

IMPORTANCE OF GENDER RECONCILIATION IN IGBO SOCIETY

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Abstract

Gender reconciliation is a process of making men and women to agree in their arguments. This is needful since the world is becoming a global village, integrating all the societies in the world and thereby, exposing people to different ways of thinking that affect many cultures positively and negatively. Positively, it is breaking all the distance and uniting all the world while the negative aspect is loss of one's cultural values and creation of inequality. It is against this backdrop that motivated this study, the rate of new forms of family life, different ways of thinking, behaviour, social structures, dressings and religious expressions are high. It is assumed that lack of gender equity is one of the effects of family crises and loss of Igbo cultures which are problems for posterity. The study employs analysis method to examine critically the conceptual involvements and their implications for our subject. The study discovers that women are the major promoter of every societal culture and to continue to oppress and marginalize women, will result to the loss of Igbo cultures. The study therefore, concludes that since the world is becoming global village, there is need for gender reconciliation in order to uphold Igbo cultures, identities and values.

Keywords: Gender, Reconciliation, Igbo Society

Introduction

Scholars have agreed that there are gender disparities; that women are marginalized but the level of the marginalization is debatable. It is the sense of this marginalization felt by women and their sympathizers, which 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 crises are obvious in families, workplaces, social structures, religious expressions, political structuring and general system of justice delivery. It is assumed that this situation is highly affecting the promotion of Igbo cultures and has thwarted sustainable development in Igbo society. Therefore, gender reconciliation is of necessity to the development of every sector in Igbo society 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 B, posit that "...the future of humanity will be decided not by relations between nations but by relations between men and women."¹ This shows how important the relationship between men and women are and the need to reconcile both gender in order to transform the roots of gender crises and sustain Igbo culture in this global world. For instance, in political participation, Igbo women are still under-represented; in terms of cultural practices such as misogyny, widowhood practices, property rights and other forms that still oppress and subjugate women. This is not to say that there are no positive efforts to remedy the situation of Igbo women or that the condition of women has remained the same over the years. As observed by Nwankwo: "In many Igbo societies, huge strides have been achieved in getting women involved in development processes."² Realistically, women improvement and development in all ramifications cannot be denied but more needs to be urgently done to avoid the redressing or stagnant of the achieved development. The study is divided into six sections. Section one is the introduction, two is pithy understanding of gender relations, the third section exposes the constraints to gender relations, the fourth section discusses how to reconcile both genders, the fifth talks of the need for gender reconciliation and the six section concludes.

Understanding Gender Relations.

Whenever the term 'gender' is mentioned, many readily attribute it to the womenfolk, who in many societies are challenged and often put in a disadvantaged position as against the men. As a result, many women empowerment programs are being championed to cushion the effects of this subjugation of women. Globally, every society, ethnic group and culture has gender role expectations that are different from group to group. There are specific roles to be played by both male and female in order to attain and sustain development.

In Igbo society, things are not just made or fixed without putting the concerned gender into consideration. Rules and regularizations are made, works, opportunities and spaces are shared based on gender. One's burdens and benefits are not based on potentials but on gender. One has authority where he/she is gendered. These practices have been in the foundation of Igbo settings till when the feminists started agitating for changes. In Igbo society, male gender is responsible for productive work while the female gender performs dual work; the productive work and the reproductive work. The productive work here connotes the general work women engage on such as jobs, handwork and businesses. Whereas reproductive work here connotes childbearing, nurturing and house chores.

Fundamentally, male and female genders have different roles, responsibilities and spaces in political, socio-cultural, religious and economic sectors. Whatever one wants to do depends on one's gender not ability or capacity. And this gender roles, responsibilities and spaces influence male and female choices and characters in Igbo society. According to Basden,

Igbo women have but few rights in any circumstances and can only hold such property as their lords permit. There is no grumbling against their lot; they accept the situation as their grandmother did before them taking affairs philosophically, they managed to live fairly contentedly.³

Akachi criticized him for his misleading position, that he "...lacks the knowledge of the sociopolitical system and power relation between Igbo men and women."⁴ Even if our

grandmothers enjoyed or ignorantly endured the system of gender oppression between men and women in olden days, it is difficult to work in this global, civilized and modern world that requires attainment and sustainability of development. This calls for gender reconciliation which is the road map to retaining success in Igbo society, when male and female are relatively equal in roles, development tends to grow faster and sustainable.

Efiritha discovers that in Igbo/African perspective, there is lack of separation between sex and gender, taking the two as synonyms, where being born male means being born a man and being born females means being born a woman.”⁵ While in the Western perspective, sex and gender are separated. Similarly, Simone affirms that there is nothing like a woman (female sexed identity) that predates gender. She affirms that one is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.⁶”

It is observed that neither biological nor psychological characteristics could define one’s gender. For her, one becomes a woman only after one goes through certain life experiences⁷. Besides, femininity is neither a natural nor an innate entity, but rather a condition brought about by society, on the basis of certain physiological characteristics. Gender is a social and cultural construct and should not be seen as the same thing with sex rather, gender should be separated from sex. Simone says that gender is politically charged construct that is formulated within a field of power to oppress woman and advanced by male to dominated patriarchal society with the intention to disfavour women and give superior position to men.⁸ She adds that a woman is only but a historical idea and to become a woman merely means to conform to this idea. In the same vein, Beauvoir claims that, woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end.”⁹ As an ongoing discursive practice says Beauvoir, it is open to intervention and re-signification.¹⁰ Seeing sex as gender is the major problem in gender relation. Once this confusion and misconception between sex and gender are understood and separated, solution would be achieved. In Igbo society, the gender one is born seems to determine one’s luck, responsibility, right and space. If one is born male, he is automatically privileged and will have all the powers to subdue and dominate in the society. From the beginning, Igbo society is patriarchal, males are seen as the heads, and this has become a major setback to gender liberation and reconciliation.

Furthermore, Beauvoir did not deny gender but holds that “... the division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history that body is not enough to define one as a woman.”¹¹ In addition to this, Jenkins avers that “...in an African life world, many factors cannot be known, controlled or predicted.”¹² He stresses that “humans are at the mercy of the forces of life.”¹³ This is quite in contrast with the Western perspective which subscribes to the scientific approach where there is claim in changing one’s own destiny. This is because Westerners agree that gender is learnt and therefore can be unlearned while in Igbo perspective, there is no separation between gender and sex. It is natural, fixed and interchangeable. Therefore, Western and Igbo perspectives are not mutually accommodating of each other as regards the relationships between gender and sex.

In another development, Ohagwu citing Achebe holds that:

In the family, if a child is born, the sex is determined, and if the child was a male, that meant greater joy for the parents. For the father, there is a greater joy, because he has a man who

will take his place after his death and continues his family line; joy for the mother because that will properly entrench her in her husband's heart. Having a son means for her that nothing can uproot her from the family. A son further means having a voice to defend you in the family. However, if the child is a girl, the husband and the wife receive the child with mixed feelings. And if the female child is coming as the third, fourth, fifth or sixth female in the family without a male child that is enough reason for sorrow. For the man, it brings sorrow because his hope of having a male child to continue his lineage is becoming slimmer, the female will soon be married off to other men. Having female children is like, tending other people's vineyard while yours is unkept.¹⁴

The above quotation, explains how Igbo culture sees male and female children, everything is made and based in the meaning derived from each sex. Igbo society prefers male to female children because of security or rather retaining of the family's name. The father is sure that if God keeps the child alive, the child will inherit what the father has laboured for and will not be taken by any relatives after his death. In line with this, Okafor asserts that;

...the Igbo custom denies the female child her right of acquisition and ownership of her father's immovable property. Particularly, Igbo girl do not have any share of land in her father's house except the boys. This practice is also obtainable in the cultures of other African countries like South Africa.¹⁵

In Igbo society, a male child makes a mother feel secure with the husband. The mother's security depends on her male child, the male child brings the mother's security and makes her place in the husband's family assured. Female don't have right of inheritance in Igbo or African society, her inheritance is established through the husband and depends on the male child. In other words, a woman without male child is invariably disinherited. On this, Anumudu confirms that:

...sometimes, the smallest male child of deceased men are allowed to say where their father is to be buried or any of the male relations of the man without taking into account what the wife or the grown-up daughter has said. The late man's house, barn and other properties are not shared unless a son or any of the male relation is there to say who gets what.¹⁶

In this perspective, Orabueze and Ogbazi observed that "...it is obvious that gender-discriminatory custom that disinherits women from acquisition and ownership of land in their father's families have not been whittled down by education, constitutional provisions and Christianity."¹⁷

Sex and gender need to be separated, abolish patriarchal structure that puts the female child at a disadvantage and modify cultures to favour both genders. Though, there has been a considerable improvement on the way the female child is seen and treated in contemporary society but a lot still remains to be done as the male child is still placed over a whole range of advantage over the female child. Moreover, the problem of unequal gender relations has been perceived from different perspectives. According to Caracciolo and Santeram, "...the question of unequal gender relations is pioneered more intensely in low-income countries or continent as opposed to the developed world."¹⁸ This is as a result of the nature of intellectual levels, magnitudes of people's awareness exposure, perceptions, interactions and different cultural ties triggering the occurrence and the definitions imposed on the phenomena across the world. In the same vein, Kimani holds that "...gender relations among Igbo/Africans have been attached to their historical and traditional ties of the given communities."¹⁹ For Akinola, "...the gender relations imposed on Igbo/Africans by

the Westerners have contradicted the long term cherished African realities.”²⁰ Therefore, the yardstick should not be the uniformity of gender roles but functionality of both gender in all ramifications without basing rights and responsibilities on one’s gender or minding each gender’s differences.

In Igbo society, a man and a woman are not equal and cannot be equal, both are different but very important in its own unique way. Therefore, no gender should be signed superior or inferior both are two different things that work together with the respect of each other’s differences and qualities.

Pre-colonial Period: Here, there was existence of gender oppression but there was no agitation because in many societies, work was gendered, and each gender knows, they only learn their roles/responsibilities and adopt them. Due to the fact that each gender was born in his or her own responsibilities, spaces and works, their major vision and mission were how to achieve their roles and responsibilities. Women were involved in various political groups and subgroups to some extent with corresponding power and authority. They built cities, received tributes from powerful local male heads, led wars and constructed new kingdoms. Moreover, women were the framework of the family, especially where polygamy exists. Sometimes, it was the first elder wife that marries a younger wife for the husband, lead other wives and play the male function. For instance, women were involved in economic and agricultural production. Though, they were not in control of the means of production or income of whatever they do but did much of the labour that were required.

In addition, one’s gender roles influences his or her behaviour, such as how he or she dressed, manner of approach, greetings, the choice of profession a person pursues, personal relationships a person enters and how one behaves within those relationships. Women are kept in the private sphere and men in the public sphere, this sometimes could be for the purpose of protecting women. During this period, women coreigned with king and were queen-mothers/sisters; princesses, chiefs and holders of offices and villages, warriors and the supreme monarchs. Politically, women were locally organized. There were customs, cultures and traditions that were guiding both genders differently but harmful and discriminatory cultural practices exist, though, sometimes it favours men or disfavours women. For instance, when a woman’s husband dies, her status reduces but when a man’s wife dies, his status remains. Ezebuilo confirms that:

...both men and women experience widowhood/widowerhood but in different directions. Widows are expected to remain loyal and faithful to their late husbands and honour their memory whereas men are often pressured into a quick remarriage, regardless of their readiness or wish to remarry. If widows remarry, they rarely do so of their own free will. In some communities, widows may be forced into new conjugal relations with a male relative or forbidden to remarry, even if they wish otherwise.²¹

This shows that there has been presence of gender oppression but the coming of the colonialists fueled its practices and created the spirit of rivalry between men and women. The colonists brought patriarchal norms and cast women aside, gave women inferior positions in the home and entire society. The possible solution, therefore is reconciliation in order to recover, restore and discover lost cultures, identities and values.

Colonial Period: This stage is where the perception and agitation that women were marginalized, exploited, oppressed by men started. For instance, the Aba women’s riot (1929) as a result of

British rule that introduced taxation on women in South Eastern Nigeria, upon women were excluded in governmental field, (still were expected to be paying tax) that men should hold all positions of power and opportunity in political, economic, cultural, religious and social aspects not by merit or ability but by their gender. This is where patriarchy was introduced, that men are better than women, therefore, men should have more power than women. This is the beginning of the white man's burden via civilization, Christianity and commerce. The colonialist knew that women were the pillars of Igbo/Africa foundation that was why the first in the line of impositions was the introduction of the rigid concept of gender. The introduction of education was made but only men could go to school and occupy available job positions as women were often held back by a long chain of children and grandchildren. That was how the introduction of salary empowered men over women and made women subordinate and dependent on the men for the subsistence of the family, it was only after this introduction that the Igbo man became the bread winner of the family before now, he was only a bread eater without knowing where it came from. The arrival of Christianity affected women's roles, figures and turned the general world to male world. The Igbo/African traditional religion that involved both the masculine and feminine lost its ground and women were left behind. The notion of women as the weaker sex is foreign to Igbo society; they only became weak or rather were considered weak after men had been empowered to their detriment, via development, globalization, socialization, education and other factors.

Postcolonial Period: This is the present period that feminists and scholars are agitating to deconstruct, reconstruct and construct gender balance for the betterment of all. In the political and structural organization of Igbo, women with the passing of time, lost their one-time identity and responsibility. They are now struggling to recover their lost glories; such as independence, identities, rights, opportunities and allegiance. Fundamentally, women of the contemporary society are of the view that women should not be defined by their gender, that a woman is more than a gender.

Constraints to Gender Relations

Globally, the issue of gender relations is improving but still the gap between men and women remains wide. Findings discover that what is contemporarily regarded as gender crises in gender relations, can be seen in economic, political, religion and socio-cultural practices.

Social Cultural Factors: Family as the smallest unit of the society is the institution which is an important concept in explaining gender inequality. Literally, it means 'the rule of the father', more broadly, it refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women. This is inherent in most Igbo societies; giving men a higher social status over females, has crept into public life, which reflects in state activities. The family plays an important role in maintaining this patriarchal order across generations. The socialization of children to expect and accept different roles in life has created a social mechanism for the development of value that engender the several forms of discrimination against the female gender. Women are the greatest psychological weapon available to men, in the length of time men have enjoyed dominance over women, who have taken it for granted especially in the area of politics that often continue to stereotype women and justify their subordination. Though, in some cases, women are the causal factor of their problem, they are serious setback to themselves but fueled by the societal settings. In Igbo society, women are mostly seen as weaker vessels and are often persuaded to be submissive and subordinate to their male counterparts and this has become a major setback to women engaging and participating in major

areas that will help the continent in moving forward. Importantly, due to their engagements as housewives in the family, most times, they are not disposed to make contribution in the society and as well showcase their God giving talents and ability as a result of some cultures and norms that allow male's superiority over the women and the burden embedded in nurturing and raising children in family. When there is gender equity in the family as regards raising children, both genders will contribute positively in moral upbringing of their children and this will help to promote good values in the society.

Political Factor: Politics is time consuming and demands a great deal of attention and price for careers. There are caucus meetings, primaries, campaign stumps and fund raising. Participation often requires attending evening meetings. Igbo women who try to engage in politics are sometimes women whose husbands are late or divorced. This is because, it is a general believe that women are not meant for public life. In Nigeria for instance, the constitution gives no room for women involvement in any decision making, and this has become a major setback to women in to actively engage in politics, elections and peace keeping. The exclusion of women in Nigeria's constitution is an indication of gender imbalance in Igbo society which gives room for men's superiority, persistent domination over the women and continuation of the practice of anthropocentric.

Economic Factor: Women have less access to economic factor and important aspects to attain financial independence which is vital to women's participation in politics. The burdens of child rearing and housekeeping; conspire to keep women off the social and political scenes. In Igbo cultures, women have no property or right of inheritance. This makes it difficult and obstacle for them to access loans, as they do not have collateral and stumbling block to them to be financially independent. The huge amount of money that is needed to run politics hinders them in involving in politics due to lack of financial support. Therefore, low or poor participation of women in politics today, results to lack of economic incentives and support. Political campaigns are expensive to run and thereby require solid financial backing for its success which women find it difficult due to financial instability. Moreover, women are not able to compete effectively with men in the labour market due to the traditional feminine association with their family and the domestic sphere. According to Egbetayo, "Women are responsible for sixty percent of work done globally yet, earn just ten percent income."²² Therefore, there is need for gender reconciliation for better development of both gender and society.

Customary and Religious Practices: Customary and religious practices of many societies are biased by subjugating women to men and undermining their self-esteem and dignity. The overall impact of gender bias, discrimination, cultural norms and practices has entrenched a feeling of inferiority in women and place them at a disadvantage to male counterparts in the socio-political scene even in urban societies. These socially constructed norms and stereotype roles make women overplay their 'feminists' by accepting that they are 'weaker sexes', overemphasizing the dainty nature of their sex and regarding exceptional achievement as masculine. Some religious doctrines militate against the active participation of women in politics and position of authority. It held that the origin of gender discrimination began from a woman's sin but have forgotten that saviour came from a woman.

How to Reconcile both Gender

LOVE: With the level of gender crisis in the families, workplaces and social structure, it is an indication that people are no longer open to love. This calls for destruction of patriarchal-ism that is associated with the lack of love in the society and accept gender reconciliation. For hooks, "...love entails mixture of various ingredients such as care, honesty, affection, responsibility, recognition, respect, commitment, trust and open communication."²³ Applying those ingredients in our daily lives is allowing love to operate.

Rodriguez prescribes love as the key to change. For her:

The basis of change lies with us, our thoughts, beliefs and actions are the foundations of our society and system. Hour by hour, minute by minute we are overwhelmed with information that provokes us into anger and bitterness. A kaleidoscope of newsreels, the buzz of notifications, outrage spilling out from our phone screens. The pandemic, climate crisis, corruption, war. We are currently at a crossroad: the system is under strain and is no longer a sustainable way of living. If we do nothing, we will face dangerous consequences. But it has become apparent that as much as we desire rapid change and solutions, we cannot achieve this through unguided anger. To reform and uproot our system, we need to base it on love. We must become fearlessly compassionate.²⁴

In our daily lives, we act as if we cannot change things and behave as if we have already failed. We are always convinced that gender imbalance cannot be changed and that we must accept it, this is wrong. With love and desire to change for good, we can fill the gap gender crises has created in our society. We need love to reach out and connect with each other. For hooks, "...a culture of domination is an antilove."²⁵ Therefore, to choose love is to go against the culture of domination and violence. Oppression, exploitation and anger have distracted and still distracting both gender from importance of relationship and development, therefore reconciliation is urgently needed.

Parental Reorientation: Gender roles were made and taught from home, change should start from home and the art of loving should also first acquire from home. Presently, parents are finding it difficult to understand their children even grandparents because they live in two different worlds, learning and unlearning different cultures, which is affecting Igbo cultures, identities and values. Gender complementary and parallel position should be accepted in practice because when there is crisis in communities and institutions, it will be transmitted to the younger generations. When change of roles begins from parents, gender crises will fade and die, then, reconciliation will take place and both men and women will be developed and empowered since to reconcile is to repair, to apologize, to forget, to forgive and to heal all without blame, shame, prejudice or judgment. Tim says:

Gender equality is not just equal opportunity although that is very important; it is about healing the wounds inflicted as a result of gender injustice that is prevalent in our culture. It cannot be done by women doing their work and men doing theirs. This wounding requires men and women to come together, to speak their truth, to listen, to open their hearts, to transform.²⁶

Reconciliation, requires both practical and theoretical meetings and teachings in order to expose, see the pains of each other and heal the deep wounds between men and women. Dennis Sturtz echoes that:

Gender reconciliation is absolute must for anyone who wishes to live to their fullest. It is an incredible experience for men and women to own the stereotypes and dispel the myths of what it is like to be a man and woman, most importantly human²⁷

Patriarchy destroys not only women but also men, therefore, there is need for human beings to know that they are beyond genders. For Jetsunma Tenzin,

Our innate potential to become liberated is the same whether male or female. The societies already in which we live were developed patriarchal; the males were the ones who were educated, so it was they who wrote the books and had the voice. Now as women are becoming equally learned it is essential that they support, encourage and respect each other rather than rely on male authority. Now, it is time for the female voice also to be heard.²⁸

Martin, posits that “...injustice and corruption will never be transformed by keeping them hidden but only by bringing them out into the light and confronting them with the power of love²⁹.”

To achieve this, requires parental reorientation in order to develop and bring both genders together to design a new structure, create a new culture in which all can flourish and build the foundation on trust and understanding.

Furthermore, Haze explains that in Gender Equality and Reconciliation International workshop conducted in India, “little boy stood before the girls (and other boys in the workshop) and apologized for all their harms that men and boys have done to women and girls.³⁰” Imagine, if a 15-year-old boy can say sorry on behalf of all men, what does this say to men? Even for 15-year-old, gender reconciliation works. No wonder, Cynthia and William warn that “humanity will never be able to move fully forward into its next phase of evolution, toward a new civilization of love and harmony without first reconciling gender imbalance.³¹” Let us work on our individual transformation and commit to build a new gender that has equal civilization together in unity.

Conceptual And Cultural Development: In gender studies, misconceptions and misleading interpretations need to be redefined, cleared to achieve development. Igbo culture requires Igbo interpretations, meanings and solutions. Tolle says, “To end the misery that has afflicted the human condition for thousand years, you have to start with yourself and take responsibility for your inner state at any given moment.”³² Reconciliation is for all. Presently, women also exploit and oppress men in many ways, silently suffering, enduring the pains so that the society will not see them as powerless. This needs to be changed, for the pains are not only affecting women but everyone in the society.

Understanding Women: Women are powerful, the society needs not to see women as those that need power, even if they have ever wanted power or seen as powerless women, that was then, women are good and powerful. Acholonu confirms that:

Women are not powerless as the society positioned, that these made women to take advantage of whatever abilities they have been afforded in their marginalized position and

predisposition for nurturance. To reap the societal rewards women, embrace and play into the stereotypes of femininity, even though, this is damaging women and the society. While men tell lies to retain their control over each situation, women employ dishonesty to pretend powerlessness.³³

She reveals that, “Power and feminism is just another scam in which women get to play patriarchy and pretend that the power we seek and gain liberates us.”³⁴ For her;

Women who give seemingly selfless adoration and care to the men in their lives appear to be obsessed with love but in actuality their actions are often a covert way to hold power. The love men receive, is even a false love that has ulterior motives, is able to fulfill their emotional needs, leaving them more psychologically well-off at an advantage that patriarchal systems of thought use as justification for male domination. Men are taught that they must do whatever it takes to maintain their controlling position while women internalize self-hatred.³⁵

When women are seen exactly the way they are instead of the societal imposition, there will be discoveries of new knowledge, women will change from the world of fashion, beauty, to the world of creation and innovation. Women are more than what the society tagged them.

Destruction of Gender Roles

Gender roles are socially made and can equally be destroyed for the betterment of humanity. It is not rejection of sex differences and natural functions but allowing both genders to have equal rights, opportunities, privileges and functions according to one's potentials not gender. Uchem asserts that:

...the traditional gender roles are usually maintained by a system of patriarchy, which sees men as preeminent 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 complementary 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 media³⁶.

To destroy the system of patriarchy is to achieve reconciliation in social, political, economic, cultural and religious aspects. Devison and Abigail say that:

Patriarchy rejects collective efforts between men and women in building the society; and considering that the efforts of men over the years in Africa 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. This is unworkable if the women are not allowed to express their capabilities and capacities which over the years have been suppressed by patriarchy. Like apartheid, patriarchy should die in Africa.³⁷

Men's effort cannot take Igbo society to their promised land without joining the efforts of women, this calls for reconciliation to attain a sustainable development.

Education as Tool for Gender Reconciliation

Education is tool for liberation of any group that is long oppressed, it brings change of culture, create lovable culture that will benefit both gender and make one useful to his or herself and the entire society. Rousseau sees "...women's education as to please men, love and honour men."³⁸ He proposes to educate women when they are young, to care for men when grown...to make life sweet and agreeable to men."³⁹ This is not the purpose of women's education rather education prepare women to take up the responsibilities, which by being educated and bring out the best in them for the betterment of entire societies. It is education that brings mutual contributions of both sexes.

However, by virtue of being humans, both men and women are entitled to the fundamental human rights, of which right to education is one. Women are not only educated, but also render great assistance in educating other people, even males. It is on this note that Pope John Paul II, in appreciating the contribution of women towards the development of the society, asserts thus:

I would like to express particular appreciation to those women who are involved in the various areas of education extending well beyond the family: nurseries, schools, universities, social agencies ...whatever the work of education is called for. We can note that women are ever ready and willing to give themselves ...in serving the weakest and most defenseless."⁴⁰

He observed that women's participation and contribution in the area of education is so commendable; so many are the records of their impact in educational programme in families and even the entire society. Therefore, education is the key, the greatest instrument for the full promotion of the rights and privileges of genders as well as for the improvement of their statuses. It is obvious to say that the educational empowerment of genders is the spring board to every other form of empowerment, that is, economic, political, religious and social aspects.

Needs for Gender Reconciliation in Igbo Society

Male supremacy and marginalization of women is generally the basic characterization and structure of the global community and therefore, not a unique Igbo social problem. Every society does not treat women the same way, women in some societies are more marginalized than women in other societies. It is a global problem and has endured throughout history. The alarming part of it is that despite the increase of girl-child education, women political representations, economic empowerments and so on, there still remains wide gap between both genders, this shows the need for gender reconciliation. Scholars and feminists interpreted Igbo problems with the Western literature, experiences and influences, there is need to revisit Igbo cultures and reconcile them. For Hazel;

...feminism is all about women wanting to become men, or that feminist women were believed to be manhaters who were always angry and vengeful and that their primary goal is to eradicate men from the face of the earth."⁴¹

Robertson echoes 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, capitalism and become lesbians."⁴²

Reconciliation is important to redefine and clarify some misconceptions and misleading statements in gender studies. No wonder bell hooks titled her book, “Feminism is for everybody” she seeks to rescue feminism from esoteric and academic jargon, arguing and convincing that feminism is for everyone.⁴³

Pope John Paul II noticed this trend some years ago 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 aspect of the life of the society and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation.⁴⁴

Struggling to end gender imbalance, Adichie says: women have been accused of hating men or attempting to create a society that privileges women over men. She says that “...feminism simply means that women should be entitled to the same rights and privileges as men.⁴⁵” This implies that if we were all feminists, there would be an end to gender crises. 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. In her feminist ideology lies gender reconciliation for a better humanity. Let us create a world that is just, a world where men and women will be true to themselves and function as human beings without minding gender differences. Hooks say;

...imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even equal but 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.⁴⁶

Gender roles are socially made, it can be changed; roles should be based on potentials. Uchem asserts that:

...men are not generally seen as complementing women and this one-sided notion of complementary 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 media.⁴⁷

This is seen in Igbo 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. Igbo society needs culture that recognizes and respects both genders as human beings in theory and in practice. hooks maintain that;

We need to affirm one another, support one another, help, enable, equip, and empower one another to deal with the present crisis, but it can't be uncritical, because if it's uncritical then we are again refusing to acknowledge other people's humanity. If we are serious about acknowledging and affirming other people's humanity, then we are committed to trusting and believing that they are forever in process. Growth, development, maturation happen in stages. People grow, develop, and mature along the lines in which they are taught⁴⁸.

Support and encourage other, envy and jealousy create conflict in the society and this must be jettisoned because it brings division. Both genders must see one another as humans and not slaves, relate well with each other for stability and sustainability.

Conclusion

Since ‘gender roles’ are now problems, it requires to be questioned and challenged to change. In this perspective, Ezebuilo affirms that:

Every social grouping in the world has specific traditional cultural practices and beliefs, some of which are beneficial to all members while others have become harmful to a specific group, such as women. These harmful and sometimes, discriminatory traditional practices include early and force marriages, widow’s ritual, the primogeniture rule and witchhunting. Despite their harmful nature and their violation of national and international human rights laws, such practices persist because they are not questioned or challenged and therefore take on an aura of morality in the eyes of those practicing them.⁴⁹

Gender roles have become a problem to humanity, not that it has no solution but it has not been given needful and practical attention. When government puts positive efforts, things will change. Ogugua affirms: “... it is imperative that females must fight for their rights first by; engaging the males in frank dialogue starting from the immediate or nuclear families to the community level.”⁵⁰ Charlotte responds that;

When we first began to conceptualize our rights, we called our struggle “women’s rights or feminism”, we did not think in terms of human rights because we were trying to understand what was distinct in women’s experience. Having conceptualized “women’s right”, we now know what is missing in the mainstream definition of human right. Our demand that women’s rights are human rights is a return to the mainstream but to transform the very definition of human rights.⁵¹

This reconciliation is by creating awareness, re-orientation and re-awakening both gender through dialogue between men and women, such as community talking, markets, on the streets, churches, homes, bars, shops and offices. From this dialogue, truth will be unfolded, what really constituted culture, tradition and customs will be exposed then both men and women will understand that gender roles are old culture and requires to be replaced with new culture. Since culture and tradition are dynamic in nature, this study advice and suggests change of culture of domination, oppression and replace with the culture of truth, love and reconciliation. It concludes that gender reconciliation should be welcomed in order to rebuild and uphold Igbo cultures now that the world is becoming global.

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