

AFRICAN VALUES, GENDER INEQUALITY AND FEMINISM: THE IGBO RACE

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Abstract

There are value systems in Igbo ethnic groups which guide the actions and belief systems of the people living within and outside the Igbo territory, but are of African descent. These belief systems have those which portray gender inequality as it pertains womanhood and as such makes the female gender look less a being from their male counterparts. Africa is a continent made up of 54 countries with Nigeria in the western part. Nigeria is made up of three major ethnic groups; Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, with other minority groups but this study centers on the Igbo race. Igbo as an ethnic group have norms, values and their belief system differs from other ethnic groups though when it comes to gender inequality in Nigeria, women in every region seems to be battling for a voice. Some of these belief systems are seen in some Igbo adage and proverbs whereas some are portrayed in some literature books written by Igbo authors as such, this paper looks into such Igbo literature works in view of highlighting some of these belief systems which portrays gender inequality and this inequality brought about struggle by some women known as feminist to have equal right. Based on the findings, it is seen that there are still some beliefs/ norms that needs to be adjusted in order to give women the full sense of belonging and freedom to exercise their natural rights. The study thus recommends that there should be awareness on the rights of a woman and women should be given equal opportunities to showcase their worth in the society and stop being neglected and/or seen as weaker being in the things they can handle.

Keywords: Values, Gender Inequality, Feminism, Chromosomes

Introduction

Onuora (2015) asserts that African values are unwritten moral codes commonly identified by people living within the geographical sphere of the continent. It also refers to moral principles which guide the actions and belief systems of the people living within and outside the territory, but are of African descent. These are of different ethnic groups, which Igbo is one of them. Our value manifests over period of time through shared experiences, environment and social interactions. Igbo value system has been an age long phenomenon, which has been positively and in some situations negatively affecting either of the sex especially females (Madunagu, 2010).

Having in mind that African is a continent out of seven continents of the world with fifty-four countries and five regions each with its own ethnic groups. Nigeria is located in the western region of Africa and has more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups with three major ones; Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba (Onuora, 2015). These ethnic groups have what they consider as their value system which may differ from each other but for the purpose of this study, Igbo value systems is to be examined. The core Igbo race is located in the eastern part of Nigeria as seen in five distinctive states, such as; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. This study extracts from some literary works, the values and status of man over woman as they are obtainable in Igbo land. Igbo people have value systems and norms which reflect in their way of living. They have value for life, respect for elders, etiquettes for women, belief in hard work, good child upbringing etc. but, we will look at these value systems that has to do with women/girls.

Value

Value denotes the degree of importance of something or action, with the aim of determining what actions are best to do or what is best to live (normative ethics), or to describe the significance of different actions (Ajibola, 2019). According to him, value systems are prospective and prescriptive beliefs; they effect ethical behaviour of a person or are the basis of their intentional activities. It can also be seen as broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of actions or outcomes. As such, values reflect a

person's sense of right and wrong or what ought to be. Equal rights for all, excellence deserves admiration and people should be treated with respect and dignity is representatives of values. Singh (2009) maintains that values tend to influence attitudes and behaviour and these types include ethical/moral values, doctrinal/ideological (religious, political) values, social values and aesthetic values. Singh (2009) divides value into six categories, namely;

1. **Individualistic values:** Valuing the self over anything else in the world.
2. **Family values:** Every family has its own way of living and has like norms they follow which governs and moderates their behaviour.
3. **Professional value:** Every person has to join an organization to earn his livelihood and contribute to the society. These organizations are designed to serve a specialized function of the society and thus need a set of value to keep all members of the organization motivated and united.
4. **National values:** The national values are often codified in their laws that seek to grant equality and justice to all its citizens. Countries with strong national values enforce their laws very severely as they keep the interest of the country over the interest of the individual.
5. **Moral values:** Moral laws are enforced jointly by the society. As every man desires to be loved and respected by the society are often more powerful to keep the man on the right path than the legal enforcement.
6. **Spiritual values:** The spiritual values are often attributed to God and called divine. It includes love, compassion, justice, truth etc. It is the nature of man to imbibe these values irrespective of his religion, race, culture or nationality. These values are so universal that all human beings seem to understand it without being taught.

Aside these categories of values, we have positive, negative and intrinsic values as explained by Ajibola (2019).

1. **Positive values:** Positive value has everything to do with these qualities that are good for oneself and the society at large. An instance was given as a young girl may choose to place value on her virginity regardless the challenging situation she finds herself, preserving it until marriage. A business man may place value on truth and will be determined to speak it always regardless the situation etc.

There are other aspects of positive value as posits by Onuora (2015). They include honesty, diligence, discipline, integrity, patience, respect, goodness, sincerely, equity, justice, prudence, self-belief, selflessness, kindness, tolerance, forgiveness, self-control, temperance, cooperation, compassion, humility.

2. **Negative values:** Negative values are bad, worthless and will only bring about one's destruction. Instance, prioritizing the unhealthy use of drugs (drug abuse) because of the temporarily feeling of relief that comes along its intake.

Example of negative values includes; pride, anger, covetousness, sloth, envy, unfair, criticism, discrimination, laziness, despair, gluttony, lust, lies, frustration, malice, self-disbelief, depression, stealing, trouble making, gossip, backbiting and hatred on another person.

3. **Intrinsic values:** A value that belongs naturally to somebody or something is said to be intrinsic. For instance, an old man is expected to be respected by his great grandchildren. The value of respect (in the above) is attributed to the old man because of his age and status. In this case, his age and status are considered as intrinsic values because that's his personality and nature.

The above values show clearly that there are categories of value instilled in human beings by God or by nature, which controls man and his attendant behaviours. By man, I mean both males and females.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is a situation where both male and female genders have no equal treatment in the affairs of life be it in the family, school, religious places, political world or place of work. Buttressing on gender inequality, Jacobs (1995) sees gender inequality as a social phenomenon in which men and women are not treated equally. The treatment may arise from distinctions regarding biology, psychology or cultural norms prevalent in the society. Some of these distinctions are empirically

grounded while others appear to be social constructs. Studies show the different experiences of genders across many domains including education, life expectancy, personality, interests, family life, careers and political affiliation. UNICEF concurred with Jacobs as they are of the view that gender inequality begins right from the home where parents assume unequal responsibility for household work with mothers bearing the brunt of care-giving and chores. Most helps/nannies are women who take care of the kids. They went further to say that in its most insidious form, gender inequality turns violent as one in twenty girls between the ages of fifteen to nineteen around thirteen million have experienced forced sex. In times of both peace and conflict, adolescent girls face the highest risk of gender-based violence. Hundreds of millions of girls worldwide are still subjected to child marriage.

In Igbo land, it is still not accommodated that a woman will inherit her father's properties in the village at the absence of a male child except the ones he acquired in the urban because in Igbo culture, a woman only have right in her husband's place not her father's place because in those days, the day a lady is leaving to her husband's house after marriage, she breaks the plate "*okụ*" she uses to eat in her father's house which signifies that she has no place there again. That's why some adage says; "*nwaanyi bu ahia*" meaning that women are like goods waiting for prospective buyer(s), "*nwaanyi enweghi oke be nna ya*" implying that women have no place in her father's house and so on. We often hear these from a typical Anambra man and/or father. All of these and more have brought about the struggle by women to have a say in their father's house, community and the nation at large. This movement is properly known as and called feminism.

Feminism

Ayomide (2018) asserts that feminism has so many ideologies attached to it. Some of which include;

1. The advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes.
2. The theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes.
3. The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.
4. Doctrine advocating social, political and all other rights of women equal to those of men.

Feminism at its core is about equality of men and women not "*sameness*".

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), a proudly feminist organization noted that feminism is about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realize their full rights. It is about leveling the playing field between genders and ensuring that diverse women and girls have the same opportunities in life available to boys and men.

According to Ayomide (2018), he maintains that "the global idea of feminism refers to the belief that men and women deserve equality in all opportunities, treatment, respect and social rights. In general, feminists are people who try to acknowledge social inequality based on gender and stop it from continuing". Feminists point out that in most cultures throughout history; men have received more opportunities than women. He further classified feminism into eight types with four as most prominent ones.

Types of Feminism

There are eight types of feminism with four as the most prominent types as maintained by Ayomide (2018). They are explained below:

1. **Liberal Feminism:** The primary goal of liberal feminism is gender equality in public sphere usually through legal actions. These goals include equal access to education, equal pay, equality in the work place, ending job sex segregation, better working conditions, equality in political rights. These also include equal rights in marriage, more male involvement in childcare, abortion and reproductive rights, ending domestic violence and sexual harassment.
2. **Radical Feminism:** Radical feminism views patriarchy as driving rights, privileges and power primarily by gender and as a result oppressing women and privileging men. They focuses on reproductive rights for women, including freedom to make choices to give birth, have an abortion, use birth control or get sterilized. Evaluating and then breaking down traditional

gender roles in private relationships as well as in public policies. A radical feminist aims to dismantle patriarchy, rather than making adjustments to the system through legal changes.

3. **Marxist and Socialist Feminism:** Marxist recognizes that women are oppressed and attributes the oppression to the capitalist/private property system. Thus they insist that the only way to end the oppression of women is to overthrow the capitalist system. Social feminism is the result of Marxism meeting radical feminism. Socialists had fought for decades to create a more equal society that did not exploit the poor and powerless in the ways capitalism did.
4. **Cultural Feminism:** It is a movement that points out how modern society is hurt by encouraging masculine behaviour but society would benefit by encouraging feminine behaviour instead.

Like every other part of the world, the Advocacy for Women's Right and Equality was registered in Nigeria. Tayo (2021) classifies feminism waves in Nigeria into four waves and they are:

1. **First waves (late 19th century –mid 70s):** The first wave occurred during the same period when many African nations were fighting for independence from their colonial master. The female activists during this period did not solely identify themselves as feminists. Rather they were in the forefront of the nationalists' movement and within that movement; they fought for the economic and political rights of women.
In 1929, the Aba women's riot was a revolt against the restriction of women in government. This riot took place in eastern Nigeria. Nationalists such as Fumilayo Ransom Kuti advocated for the economic and political rights of women. She fought against price controls that were affecting market women negatively.
Margaret Ekpo was another prominent feminist who was active in politics and from 1953; she started taking political positions in the country. In 1958, women in the southern part of Nigeria could vote in elections. Suffrage in northern part would not be achieved until 1978.
2. **Second wave (mid 70s-2005):** 1975 was declared as the international year of women. Also, the United Nations declared 1976-1985 as the decade for women. During this period in Nigeria, there was an increased drive for the education of the girl child; especially in the north 1982 would witness the first feminist movement in Nigeria with a national conference held at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. Ayesha Iman, Bene Madunagu, Bilkisu Yusuf, Renese Pittin, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie and Theresa Nweke made presentations.

By 80s, feminism in Nigeria would focus on family planning and speak up against polygamy. The second wave would see the governmental contributions for feminist causes with the better life program for rural women in 1987 and family support program in 1994. Within this period, safe sex, the eradication of harmful cultural practices and HIV/AIDS would be major issues for women.

3. **Third wave (2006-circa 2014):** In 2006, the Nigeria feminist forum was created which more or less marks the beginning of the third wave of feminism. This wave would focus on issues such as the right of a woman to have an abortion and the support of LGBT rights.
4. **Fourth wave (circa 2015-till date):** Just like the fourth wave in the western world, feminists have relied heavily on social media and the internet to pass their message across. Rape culture, sexual assault and molestation, gender equality, consent, gender pay gap, sexuality and the elimination of patriarchy. This wave also put to spot light on the rape of minors, sexual molestation in universities, marital rape and gender fluidity. Body shaming, misogyny, workplace discrimination are also key issues within this wave.

This wave coincides with an increase in feminist literature most notable amongst them is Chimamanda Adichie's 2014 essay titled '*We all should be feminist*'.

Madunagu (2010) noted that the oldest and largest women's movement in Nigeria is the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) founded in 1958. It is a movement for the progressive upliftment of women for motherhood, nationhood and development. This movement is at home with the protection of our culture and tradition as well as with the supremacy of men. It accepts what the tradition has been and what religion sanctions. In 1983, the inauguration of the organization Women in Nigeria (WIN) was championed. This organization has a policy of "come one-come all", where anyone, male or female was accepted so long such a person accepted the provisions of WIN's contribution,

carried the danger of WIN including persons who have contempt for feminism but come into WIN with their own agenda. There was no punishment for anyone who played no active role so long such a person showed up once in a while at meetings. One must pay tribute to WIN as training ground for the emergence of organized feminist struggle in Nigeria.

Igbo Values and Gender Inequality

There are lots of values in Igbo land which was passed down from their ancestral fathers verbally and consciously or unconsciously, the people have been abiding by them and imbibing them in their day to day life. These values are as a result of their cultural belief, traditions and customs. They tend to tilt towards undermining the efficacy of a woman /girl child in the midst of the male counterparts. These values are some of the things that gave rise to feminism in and out of the country as women/girls are held bound by the society they are part of. The Igbo society believes **“men are superior beings than a woman”** and it is a man’s world therefore, women appear as second class citizens in everything they do right from the home to the community at large.

Examples of Igbo values are; value for life: like other people in the world, Igbos value life to the fullest and it is seen in their names and titles. They bear names like; *Ndubuisi* (life is paramount), *Ndubuaku* (life is wealth), *Uzundu* (way of life), *Ndukaaku* (life is more precious than wealth), *Chikelundu* (God gives life), *Nduđi* (once there is life), *Chijindu* (God owns life), *Chibundu* (God is life) *Chikwendu* (God permit’s life) etc. Then we have proverbs/adage like; *Ako bu ndu* (wisdom is life), *Ndu buru eriri, onye iro ebee ya* (if life is a rope, enemy will cut it short).

The Igbo culture forbids one from taking his life or the life of another. It is a sacrilege that requires grievous punishment. The corpse of anyone who takes his life is considered abominable corpse and is thrown into an evil forest because it is a bad omen. Then, anyone who takes life of another “ochu” is ostracized from the community.

Value for gods/place of worship: Call for worship is highly upheld in Igbo land. Fathers as the head of the family have their *“ikenga”* staff of authority. They worship their gods and keep the shrine sacred. Women in their menstrual cycle do not enter the shrine because they are considered unclean. In case of any issue in the family, the men consult the gods through the chief priest or diviners to get solutions as such, they offer sacrifice. There are lots of gods they worshipped before the advent of Christianity and some are still worshipping like; *Amadioha, Ibini Ukpabi, Ezu, Ulasi, Ekwensu Anaku, Ngene Ugwu, Haba Agulu, Ogwugwuakpu Okija* and so on. Although, they reverence God *“Chukwu Okike Abiama”* and they belief *“Ala”* is the highest god which is why some swear touching the ground or placing their bare foot on the ground to prove their innocence.

Value for hard work: Igbo people are known for been industrious, they learn apprentice work from their parents and it transcends to their children. They despise laziness which brings the adage *“aka ajaaja na-ebute onu mmanumanu”* and *“onye ruo n’anwu. o rie na ndo”* (if you work, you eat). Every man works to better his family and be more prosperous than his father as in the case of Okonkwo in Achebe (1958). Okonkwo worked hard as he borrows yam to plant in order to make a living and be better than his father who was reckoned with laziness and cowardice throughout his life. From an early stage, he builds his home and reputation as a great wrestler and hardworking farmer.

In Igbo land, there is no excuse for been lazy or a beggar as they don’t believe in living off another person or been at the mercy of arms giving to survive in life. Nwana (1963) *‘Omenuko’* came from a poor home so his parent sent him on apprenticeship *“igba boyi/odibo”* to learn trade from *Omemgboji*, who is a renowned trader at that time. He served the man for a period of time before he was settled him but he still attached himself to the man to transact business until he mastered the act of trading. When people saw how his hard work and loyalty to his master paid him off, they brought their sons under his tutelage to learn trade”.

Values and beliefs that pertains women

In the struggle of women for equal rights and no patriarchy, there has being a hard crack in the Igbo norms, values, traditions and customs which is not actually allowing the rights of women to be exercised in full gear like every other ethnic group. It is seen as being against the values subconsciously inculcated into the male folk and most female folk who has this notion that “men are superior beings than women”. This can be seen in various spheres of Igbo cultural belief system.

1. The belief that a woman has no permanent place until she is married “nwaanyi enweghi be”. This is why most family properties are not allotted to women because of the belief that a woman has no share or inheritance in her father’s place.
2. Preference to male children than female who will take over the family’s name and in absence of any, the lineage ends. A man keeps saying” *ama nna m agaghi echi*”. Even women have the notion that you have not arrived in your husband’s place until you give birth to a male child. Ogbalu (1988) opines that “*N’obodo ha, adighi ewe nwaanyi n’ihe. O buru na nwaanyi amunyeghi nwoke jide, o mara na agunyeghi ya n’ihe n’umunna ahu. Obi adighi eru nwoke nwunye ya na-amu nwanji nwa anyi ala n’ihina a choo ya a hughu ya, ndi umunna ya nwoke adakpoo ihe ya dum mee ya onye buta o buru, obuladina a mutara umunwaanyi iteghete. O buru nwoke ji otutu nwunye, o bu umunwoke ya ga-akpakoro ihe ya dum gbaba ndi nwunye ya na-amunyeghi nwoke aka, kerie ego niile a na-eme n’isi umu ya nwaanyi mgbe ha nweere di...*” “A woman is not recognized in her husband’s kindred without a male child and the husband will not be relaxed because at his demise, his brothers will take over his properties”
3. The notion that it is a waste giving a female child the best of education since she is another “man’s property”. Seeing a girl child as a property, an item to be taken by a man. Using a word like; “*nwaanyi m ji ego m luta*” that’s a woman I married with my money.
4. Inculcating the motherhood syndrome into a girl child from a tender age. Making her believe chores and cooking is solely the duty of a woman while the male children go about playing or doing other things. So most male children grow up with no knowledge of how to take care of a home.
5. Consciously reminding a girl child she is a girl and that the other is a boy especially in the disbursement of duties or slight misunderstanding with the male folk “*I maghi na i bu nwaanyi*”. It makes it look as if because you are a woman, you should be limited or conserved in every aspect of life.
6. There is this belief that in no circumstance should a girl/woman point at a man. It shows lack of home training. “*I maghi na adighi atu nwoke aka n’ihu*”. Most people consider it as abominable for a woman to point a finger at a man while talking.
7. Superior nature of a man over a woman which limits a woman psychologically, emotionally, financially etc. Women answers their husbands sir, some calls their husbands my master “*oga m*” making them lord over them and their owner whereas there are men who address women as less valuable from the way they call out to them. You will hear something like woman, come “*bja nwaanyi*”. The way most men address a woman in their language usage is derogatory. For example; “*nwaanyi tukwu ala anyu nwaamiri*” a woman that squats to urinate
 - The belief that women should not sit amongst elders, no woman is made a cabinet member in any palace, women do not break kola nut or dare to chew it, women do not eat gizzard because it is solely for the men.
 - It is seen in the names they give their male children like; “*Nnabuenyi*” father is the pillar, “*Obiechina/Obiefuna*” lineage will not end, “*Ikenna*” strength of the father, “*Afunwaelotanna*” father’s replica, “*Odogwu*” strong man, “*Ike dike*” strength of a warrior, “*Agunnaya*” father’s might, “*Agunwa*” mighty child etc. Their names give them supremacy from infancy making them look great and overrated.
8. A woman is always nurtured to fit a man/ be acceptable by a man right from the days of “*ipu ebe/iru mgbede*” a tradition that aims at preparing a marriageable young lady to look good for marriage. Fast forward to now, a lady does all she could to be attractive they watch their weight; go through all sorts of beautifications. When a lady is fat, society will advise her to trim down to look good for her husband but when a man is fat/ chubby, he is seen as looking refreshed/

rich. When a man has a pot belly, no one body shames him because a man is not considered bad “*nwoke adi njo*” but, a woman with same feature will go through mouth surgery from families and society. In fact, there are lots of adverts body shaming her so; she will do all she can to get rid of those adipose tissues. Most women will go to any length or do anything just to be accepted by a man.

Ubesie (1973) perceived it and states; “... *Ma ugbuga, e kwuru okwu na a ga-eri ugwo, iwe juru Ada obi n'ihina nke a mere ya ka o chewe ihe ya ji ego ya rutara n'oge gara aga wee mee. Naani ihe o ji ego ndi ahụ mee bu izuru ihe di icheiche o ji choo onwe ya mma. Maka ginị? Ka o wee di out nwoke mma ile anya! Ma, mmadu gbachaa egwu ma o nweghi onye si ya na o gbatara egwu o gbara, onye na-agbaghi agba ka ya mma*”. “Ada stated how sad she feels whenever salary is paid because she remembered how she lavished the previous salary on clothes and make-up just to make a man somewhere happy yet, nothing. She felt it is a waste of time wasting her money on beautification since the ones she had done didn't pay off as no man asked her out let alone spoke about marriage with her. Since she could not attract any man, it is of no use continuing beautifying herself”

There are some proverbs/adages existing which makes a woman feel less of a being example;

- *'Nwata nwaanyi zuru tooro onwe ya'*. There is an assumption that a child brought up by a woman did not undergo any home training.
 - *'Nwoke luchaa ogu, nwaanyi enwere akuko'*. When a man has won a battle, women go around discussing and celebrating the victory.
 - *'Ugwu na mma nwaanyi bu di'*. The beauty of a woman lies in the husband meaning, she is worth nothing without a man of her own.
 - *'Nkita nwaanyi zuru na-ata akwa okuko'*. Any child brought up under the tutelage of a woman is uncontrollable/ as free as air. The person has shallow discipline.
 - *'Anaghi ebu ogaranya ala be di'*. Whatever family name you have, financial strength or anything you are stays in your father's house. You don't move into your husband's house with any form of ego.
 - *'Di bu ugwu nwaanyi'*. A woman is respected because of her husband. This implies that one without a husband lacks respect from the society at large.
9. Traditional burial rites mated on widows: There are lots of rites that are dehumanizing and flinches on the right of a woman like shaving of hair, wearing sack clothes for months, some customs belief she shouldn't sleep in the afternoon because the husband may appear, she won't eat the food cooked for the husband's burial rites, she is not expected to collect money from anyone who has come to commiserate with her during the rite. In some towns, the woman is not expected to bath for days and she has to sit on the mat with women surrounding her, she is not to attend any function and a she is not to pour sand into the husband's grave.
 10. The belief of some male folk that a woman's place is in the kitchen and bedroom. This notion was what kept most women in the Dark Age because they didn't have the opportunity to interact with their environment fully and get educated. Women were limited in their fight for their right as they were not equipped educationally as it is said, “education is power”. Agwuna (2004) concurred with girl child education as a tool for better life as seen in the life of a character, Ijeanuli got admission into the university as Chike came to marry her and after the marriage, Chike travelled back to abroad and over there had issues that marred the other remaining marriage rites from being concluded. Ijeanuli graduated and luckily remarried to a man who lived abroad then, she began to practice as a medical doctor being her course of study.
 11. The belief by most men that the sex of a baby is determined by a woman as stated by Ogbalu (1988) maintains that “*onye obula bu na imu nwoke maobu imu nwaanyi di n'aka nwaanyi na o bughị n'aka nwoke. O burị eziokwu na mmadu dum maara na okike di n'aka Chukwu ma ha kwenyere na a muru nwaanyi sitere n'aka nwaanyi naani. Nke a mere na otutu oge na ihere na-eme nwaanyi na-amu nwaanyi n'ihina o woola ya anya na o bu n'aka ya ka o sitere*” “It is believed that the sex of a baby lies in the hands of a woman and not a man even when they are aware that the creation of humans is solely in the hands of God but the sole

determinant is the woman which is why most women get ashamed when they keep having baby girls only without a male child”

Some of these values are their belief system and culture. Enculturation and acculturation blended some and changed their mindset but good numbers of people still live these mindset. All these gave rise to women’s struggle for gender equality which led to feminism approach.

Igbo Values and Gender Inequality in 21st Century

There has been a drastic change from what it used to be in the world of women from time immemorial to now. The voice of women is gradually being heard in all facets of life from their parents’ house to the society at large. Westernization/ education has widen the horizon of the male folks into seeing the need to their daughters/ wives better persons and stand by them as they make choices of waxing strong in the society. Through the feminism struggle, women have gotten power which came through education. They acquire any knowledge they want and to any height once they are financially supported. From education, they got boldness to talk even in the midst of their male counterparts having in mind they are all humans and there is freedom of speech. Women pierced through the political world that has being the men’s world to lend a voice in making the nation great.

There are lots of Igbo women in the corridors of power in and outside Nigeria whose voices are heard. The likes of Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (first Africa woman to be appointed as director general of the World Trade Organization), the late Dr. Dora Akunyili, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili, Mrs Uzoma Emenike (former ambassador to Ireland and 2021 appointed ambassador to United States), Nnenne Iwuji-Eme the British-Nigerian who was appointed by UK government as the first black woman to hold the post of British high commissioner to the Republic of Mozambique in 2018 as reported by BBC, senator Uche Ekwunife, Senator Stella Oduah, Hon. Nkeiruka Onyejeocha and host of others in different fields of endeavor.

The Lionesses of Africa listed numbers of female entrepreneurs and Igbo women were not left out. We have Uche Pedro (founder of Bella Naija), Nkemdilim Begho (founder of future software resources limited), Chinwe Ohajuruka (founder and CEO of Comprehensive Design Services), Ngozi Opara (founder of Heat Free Hair), Leslie Okoye (founder of Cookies Skin), Nkem Okocha (founder of Mamamoni Limited), Ijeoma Ndekwu (founder of Redrick Public Relations), Ugochi Ugbomeh (co-founder of Transit, Nigeria) amongst others.

Entertainment industry: Igbo women have recorded lots of output in this industry; films, music and comedy both as actors and producers whose names make waves in and outside the country. In the movie industry, the likes of Genevieve Nnaji, Rita Dominic, Uche Jumbo etc. In the music industry we have the likes of Sinach, Chidimma, Ada Ehi, Obianuju Udeh (DJ switch) and in comedy, Chioma Omeruah (Chigul) among others.

In the field academics, there are lots of Igbo women as professors in higher institutions. In fact, there are more women as teachers in primary/ secondary schools now more than men because the male folk of this era are not looking for money over the counter. In sporting activities, we have the famous Chioma Ajunwa and co. There is no facet of economy or area of specialization where you will not find a woman participating. Ubesie (1973) concurs with the fact that women are happier working and being busy as against staying idle at home. He made the remark from Ada who was so happy she has gotten a job.

“The na-atọ Ada uto ugbua, abughị maka ugwo a na-akwu ya n’orụ o nwetara oheru. Ebe obi anurị ya kariṛi bụ na ibe ya teta ụra n’utu pụwa, o soro ha pụwa. Ha lotawa, o soro ha lotawa. Ndị mmadu hu ha, a na-asị na ndị orụ Bekee a lotawala” “Ada is now happy not just because of the money she earns from her work place but mostly with the fact that she is not idle while others leave for work in the morning”. Most women have come to terms with accepting their bodies the way they see it “self-love” then, keeping fit to be healthy not to impress anyone.

The traditional burial rites are gradually changing. Most women wear low hair cut these days so, it avail anyone opportunity to use razor in shaving off their hairs. Most women fight against shaving their hairs no matter what. Most women work so, she is not expected to sit home for months observing the rites as the children will need to be taken care of and her job retained. The issues of brothers-in-laws taking over the husband's properties are in the past as innovations have taken place. Some women are even the owner of the properties the family live in and they are signatories to their husband's accounts and properties. It is left for a woman to decide her fate of whether to remarry or not.

The usual adage "*nwoke adi njo*" that no man is unacceptable which made most ladies feel that a man is her all and therefore most people settled with a man that ordinarily wasn't her type is becoming a faded word because, anyone can be accepted or rejected. Women have their choices to make when it comes to marriage. They are no longer married off as a child or even allowed by her parents to dabble into an affair with someone she is not proud off all in the name of a man cannot be unacceptable by a woman as long as he has what it takes to keep that woman. A lady is allowed to give her maximum, unadulterated consent to a suitor unlike before when choices were made for many on the basis of family ties, yam bans, family name and the might of a man in the village.

A lot has changed but more changes still need to occur especially in the political world because there are sensitive seats that are still left for the men only as they feel women cannot be able to take up such positions like the recent happening in National Assembly Recently on March 1, 2022 where three bills amongst others sponsored by women in the house were rejected by the majority been men. The bills were as follows;

- Citizenship to the foreign-born husbands of Nigerian women because a Nigerian man's foreign-born wife gets automatic citizenship.
- Right of women to take indigeneship in their husband's state after five years of being together
- Thirty-five percent affirmative action in party administration and leadership as well as specific seats for women in the national and state assemblies.

This rejection has caused uproar in the National Assembly as many women and organizations are protesting against the inequality. So, all these inequalities are meant to be looked into and balanced to give women a say in the nation.

Summary

Igbo values over the years made remarkable change to accommodate the plight of women in their struggle for the equality of their rights owing to the fact that the constitution of the country is made to govern everyone and people have rights to exercise as citizen of Nigeria. Women began the struggle to be given fair share in the society and not to be seen as less of a human that is weak. The predominance of the male folk and superiority further triggered their actions to what turned out to be the feminist movement. This movement has engineered the government attention towards women and in today's world; the male folk has come to realize the importance of female education and equipping a woman financially. The fact that a woman is financially free does not pull a threat to a man who knows his worth rather, it is an admiration and a burden off his shoulder as she is able to sort out her bills and become independent so she can fully run a home in absence of the male folk.

It is quite a welcomed development that women are no longer limited to the kitchen and bedroom or seen as an object any man can purchase. It is not to be said that women should assume the role of being a man because God in his wisdom designated duties to both sex. A man cannot carry a baby since he has no womb and a woman cannot impregnate herself. A man was first created and out of him made a woman but nevertheless, we are all humans created by God and therefore, no human is less of a being. Women have proven their worth in today's society and they can be held accountable for good jobs.

Recommendations

1. The struggle for equality is good but should not be misinterpreted by women as sameness with men.

2. Women should weigh in the kind of laws they impose on themselves because most of these laws binding a woman traditionally are made by them and enforced by same gender. So like the saying “you cannot eat your cake and have it”.
3. Women should be given more executive posts in the society. If she can be entrusted with the management of a home, it means she is equally perfect to handle the affairs of the country.
4. In the upbringing of children, both sexes should be taught household chores because there are situations whereby a family has no female child; the whole burden is rested on the mother’s shoulder.
5. Women should not be body shamed in any form or castigated because it lowers self-esteem.
6. There should be a conscious effort right from home teaching a girl to love herself, fight for her right and be outspoken which will lessen women abuse and gender based violence but not to now undermine the role of a man or assume a man is of no importance to her. There should be equal respect for both genders.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that women are picking, and it is important that they are encouraged to do more. There has to be a striking balance in Igbo values as it has to do with the right of a woman in Igbo race and the society at large bearing in mind that every nation has a constitution meant for all the citizens who are considered equal human beings and there is no line in the constitution which states that men are superior beings. The creator of the universe (God) never placed man superior over a woman; he only designated duties to them by virtue of their bodily make-up. These days, women get educated, bring money to table, contribute in running a home and then, she is considered a home manager so, how can she can’t be considered when it comes to handling executive positions? After all, the recent happenings in the world have shown the capacity of women running executive positions. Byrnes and Harrington (2020) lists nations governed by women to include Germany that has Angela Merkel as her chancellor, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the prime minister of Bangladesh, Simonetta Sommaruga, president of Switzerland, Erna Solberg, the prime minister of Norway, Tsai Ing-wen, the president of Taiwan, Jacinta Ardern, the prime minister of New Zealand, United States of America that has Kamara Harris as the vice president etc. This is a proof that women can be great leaders too, all they need is an opportunity to prove themselves and for the male folks to support them equally.

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