

A SHORT ESSAY ON GENDER INEQUALITY AS A HUMAN PROBLEM: AN ATTEMPT AT A BALANCED PERSPECTIVE FOR BOTH SEXES

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Abstract

At the mention of women empowerment in a program, a man asked: “what about men? Ma, don’t men need empowerment? Why is there no minister for men affairs?” The man’s interjection puts into perspective a dominant single narrative approach to gender inequality that makes it solely a woman’s problem. While it remains true that the present world order ensures that women are often the victims in the unequal opportunities due to their gender, it is also true that the picture will not be complete if men are not also considered in the narratives. This paper interrogates the dominant perspective to gender inequality that enthrones women as victims and men as offenders. The purpose is to investigate and discover the wounds of each gender and heal it by the powers of truth and love. The study employs analytic method and discovers that we must unlearn the prejudices and discriminatory practices, without shame and blame, despite their hurtful nature. As such, we can reclaim and recover our humaneness and sustain it. The study argues that without healing the old and recent wounds of both genders, a new humanity cannot be possible. Yet our society will forever bear the marks of crucifixion even as we begin to experience the resurrection.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender equality, Love.

Introduction

The dominant functional societal structures in the world are patterned in favor of men. For this reason, very often, there is the saying that ‘it is a man’s world.’ Consequently, the feminist movement enjoys a lot of traction in the present world order. Yet if any order is to be just, it must offer equal opportunities to all the members of the society. While evidently women would need more

in order to continue to equal men in the society - socially, economically, politically etc., it is also true that some men are structurally conditioned to be unequal to their women peers in the society. It is for this reason that justice can only be met when inequality becomes a human problem and not just gender problem.

Clarification of Concepts

Feminism is the struggle to reverse issues of gender inequality. Feminism is a movement that advocates for equality between men and women. It developed from a position of opposition. This opposition not just to men but to all forms oppression of women. This opposition is first by implication and then implicitly extends to all peoples who are treated as inferior by dominant groups. It centers its demand on the basis that man constantly frustrates the right of a woman to take control of her own destiny. It strives towards equalizing women with men in the areas of cultural, social, political and economic responsibilities.

Gender Inequality, simply means, unequal treatment of the two genders (men and women) with respect to the allocation of rights, opportunities and statues.

Statement of the Problem

Researches are geared towards elucidating and/or resolving an existing problem. This entails breaking the silence by being human because human beings are not built in silence, but in words, in works and in actions/reflections. This research was motivated by the problem of gender imbalance that has been taken as women problem instead of human problem. Men are labelled as the ‘offenders’ while women as the ‘victims’. The effects of these misconceptions are obvious in the families, workplaces, businesses, etc. leading to disruptions of massive proportions, creating profound misery in our societies that continues to thwart sustainable development.

Fundamentally scholars are in accord that there are gender disparities in many human societies. They agree that women are marginalized. However, this marginalization has not received practical solutions, because it has been taken as women's problem. This is because women advocate or rather fight for the betterment of only women, instead of all humans and the elimination of all forms of oppressions and dominations in the society. It seems that women have forgotten that men are our brothers, fathers, uncles, husbands while women are also the sisters, mothers, wives, aunties. Any effective struggle that would gain traction among all must therefore be a fight against all forms of oppressions and dominations in order to create a new humanity.

It is the wrong view of seeing marginalization as women's problem that birthed this topic. It was the same marginalization felt by women and their sympathizers that galvanized women around the globe and subsequently gave rise to the different waves of feminist ideologies that have rocked the world at different times with some attendant cultural consequences. The effects of this disparity that resulted to gender crisis are obvious in families, workplaces, social structures, in religious expressions, political structuring and general system of justice delivery. Therefore, gender balance is of necessity to the development of every sector in Africa because equal access, equity and meaningful participation are preconditions for ensuring mutual contribution of men and women in ideas, developmental directions, policies and practices. D.H. Lawrence citing William K. and Cynthia affirms that "the future of humanity will be decided not by relations between nations but by relations between men and women"¹. This is true, the relation between men and women are very important and needs to be looked at because the high rate of gender crises in the families, workplaces and social structures is massive and requires gender balance in order to transform the roots of gender imbalance.

A Balanced Perspective on Gender Inequality

To investigate and discover the wounds of each gender and possibly heal it, it is necessary to employ the twin powers of truth and love which requires dialogue between men and women. From this dialogue truth will be unfolded thereby engendering both genders to unlearn the prejudices and discriminatory practices, without shame and blame, despite their hurtful nature. As such we can reclaim and recover our humaneness and sustain it.

Bell Hooks posits that “love is the only tool that can fix gender imbalance in a loveless society”². According to her, “love is a verb. Love is an action not only a feeling that simply comes and goes but a skill”³. She goes on to assert that “love is a mixture of various ingredients such as care, truth, responsibility, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, trust, as well as honest and open communication”⁴. This means that we must be committed and exhibit attitudes of generosity toward love. For Bell Hooks, therefore, love is not only a concept but an act that regulates personal and social relations. She says that “we know so little about love in theory and practice, it is only returning and surrounding to love that will proffer solution to gender imbalance”⁵. It is the predirection of this essay that we need to change our perspective, see gender imbalance as human problem and not as women problem. For Hooks, “the choice to love is a choice to connect, to find ourselves in the other”⁶. To find ourselves in another person is to extend ourselves, and to serve one another is what Hooks calls love. Hooks sees one serving another as love not as slaves.

The power of truth and love therefore, remains the allen key. In line with this, Merton assert:

Love affects more on our thinking and our behavior toward those we love. It transforms our entire life. Genuine love is a personal revolution. Love takes your

ideas, your desires and actions and welds them together in one experience and one living reality which is a new you”⁷.

It is truth telling in love that will repair gender imbalance, heal the wounds and the damages caused by gender crises. Richard Bach supports this view that, to return to love one has to be willing to sacrifice and surrender, to let go of the fantasy of being someone with no sustained emotional needs, to acknowledge one’s need to love and be loved. We sacrifice our old selves in order to be changed by love and surrender to the power of the new self.⁸

Therefore, since the problem of gender imbalance started from human minds and thoughts and love start their first duties from the minds and heart, love remains one and only solution in resolving gender imbalance without shame, blame, prejudice and judgement. To achieve the kind of love advocated above, it is necessary to redefine feminism in such a way that it would be more inclusive. Such a definition would clear people’s misconception and misinterpretation of feminism, and engender a view gender inequality that would not be seen as women problem but human problem. Hazel Biana tries to reconcile some misconceptions that were prevalent, particularly, “that feminism is all about women wanting to become men, or that feminist women were believed to be man-haters who were always angry and vengeful and that their primary goal is to eradicate men from the face of the earth.”⁹ In line with the non-inclusive view of feminism, Pat Robertson opines that “the feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family, political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.”¹⁰ Pope John Paul II affirmed the inadequacy of the non-inclusive forms of feminism and advised women to:

Join hands in encouraging a culture that supports life and to promote a new feminism which rejects the temptation of imitating models of male domination in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspects of the life of the society and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation¹¹.

Along the same vein, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie holds that feminism is struggling to end gender imbalance. Women have been accused of hating men or attempting to create a society that privileges women over men. She notes that “feminism simply means that women should be entitled to the same rights and privileges as men¹²”. This implies that if we were all feminists, there would be an end to gender imbalance. Then, we could cultivate a culture of love, equity that bridges the gap in gender balance and enables women to be free and fully live their lives without pains and deprivations. Once feminists’ views become agitation for all human beings, the world will be a better place for all. She encourages us to create a world that is just, a world where men and women will be true to themselves and function as human beings without minding their differences. Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are equal, where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping interaction. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility.

Loving each other, seeing both genders as equal human beings will bring more harmony and happiness between men and women. The contrary breeds the opposite. Uchem informs that:

...gender roles are usually maintained by a system of patriarchy, which sees men as pre-eminent human beings and women as secondary, whose roles are meant to complement those of men. Men are not generally seen as

complementing women and this one-sided notion of complementarity is, therefore, problematic. Women are perceived as existing for men and not really as human beings in their own right. The patriarchy system is sustained by economic, political, cultural and religious institution (including marriage), the educational system and the mass media¹³.

The practical example of the above assertion is seen in the society, where men are assigned more power than women and are expected to be dominant. This dominance grants them the ability to go against rules and norms without showing any regard for the consequences. A balanced view of gender inequality would entail equality of social, political, economic, cultural and religious opportunities for both men and women rather than to biological sameness. For, gender equality is not about denying differences and natural functions but allowing both genders to have equal rights, opportunities and privileges.

Devison and Abigail affirm that

Patriarchy rejects collective efforts between men and women in building the society; and considering that the efforts of men over the years have not achieved great results, there is the need for both men and women's efforts to combine with those of women in all areas of life. In the long run and taking account of all the indirect effects, suppression of any gender will always do more harm than good ¹⁴.

Conclusion

To exist humanly, is to name the world and things in the world. Once named the world is changed and reappears to the namers as a problem. It then requires a new naming, because it is only when a man and a woman name things and nourish them with true words and actions that they can transform the world. Men and women

exist to name the world, and change the world positively. Our effort so far has been to name the problem in order to create the possibility for a solution. Hence, the issue of gender imbalance, to be effectively tackled must be named a human problem, and not women problem in order to build a human community. Community is formed not by the eradication of differences between both genders but by the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world. We need a society where we will all set our history of gender aside and seek to love one another. A society where we need to focus on loving ourselves and ignore the issue of gender and focus on creation of new humanity.

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Endnotes

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³ *Ibid.* P. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 9

⁵ *Ibid.* 5

⁶ Bell Hooks, “*All About Love*” <https://readingundertheolivetree.com/2020/06>

⁷ Merton, on Bell hooks “*All About Love*” <https://readingundertheolivetree.com/2020/06>

⁸ Richard Bach, on Bell hooks “*All About Love*” <https://readingundertheolivetree.com/2020/06>

⁹ Hazel, T. Biana. “*Extending Bell Hooks’ Feminist Theory*” in *Journal of International Women’s Studies*. Vol. 21 Iss.1 2020, Art.3 Bridgewater State Unwery <https://vc.Bridge.edu/jurs.> / p.14

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¹² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminist* <https://feminisminindia.com> 12/01/2023

¹³ Rose Uchem, *Gender Equality from a Christian Perspective*

¹⁴ Devison U. M. and Abigail O.O. “*Expressions of Patriarchy in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree and Ama Ata Aidoo’s Changes: A love Story*”, in *On Justice, Equity and Dignity: Recreating Woman being in Contemporary African Society* 2019, Awka: Fab Anieh Nig Ltd. P.91