

Addicts of Gender-Based Violence: Patriarchy as the Seed-bed of Gendered Witchcraft Accusations

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Abstract

The concept of patriarchy has occupied the minds of humanity from time immemorial. Over the past centuries, the construct has suppressed the lives of women, while according unlimited power and privileges to men in ruling communities. In this paper, the researcher presents an analysis of how patriarchy and its surrogates (sexism, misogyny, machismo, marianismo, masculinity, and male menopause) are used in witchcraft discourse within communities to perpetuate exclusive male power and dominance of women.

Keywords: gender-based violence; patriarchy; misogyny; sexism; masculinity; machismo; witchcraft

Introduction

The practice of witchcraft accusation, persecution and hunting is the most complex, multi-layered and elusive phenomenon that has occupied the minds of many researchers over the years. In one context, it exhibits different and multiple causes and variations. Scholarly literature on the subject explains its manifestations in society through the matrix of patriarchy. In this paper, patriarchal systems are explored as the consolidation, manifestation and institutionalisation of traits—such as sexism, gender-based violence, misogyny, machismo, marianismo, sexual dysfunction, vulnerability, and intimacy in human relationships, to mention a few—as constituent factors that not only give accusations of witchcraft shape, but also content (Campbell 1981; Haj-Yahia 2005, Hester 1998; Rieder 2012). The paper explores witchcraft persecutions from a universal perspective rather than from only an African perspective.

Most scholars of the subject tend to come up with theoretical explanations of what gives rise to witchcraft, rather than exploring the very fabric of the society in which it is rooted. This paper goes a step further in investigating the concepts that are determinants of gendered witchcraft accusation, persecution or hunting. Classical and recent literature



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on the phenomenon is explored and interrogated. Factors explored include patriarchy and its constituent elements, such as gender roles, sexism, misogyny, machismo, marianismo, manhood status and human vulnerability. We examine the way in which they hinder or are used in their control of women, and their behaviour in the instrumentalisation of religious beliefs such as witchcraft. Patriarchy as a social phenomenon, especially as underlying societal construct towards the status of women, could be studied from the viewpoint of social sciences, including theology. Sixteenth-century European witchcraft persecutions and their link to modern gender stereotypes can be studied from the perspective of church history.

In many societies around the world, women are commodified, bridled and subjugated to serve the cause and interest of men, and in this way a perpetually self-serving culture is established. Such a system brooks no dissidence and employs measures such as witchcraft accusation and persecution, especially against women who are feared by men, because they may challenge and even topple them from their privileges (Kgatla 2019). The system is socially constructed and historically modified in order to preserve itself (Hester 1998) as soon as new paradigm shifts and changes occur that may bring about uncertainty. Overt mechanisms are used against perceived transgressors of social rules in an unprecedented way.

The Patriarchal System as a Defining Moment in Witchcraft Accusations and Persecutions in Africa

This paper is concerned with witchcraft beliefs and their agency in ordering worldviews against women. It argues that witchcraft beliefs and resultant persecutions are orchestrated from community, political, cultural, economic and religious conceptualisations. Many researchers have found that feelings such as fear, hatred, guilt, jealousy, pain, grief, confusion, lust, and hunger are at the centre of witchcraft accusations (Ally 2015; Goloba-Muteni 2005; Maxwell 1995; Parrinder 1963). As a system constructed by humans, patriarchy serves men's interests (especially) in defining gender roles. It is the bedrock of many witchcraft-related accusations, as well as many other punishments women may be subjected to, because of their failure to perform to the expectations of their male counterparts. In patriarchy, the male members of society hold primary power and prominence in roles related to political, social, economic and cultural leadership, which include moral authority, social privilege, and all spheres of control and power (Weldon 2019). It is a determining force of how society is shaped and functions. The consequence of stereotypical framing of women is that it undermines trust, intimacy, social cohesion and the building of human capital (Ally 2015). At times, in the grander scheme of things, patriarchy¹ poses as an altruistic system, while concealing its menace of subtle manipulation of women and children (Kgatla 2019). It

1 It enacts and upholds laws that marginalise, disenfranchise and harm women on an ongoing basis (Weldon 2019).

defines a general structure in which men have power over women, and where power has some level of privilege to which women and children are not entitled (Napikoski 2019).

Patriarchy, as a system of gendered/subordinated relations, is closely related to misogyny (hate of women), which serves patriarchal norms and the enforcement of those norms (Manne 2016). However, in this paper, it is argued that these norms share the same space in domesticating, controlling, and forcing women into a subordinate role in society (Campbell 1981, 67). They operate from a common cause of creating an environment in which women are subjected to the rule of men. Patriarchy, clandestine in creating conformity to male-engineered structures in order to control women in society, is hard to change. Ruth Mace (2018), in her article “Behaviour and Society” in *The Conversation*, found that witchcraft accusations act as punishment for those who do not cooperate with local male-sanctioned norms. According to her, the prejudice targets those who are vulnerable and untrustworthy (such as women), and encourage other women to conform out of fear of being labelled a witch (Mace 2018). Women who fear losing reputation as a result of being labelled a witch can be a huge driver of blind cooperation in the community (Mace 2018). A patriarchal dimension to witchcraft accusation could be an explanation of why women are commonly victims, both in traditional societies and in modern contexts (Haj-Yahia 2005). Kounine (2013) maintains that the category of gender is useful only when the category of differences is the question rather than the answer. Where there is no question or problem regarding gender roles, gender as a concept is innocent. However, gender category is evoked when gender norms are at stake. Patriarchy is like still waters that run deep.

Pillars of a Patriarchal System and Control

Angela Michelle Schultz (2019) argues that for one to understand what causes witch hunts and persecution in society, one has to understand the triggers behind the feelings and evils within that culture (Schultz 2019). In a time of sudden mishaps and uncertainties, and where society is grasped by fear, new coping mechanisms, which may give rise to new beliefs and responses, are sought. To combat their fears, people may seek new ways, such as witchcraft accusations, to fight perceived evil and protect themselves. In this respect, Jessica McCallister (2018) identifies four characteristics that form the basis of patriarchal systems:

- 1) Male dominance: Here, men make all decisions in both society and their family, hold all positions of authority, and are considered superior both physically and intellectually. Where such impositions are resisted, especially by their victims (women), force is used to maintain them.
- 2) Male identification: This form of identification includes the misnomers (McCallister 2018) qualities of control, strength, forcefulness, rationality, strong work ethics, and completeness. These contribute to male identification in bolstering a patriarchal system of dominance.

- 3) Male-centredness: In a patriarchal system, all activities and systems of control revolve around men and they may literally hold the society at ransom if their will is not allowed. Men remain the focus and drivers of all events and inventions, and steal all the glory for themselves (McCallister 2018).
- 4) In a patriarchal system, men are possessed with control over everything. The oppression of women is not only done, but also seen to be done, when making decisions regarding all matters in life.

Women who raise their heads against the system may be seen as threats, and weapons used to suppress them or bring them to subservience could appear as witchcraft accusation or persecution. Once resistance surfaces, stereotypical measures such as witchcraft persecution are invoked to quell insurrection. Hester (1998) portrays witchcraft violence as something that lies at the heart of male supremacy, as well as eroticised violence and a socially-constructed instrument to reduce women to subordination and passivity. It is argued in this paper that in our quest to understand the witchcraft phenomenon, we have to realise that male-female conflictual relations are an integral part of the problem (Hester 1998). The accusation of women of witchcraft in history should be seen as the social control of women in the general context of the configuration of forces to deal with sudden changes that threatened existing ideologies, economic relations, religious doctrines and political systems (Ally 2015). Change often presupposes uncertainties, fear, loss, pain, hurt, and even perceived peaceful situations. Coping mechanisms are often sought in interpersonal relationships and managed according to learnt stereotypical coping mechanisms.

Kristi Salmons (2003) postulates that, in a patriarchal system where society is composed of socially-constructed rules and regulations, governing action, behaviour and even thought can be raised as part of an explanation of mishaps. Through networks, both formal and informal, society's values, beliefs, morals, and folkways are weighted and measured to stabilise the endemic (Salmons 2003). Existing stereotypes are crystallised and new rules and boundaries are erected in order to curb the threat. Any suspected transgressors (especially those who are vulnerable in society) are harshly dealt with in the name of protecting the greater society from harm against the enemy at the gate. Salmons (2003) concludes that the greater the perceived threat, the more stringently the society narrows its area of inclusion, while simultaneously widening the range of exclusion. According to Salmons, the witch hunts of the 17th and 20th centuries—despite being separated by hundreds of years and taking place in unrelated circumstances—display similar traits.

Gender Roles and Domination of Women

Definitions of gender depend largely on the interests and discipline of the study field. The interest in this research is that of religious studies. Gender is a stereotypical perception through which one looks at each sex (Blackstone 2003). Gender, therefore, is a social construct which holds that individuals ascribe to particular traits, statuses, or values purely because of their sex (Campbell 1981). In this respect, Blackstone (2003)

maintains that the traditional view of the masculine gender role, which suggests that men should be leaders by virtue of their sex, is always a driving force. These perceptions intercept expectations in societal roles, the workplace, and in the family environment. Any persons (especially women), who question these arrangements are viewed as deviant and liable for correction. Witchcraft accusations, more often than not, prove to be effective and readily available corrective measures for male-dominated situations.

Gender roles are culturally, religiously and personally specific (Blackstone 2003). They determine how males and females should think, speak, dress and interact within the context of a society. Witchcraft is a highly gendered crime, squarely situated in one's identity: Who are you? Are you a human or a witch (Kounine 2013)? Accordingly, women who are susceptible to being accused of witchcraft are those who enjoy high levels of education, high income, or sexual independence from men (such as lesbians or the elderly) (Blackstone 2003), or those who stand at the margins of society by their otherness (mumblings, bitterness, poor, aged and socially offensive behaviour). Their otherness from men's control poses a threat to men's ability to be in charge and, therefore, dispel the myth of men's indispensability. In some cultures, old women are also susceptible to accusation because their dependence on society is irritating or burdensome (Ally 2015).

In patriarchally-ruled societies, gender is constructed in individual and structural ways to create environmental constraints and opportunities that usually benefit men more than women (Blackstone 2003). For it to be effective, gender interacts with other characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, tribalism, sex and social class to find more pronounced stereotypical societal roles. Gender roles are the products of the interaction between individuals in a society and they provide clues to what sort of behaviour is believed to be appropriate for each sex (Hester 1998). Gender is differentiated from sex in that the latter is a biological concept, determined on the basis of an individual's primary sex, while gender refers to the meanings, values, and characteristics people ascribe to the different sexes.

Feminist theologians such as Elliot (1996), Dobash and Dobash (1988), Brayford (1991), Klein (1993), and Kunin (2003) see gender stereotypes that describe the subordinate role of women through myths, folk stories and other means (such as daily discourse) as being constructed to endow men with economic and decision-making powers in all levels of society. Many gender views expressed outside of these circles are outlawed and rejected as inappropriate (Brayford 1991, 1431–1458). Biblical texts are, for example, according to Yu-Fen Lin, shaped by historical, social and political factors that are hard to change. Women in the Bible are always subordinate to men and sometimes are not even mentioned by name, or their presence recognised (Klein 1993, 32).

Witchcraft is a highly gendered crime that leaves women with no defence if they are identified for accusation. The fear of a witch as someone inhuman, someone incapable

of human emotions, is inherent in many societies around the world (Kounine 2013). Often, a woman's denial of crime serves as the very proof that she is guilty of that crime. A witch is believed to be stubborn, to not show any remorse, and to always deny her crime. Hester (1998) concludes that in order to understand witch hunts as a gendered crime, we should see them as male-female conflictual relations for power and dominance in society.

Sexism as a Prejudice Based on Sex against Women

Masequesmay (2009) describes sexism as having emerged from the "second-wave"² feminism of the 1960s through to the 1980s. Sexism can be defined as a belief that one sex is superior to and more valuable than another. In practice, it imposes limits on what men can and should do and what women can and should do. Sexism may operate under the guise of the harsh form of masculinity called machismo.

Under fascist patriarchal regimes, women are urged to know their place and perform their traditional gender³ role as wives and mothers (Kgatla 2019). Sexism in a society is most commonly applied against women; it functions to reinforce patriarchy through individuals, collectives, and even institutions that are used to oppressing women on the basis of sex and gender (Masequesmay 2009). Such oppression usually takes the form of economic, political and social exploitation and domination. Sexist behaviours, conditions and attitudes that perpetuate stereotypes of social rules are based on one's biological sex (Hester 1998). Tankersley (2018) contests that sexist prejudices follow women from their birth, exerting a lasting impact on their work, earnings, careers, and families; to their death.

Sexism is associated in the persecution of women (under the overall umbrella of patriarchy) with misogyny, chauvinism, and racism (Bouwer 2017). More often than not, a woman's crime was that her presence threatened the male dominated space, especially if she was insufficiently oriented to the male stereotypical interest, as already said. The bullying styles utilised to control such women often include witchcraft accusations. The ideals of womanhood in many societies are undergirded by patriarchy (Walker 1990, 12) and continually become inferior in the eyes of men. Despite this, these women have carried an unbearable burden without complaining (Walker 1990). Despite the harsh means of keeping women under male control in some societies, one of the ways that women are kept in their male-dominated positions is through being given statues of honour (which become the symbols of ideal womanhood and respectability, portraying the women as heroines) (Walker 1990, 13). However, whether the control is euphemistic or heavy-handed, the goal remains the same. Masequesmay (2009) maintains that the extreme form of sexist ideology is misogyny, the hatred of

2 Second-wave feminism was a period of feminist activity and thought that began in the United States in the early 1960s and lasted roughly two decades. It quickly spread across the Western world, with an aim to increase equality for women by gaining more than just enfranchisement.

3 Especially if they are educated or well-to-do and act independently of male dominated structures.

women for no apparent reason. Sexism, as the cultural interpersonal manifestation of patriarchy, functions well in the space where women are identified for witchcraft persecution.

Misogyny and the Ecology of Men's Fear of Women

While patriarchy is a system of gendered/subordinated relations, misogyny is about patriarchal norms and the enforcement thereof (Manne 2016). Rieder (2012) describes misogyny as a general distrust and dislike of women by men, as women are held as more dangerous than men. McNamara argues that there was a crescendo in the language of the medieval clergy (Rieder 2012) that located misogyny in the realm of the established patriarchy. Misogyny involves, in the main, the abuse and commodification of women in society in general. According to Campbell (1981), misogyny is in the service of patriarchy in the determination and maintenance of patriarchy. Both patriarchy and witchcraft accusations depend on a constellation of attitudes, including paternalism and prejudice (Rieder 2012).

Misogyny is defined as the hatred of women or girls, and is expressed as disgust, intolerance or entrenched prejudice, serving to legitimise the oppression of women. It is manifested through religious and cultural beliefs which represent women as dangerous, defiled, or polluting; hostility towards women in positions of power; and sexual violence and domestic despotism (Ussher 2016). "Misogyny" literally means "hatred of women." However, in everyday usage, beliefs and actions described as misogynist range from intense hatred of women to a more subtle disdain that maintains that women are inferior beings who must be dominated and controlled by men. Ussher postulates that misogyny damages the physical and mental health of women, putting them at a disadvantage throughout their lives and stifling the development of their societies. There are many psychological explanations for misogyny, including men's envy of women's capacity to reproduce; castration anxiety leading to the fear of menstrual blood; frustration-aggression, resulting from unfulfilled sexual desire for women; and psychic imbalance resulting from men's dependency on women, combined with regressed fear of and longing for physical harm (Walinski-Kiehl 2004). Misogyny also serves to maintain women's position as the second, inferior sex, which benefits men financially, politically and socially. Misogyny underpins gendered power imbalances in a patriarchal society, and thus, while patriarchy prevails, so will misogyny (Lemonik 2015).

According to Kimberly (2006, 127–128), who quotes Gilmore's (2001) *Misogyny: The Misogyny as Male Malady*, misogyny is universal and is an institutionalised and ritualised fear of women by men. It cuts across all nationalities, although it is more pronounced in some nationalities, especially in poor communities (Schutte 2013, 4). Misogyny in society is subtle; in its subversive form, it hides and obscures its colours while stereotyping its victims (Campbell 1981, 69). Andrews (1981, 4) describes misogyny as wearing many guises and revealing itself in different forms, but also describes its chief characteristic as pervasiveness. It uses commodities like wealth,

education, race, religion and dramatised language to gain hold of its subjects (Andrews 1981, 4). Brogaard (n.d.), in her article “The Mysteries of Love: 12 Ways to Spot a Misogynist,” describes misogyny as typically an unconscious hatred that men form early in life as a result of some form of traumatic experience. In some societies, women are encouraged to internalise the system of misogyny and the belief that they need male policing, while it is used to maintain as well as control the structures of male dominance (Andrews 1981, 5)

Some men have come to believe that their socialisation into a male-dominated society is divinely ordained (Andrews 1981, 6). However, their portrayal and the praise for their heroism, patriotism and imagined worthiness add to their complacency in their socialisation. In some cases, Andrews (1981, 6) argues, women do not need men to put them down, violate, or denigrate them, as they do these things quite well themselves (Manne 2016).

However, I argue that these terms (patriarchy, sexism, misogyny and paternalism) share the same agenda of domesticating, controlling and forcing women into their subordinate role in society (Campbell 1981, 67). They all operate from the common cause of creating an environment in which women may be subjected to rule by men. Where misogyny tirades, an exaggerated fear of women is fostered in men; this is responded to with the justification of actions such as witchcraft accusations and homicide (Campbell 1981). Misogyny is embedded in patriarchal structures as an image of male aggression and virility complete with acts of violence against women. Misogyny can be traced to the Freudian theory that states that “women are naturally defective” and that postulates that the woman who rebels against a stereotyped role is mentally ill and needs to be cast out by society or “cured” by the patriarchal figure or the psychiatrist (Campbell 1981). Campbell concludes his argument by referring to witch-burning in medieval times as a slaughter of women who did not conform to the stereotypical role of the subservient. These sentiments can lend themselves towards stereotypical persecution of women during witchcraft crises.

In most stressed societies, women’s abuse is orchestrated through misogynist stereotypes. Andrews (1981) concludes that where male dominance has come to fruition, women do not need men to put them down or violate them because they perpetuate male dominance themselves. Women can internalise misogyny to the extent that they frown on other women who resist the system of their subordination (Kgatla 2019). The patriarchal system that is driven by traits such as misogyny threatens women’s self-image by unfairly emphasising the achievements and competitiveness usually associated more with masculinity than femininity (Haj-Yahia 2005).

Misogyny is manifested through religious and cultural beliefs which represent women as dangerous, defiled, or polluting; hostile folklore and jokes; the sexualisation and objectification of women through art, film, literature, mass media and pornography; hostility towards women in positions of power; sexual violence and domestic abuse;

female genital surgery and foot-binding; and the visceral horror held towards female secretions, including menstrual taboos and phobias (Gilmore 2001).

According to Ussher (2016), misogyny has the potential to damage women's physical and mental health. She concludes that "unequal treatment of women—by the state, in the market and by their community and family—puts them at a disadvantage throughout their lives and stifles the development of their societies." Women significantly outnumber men amongst the world's poor and dispossessed, earn significantly less than men if they are in paid work, and are absent or under-represented in positions of social and commercial power (Ussher 2016).

The misogynistic continuum of objectification and abuse against women starts with the sexualised imagery that is endemic in many cultures. Misogyny can also take the form of sexual harassment and abuse, including sexist and sexual comments regarding women, derogatory language (Ortiz 2018), and depictions of men or boys leering at women.⁴ Witchcraft persecution can easily take its cue from misogynist mythical folklores.

Machismo, Marianismo Forms of the Masculine Ethic of Self-imposition

Campbell (1981) contests that the most virulent effect of growing up as a male in a patriarchal society is the form of the masculine ethic known as machismo. Machismo is described as a compulsive masculinity arising from and supported by the patriarchal structure, which exalts strength, power and competitiveness with superiority over other men and, at worse, over women (Kounine 2013). It is a male self-esteem based on the illusion that men are invulnerable, fearless, virile and powerful; and it is often enforced by violence (Campbell 1981). Marianismo, a counterpart of machismo, represents an ideology of a set of values and roles concerning female gender expectations. Within the gender paradigm, women are understood and expected to embrace the values of the Virgin Mary, who serves as a passive submissive role model (Derks and Heessels 2011). The two cognitive concepts are intertwined into co-existing constructs that describe socially acceptable norms and beliefs that support men's and women's roles in a patriarchal power structure (Nunez, Gonzalez, and Gallo 2015). The endorsement of machismo is often supported, even by women who have been socialised and indoctrinated to show respect for male authority, and to internalise and normalise patriarchal values (Rosen 2017). Machismo perpetuates relations based on power; it promotes inequalities in the social, political and economic spheres and imposes specific ways of how to act and think (Ortiz 2018). Witchcraft accusations flare up in such circumstances.

4 Ussher 2016 <https://www.researchgate.net/deref/mailto%3Aj.ussher%40uws.edu.au>.

Marianismo emphasises the role of women as centred in the family and the home; it encourages passivity, self-sacrifice and chastity (Nunez et al. 2015).⁵ Marianismo is rooted in Christian values brought by Western missionaries to the third world through colonisation, which, for all intents and purposes, defined women as nurturing figures and spiritual pillars within their families, based on the ideal of the Virgin Mary (Niemann 2004). Derks and Heessels (2011) found that the battered women of Bolivia do not accept their situation in a Marianistic way, but rather experience rage as a central concept in their religious experience. As their economic, social and physical means are limited, they draw on spiritual powers from female women's associations where men are absent.

Ideology of Self-entitlement as an Extension of Machismo in Patriarchal Societies

Edwards (2017) describes self-entitlement as individuals perceiving themselves as more deserving than others of unearned privileges. At the heart of self-entitlement lies narcissism and greed. The exaggerated sense of self-importance accompanied by fantasies of power, beauty and brilliance form the basic constituencies of masculinity and hence the basis for stereotyping women as less human (Edwards 2017). It is on this position that it becomes easy to accuse them of social evils such as witchcraft. Entitlement is also found among women, but in our context is explored in relation to masculinity. Men, trapped in a sense of entitlement, feel that life owes them something: a reward or a particular standard of living. This sense of entitlement brings with it an uncompromising attitude that does not comprehend that rewards are earned through decent and responsible behaviour. People with an attitude of entitlement are normally unaware that their attitude is detrimental to the wellbeing of others, and are also in denial as to how they destroy unity and coexistence among people (Edwards 2017). Self-entitled individuals make unrealistic demands while being oblivious to the fact that their personal happiness comes at the expense of others (Edwards 2017). Patriarchy, misogyny, and masculine assumptions are the antitheses of social cohesion (or trusting relationships), which is essentially the expression of a community's social capital (Ally 2015).

Self-entitlement includes an ambiguous attitude that informs the beholder that what belongs to others also belongs to him or her, but what belongs to him or her, is his or hers alone. Such people are generally lazy and ungrateful. No amount of shame could curb their desire to possess everything. According to Edwards (2017), self-entitled people overrate their own achievements while simultaneously underrating others' performances. In a practical sense, self-entitled people drive other people away through their behaviour because real achievers will avoid them, lest they are hurt. Self-entitled people are usually arrogant and confrontational. They bully, project anger and are

5 "Machismo, Marianismo, and Negative Cognitive-Emotional Factors: Findings from the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos Sociocultural Ancillary Study" (Nunez, Gonzalez, and Gallo 2015).

possessive. They rate themselves very highly and mask their real self. Behind self-entitled behaviour is a craving to be admired, adored and respected. Insecurity could be another problem haunting the self-entitled. These traits are constituent elements of patriarchal stereotype and feed into witchcraft ideology.

In concluding this section, I should emphasise that machismo encompasses positive and negative aspects of masculinity, including bravery, honour, dominance, aggression, sexism and repressed emotion, as described in “A Reinterpretation of Male Dominance in the Chicano Family” by Mirandé (1970, 473–479). As violence may become the most appropriate way to protect one’s honour, to show courage or to conceal the fear of revealing one’s weaknesses, machismo can be utilised in order to achieve those goals. Conversely, men may use machismo to instil fear in women, and in that way ensure the continuation of the patriarchy (Campbell 1981). In shaky situations (such as recession, cynical hostility, or where traits such as anxiety and anger are exposed), machismo can reinforce the moderation of men’s respectability and dominance and restore a sense of control over women.

Witchcraft Accusations and Men’s Sexual Dysfunction

One other phenomenon that requires researchers’ attention is male sexual dysfunction as a source of men’s perceived threat of losing power over their wives. In that way, they may invariably try to regain their power through accusations of witchcraft. “Male menopause”⁶ can constitute a real threat to men’s ability to exercise influence and power over their wives⁷ (Chaudhury 2017).

For the purpose of this section, through the explanation of impotence as a potential cause of persecution in marital relationships (as we investigate how traits associated with patriarchy serve as conducive to the formation of accusations of witchcraft), we also investigate conflictual relationships between men and women related to sexual dysfunction. How this may give rise to new accusations is a critical aspect of explaining the phenomenon of witchcraft accusations. In this respect, we now turn to a common symptom of impotence, also known as male menopause, which includes low energy, depression or sadness, lowered self-confidence and erectile dysfunction.⁸

The research conducted on “masculine honour” and witch hunts in seventeenth-century Germany by Walinski-Kiehl (2004) and Kounine (2013), as well as contemporary literature on women accused of “stealing” manhood (the penis) through the means of

6 Loss of manhood by becoming sexually impotent (a medical problem experienced by men, characterised by the consistent inability to sustain an erection sufficiently for sexual intercourse or the inability to achieve ejaculation).

7 Common symptoms of impotence, also known as male menopause, include low energy, depression or sadness, lowered self-confidence and erectile dysfunction (Thomton 2015). Accessed April 12, 2020 www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5994393.

8 Thomton 2015. *Menopause and Sexuality*. NCBI. Accessed April 12, 2020. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5994393.

witchcraft, are investigated. Accounts of stolen manhood in literature have occupied the minds of many scholars who have researched the agency of witchcraft on penis snatching for centuries (Azulai 2019; Beusman 2016; Radford 2013; Kallinen 2008; Rider 2006).

Kounine (2013) writes about the account of Jung Aberle Wagner, who, after having intimate relations with Maria Schramm—a woman twice his age—later realised that she had stolen his manhood. Seven years later, she was accused of doing the same to another man. According to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, German author Heinrich Kramer's 1486 manual for hunting witches (in Azulai 2019), witches were believed to be capable of stealing, transforming, or concealing a man's penis and using it for their own purposes. Azulai (2019) accounts that the *Malleus Maleficarum* incriminated all women in a bloodthirsty quest brought on by their carnal lust to capture men's penises. Meel (2009) categorises two types of witches in Africa: 1) Those who cause impotence, turn milk sour, prevent hens from laying eggs, and cause diseases and death; and 2) Those who are believed to be able to fly and change themselves into familiars.

A society where misogyny and masculinity are prevalent has a high rate of brutality against women, expressed in the form of domestic violence and rape (Ortiz 2018). The root-cause of gender-based violence is the prevalence of misogyny and machismo. Sometimes, the misogynist misuse of power may be demonstrated when a man forces himself on his wife, forcing her to perform sexual acts she is not comfortable with, and belittling and degrading her (Twerski 2016). In such circumstances, a woman is forced to accept that she is a problem and should allow sexual abuse as a result of her "problems." Misogyny may also employ different abuse tactics, one of which is sexual abuse as the concealment of the man's weaknesses, such as impotence. A post-menopausal man is likely to accuse his wife/lover of taking his virility out of jealousy so as to prevent him from being with other women (Kounine 2013). The accusations of stolen manhood become more common between couples above the age of fifty and in polygamous marriages (Meel 2009).

The underlying argument in this section is the belief that impotence (sexual dysfunction) can be explained as the responsibility or doing of witches. Because men have the prerogative to craft stereotypical language, they can use this language against women, and even project their weaknesses on women to easily exonerate themselves from any blame. Impotence also serves as a reason given for a promiscuous and polygamous lifestyle for men, as they are then able to make the excuse that their first wives are bewitching them by stealing their manhood. Armed with a patriarchal arsenal, they are capable of leading lives that women cannot control, and any attempt from a woman to call them to order can be resisted with violence. Women, who are more persistent when it comes to responsible lifestyles on the part of their spouses, may be silenced through an accusation of witchcraft. Men may go to the extent of protecting their manhood, their status and their esteem in society by projecting their weaknesses onto women through slanderous disinformation. If their masculinity is perceived to be under threat through

showing signs of sexual dysfunction, they may go to extremes to protect their “honour” against a bad reputation (Kounine 2013) by accusing their wives. Masculine honour bestows a vital identity on male subjects in a patriarchally-constituted society. Loss of this honour, which is a public affair, could lead to their social isolation and a stigma that may permanently alienate them from society (Walinski-Kiehl 2004). Out of fear, they may try to protect themselves by blaming their sexual counterparts.

Humans’ Vulnerability as a Factor in Witchcraft Relationships

A discussion on the use of patriarchal means to unfairly blame women for men’s weaknesses is not complete without exploring vulnerability and intimacy in society, especially as ordered by masculine stereotypes. Both sexes are vulnerable, but social stereotypes and resultant persecution show women to be more vulnerable. Women are doubly oppressed by the patriarchal system in particular, and human susceptibility to persecution in general. Vulnerability is antithetical to security and protection. In this paper, an attempt has been made to inquire as to how women are incapacitated as a category and how negative social constructs could be misused to perpetuate patriarchal stereotypes.

The Oxford Dictionary provides multiple definitions of vulnerability. One meaning of being “vulnerable” is to be susceptible to something (a negative “something,” naturally), such as disease or infection. People living in war-torn countries, where the water and sewer systems have been destroyed, are, for example, vulnerable to contracting malaria and other waterborne diseases. A second meaning of being “vulnerable” is to be capable of being physically or emotionally wounded. With the pandemic spread of COVID-19 in the world today, the whole of humanity is vulnerable to being infected.

Vulnerability could also be defined as an internal risk of a subject or a system that is exposed to a hazard or susceptible to damage in the case of threatening circumstances (Paul 2013). At its worst, a patriarchal system constitutes a vulnerable environment for women. Behaviour (such as masculinity, misogyny, sexism, and male dominance in society) creates an environment of interpersonal vulnerability.⁹ Vulnerable behaviour that is being punished will develop feelings of anti-trust and anti-intimacy. Feelings such as depression, stress, anxiety, and rejection will decrease intimacy and increase insecurity (Vargas-Benitez 2010). In a social setting where interpersonal conflicts are attended to according to the preconceived ideology of a patriarchal disorder, solutions are likely to be sought in predetermined frameworks like witchcraft. In the time of heightened relationships, quick solutions are sought according to pre-learned prejudices. Women are continuously exposed to the danger of persecution emanating from

9 Interpersonal vulnerability refers to interactions between people where they may be required to be open to the possibility of punishment or hurt, which may be responded to aversively by those who feel threatened (Cordova and Scott 2001. Intimacy: A behavioral interpretation. *BEHAV ANALYST* 24:75–86. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03392020>).

patriarchal bias; and often they depend on their ability, capacity or resilience to cope, adapt or recover from the effects of such a hazardous system (Paul 2013).

Vulnerability is minimised where there is an environment of trust, reassurance, intimacy and love. Vulnerability feeds on close social relationships and social cohesion (Ally 2015). In abusive relationships, victims are driven by a self-preservation instinct to develop defences against menacing systems. A study by Burton et al. (n.d.) on the role of trust in low-income mothers' intimate unions, revealed that 96% of mothers voiced a general distrust of men, although that distrust did not deter them from being involved in an intimate union. Such women survive by suspending, compartmentalising, misplacing and enduring pain.

Concluding Remarks

The focus of this paper was to explore the role of the patriarchal system and its related elements (such as sexism, misogyny, machismo, marianismo and sexual impotence) in stereotyping women as an explanatory frame in the light of witchcraft. The paper argued that accusations of witchcraft emanate from closely-knitted kin deflecting responsibility for their failures. The patriarchal category is easily available and readily utilised in dealing with misfortunes in a non-accountable and stereotypical way. Because of its historically deep-rooted political, economic, religious and cultural beliefs, violence against women has been legitimised and justified—sometimes even before it occurs. The fear that stereotypes serve, disrupts important links and networks that could help communities in development projects (Ally 2015). As a result, violence has been elevated to a (false) cognitive explanatory outlet in coping with accusations of witchcraft. Deficiencies of the human body that come with age are also blamed on women in an abusive manner. Trust and intimacy are driven out of personal relationships and replaced with fear, suspicion, intimidation, hatred, disharmony and mistrust. Solutions or interventions that can mitigate against these inherently debilitating social burdens are hard to find, although that would fall outside the scope of this paper. More research on the elimination of patriarchy should be initiated. International conventions such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention against Torture, could provide valuable resources (Mudgway 1977).

The paper has intimated that the prejudices discussed are hard to remove from society.

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