

FEMINISM: TOWARDS RESTORING THE DIGNITY OF IGBO WOMEN

Orji, Francisca I. & Ekemezie, Uchenna G.

Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu, Anambra State

Email: orjifrancisca1@gmail.com; drekemezie@asubeb.gov.ng

Abstract

Women over the years have engaged in feminism activities against men and the society in general. This has brought untold consequences to the family and society we found ourselves today. In their fight against men oppression, they have thrown their roles in the family and society to the background and in exchange pursue power, fame, authority, and money instead. The biological, cultural and physiological roles of the women add value to our existence and these roles can be passed-on or transmitted irrespective of the status of women. Igbo women should see “dos” and “don’ts” hung on their neck as a means of enhancing sustainable and eternalizing woman dignity which helps every Igbo woman to understand the essence of motherhood as the significant roles in the home, such as caring for the children, home upkeep, cooking for the family, moral training of the children etc lie in the mothers.

Keywords: Restoring, Dignity, Roles, Status, Igbo concept of a woman.

Introduction

Although, it is common to discuss women in the developing world as a unified group, this oversimplification ignores the complexity that characterizes developing countries. Old values, challenged by new values, continue to influence relations between men and women among themselves. In some Islamic Societies, some women insist on wearing a veil and yet others reject veiling. However, throughout the developing world, women are the principal initiators of changes that will improve their lives. Modernization and globalization are eroding cultural boundaries and weakening the control that some men, the government and some women exercise in an effort to maintain the status quo. According to Payne and Nassar (2006), access to education and economic opportunities has enabled many women in Asia, Latin America and Africa to develop a degree of social and financial independence that most women in the United States and other industrialized countries enjoy. Elias (2004) stated that the UN Development program created the gender empowerment measure (GEM) to focus women’s participation in economic and political activities. It also concentrates on gender disparities in government and economic opportunities. Global changes have not affected all women in the same way. Development has, in some cases helped to widen economic and social gaps among women. He however noted that rural women

and urban women do not necessarily face the same problems or opportunities. Furthermore, George (2003) explained that each country has its own traditions and policies relating to women. The differences make it difficult to generalize about women in developing areas. Nonetheless, there is wide spread agreement that women throughout the developing world are bringing about economic, social and political change, but the change should not be used to erode the value of women in the family and society which gives dignity to womanhood

Roles of Women

The roles of women can be looked at from biological, cultural and psychological perspectives. The most important and enduring consequences of industrialization for women has been the emergence of the modern role of house wives Payne and Nassar (2006). There is a mingle between biological and cultural role of women. Women are disadvantaged by their biology. Stromquist and Nelly (1998) stated that menstruation, the menopause and child birth are all physical burdens for women, but pregnancy and breastfeeding have the most serious social consequences. At these times, when women are pregnant or looking after infants, they are dependent on males for physical survival. Women dependence on men is increased by the long period during which human infants depend compared to the infants of other species. The interdependence between mother and child, and in turn their dependence on men, has been found in every society and it has influenced the psychology of every human being. Dependence on men produced unequal power relationships and power psychology. Ortner in Haralambos and Holborn (2000), argues that women are universally defined as closer to nature because their bodies and physiological functions are more concerned with the natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species. (Payne and Nassar) these natural processes include menstruation, pregnancy, child birth and lactation processes for which the female body is naturally equipped.

Women's role is linked to the family; the family itself is regarded as closer to nature compared to activities and institutions outside the family. Thus activities such as politics, warfare and religion are seen as more removed from nature, as superior to domestic tasks, and therefore as the province of men. Oakley's conclusions in Haralambos and Holborn (2000) stipulate that gender roles are culturally rather than biologically determined. The mother role is a cultural construction. In fact, women's role in the society and community is a combination of biological and cultural factors. Women are universally oppressed and devalued. It is not biology that ascribes women to their roles and status in society, but the way to which every culture defines and evaluates female biology.

John Bowlby in Haralambos and Holborn (2000) examined the role of women and, in particular, their role as mothers, from a psychological perspective. He argued that a mother's place was in the home, caring for her children, especially during their early years. Bowlby conducted a number of studies of juvenile delinquents and found that the most psychologically disturbed had experienced separation from their mothers at an early age. Many had been raised in orphanages, and as a result had been deprived of maternal love. They appeared unable to give or receive love and seemed compelled to adopt a career of destructive and anti-social relationships. He therefore concluded that it was essential for mental health that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother. Bowlby's arguments imply that there is a genetically based psychological need for a close and intimate mother-child relationship. Thus the role of the mother is firmly attached to the female. There is also socio-biological perspective of women's role. Although all the arguments allow some variation in the way gender roles are played, none holds out much hope for those who seek to abolish them.

Status of Women

All members of society occupy a number of social positions known as statuses. Statuses are culturally defined, despite the fact that they may be based on biological factors such as sex. Some statuses are relatively fixed and there is little individuals can do to change their assignment to particular social positions. Each status in society is accompanied by a number of norms that define how an individual occupying a particular status is expected to act. Thus, the status of a wife is accompanied by the role of a wife.

Stromquist and Nelly (1998) explained that, women naturally have a lower status than that of men in most societies, including those in the industrialized world. Status refers to one's position in the social, economic and political hierarchy. According to them, men are generally regarded as occupying a higher place than women occupy in the social system. These positions are largely socially constructed primarily by men. This means that society use subjective standards to determine who will have a higher or lower status. These standards are subjected to change as societies change. Tradition, religion, political and social beliefs, and economics determine status. Women in societies where religion does not play a dominant role generally have a higher status than women in countries where social relations are based on religion. As societies become more industrialized and as women are economic position is strengthened, the gap in status between men and women narrows.

Traditional Igbo Concept of a Woman

Igbo people in the past held Igbo women in a very esteemed and high position hence, the "dos" and "don'ts" hung on her neck. These "dos" and "don'ts"

were designed to enhancing sustaining and eternalizing women dignity which helps every Igbo woman to understand the essence of motherhood and the significant roles in the home that lie on them Udechuwku (2015). Unfortunately, because of the coming of the white men with their culture and civilization, there have been negative assumptions of Igbo people's view about the Igbo woman. Consequently, most present-day Igbo women have neglected their duties as mothers, and are only after the positions to be shared with their male counterparts.

Udechukwu (2015) also explained that over the years, people in various facets of the society have been entangled with much hues and cries concerning the falling standards of moral attitudes in the contemporary Igbo society. When one sits to give deep thought to this ugly situation, it is found that there is visible parameter that could be useful for substantiating the assertion. The parameter includes the increasing incessant violent crimes and some other unwholesome behaviors that are exhibited by the citizenry, it was only when the woman activists started preaching the dangerous sermon – “that what a man can do, a woman can do it better” that the traditional Igbo concept of women crumbled.

Effects on the Family

The family institution is regarded as the bedrock and cornerstone of society from which every individual developed his or her self concept through the acquisition of a set of socially constructed norms and behaviors that essential for survival. Women are often regarded as the mother of all living. Women by nature are programmed to reproduce and care for children and they are very essential to the well being of the children. Thus, a woman's role and position in the family can be characterized as expressive in that she provides warmth, security and emotional support to the family. Her role is essential and effective in the socialization of the young children. It was observed that as the women's movement turned fanatical and ugly in the 1960 and 70 the focus began to shift from reform and equal opportunity to hatred and abuse of men. Based on Gottfried (2001) theory, it was discovered that the feminist leaders-humorless, militant, pugnacious, and angry with their particular lot in life, launched programs that were anti-God, anti-capitalism, anti-family, anti-birth, anti-heterosexual and fostered a virulent hatred of anything having to do with males. They no longer wanted to equalize the status of women, but instead wanted to irreversibly alienate women from men and vice versa. Home and traditional family values are no longer accepted answers to the questions, “Who am I?” and “What am I here for?” The pre-eminent purpose for some women has become their careers, and they decided against the value of home and family. This has resulted to divorce, abortion, lesbian rights and all worthless practices among women which to them are preferable to their duties and values to the family and society. Gone are concerns about equal pay,

assertiveness, and expressing one's individuality. In their place are women ensconced in bitterness, hatred and resentment. They certainly do not want males to be able to exercise any control over them. They don't need men to be happy. With men being precluded from the ultimate decision-making process regarding the future of life in the womb, they are reduced to their proper inferior role. Women were liberated from the home, liberated from their authority. Children were liberated from limits, from rules, even their parents. And the entire population was liberated from moral and ethical standards. Yet it turns out that those things were precisely what held society together. "Family values" have been so scorned that the societies are left with neither families nor values. Militant feminists and extreme feminism have been a force for social evil as it has destroyed much. Gay marriage is equally linked to this too.

Conclusion

Women should go back to bases to restoring particularly the dignity of Igbo women. Women's roles are assigned to them by God and described by the society they find themselves. It is not men's oppression on them nor their suppression and taking advantage of them. Failing in these roles means disobedience to God the creator of all things. Most surprisingly, some of these women struggles are organized under church(es). what an irony?

Women's struggles for human rights often position them in opposition to family and social networks where their roles and rights have been defined. However, because of the sanctity of the family; they should not choose to seek empowerment and freedom which sets them against their kin. It is crucial to find ways for women to be protected as individuals against abuses. Doing so should not mean that the family will be undermined as an important social institution. Family is the place where individuals learn to care, to trust and to nurture each other. The law should protect and privilege that kind of family and no other.

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