism/discrimination  Strength of cultural belief and ideologies enhancing legitimizing myths
The requirement of physical strength	'The job requires physical strengths to do it...lifting and pushing heavy materials', 'Physical strengths are required to loosen bolts and nuts because I cannot afford the equipment', '...driving on the Lagos road is super hectic, it require a high level of stamina and strength'.	Feminism/patriarchal imperialism/discrimination

<p>Misgivings about women's professional abilities</p>	<p>'A woman? are you sure you can fix this car?', 'I have never seen a woman fixing a car, I'm not paying until I'm satisfied it's okay', 'A woman? No, I'm sorry', 'I need powerful men on my project, not women'.</p>	<p>Feminism/patriarchal imperialism/discrimination</p>
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