

**NAME: LUPER ANGEL NGUYILAN**

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### **QUESTION**

IS GENDER RELATIONS CHANGING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY? WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF CHANGE AND THE FACTORS DRIVING IT?

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender relations refer to relations between men and women that are socially determined by culture, religion, or socially acceptable ways of thinking. It is the way society patterns our understanding on masculinity and femininity. Before the 21st century, women were seen as domestic helpers in the society and were given positions like taking care of the house, nursing the old and the children, while the male gender were allowed to do jobs like engineering, medical doctors, pilot and so on. This was because of the general belief that women should be seen and not heard. As a result of the various protests and activists that supported feminism, women are now taking over in different areas such as medical doctors, engineer, lawyers and other government related activities and so on. Not only are women leading in different areas, they are also participating in areas like voting, campaigning for election, owning private business in the recent days. Men also face issues of inequality. Male victims remain invisible, as they are usually reluctant to get help because of humiliation and ridicule from the society. This is because the

society believes men should be strong and emotionless. The government and majority of the society focus on men as perpetrators of violence towards women, and do not acknowledge that men are suffering from domestic violence in the same way as women.

However, to give an insight into the question of whether or not gender relations are changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it will be important to explain in depth background on the definition of the term gender, gender roles, gender relation and gender inequality, nature of gender relations before the 21st century, changes in gender relations and inequality still treading today. Hence summarise with conclusion and references where the secondary information was collected concerning the seminar work.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **Gender**

Gender refers to social definition of what it means to be a man or a woman in the society. It is the social relations between women and men, girls and boys defined by cultural values and norms. Gender involves the way the society creates patterns and structures our understanding of femininity and masculinity. Gender is not only about women as is sometimes wrongly assumed, but denotes all qualities of what it is to be either a man or a woman. The term has increasingly acquired a social meaning where the word gender defines how male and female gender relates in the society and how duties are allocated based on one's sex. It also is used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female.

### **Gender Role**

Gender role is the behaviors, attitudes, values and beliefs that a particular cultural group considers appropriate for males and females on the basis of their biological sex. Thus, roles are assigned based on one's sex. Gender roles and expectations are learned. It is important to note that society have assigned men and women different gender roles based on their sex and social norms. In the relations between women and men, girls and boys, roles are assigned to them and are socialized from birth. Gender role is the role or behaviour learned by a person as appropriate to their gender, determined by the prevailing cultural norms.

### **Gender Relations**

Gender relations refer to relations between men and women that are socially determined by culture, religion, or socially acceptable ways of thinking or being. These relationships between men and women, as they exist in most societies, are characterized by the marginalization of women in decision making and other forms of power sharing in the home and places of authority. The economic exploitation of women and extensive violence to the person and psyche of women the problem of unequal gender relations is both personal and systemic. This is giving rise to gender-based violence, death, poverty of families, neglect of children and a variety of societal dysfunctions in the interest of justice, empowerment and the development of families and communities, these relations need to be analyzed and new solutions found for their transformation. The problem will need to be analyzed both from its personal and systemic roots.

### **Gender Inequality**

Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal differences. Gender systems are often dichotomous and hierarchical; gender binary systems may reflect the inequalities that manifest in numerous dimensions of daily life. Gender inequality stems from distinctions, whether empirically grounded or socially constructed. It acknowledges that men and women are not equal and that gender affects an individual's living experience. These differences arise from distinctions in biology, psychology, and cultural norms.

### **NATURE OF GENDER RELATIONS BEFORE THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Women in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were challenged with expressing themselves in a patriarchal system that generally refused to grant merit to women's views. Cultural and political events during these centuries increased attention to women's issues such as education reform, and by the end of the eighteenth century, women were increasingly able to speak out against injustices. Though modern feminism was nonexistent, many women expressed themselves and exposed the conditions that they faced, albeit often indirectly, using a variety of subversive and creative methods.

The social structure of sixteenth century Europe allowed women limited opportunities for involvement; they served largely as managers of their households. Women were expected to focus on practical domestic pursuits and activities that encouraged the betterment of their families, and more particularly, their husbands. In most cases education for women was not advocated it was thought to be detrimental to the traditional female virtues of innocence and morality.

The seventeenth century was not an era of drastic changes in the status or conditions of women. Women continued to play a significant, though not acknowledged, role in economic and political structures through their primarily domestic activities. They often acted as counselors in the

home, "tempering" their husbands' words and actions. Though not directly involved in politics, women's roles within the family and local community allowed them to influence the political system. Women were discouraged from directly expressing political views counter to their husbands' or to broadly condemn established systems; nevertheless, many women were able to make public their private views through the veil of personal, religious writings. Again, women who challenged societal norms and prejudices risked their lives

The eighteenth century brought the beginning of the British Cultural Revolution. With the increasing power of the middle class and an expansion in consumerism, women's roles began to evolve. The economic changes brought by the new middle class provided women with the opportunity to be more directly involved in commerce. Lower-to middle-class women often assisted their husbands in work outside the home. It was still thought unseemly for a lady to be knowledgeable of business so, though some class distinctions were blurring, the upper class was able to distinguish themselves from the rest of society. The rise in consumerism allowed the gentry to place a greater emphasis on changing fashion and "display," further distancing them from the middleclass. With the advent of changes in rules of fashion and acceptable mores within society, some women established a literary niche writing etiquette guides. Also due to the Cultural Revolution, mounting literacy rates among the lower classes caused an increase in publishing, including the rise of the periodical. Men and women of all classes found new means to express ideas in the wider publishing community. Though women's writing during this period continued largely to be an extension of domesticity, and focused mainly on pragmatic, practical issues, women found a wider market for publication.

### **CHANGES IN GENDER RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY.**

Over the past decades' women have been segregated from various areas in the society especially political areas. Their roles were basically domestically related. However, we had strong women in past who were able to overcome this successfully regardless of this discrimination and segregation and who attained leadership roles, as well as created the path towards achievement of equality of women Nefertiti, Cleopatra, Margaret Thatcher, Susan. B. Anthony and so on.

Massive changes have occurred since the 21st century with the rise of feminist/women activists', women have been given the opportunity to use and express their rights. In terms of political participation, women have been able to succeed and participate in political sectors. Men and women today in some countries of the world majorly the first world work hand in hand in order to ensure that the political sector of their state is managed properly . Women like Hillary Clinton, Patience Jonathan have succeeded in the political sector of their state among others, Also, there are women who now own businesses, they play equal roles as men in owning lead large companies and managing big organizations

Countries also have been able to establish laws that enable equality in some sectors. A country like Rwanda, has been able to establish an equilibrium between men and women in its political affairs of the state where women consist of about sixty-eight percent of seats in the Rwandan parliament today. Women are given significant political positions. We also have families today where working mothers increasingly reliant upon as breadwinners or co-breadwinners. The past four decades have brought about dramatic changes in how women and men navigate their workplace responsibilities, caregiving needs, and personal lives. Four in five U.S. families with children are headed by either two working parents or a single working parent, and thus most families have to navigate issues such as costly or inadequate child care, a lack of paid family leave, and the persistent wage gap, just to name a few.

### **MAJOR AREAS OF CHANGES IN GENDER RELATIONS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

There are three basic areas where we will be explaining the changes that have occurred in the twenty- first century: social area, political and economic area or sphere.

#### **SOCIAL AREA**

This area of change will be sub- divided into the work, property rights and education aspect of change.

**Work:** prior to the twenty-first century women only had domestic duties and roles to play in the society such as cooking, taking caring of family and so on. The society had from birth assigned these domestic or private roles to women whereas the men were to assume public roles such as providing money to cater for family's needs and so on hence only the men were allowed to work. Now this gender roles which are as a result of the cultural norms, values and traditional beliefs over time has been subdued to changes with the advent of globalization which create awareness through social media , education etc on this norms hence today we can now see how women are now involved in public roles too. Today all over the world we have women working to earn a living and some are even the bread- winners of their families about forty-percent of women are now working in Sub-Sahara Africa. In Europe, women consist about forty-five percent of the labor force, in the US, women account for forty-six point eight percent of the labor force and so on this shows that there has been a change. Unlike in the past where women could only do domestic roles there is a great improvement. Women generally account for 77.4% of the work force (US Congress Joint Economic Committee review)

**Property rights:** prior to the twenty-first century, women never even had any rights they were only acting on the decisions of their husbands, they had no right to own any properties it was believed that only the men who were considered the head and superior to the women that were allowed the right to own properties women were required to give up all property rights and

money earned to their husbands upon marriage but today, the Law of Property Act allowed both husband and wife to inherit property equally, legislation passed four years later meant women could hold and dispose of property on the same terms as men. The Married Women's Property Act today gives wives control of their own possessions and any money which a woman has earned would be treated as her own property. The 21<sup>st</sup> century have help to strengthen gender relations, both men and women are equal even if some tradition till restrict women putting them under the control of someone majorly their husband. Rwanda is a good example of a country where this property law has worked women are free to own their own property even after marriage the decision on whether to share or not share her property is hers to decide and not the husband and was before.

**Education:** before the late twentieth and the twenty-first century, women were not granted access to education they were being given out for marriage once they had reached a certain period and even the ones who were went to school never finished they stopped at the primary or secondary level of education but today things have change quite a lot we have women who more than just attending secondary schools, went through with their B.sc (60% ), masters degree and even a PhDs degree. We have about fifty percent of girls in school today however, we still have some countries where women are still not allowed to go to school for one reason or the other.

### **POLITICAL AREA**

During the 19th century, women held an inferior position to men and were therefore not allowed to take part in politics as only the men were considered qualified to be leaders or to make decisions that could influence the country. Today, we have women involved in politics and some even gained leadership roles as presidents or ministers. Africa for instance has had ten female presidents from 1993-2018. Nigeria's current Minister of Finance and the Head of Nigeria Ports are women, "Zinab Ahmed" and "Hadiza Bala Usman" respectively. In Rwanda also, we have women holding about sixty-eight percent of seats in the Rwandan Parliament. Women today seem to be quite involved in politics a lots either through voting for others or contesting for themselves and this has been possible major because of the feminist who stood for their rights as well as the education that has brought to light or created awareness to people on the importance of women and not just men in the society.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has shown how far male and female relationship has developed and how it can work and be equal. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has promoted feminism we now see people both male female who supports and defends equal social, economic and cultural rights for women. It is not only reduced to females but as well equality between men and women.

However, inequality between genders is still visible in our day to day life. Both men and women are victims of inequality; however, women have been the most disadvantaged party when talking about gender inequality.

Firstly, the society where we live in practices “Andro-Centrism”, which can be defined as the doctrine of male centeredness, which relates to the notion of putting men at the centre and relegating women to outsider in the society. It is the practice conscious or otherwise of placing a masculine point of view at the centre of one’s worldview culture or history. The practices are those whereby the experience of men are assumed to be generalizable, and are seen to provide the objectives criteria through which women experience can be organized and evaluated rather than using the experiences of women to be generalizable in a society. Also the system of “Patriarchy” being used. It is defined as a system in which women are subordinate to men in terms of power and status, which is based on the belief that “it is right for men to command and for women to obey”. It maintains that men have created boundaries for women, thus making it harder for women to hold power therefor there is an unequal access to power between men and women.

Education; less than 40 percent of countries offer girls and boys equal access to education and only 39 percent of countries have equal proportions of the sexes enrolled in secondary education. By achieving universal primary and secondary education attainability in the adult population, it could be possible to lift more than 420 million people out of poverty, but this would have a greater effect on women and girls who are the most likely to never have stepped foot inside a school. Even once girls go to school discrimination follows, girls are at greater risk of sexual violence, harassment and exploitation in school. School related gender based violence is another major obstacle to universal schooling and the right to education for girls. Also, in schools, authorities give laws based on gender roles, often times they appoint certain prefect-ship posts to boys and others to girls, for example, a boy is appointed as the head boy, while the girl as the vice.

Economic Independence; increase in female labour force participation result in faster economic growth, but women continue to participate in labour markets on an unequal basis with men. In 2013, the male employment to population ratio was 72.3 percent compared to 47.1 percent for women, and women continue to earn only 60-70 percent of men’s wages globally. It is estimated that women’s income could increase globally to 76 percent if the employment participation gap between men and women was closed, which could have a global value of 17 trillion dollars. Women also carry a disproportionate amount of responsibility for unpaid care work. Women devote one to three hours more a day than men. The time given to these unpaid tasks directly and negatively impacts women’s participation in the workforce and their ability to foster economic independence.

Child Marriage; this is another form of gender inequality that is still happening in even in our day to day life. Globally, almost 750 million women and girls alive today married before they are eighteen. Those who suffer from child marriage often experience early pregnancy which is a key factor in the premature end of education. As a mother and wife, girls become socially isolated and are at an increased risk for domestic violence. Child marriage is one of the most devastating

examples of gender inequality as it limits women's opportunities and their ability to reach their full individual potential.

Representation in government; as of June 2016, only 22.8 percent of all national parliamentarians was women. There is growing evidence that women in positions of leadership and political decision-making improve the systems in which they work, but they are not given the chance because of the population men possess in the government leaving very few and little positions for women to occupy.

Another factor is the more freedom in men than women, in the sense that women are not allowed to do most the things freely, they are being caged by the laws that governs them. For example, in Saudi-Arabia women are not allowed to drive and also they aren't allowed to go any sporting centre such as football stadiums. Even in our homes, boys are usually allowed to go out whenever they want and do certain things that sometimes need to be questioned by their elders, but girls' movements are usually restricted. They are usually more protective about girls than boys, which is also a form of inequality, as the male child also needs adequate protection and monitoring.

### **FACTORS THAT BROUGHT ABOUT THIS CHANGES**

**Feminist movement:** the struggle and fight for freedom of women's right to vote, to own property among other right is a major factor to the changes that have occurred in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have feminist such as Susan .B. Anthony who violated the law and voted leading to her arrest in 1872 aside other feminist. This action and bold step of hers further made others to rise up and fight for their right and eventually led to freedom of women's to vote first in Finland in the early twentieth century after which other countries joined to give freedom to women and as time passed, the feminist activities changed from the first wave to the fourth wave, causing the society as well to changed its behaviors towards women as enlightenment was being created little by little and today we can see how the world has improved so much in promoting to an extent gender equality of both sexes. This feminist movement also brought about women studies today known as gender studies which has helped in creating awareness on the gender issues affecting both sexes as well as enlightened us on the importance of both sexes in the society.

**Globalization:** this involves worldwide interconnectedness that has been made possible through information communication technology. Through social media, education all which has been brought about by globalization, issues affecting either sexes are been made know and solutions are been arrived at to resolve them. It is globalization (social media and education) that has helped create awareness on the cultures and beliefs affecting women mostly in the society as



well as the elimination of such beliefs which could stand in the way of promoting equality of both sexes.

**Government policies:** The policy made by government of different countries is also a factor that has helped in bring about the changes in the twenty-first century. There are some countries who have been able to through their policies put women at the head of affairs of their states in relation to the men of which this has also help to promote development in those countries. A good example is Rwanda, the policies of Rwanda seems to favor the women at large and equally the men too be it in the socio-economic or political sphere we have women consisting about sixty-eight percent seats in the Rwandan parliament, also women in Rwanda consist about eighty-four point one-six percent (84.16%). On the other hand we have a country like Nigeria where the women make only four(4%) of the seats in the parliament. This shows how the policies of different states has caused a change be it positive or negative in gender relations of the different countries in the world.

## **CONCLUSION.**

In conclusion, massive changes have occurred till the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The following recognizes male roles and responsibility which currently being handled by both genders in current generation, marriage proposal was done by male gender before but now done by both genders, dress code is being shared by both genders in the 21st century. Women have been able to succeed and participate in political sectors. Women like Patience Jonathan, Hillary Clinton has succeeded in the political sector of their state. Women are allowed to have their own business, they are allowed to vote and be voted for. Many challenges are face by gender in the 21st century that include; domestic violence, language for genders, decision making power, inequality, transgender, gender imbalance, equality has increased divorce, limited education and exposure which have creating challenging moments to gender. The following are suggestions to the above challenging moments of gender; encounter stereotypes through young generation in schools by mentoring them about gender at the earlier age, handling proper cultural transition from tradition to current generations, equal economic empowerment for both genders other than focusing women gender as the most affected, education and exposure of both genders for easy understanding gender from different perspectives in different environments. Through above solutions, we do agree that gender perspective by 21st century generation would create an understandable meaning for gender.

## **RECOMMENDATION.**

Firstly, it is important to note that the solution to gender equality starts from us, because we are the ones that make up the society.

The government should enforce laws and regulations that favor both genders, and avoid discrimination in law making.

Parents should not assign duties to their children based on gender roles. Every child should be assigned to any domestic work, irrespective of whether they are boys or girls.

Seminars should be conducted from time to time on gender equality and ways to promote gender balance.

Gender studies should be a compulsory course of study in schools to create awareness on the danger of inequality to the society.

Girls should be allowed the freedom of education, and there should also be an eradication to child-marriage.

There should be a changed mentality on how gender roles have been since inception. Both males and females have set ideology on certain principles that discriminates one sex against the other; there should therefore be a change of perception in order to bring about gender balance.

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