Rape and the Inordinate Quest for Pleasure: Implications for Social Cohesion and National Development

by

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ABSTRACT

For every action performed by human beings within a given social precinct, there are implications - whether good or bad. This explains why human actions are said to be value loaded and not value neutral. Thus, human actions are critically evaluated by one set of values or another. Rape is one such human action that calls for urgent appraisal; the increase in the reported cases of rape shows that it is a serious moral problem that must be investigated. Undoubtedly, rape like all other social vices like drug abuse, prostitution, etc have eaten deep into the heart of our society. As we begin to philosophize on this matter, the following questions become pertinent to ask: why do people engage in rape? Is it for the mere fun of it or as a pseudo-punitive measure against the victims? Is human freedom to act antithetic to the doctrine of responsible behaviour? Is the rapist morally justified to transgress the bounds of decency in defiling other oral agents within the society? However, our aim is not just to raise rhetorical questions without confronting this problem on its head. Rather, this paper seeks a conceptual understanding of the issue of rape in an attempt to trace its adverse effects on social co-existence and human flourishing. Further, it argues that if this social ill is not checked, it could constitute a clog in the wheels of national development. The paper conclusively maintains that rape is an immoral act and should be condemned by all and sundry.

INTRODUCTION

The reported cases of rape in Nigeria recently has been on the increase even though attempts by the media and non Governmental Organizations to sensitize the public has been intensified lately against this form sexual abuse. One of such cases is reported by Saturday Punch newspaper on January 25, 2009. This is a pathetic case where two sisters (teenagers) were reportedly raped for over forty-five minutes by a gang of four in Bariga area of Lagos. The
girls were aged 11 and 18 respectively. Such is the lot of many children in the world today; most teenagers who are raped in this way never get justice for so many reasons.

Apparently, the cited case above appeals to strong emotions because we need not be in the shoes of the victims to know that it is a devastating and noxious experience. Whether we are conscious of it or not and whether we like it or not, each of us has a set of values that we live by. In any case, the moral uprightness or wrongness of such values is another question – the question of how the relation between men and women should be understood historically within a given social framework. However, the liberal moral theorists may not see any problem with this immoral act because their perspective is benchmarked on the hedonists’ moral theory which stipulates that an individual should pursue only such actions that could guarantee him the acquisition of pleasure. But then the leftist, the conservative moral thinker will be quick to ask: is pleasure the greatest good? Should we seek pleasurable actions at the expense of other peoples’ moral rights to life and dignity of human self? Rapists are wont of destroying their victim’s self esteem and sense of modesty.

**RAPE: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

Rape is unlawful coitus by force with another person without that person’s consent. It is also referred to as sexual assault, an assault by a person involving sexual intercourse with or sexual penetration of another person without the person’s express consent. It is generally considered as a serious crime as a civil assault. Put it differently, rape is a despicable form of sexual abuse especially when it involves children and the under aged. According to the first UN Secretary-General’s study on violence Against Children, released in 2006, 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence during 2002. If a rape victim is found guilty of raping a minor the accused could be sentenced
for life; although such legal charges are not universal – regional differences also allows for variation in degree of punishment.

As a matter of fact, this mellifluous incidence of child rape is rampant not only in Nigeria but also in Africa and globally. The following cited cases buttress this point further. On 23 January 2009, a 62-yrs old medical doctoring Pretoria was accused of raping and indecently assaulting a 14-yrs old female patient. How can such act be morally justified? Given the background that all qualified doctors are sworn to an oath of protecting lives at all times, they have a non-negotiable obligation to do so by all means and not to contribute, in any way to the health challenges of their patients.

In a similar fashion, a 17-year old Nigerian pupil was reportedly raped in a hospital is South Western Nigeria. This particular incident was reported by the Action Congress (AC). According to the story, the rapists after having their way with the victim shaved he pubic hair and stuffed it in to her mouth then tucked a steel bottle opener into her vagina. How inhumane can people be? Is this act morally justified? The human desire to get sexual satisfaction at all cost is actually devilish. As a matter of fact, people hide under various acrimonious guises to molest and abuse children indiscriminately. A cause of this type of juvenile rape could be social stigmas of children, cultural disillusionment, moral starvation, incivility, social confusion and the logical deficiency of a people’s misguided opinions and evil intentions within a social praxis. For instance, an increasing number of children in the Niger Delta, Nigeria are being forced to the streets and trafficked as a result of a deeply held belief in child “witches” and also due to persistent torture, conflicts, poverty, abuse or rape.7

Generally speaking, rape is a form of gender-based violence against women because it is dehumanizing, physically and psychologically harmful and causes loss of self-worth. The
Declaration of Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVWA) states that “The term ‘violence against women’ means any act of gender-based violence that resulting, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.”

Invariably, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) seriously condemns rape as an ignoble act. It restated in its Gen. Rec. No.19 that gender based violence is a form of discrimination which CEDAW requires its state parties to eliminate in all forms.

CAUSES

From the foregoing, there is a need to look at the issue of uncontrollable sexual urge this is often said to be the cause of rape. Is rape a consequence of the inability of persons to control their sexual urge? Answering this question depends largely on how one wants to argue. But is there a motive behind rape other than the desire to attain pleasurable satisfaction? A point to note here is that the inability of one to control one’s sexual feelings is not a justification for rape.

Sexual urge, like any other human urge – quarrelling, fighting, stealing, socializing, etc. can be brought under control. Man is actually a complex of inexhaustible emotions, feelings and psychological dispositions; if he can successfully exist in a sub-structural setting with other beings without experiencing struggle and conflict ad infinitum, then it follows that he can consciously strive to put his emotions and urges under lock and key. Indeed, most experts believe that the primary cause of rape is an aggressive desire to dominate the victim rather than the quest to achieve sexual fulfillment as often claimed by analysts and psychologists. Principally, rape should be considered, in this view, as an act of violence rather than a sexual encounter.

CATEGORIES OF RAPE
Heretofore, we have argued succinctly that rape is forcing somebody into sex; this comes under different guises. Rape is grouped into three categories. One is the identity or characteristics of the victim, the other is by reference to a situation in which it occurs and by the identity of the penetrator. Other notable types are acquaintance rape, rape of children, spousal rape, gang rape, statutory rape, prison rape (mainly homosexual) rape within the military and so on. Some of these shall be discussed.

1. **FORCIBLE RAPE**

This type of rape is carried out without a person’s consent or against a person’s will by the use of threat. It often involves the use of naked force which is why it is referred to as forcible rape. This form of rape is also called *aggravated sexual assault* because it involves causing physical injury like wounds, bone fracture, disfigures, put the life of the victim at risk or may even lead to death. For instance, an 11-year old Junior Secondary School student of a College in Ibadan was found dead at a church which supposedly specializes in miracle deliverance where she had been taken by her mother for spiritual deliverance after also being accused of witchcraft. She was allegedly raped to death by the presiding pastor of the church; her naked body was later found with congealed blood gushing out of private part in the pastor’s bedroom.

2. **ACQUAINTANCE RAPE**

This type of rape does not come as a surprise attack because the rapist is somehow close to the victim. It is also called date rape or non-domestic rape because it is a situation where a person rapes a person he or she knows. The two people may be co-workers, school mates, friends, former lovers or presently dating. In most cases, a woman is ore prone to being raped by an acquaintance than by a stranger or a relative. Sometimes, acquaintance rape may include the use of force but the term *acquaintance rape* usually applies when the sexual intercourse is
nonconsensual (without an expressly granted consent) and does not involve the physical trauma of coercion typically associated with forcible rape, such as assault or threat of violence and use of dangerous weapons.

3. STATUTORY RAPE

This is when one engages in a sexual intercourse with an under aged. That is, having sexual intercourse with a person who has not reached the age of consent. The age of consent is not universally decisive; it varies depending on state laws, policies and cultural biases, but nowhere is it higher than 18. Under most state laws, the younger the victim is, the greater the punishment. This form of rape also attracts severe punishment when it involves drugs or asleep.

4. MARITAL RAPE

It is otherwise referred to as spousal rape – a rape of a person’s spouse. This form of rape is often looked down on an under reported because it involves two parties who are out to protect their conjugal love or companionship against all odds. Even law enforcement agencies rarely prosecute this type of rape in Nigeria. Also the English common law does not recognize rape within a marriage as a punishable offense.

5. RAPE OF MEN

This type of rape is controversial and is not taken seriously, often times, within the society. It may be due to the fact that men are considered to be stronger than the female who are considered to be “weaker vessels”. But is it not possible for a man to be raped by a woman, particularly when he is not in the mood for sexual intercourse? Arguably, it is possible but the point remains that men may not be totally humiliated, tortured, molested, and threatened as most women are made o go through. Traditionally, rape laws were gender specific, providing that women could only be victims of rape and only men could be rapist. But recently, an increasing
number of states have rewritten their rape laws to be gender neutral – to accommodate rape of men. It is pertinent to state that this paper does not consider rape of men as a serious issue.

ETHICS AND RAPE

Ethicists are mainly concerned with the measuring of ethical concepts in relation to a people’s way of life and the way people conduct themselves in the society. For A.F. Chuka, ethical inquiry offers one the critical disposition of the mind to question the rational basis of our actions as to conform to a higher realm of good and right. However, we must note that, “Ethics begins when a person reflects on his moral standards or moral standards of his society and asks whether these standards are reasonable or unreasonable, whether they are supported by good reasons or poor ones.”

Similarly, Brooke Noel et al., sees ethics as an aspect of moral philosophy that is concerned with moral judgments or value judgments about what virtuous or not, just or unjust, morally right or wrong, morally good or bad or evil, morally improper or proper. In this light, we want to examine rape with the following ethical concepts to determine its morality.

1. EGOISM AND RAPE

This moral theory holds that man should always do what will promote his own interest or good regardless of whether it involves taking advantage of other people or not. There are two variants of egoism: Psychological and Moral egoism. On the one hand, psychological egoism views human actions as natural process of expression based on self-interest – that beings are naturally motivated towards self actualization and fulfillment. On the other hand, moral egoism states that morality does not require people to put others before self. Egoism as an ethical theory is seen as realistic because it is grounded in human psychology and the antics of man in his dealings with his fellow man. Man has concealed behind all his actions some tincture of
anticipated good which he will derive from such actions.\textsuperscript{15} Hence, a rapist may be assumed justified by virtue of the prima facie consideration of this theory which puts self interest above other people’s interest. But the question to ask is: should people engage in rape because they seek selfish sexual-gratification? Absolutely not! We answer in the negative because the devastating effects that follows after the act is too grave to be morally permissible, not even in tandem with the claims of the egoists. Egoism under whatever guise cannot make rape moral.

2. **HEDONISM AND RAPE**

Hedonism is the ethical theory which states that the goal of all human actions is to seek pleasure. Its central tenets hold that “man by nature is a pleasure seeking animal, all human actions are directed towards the search or pleasure.”\textsuperscript{16} But how pleasurable is rape and at what expense? Should pleasure be sought at all cost regardless of the means and how it might affect other people? However, the argument that rape gives pleasure may be ostensibly rebuffed because “pleasure” is not something that can be conclusively determined – it is a relative term for a subjective human feeling. How then can we say that rape is pleasurable as claimed by the hedonists? Let us consider one case of rape reported by the media\textsuperscript{17} to substantiate facts for our criticisms. Three kids of the same mother, aged between two and six years, were raped on the same day by a Ghanaian, Emmanuel Assai, who allegedly tricked the children into his room and, according to preliminary medical examination carried out on the children, gained forceful entry into them. Is this what pleasure is all about? According to J.I. Omoregbe; the best refutation of the theory of psychological hedonism is experience. We know both from our own experiences and from those of others that our actions are not always motivated by the desire for pleasure\textsuperscript{18}. This goes to show that pleasure is neither the only nor the greatest good in life. There are other goods like chastity and sanity.
3. UTILITARIANISM AND RAPE

The doctrine of the utilitarian is enmeshed in the moral doctrine which states that an action is good if and only if it brings the greatest number of happiness to the greatest number of people. Jeremy Bentham and J.S. Mill are the two major proponents of this theory. For Utilitarians, the utility principle reigns supreme – that the utility of an action can be measured by the consequences of the action. This consequence is the tendency to reduce pain and to increase pleasure. In other words, an action is considered to be either right or wrong based on its utility value. So the question that immediately comes to mind is: does rape produce the greatest balance of pleasure over pain? If not, then it follows that rape is deficient in its utility value and should be totally condemned in all of its ramifications.

We may further buttress this point by evaluating rape from utilitarian’s perspective by creating a hypothetical action weighing table (to consider the greatest balance of good over evil) with the case of the two girls cited earlier, who were raped by a gang of four.

**UTILITARIAN ACTION WEIGHING TABLE (RAPE)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GANG OF RAPISTS</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AMOUNT OF PLEASURE</th>
<th>OTHERS: AMOUNT OF PAIN ACCRUED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DERIVED</td>
<td>VICTIMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ALFA</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>(H)</td>
<td>PELU-85(PN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ABBEY</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>(H)</td>
<td>FUNMI-90(PN)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Total No. of happiness = 165 H
Total No. of pain = 630 PN

Total No. of pain – Total No. of Happiness
630 PN – 165 H = 465 PN (pains)

Thus this action has a greater balance of pain over pleasure so it considered immoral and useless as far as the utility principle is concerned.

**IMPLICATIONS OF RAPE FOR SOCIAL COHESION**

Apart from the fact that women who are raped suffer a sense of violation and abuse that goes beyond physical injury, it also portends serious implications for healthy social living. Rape may constitute a strong barrier to marriage because it could disrupt enduring family moral values. Assuming a girl who is supposed to get married was raped a fortnight to her wedding, the man (the intending groom) may be forced to call off the wedding as he may not be able to withstand the shame and pressure from his friends and kinsmen.

Rape could lead to the ostracizing of women in the society because it involves intimidation and threat of violence. Women may become distrustful of men and experience feelings of shame, regret, humiliation and loss of privacy. When this occurs, life may become solitary and uninteresting because men cannot live alone without women in the society. The effect rape has on its victims is endemic as victims; most victims suffer *rape trauma syndrome.*
Victims who suffer this type of trauma experience physical symptoms like headaches, pseudo-phobias, sleep disorder, and general fatigue.

Inadvertently, psychological damages done to rape victims may affect them during sexual intercourse with their husbands. The negative thought of the rapist may be hard to forget and may even make the woman to become scared of having sex with her lawfully wedded husband; this would adversely affect the husband who is supposed to get sexual satisfaction from his spouse. However, this psychological disturbance is inextricably related to the circumstances of rape such as intense fear as a result of aggressive intimidation and brutal penetration.

More so, rape could lead to unwanted pregnancy or even underage pregnancy which could jeopardize the social acceptance of the victim or even lead to death, in severe cases, like gang rape. For instance, if a girl who is a virgin is raped in this manner, she may never be able to live with the shame and may consider suicide as the next available option. Losing people in this way may affect social belongings and lasting friendships. Again, a girl who becomes pregnant through rape may find it difficult to get a good husband to marry because only few men, if they exist, would want to marry such kinds of girls in Nigeria today. Also, a child who is conceived by rape may not get the full attention of the mother because he/she would be regarded as a bastard; such children may end up becoming touts who disturb social peace in the community.

Sometimes, rape is used as a psychological tool by soldiers for warfare, to humiliate victims especially during inter tribal wars, as witnessed during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes. Even in Nigeria, rape of women and girls by both police and security forces is acknowledged to be endemic. Therefore, the fear of being raped and rape has grave social as well as personal consequences. For example, it may prevent women from socializing of move freely as they wish within a society.
IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Undoubtedly, the recurrent incidence of rape in a nation, like Nigeria, could affect the recent efforts at women empowerment and emancipation geared towards nation building. When women are continually raped by men, it could cost a nation the fertile contribution of the female gender to the business of nation building and development. Women’s political and economic empowerment is strategic to development issues in Africa; so they should be treated with respect and not molested by the male folks.

The fact that women have been and are still being oppressed, marginalized and denigrated has been a topical issue in many nations of the world, most of whom have either gone through such oppressions in one form or the other who have been witness to them, accept that the male gender has upper hands in several things in the society. This is detrimental to the women, who are regarded and treated as second class citizens.

In addition to this, continuous cases of rape in a nation may place it at the highest point of moral bankruptcy. A society is said to be sick when there is a collapse of moral uprightness. In such a society, progress can only be recorded but in an oscillatory manner. This may also cause a nation to lose much needed foreign exchange, goodwill and favourable business deals among the comity of nations. No right-thinking investor would like to invest his hard earned funds in a society where moral decadence is the other of the day.

Furthermore, rape may constitute serious health hazards for a nation. Victims are liable to contact deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS, syphilis, staphylococcus, gonorrhea, etc. This is because rape is a form of unprotected sexual intercourse. If this happens at an alarming rate, it could increase and project the financial needs of a nation’s health sector beyond the statutory budget.
allocation from the national treasury. Hence, a nation stands the risk of running at a budget-deficit if this social ill is not curbed.

Also, severe cases of rape could lead to death. When this becomes a general problem, it would adversely affect the population of a nation and other vital national wealth measuring indices like the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), National Income (NI), and Gross National Product (GNP) etc. In order to avoid this unpalatable situation in our nation, all hands must be on deck. We must realize that the ethical destination of man is humanity and this can only be achieved through mutual love and tolerance; through the realization that there are moral and religious values, which belong inseparably to the very idea of humanity, which must not be eroded, if man must retain his worth and place in the order of things.\(^\text{21}\) Thus, rape must be condemned in all its ramifications.

**CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we have demystified the concept of rape and its various forms. We also attempted a critical examination of this moral problem by ethical standards valuation but found it wanting both in content and effect. In furtherance of this, their implication for social unity and national progress was brought to the fore. In a precise therefore, the public should be continually sensitized on the dangers of rape and pornographic materials, x-rated materials in out TV stations, musical videos, films etc which could germinate the craving for this evil act in men, should be discouraged, and if possible, banned by the government and other law enforcing cum regulatory agencies. Rape is an immoral act and we should all eschew it from our minds first, before it can be erased from the society.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1Emmanuel Onyeche, “11-year old rape victim says: they stuffed rags into my mouth to stop me from screaming” Saturday Punch, Vol.17, No.19, 518, p2.


6The Guardian of Nigeria represents the details of this horrible crime in the last column on pg. 6 on Oct. 1, 2007. For further readings, see. www.Huliq.com37051/Nigeria.

7A non-governmental organization is seeing to the prevention of this form of abuse on children – Preventing Abandonment of Children Today (PACT). See the article: “Child Witches”, www.steppingstonesnigeria.org.

8See. “Rape – the Silent Weapon”, www.ammnestyusa.org/rape/nigeria

9nigeria ratified the convention on 13 June 1985.

10www.wikepedia.org/types of rape


18 Ibid

