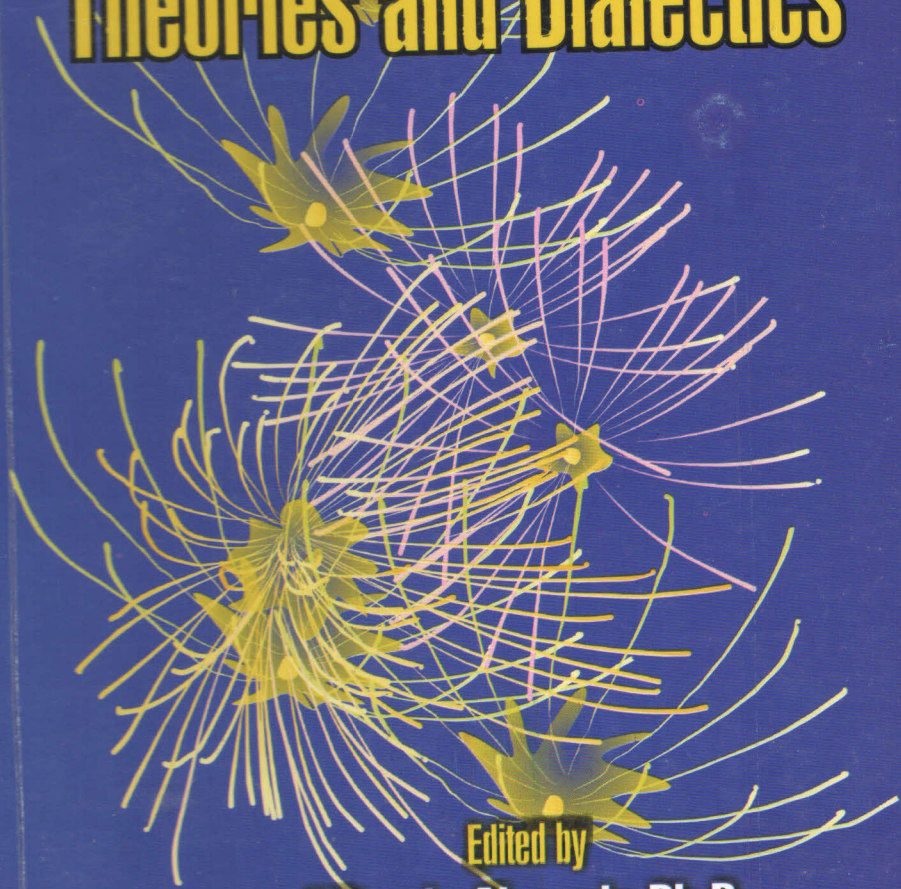


Gender

Theories and Dialectics



Edited by

Yetunde Akorede Ph.D.

Gender Theories and Dialectics

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A CASE FOR GENDER EDUCATION AND INSTRUCTION IN FEMINIST ISSUES IN NIGERIAN INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING.

Omotayo F. SIWOKU-AWI

Abstract

This paper underscores the prevalent issues of gender discrimination, sexist traditions and practices that inhibit female physical and mental health and economy empowerment in Nigeria. It reviews some cultural practices across Nigeria and of international opinions and researches on gender disparity. Family life is fraught with domestic violence, female genital mutilation, oppression of widows and violation of human rights. Most religious practices and cultures in Nigeria do not accord women equal status with men, and it is the inequality in their roles, and conflict with societal expectation, that create tension in individuals, families and by extension the society. It is proposed that our educational policy should take into cognisance the need for gender education. And this should be incorporated into the curriculum for all levels of the educational system. It would take instruction in behaviour modification to change the thought pattern of people, so that they can choose to renounce inhumane cultural practices that have often caused women pain and death. Even though the Human Rights Charter adopted by the United Nations Organisation in 1948 accorded equal rights to both men and women, there is no equality in all facets of life till date. It is a monumental struggle to change the worldwide patrocetric culture.

Key words used are: *patriarchal traditions, gender and feminism.*

1.0 Introduction

Gender issues have gained prominence in our national life since the 1990s. Philanthropists, researchers, social activists, health

workers and others have shown concern for battered women and the attendant implications on childcare and social peace. The home front is often faulted for recurrent discrimination against women and violence outside the home. If the woman is battered physically and or emotionally sequestered at home, is refused employment for gender reasons; and could only pursue a career tagged feminine and or is forced to undertake life-endangering traditions, to what extent would she be able to make viable contribution to social life and humanity, give her children the emotional stability and self-esteem that are an extension of her own personality and mental well being? Her value should transcend procreation or being used as a booster for the male ego. The proposition is therefore that our system of values has to change. Our national policy on education should include strategies to promote gender relations and provision should be made for instruction in feminist and gender theories and practices that will enhance individual commitment to fundamental human rights and build an empathic understanding of human nature. Education has always proved to be a potent weapon in the fight against social injustice and violation of human rights. If a curriculum in gender issues is incorporated into all levels of education in Nigeria, fundamental problems of gender biases would be minimised. Techniques of behaviour modification should create awareness; instil a sense of justice, equity, respect for human dignity and integrity.

It is a landmark that few women have managed to attain political positions, which in reality are more or less tossed at them as tokens. A quick look at the Council of Ministers in Nigeria, reveals that men control government, law and public affairs. At the moment, women constitute a minimal percentage of the whole political structure. We could proffer explanations for the very low number, that women are simply not interested in taking up challenging leadership roles. Also, men relentlessly hold on to their privileged position and would not oblige women to attain significant political or leadership roles.

Patriarchal Traditions are practices that make the woman subordinate to the man in such a way that she may not be able to make her choices and live her life the way she wants. These traditions are as diverse as the cultures and religions of the world: practices like female circumcision, widowhood rites, career restrictions for women, laws of inheritance, rape, sexual abuse, imposed motherhood, levirate union, religious taboos, witchcraft manipulation, violence against women etc. They have constituted the main reasons for female subjugation, and oppression (Simone de Beauvoir, 1993). The past decade has witnessed a dramatic turn of events as women in Nigeria as well as those in other parts of the world exhibit greater capability for progress and self-expression, than before; even though there are still a lot of sexist traditions, which the African woman has to contend with, it is however worthwhile to mention that patriarchal dispositions constantly play an indisputable role in the social and political edifice of African nations.

Gender is a construct that expresses cultural differentiation of biological sexes. It is a distinction that affects societal, interpersonal and individual relationships and that determines how power (domestic or political) is allocated to the sexes.

Feminism is the struggle to create an awareness of the marginalisation of women in home and society. Divergent interests, multiplicities of concerns and socio-cultural contexts have led to the insurgence of a plethora of definitions of feminism and its *modus operandi*. All conceptualisations about feminism are explained with reference to male hegemony, dominant patriarchal and socio-cultural traditions; symbolic representations of women; gender discrimination and sexual politics. Feminist movements in Europe and America started as reaction to male assumptions about the rating of women according to prevalent social, religious, cultural, political and ideological norms (Crawford and Unger, 2000). A variety of feminisms has been identified in Europe and America. A few

examples are: ecofeminism, socialist feminism, womanism, radical feminism, liberal feminism, and cultural feminism.

Our focus is not to do a detailed discussion of each theory of feminism; however, we herewith give a cursory explanation of some of them. Ecofeminism is a socio-philosophical movement of the twentieth century. Laura and Buchanan (2001) explain ecofeminism as follows:

One salient facet of the ecofeminist perspective attributes the current environment and global crisis to the educational, political and institutional dispositions of a patriarchal society. Consistent with the ecofeminist presumption is the corollary view that the rape of nature and the rape of women are parallel socio-cultural manifestations of the patriarchal 'psyche' which conditions the way in which both nature and women have traditionally been valued and treated in western society.

While Laura and Buchanan might have particularly observed the western society, a similar situation is prevalent in Africa. In African patriarchal 'psyche', animals should be killed for sacrifices and rituals, women nonetheless as sexual object, without a right to be respected. Rituals are incorporated into the socio-political framework of our times as well as murderous traditions, which are being revived in the name of cultural heritage. Socialist feminism decries social stratification, racism, sexism, gender discrimination and sex role learning in childhood. Womanism is the combined struggle of Asian-American women for identity and equality. This struggle also includes men of colour who see themselves as suffering the same effects of racism. Womanism can be rightly perceived as original to Black feminism and very influential on African Literature.

Radical feminism focuses on male domination as fundamental to female oppression and therefore should be subverted. Liberal feminism advocates equal rights of women with their men counterparts and for social reforms that would achieve equality. Finally, cultural feminism insists that woman's responsibilities of nurturing, caring and sensitivity to others' needs should be respected, because the unpaid works of family and childcare are valuable contributions to society.

African theorists have also developed their own brands of feminism to address African problems, which Western based feminisms do not take into consideration. African feminists propose that both men and women have been through a common experience of slavery, colonisation, imperialism and racism, therefore they should equally fight off the effects of their multiple subjugations. Their focus cut across issues of motherhood, sexism and patriarchy. Variants like Black womanism, motherism, negofeminism, feminitude and stiwanism have been developed. We are particularly intrigued by stiwanism, which is an acronym of "Social Transformation Including Women in Africa," a theory postulated by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994). The theorist identifies the problems of women as mountains, and there are six of them, they: the mountains of external oppression, tradition, backwardness of women, men, race and the woman herself. Nevertheless we are of the opinion that all variants of feminism, both Western and African are motivated by the need to improve the condition of women. We agree with Adebayo (1999), who posits that:

All versions of feminism assert that women have in the past been suppressed and oppressed by men through patriarchal norms, which have been rationalised as natural. (26)

Worldwide patriarchy: cases of gender discrimination in the USA

Crawford and Unger (2000) made a case for feminism and feminist struggle for social change by relating some facts of history.

They raised some events in the United States that prove that women are continually subjected to gender discrimination and prejudices. I have quoted the following from their finding:

- ? After more than 200 years of U.S. democracy, only 9 percent of U.S. senators and 11 percent of members of Congress are women.
- ? In Massachusetts, the Back Bay Brewing Company sells "Boston Strangler Stout" - a beer named after a serial killer who raped and murdered thirteen women.
- ? In the United States, women earn about seventy-four cents for every dollar earned by men.
- ? On television news, 97 percent of the anchors over the age of forty are men.
- ? The United States estimates that 100 million women worldwide are missing from the population - dead because, as females, they were unwanted.
- ┐ One in four U.S. college students believe that the activities of married women should be limited to home and family.
- ? Women have been heads of state in twenty-three countries around the world, yet in others they lack basic human rights such as voting and going to school.
- ? Less than 5 percent of the artists in New York's Metropolitan Museum collections are women, but 85 percent of the nude paintings are of females.

Crawford and Unger (2000:2) present the above facts as justification for feminist struggle in the USA. The authors created a link of all the facts in that women's role and gender issues are subjects of heated debate. One can add however that the facts reflect to what extent women are till date considered objects of expropriation as in

the case of the nude paintings of women or the limitation of their activities to household chores even in a developed country that has given the world a model of democracy. While some of the events may not correlate with cultural patterns in Nigeria, there is a common ground of social inequality. The authors conclude:

A worldwide gap, under representation of women in positions of status and power, and significant problems of violence against girls and women persist. Competing images of femininity abound. Gender, sexuality and power are at the core of social controversies around the world. (p.2)

We have drawn on the American situation because it underscores the fact that a developed nation that has given the world a model of democracy can overlook discrimination against women in the various dimensions that have been described.

Patriarchal Customs in Nigeria

Historically, Nigerian women participated actively in local governance and in cultural and social life. It was the practice for them to assume full responsibility for family upkeep, as most of them were either farmers or traders. Colonial law and the introduction of British legal system made women dependent on men, who were required by law to provide for them and their children. C. Coquery --- Vitdrovitch (1994) reported on incessant women struggle against the new social order introduced by the colonial masters. They rioted to cause reduction in taxes, which were not meant for them but for men. Mrs. Abayomi organised women in Lagos, while Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti founded the Ladies' Club in Abeokuta. Their objective was to protest the imposition of market taxes and make women relevant to the decolonisation process. British authority had only

recognised male leadership by the introduction of warrant chiefs. Women could no longer participate in local governance as advisers or members of the council of elders as the Anglo-Saxon tradition and legal system confined the women to home affairs. Between 1925 and 1930 women in Calabar, Owerri, Onitsha, Aba women rioted demanding that precolonial lifestyle be restored. In 1928, the war of women broke out with the introduction of taxes in Lagos and the Eastern region. Since the colonial era Nigerian women have been known for their activism. New cultural practices have been adopted with contacts with European traditions and education.

Nigerian women have had to contend with cultural practices that make them invisible and confine them to the kitchen or subordinate roles. They are sometimes subjected to sexual harassment at work and might be required to play the second fiddle, where they are qualified to assume responsibilities. Issues of money, the care of children, inadequate funding from spouses or male partners have made some consider options of prostitution. Nigerian culture is a composite of many cultures that identify each people group and this means that we might have as many as four hundred cultural representations as there are the number of languages, however a common factor is the view that a woman is only an item to be purchased as indicated in the high bride price and of course she could be disposed off at will since she has been a bartered item. Some cultures go so far as diminish the humanity of the woman by making her voiceless and incapable of making intelligent choices about her life, examples are found in the Northern parts of Nigeria, where teenage and arranged marriages are practised. Parents are the recipients of bride prices paid on such girls. Lasebikan (2001) reports that research into cases of pelvic cancer in Nigeria revealed that the victims are children given into marriage between the ages of 9 and 17, when they have not attained full physiological maturity.

Female circumcision was devised as a method of reducing female libido and of depriving her of any sexual pleasure. Only the man could have sexual pleasure, while the woman cannot, but should

only hope to procreate through sexual intercourse. She is accorded honour as a mother and according to Akintunde (2001) that is what defines her success.

Discrimination against women is also evident in matters of inheritance. Some cultural practices deny female right to family inheritance or if she becomes a widow, right to her husband's property. Oke (2001) cited the examples of Kaduna where the "girl child" is not entitled to inheritance; in Igboland the property passes to the eldest son. In addition, widows are subjected to dehumanising experiences at the demise of their spouses. The rites of widowhood often spell health hazards to the woman. Omoigui (2001) cites the tradition of the Bini-speaking people of Edo-state, in which, the widow is made to sit on a bare floor or on a torn mat, in an unkempt isolated room for the number of days decided upon by her late husband's family. In some cases she is made to drink the water used in bathing the deceased, or eat a morsel of yam or kolanut placed on the forehead of the deceased.

Some parents prefer not to educate girls. According to Omoigui (2001:119) illiteracy amongst girls is about 60%. This may be due to the higher percentage of women in the population and the fact that parents prefer educating male children since girls will change their names and take away the benefits of their education to their husband's home.

One can say that the Nigerian society has changed considerably as women have got more recognition for their achievements. This is undoubtedly due to the increase in the number of girls attending school and the efforts made to close up the North-South educational gap with UNICEF/FGN initiative of the girl-child education programme and the implementation of the National Policy on Education. Africans benefit a lot from industrialised nations that have had to go through protests and struggles for social and political changes, and as such they have enacted laws to favour human rights and social justice. All these changes are somewhat 'imported' to African nations, which have affiliations to the United Nations

Organisation or through non-governmental organisation that work in the grassroots. Changes also occur through individual's exposure abroad or by media impact, particularly the international media.

As mentioned earlier, most cultures in the world are androcentric, that is, they are male-centred and patriarchal culture emphasises the physiological differences between men and women to prove female incapability and limitations. Anti-feminists claim that the woman is limited by her brain, which nature has constructed quite differently from men. This erroneous view is contradicted by Wood (1996:5), which concluded as follows.

In general, females are more adept in using the right brain, which controls creative abilities and intuitive, holistic thinking. Males are generally more skilled in left-brain functions, which govern linear thinking and abstract, analytic thought (Hartlage, 1980). Females typically have more developed corpora callosa, which are the bundles of nerves connecting brain lobes. Thus, females may have an advantage in crossing from one side of the brain to the other and in using both brain specialization, however it doesn't prove that sex determines brain activity. It is equally possible that males and females are socialized in ways that lead to differential development of ability in the distinct lobes of the brain.

The foregoing research findings prove that women's mental capacity is at an equal level with men. In fact, women have the added advantage of using both brain hemispheres, which implies that they can perform linear thinking and be as analytical as men. Female physiological peculiarities and her ability to bear children have been used by adherents of patriarchy to limit her sphere in the competitive

world of men and to justify the supremacy of man. (de Beauvoir 1993:xlix).

In the economic sphere men and women can almost be said to make up two castes; other things being equal, the former hold the better jobs, get higher wages, and have more opportunity for success than their new competitors. In industry and politics men have great many more positions and they monopolize the most important posts. In addition to all this, they enjoy a traditional prestige that the education of children tends in every way to support, for the present enshrines the past and in all history has been made by men.

These same patriarchal biases are responsible for the sex-typing of both males and females and children are made to learn the differences early in life, by the sex roles they are made to perform, toys that are provided for them at home, school and the society at large. Prominent social learning theorists like Bandura (1977) have argued that sex-typed behaviours are learned in two ways: direct tuition means that parents, teachers and other facilitators of learning instruct the child in appropriate responses. Observational avenues imply observing and imitating the same sex models. So, children learn gender identity very early in life and grow up to conform to societal expectations in order to gain acceptance and be considered part of the society, Shaffer (1985:516-517) has clearly distinguished societal expectations of the sexes.

The female's role as child bearer is largely responsible for the sex-role standards that characterize many societies, including our own. Girls are typically encouraged to

assume a nurturant, expressive role, for as a wife and mother, the female is often assigned the tasks of raising the children she has borne and keeping the family functioning on an even keel. To serve this end, girls are expected to become warm, friendly cooperative, and sensitive to the needs of others (Parsons, 1995). In contrast, boys are encouraged to adopt an instrumental orientation, for as a husband and a father, the male faces the tasks of providing for the family and protecting it from harm. Thus, young boys are expected to become dominant, independent, assertive, and competitive in short, to acquire those attributes that will prepare them to make a living and to serve as intermediaries between the family and society.

Societal expectations for boys make them aggressive, determine their superior attitude to women and consequently aggravate their desire to put them down. Objections and self-assertiveness from women can lead to violence and manipulative devices adopted by men to cow them into submission. On the other hand, African historians like Nina Emma Mba, present the pre-colonial African woman as versatile and not totally inactive. She could be a trader; a farmer or she could be a member of the local traditional council of elders, but the European legal system imposed the female dependence on man.

We may argue that times have changed and that there are more educated women who also occupy public posts and that they have since crossed the barrier of gender stereotyping. But according to Chesler (1972) the frequency of mental illnesses and stress particularly in women caught in the web of traditions has been

attributed to the conflict generated by societal expectation. Insisting on male and female differences has been the root cause of many psychological and mental problems in women. Chesler (1972) concludes in *Women and madness* that in contemporary society, women's mental illness is often a result of gender discrimination and sex typing (Crawford and Unger, 2000: 12-13). A lot will be achieved by a concerted effort to create a just and fair society where men and women operate as equals, without the one taking advantage of the other. A greater sensitivity and concern for the well being of the other should go a long way in resolving issues of health and material deprivation.

Nigerian feminists in a number of fields, for instance Bolanle Awe in history, Molara Leslie-Ogundipe in literature, Kolawole, Mary E. Modupe, also in literature and several others in sociology or politics write with a consensus that women are circumscribed and are only valued for utilitarian purposes like bed mates, for procreation or domestic hand; their lot is comparable to that of animals of burden as Laura and Buchanan prove that patriarchy is the rape of nature and the rape of women (58), both of which are treated in general as mere possessions. Laura and Buchanan have rightly observed that

Recognition of the mindless rape of animals and nature makes it easier to appreciate the argument that the social value placed on women has historically been largely utilitarian. Women have not infrequently been regarded as little more than animals or living chattels, to be bought, or sold, or traded in accord with the caprice of men, and recent research that such violations of women are less rare than the conventional patriarchal wisdom suggests. Amnesty International (1995) asserts that millions of women all over the globe each year are mutilated, beaten,

burnt alive, battered to death, stripped of their legal rights and treated like market commodities. For example, Amnesty International describes how women in some Islamic countries after enduring the horror of being raped, are then murdered by their own families for having brought shame upon the community (59-60).

This view of women explains the high incidence of domestic violence, physical, psychological or emotional psychic and occult manipulation, femicide, forced prostitution, genital mutilation, excision, infibulations, bride price, honour killing, child marriages, traditional or cultural practices that frustrate women's progress. UNICEF publication, Digest Innocenti, No 6 June 2000 declares:

Comprehensive and well-informed researches confirm the prevalence of physical violence in the four corners of the globe and an estimated 20 to 50%, depending on the country, of women who have experienced domestic violence. Statistics are staggering wherever one turns. Data from industrialised and developing countries as well as those in transition furnish a comprehensive view of the global problem. There are comparable minimal statistics on psychological violence, sexual abuse, and assassinations of women by their close partners or other members of the family. As it has been highlighted, physical violence is often generally accompanied by psychological battering and in most cases by sexual aggression.

UNICEF (Innocenti, NO 6 - June 2000: 4) of battered women

in various countries of the world, gives a shocking revelation of 60% of the sample population of Polish women as abused and battered, while an African country, Kenya is placed second on the same study at 58% of regular battering. Violence against women is inextricably linked to the philosophy and dominant cultural values that women are biologically, intellectually, spiritually and physically inferior to men. The machinery for the marginalisation of women is being fuelled and operated by the cultural concepts and identities extrapolated by social and political hierarchies. Amnesty International (1995:3) highlights the invisibility of women as the major cause of the denial and violation of their rights. The basis for feminist struggle is that a larger proportion of women are to date kept perpetually under terror and hardship by the significant male in their lives. Most battered women are afraid of talking about their plight.

Apart from physical violence against women, taboos are also devices adopted by some societies to circumscribe women. Taboos and superstitions about menstruation, maternity and childbirth are used to hold women in bondage. Women Centre for Peace and Development (WOPED) (2000:15) cited high proportions of the practice of female genital mutilation in Nigeria with a prevalence rating of 60 to 100 percent in the northern states of Nigeria, Benue, Delta, Rivers, Kebbi and Ondo states. In fact, female genital mutilation is practised in every state in Nigeria in varying percentages except in Kogi and Yobe states where the practice is virtually unknown.

The Ghanaian writer, Nimako (2001: 48-49) in his book *Mutilated*, describes the extent of this inhuman practice in some parts of Africa:

There is this notion in Egypt that female genital mutilation is a protection of the girl's chastity, on the assumption that the practice decreases libido. Similarly in Ghana the chastity of the girl is believed to be kept untarnished until marriage. This is not true of course. The truth is that we can

maintain the morals of our girls or daughters only by implanting virtue and good principles in their hearts not by sexually mutilating them. In Nigeria, where female genital mutilation is widely practised, the dominating reason is the need to maintain tradition, expressed by the frequently heard statement, "It is the custom of our people." It emphasises the general importance of adhering to age-long traditional practices among people in rural areas. Another reason is aesthetic and cosmetic, that is to ease social acceptance of girls or women who have had female genital mutilation on them. The practice is also said to protect the baby's health during delivery otherwise the baby may fail to cry at birth or may get sick and die soon after birth. The clitoris is considered a dangerous organ that can cause symbolic or spiritual injury to the baby. Then circumcision is said to enhance reproductive ability.

Little thought is given to the effects of the dismemberment of these girls, as some suffer from vesico vaginal fistula (VVF); sterility; neurosis of the septum between the vagina and the bladder; perineal tears because of antecedent infibulations; HIV/AIDS from unsterilized surgical knives used in excision; and stillbirth from prolonged contractions which may be responsible for various psychosomatic reactions. Examples abound daily as reports are made on the effects of the cultural construct of hierarchy. While we could attest to the numerous changes that may have taken place since the seventeenth century when the first wave of feminism started, the male psyche steeped in the logic of domination still has to be educated. Amnesty International "Human Rights are Women's Rights" in (1995: 3) states that:

Today, what unites women internationally - transcending class, race, culture, religion, nationality and ethnic origin - is their vulnerability to the denial and violation of their fundamental human rights and their dedicated efforts to claim those rights. Women are the invisible victims of the 1990s, the faceless masses filling the background on the canvases of terror and hardship. Most of the casualties of war are women and children; most of the world's refugees and displaced people are women and children; most of the world's poor are women and children. Most of these women are struggling to care for and protect most of these children. Human rights violations against women are rampant partly because they remain largely hidden.

To justify violence is the view that equates women and nature; the concept of "mother earth" actually spells its degradation as it reduces "nature into a sexualised female", a resource for economic production and reproduction (Laura § Buchanan, 2001:64). The discourse pattern of patriarchy weighs heavily in support of this perception. Laura § Buchanan recorded:

that within language women are firstly neutralised, while nature is feminised thereby distracting us from the deeper truth that feminisation equates to neutralisation. In reality, both women and nature are dominated and debased. Women are often referred to as animals - chicks, bitches, broads - i.e. a pregnant cow. On the other hand, nature is sexualised as when we talk of

nature as a woman whose 'Virgin' timber is felled; whose 'fertile' soil is ploughed; whose land does not yield and is thus 'barren'; whose secrets are 'penetrated' by science, and her 'womb' mined by technology.

The picture of nature as a woman, or woman as an animal or a child presents the woman as weak and fragile and therefore could be the object of man's subjugation. The patriarchal principles of male superiority and hegemony orchestrated by institutional processes still have the woman in perpetual subordination to the man. It is for this reason that feminists struggle for a greater measure of sensitivity towards nature, women, children, animals and natural resources. In the interest of our society and posterity, our educational policy could focus on enhancing an egalitarian society by eschewing patriarchal subjugation of woman and nature, engendering empathy with the "weaker" section of the society, and promoting human dignity.

Religious inhibitions

It is pertinent to consider the extent to which religion has played a considerable role in gender stereotyped cultural norms and practices. The religious beliefs of parents often affect the schooling rates and / or the academic achievement of girls, who in most religious tenets are assumed intellectually inferior. Recent researches reveal the shocking reality of life in rural areas, where sex-linked cultural malpractices are still rampant. In the Academy Science of Publication Florence I. Muranga (1997) submits that parents discriminate according to gender and that children acquire gender related behaviour which makes for distinct perspectives and behaviours.

Gender stereotyping is inherent in religious teachings. The world dominant religions actually dichotomise between male and female status, abilities and roles within the framework of home, work and worship. For instance Biblical cultural practices could be

separated into two: Jewish culture and the Christian culture. Jewish culture limited the role of women to children and the home. They had fewer rights than men and could not play leadership roles in the political and religious activities of the people, except the few ordained women for special purposes, like Deborah, Esther and Ruth. The Christian cultural practice constitutes the second type of Biblical culture. Even though the immediate disciples of Jesus were all men, there were female disciples who played significant roles in His outreach. Orebiyi (2001:75) opines that religion cannot be separated from culture. The practice of Christianity in Nigeria has obviously been affected by cultural practices: Western missionary culture and local culture often reflect in our lifestyle and ideals.

However decades of secularisation and exposure to western education have made tremendous impact on women's academic achievement. Nevertheless, the pertinent question to ask is, to what extent have women been fully liberated from the shackles of tradition and fears of violating religious impositions? Some Moslem parents do not have faith in western education; they prefer Koranic schools in order to perpetuate the teachings and practices that circumscribe women. For instance the rate of the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is higher in the Northern part of Nigeria, where Islam is the dominant religion. Societal and moral values that are taught, point mostly to male hegemony and superiority. In multi-cultural and religious settings, there is a major difficulty in conceding to what religion proposes as moral values and codes of conduct. Therefore it means that the infusion of training in constitutional human rights into all levels of education should make individuals develop personal attitudes that would in the long run change the system. In order to promote intellectual, political and institutional relationships in a democratic system, it is important to decry religious sentiments and promote rational thinking, which will remould emotions and assist men and women in reaching a state of mind in which knowledge can be acquired and the world reinterpreted (Brent, 1978).

It is generally accepted that religion creates a worldview for the individual and gives him a system of values by which to live. Moreover, we should note that religious beliefs go a long way in determining our thinking about our purpose for living. Religious impositions may however not promote a wholesome mental state. One wonders to what extent such overt behaviours like dressing or demonstration of piety reflect the inner pliability required in fostering life changing values that preserve life and human dignity. If pushed out of proportion, such religious beliefs would only be reasons for sexual discrimination, social inequality and violation of human rights. A case in point is Dr Hama Darabi's suicide, as recorded by Amnesty International (1995:2):

In February 1994, Dr Hama Darabi went to one of the busiest streets in Tehran, Iran's capital city, tore off her headscarf and chedar, poured petrol over her body and then set her self on fire. As the flames engulfed her she shouted: "Down with tyranny, long live freedom, long live Iran". Professor of child psychiatry at Tehran's National University, she had been persistently harassed by the security forces for failing to follow the strict Islamic dress code, culminating in her dismissal in December 1991. A talented and widely respected professional was thus forced into a life of inactivity. She chose to die instead and to make her death a protest for justice and freedom.

Many women like Darabi suffer in silence, subjugated and silenced by religious obligations. It is this invisibility and lack of self-expression that feminism fights against. Such religious pretexts only end up in creating emotional and psychological conflicts and

anxieties that could spell psychiatric troubles in women.

Fostering Social and Behavioural Change.

Studies and researches on women and gender are designed to effect social change. Such researches are carried out in various disciplines, particularly in psychology, education and sociology. The emphasis is on behavioural change, in which case there must be a reordering of our values and of the human psyche. Crawford and Unger (2000:26) have precisely stated the reason for feminist research and struggle for change as follows.

Because feminists believe that gender equality is possible, although it has not yet been achieved, they are sensitive to the ways that social contexts and forces shape peoples' behaviour and limit human potential. Feminist psychologists try to understand not only the effects of gender, but also the effects of other systems of social classification such as race, social class, and sexual orientation.

In effecting a change, it is important to do a study of how biological, social and cultural factors interact to influence human behaviour. This is the purpose of psychological study and its implications for educational and social life. Crawford and Unger have written;

Traditionally, psychology has focused on changing individuals. Psychologists have developed new techniques to bring about attitude change, to increase insight and self-understanding to teach new behavioural skills, and to reduce or eliminate self-defeating thinking and behaviours. These techniques are

applied in a variety of educational and therapeutic settings (2000:26)

It must be acknowledged that in the planning of our National Policy on Education and its implementation by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERC) and other policy agents, relevant psychological principles are put in place to affect the learner for more meaningful knowledge application. While very long strides have been taken in the domain of cognitive training, the call for social justice and gender equality is more affective in nature and therefore requires personality change. In that case, individuals have to learn new socially acceptable behaviour and avoid previous antisocial habits. Social change may be slow but it is gratifying that the years of education are not wasted. This in the long run will entail incorporating contents and techniques that will teach values, which will promote mental and emotional health for all Nigerians, enhance respect for human dignity and advance employment equality and equal remuneration.

It is then pertinent to ask ourselves what we consider the essence of human existence. Should we just limit our educational goals to meeting individual needs and national economic development? The modern culture and technological sophistication have increased human needs and have subsequently compounded human problems. Hitherto, methods have been adopted to implement the teaching of ethics as a principle of education. Examples are: moral instruction, citizenship education or religious studies. While moral instruction and citizenship education may be broad based and unbiased in content and practice, religious instruction takes uncompromising and unflinching positions about moral standards and these differing opinions are sometimes at the root of social injustices that pervade our society. Rather than allow our religious differences to tear us apart, we should actually make use of religious education in nurturing a more socially stable and just citizenry. Our emphasis should be on aspects of religious beliefs that define clearly

and in realistic terms the meaning and purposes of human life. This would actually be the meeting point of the basic principles of education adopting ethical, epistemological and metaphysical foci. No dichotomy should then exist between outcomes of learning as stipulated by the National Policy on Education and the aims of religion to give meaning to life. It is useful to consider our aims of education and their import for individual and national development.

Aims of Education

Crittenden (2001) submitted the following aims of education as stated by C.E.M. Joad (1945): to enable a boy or girl earn his/her living, play his/her part as the citizen of a democracy and develop all the latent talents and powers of nature and so enjoy the good life. While these aims may serve the liberal education purposes of the 1940s and may not emphasise knowledge acquisition, our contemporary society cannot afford education, which trivialises specialised knowledge and information particularly.

Observations show that the implementation of our national educational policy in achieving economic objectives may not suffice for our modern times, where issues of discrimination, or oppression are modified and are expressed in more euphemistic terms. I would quickly add that the stress inherent in an inegalitarian and hierarchical social order is the reason for my proposition that we need to add to our educational aims, constructs that would promote empathy, affective, conative traits and qualitative relationships. Crittenden (2001) explains the celebrated poet's views, that education should not be confined to acquisition of vocation or societal status. It is the nurturing of a cultured person and the formation of desirable features of character. It encourages sociability by mediating in the relationship, which individuals have in their society and it influences the scope of mutuality of relationship. Education encourages the development of inner and personal capabilities. In addition, it enables critical and creative thinking.

Scholars concede to the fact that education is multi-faceted in purpose. Bámisaiye (1989) submits that education is lifelong; therefore learning should go beyond acquiring knowledge and ability or building of potential while achievement is the result of positive knowledge application. This goes beyond being able to earn a living. Knowledge application is inextricably tied to Joad's second aim of being able to play one's part as a citizen of a democracy. The individual in applying knowledge is able to make moral judgement about fundamental issues of human life - like cultural values to be reinforced or discarded and ethical solutions to contemporary problems of life. It is in this vein that we acclaim that education enables us acquire desirable behaviour and to develop a keen sense of responsibility for our moral actions and choices.

Joad and Eliot both agree that education provides the intellectual requirements, which enable a person to participate as a citizen in a democracy. Eliot also points out that moral values are central to an individual's role as a citizen. In essence, it would be out of place for the democratic structure to impose on a person or group of persons, values that are not relevant to building a just and egalitarian society. Education has proved to a large extent to be useful in helping people ask pertinent questions about issues of female genital mutilation, social stratification, child marriage, sexist education, rape, discrimination in career and employment and so on. On the other hand, individuals who are obsessed with traditional values may not be able to reason about the cruelty of their actions. Yet such irrational and unjustifiable practices do not necessarily brand the practitioners as mad - they are ironically acclaimed as the life wire of the society in which they are upheld.

The high incidence of female genital mutilation, points to the fact that this barbaric tradition like other inhuman practices have not yet given way to modern learning and consciousness as provided by western medicine and education. The taboos and superstitions that go with the practice still hold sway in societies that have been exposed, for decades, to more humane practices, but would not be positively

influenced. One could then conclude that in some respects education has still not had the desired impact.

As an individual is helped to make choices without inhibition, then Joad's third objective could be attained that is - to develop one's latent powers and use them to lead a good life. The concept of a good life could be relative to every society depending on its economic and political circumstances. To a large extent it is the society and the opportunities that it provides that make the individual develop his potentials. The ability to make a choice or act without intimidation is primordial to the concept of freedom, it is then important to take cognisance of the fact that educational planning must incorporate the nurture of such latent powers that would allow the individual freely make reasonable moral and ethical choices. Bamisaiye (1989:5) says:

...education is expected to affect the social behaviour of either the educated person or the person being educated. Such social behaviour ranges from avoidance of such social crimes like stealing, murder, rape, to demonstration of pleasant behaviour like helping the aged, the weak or disabled, dressing in a respectable manner, or strictly avoiding abusive language or unruly behaviour of any form.

One could see that it is the proper function of education to prepare citizens, who could embrace social justice and shun antisocial practices associated with gender bias and discriminations.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Curriculum Content

If feminist and gender study is about fight for freedom, of struggle against brutalization and murder for religious reasons, about sensitivity to fellow human beings, and animals (as in eco-feminism), of accepting the other's liberty and exhibiting human traits of

kindness, justice, impartiality and amicability, its impact on democracy cannot be underestimated. It is therefore important to promote gender education by including it in school curriculum. Departments and Centres for feminist studies, gender relations and development already exist in European and American Universities and degrees are awarded in Gender studies. Some Nigerian universities now have centres for gender studies. Where they exist, they should provide support services for the Department of General Studies and Counselling Units. Colleges of Education take courses in Citizenship, I propose that such a course should include gender and feminist awareness and it should equally be incorporated into the General Studies course done in virtually all universities. Guidance Counsellors and classroom teachers could be facilitators of gender education at the secondary and primary levels in the teaching of social studies. Curriculum intended for gender and cultural restructuring in higher institutions of learning may include but may not be limited to the following pertinent aspects:

- ? Consciousness raising about feminism and gender.
- ? Historical basis for feminist and gender struggle.
- ? Growth of feminist ideas and their implications in democratic societies.
- ? Gender and development in modern societies.
- ? Gender politics: enfranchisement of power politics from sexual politics.
- ? Training in integrated sex roles and androgynous life patterns, as impetus of mental health, good family relationship and socio-economic development.
- ? A study of supporters and opponents of feminism.
- ? Highlight on governments that have protected human rights and their achievements.

- ? Types of non-governmental bodies that have influenced gender restructuring.
- ? Legal systems that ensure women's rights.
- ? The role of the mass media in gender education.
- ? Students' role in promoting feminism in their nations and the world and how it is linked with current democracy.
- ? Consonance of feminists' views with modern religious positions.
- ? Training in values clarification and self-assertion.
- ? Sensitisation about human rights as stated in the Nigerian Constitution.

Policy makers and other relevant bodies like the National Human Rights Commission and Civil Rights Agencies have in reality been actively engaged in social change and they may from their work experience have suggestions that could be meaningful and practicable in the Nigerian situation. This outcry is for mental and value restructuring, a venture that will entail sacrifices from individuals, corporate bodies and governments. It is in this wise that educational goals of creating a just, free and mentally healthy society can be fulfilled. It is my deep conviction that it is as the rights of individuals are taught and respected that a democratic society can be built and we can have a stable future for posterity.

By and large, appellations like liberal feminism, separatist feminism, revolutionary feminism, socialist feminism, womanism, cultural feminism, militant feminism, eco-feminism and so on will fade into oblivion, as individuals are able to make choices between good and bad. This desired result may not come on a platter of gold. Matthew Gandal and Chester E. Finn, Jr. (1997:1) present that:

as new formed democratic societies attempt to rebuild their countries politically,

economically, and socially, and to extend to their citizens rights and freedoms they deserve, one thing is apparent: their long-term success depends in large measure on how quickly and deeply the principles and institutions of democracy take root in the hearts and minds of their citizens.

It is imperative that we safeguard our well-earned democracy and political freedom by making institutions that promote human rights work and function for the family and the society.

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