

THE ABORTION DEBATE: AN AFRICANIST ETHICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: The prevalence of abortion is of central concern to all societies in the world including traditional African societies. It is perturbing that, virtually in all countries; the phenomenon overtly presents itself and the need to legalize it or not continues to elicit responses and very strong arguments in defence or against. Given this, my aim in the work is to meticulously explicate the abortion controversy and evaluate the reasonability or illogicality from the parameters of the African value system. My discovery reveals that there seems to be no place for abortion in the traditional African societies as clearly manifested by the ethos of ‘dos and don’ts’ and values that characterized African ontological environment and world-view. As a method, I approached and analyzed the abortion controversy by subjecting them to the Bini ethical standard. Furthermore, the work examines the nature of abortion and the real dangers that come with it. I argued that procuring abortion for whatsoever reason(s), as may be upheld by the consequentialist ethicists and some feminist thinkers is inadmissible and morally prohibited. I concluded that the argument—that mothers have right over their body, perhaps a way of justifying abortion, is simply a relative position and an outright manifestation of some western radical propaganda for global feminism.

Keywords: Morality, Abortion, African Ethics, Bini’s Concept of Abortion, Feminism.

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INTRODUCTION

The view that abortion should be legalized or not, continues to dominate discussion among clergy, ethicists, philosophers, conservatives, liberalists and social commentators to say the least. Obviously, two things come to bear in the debate: first, whether the *conceptus* or fetus is a full human being with equal status and right with that of the mother or whether the fetus is capable of independent existence without the mother? The second point is on the right of the mother over her body to either continue to accept or carry the pregnancy or terminate it. In other words, is the mother justified by whatsoever reason(s) to stop the growth of the fetus in her womb?

The first strand of the argument inadvertently leads to other questions such as when does life begin? When is the fetus regarded as a human person? What is the nature of the fetus? Though it seems easy to provide answer to the latter question judging from the biological and scientific configuration or explanation of the nature of the fetus, arising from the fusion of two cells; spermatozoa and oval, of the male and female reproductive gametes respectively, yet it is difficult to ascertain the real nature of the fetus philosophically. These two substances are purely matter, i.e., material in nature. A close examination of the fetus reveals that it has or possesses a soul or mind which is purely immaterial. The inability to distinctly reconcile the fusion of the material (body) and the immaterial (mind or soul) components of the fetus poses a fundamental problem on the definite nature of the fetus.

The question when does life begins is further compounded by the failure to decipher the real or true nature of the fetus. Though Saint Augustine has given us a clue or hint on the time or point when the fetus begins to exist as a

human being but it is barely adequate and difficult to scale through the rigor or scrutiny of reason. Augustine's assertion that life begins when the fetus receives a soul; a spark of the Almighty God has been watered down by the insufficient proves to establish God's existence. Hence, this renders the precise nature of the fetus inconclusive and indefinite. In the view of Pythagoras, as explicated by his theory of *Orphism*, the human soul is distinct from the material body. According to the doctrine, the soul has the ability to subsist without necessarily dependent on the body. The soul is believed to have existed in a mystical cum esoteric world, before it was sent to this existential world to be imprisoned in the body. This implies that, the body may have been specifically designed to serve a purpose, that is, to serve as limitation to the soul. The soul is eventually liberated having attained asceticism. By this process, the soul is completely cleansed from whatever reason it was thrown into the empirical abode. Though Pythagoras's theory is somewhat mystical but the insight it provided in the understanding of the nature of the fetus is quite explicit and appealing.

The argument of the women's right over their bodies perhaps as a justification for the procuring of abortion stems from the issues and ongoing debate on sexism and feminism. This can be understood from the struggle staged by women with a view to asserting themselves and to break from barrier that nature has placed on them. The ancient Greek civilization, reflected by its democracy clearly buttressed this point. In the traditional Greek societies, especially among the Athenians, women, children and slaves were treated as second class citizens in vital discussions relating to the over-all well-being of the society. Women's decision and opinion did not count as anything. They were never to be heard on important debates on the governance and administration of

the societies. By this, the female folks were completely relegated and regarded as inferior. The male folks clearly dominated the scene. This may have instigated the ongoing revolution depicted by feminism and gender advocacy. "By feminism, we mean the belief that women should not be disadvantaged by their sex, that they should be recognized as having human dignity equally with men and the opportunity to live as fulfilling and as freely chosen lives as men can" (Okin, 1999).

This work explores the nature and meaning of abortion. The methods and the various arguments for and against abortion will also be examined. The controversy surrounding the abortion debate will be thoroughly dissected and x-rayed from the lens of the Bini ethical standard. We shall set out by clarifying some important terms.

Conceptual Clarification

It is germane to clarify what is African ethics, particularly as the term is taken to be a branch of African philosophy. The controversy surrounding the existence or authenticity of African philosophy cannot be ignored. Even African scholars are divided on this issue. Some have argued that there is nothing as African philosophy other than Western philosophy. The traditional African thinkers are of the view that Africa has a philosophy, the same way we can talk of Western or Chinese or American philosophy. However, it is not within the scope of this work to delve into detail argument on the existence or non-existence of African philosophy. One succinct fact to buttress the existence of African philosophy is the existence of a people known as Africans. These people have a unique way of life, world-view and experiences of reality around them. They are capable of reflection and independent thoughts. By this, they were able to evolve sterling indigenous civilizations prior to western contact. It

is based on these facts and many more that we can argue for the existence of African philosophy.

The term "African ethics" is an amalgam of two separate words; "African" and "ethics". The former refers to a set of people of the same racial and geographical extraction. Azenabor (2002) succinctly captures the meaning of the term when he asserted that "the term "African" is a racial geographical entity. "Africa" is a continent inhabited by people of a particular race, which could be Black, White, Arab, Negro, etc., but definitely with similar culture, custom, common history of colonial experience and tutelage."

Ethics, on the other hand is "concerned with the question of right and wrong in human behavior. It deals with how men ought to behave and why it is wrong to behave in certain ways and right to behave in certain ways. In other words, ethics studies the reason why certain actions are morally right and commendable, good and bad (or right and wrong)" (Omogbe, 1993). In the view of Eboh (2004), ethics is moral philosophy or that branch of philosophy which studies human conduct in terms of its being right or wrong . . . Morality is best founded on human dignity. Whatever promotes the dignity of the human person is good; whatever degrades the humanity of a person is bad. Conscience, knowledge, circumstances, intention and human dignity are criteria for adjudging conduct to be good or bad. It should be noted that the term ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which means custom or norm. According to Socrates, it is the knowledge of good and evils, the knowledge of the wisdom of life. It is concerned with morality, the good life (Airoboman, 2011).

We shall now examine the two terms together. According to Azenabor (2002), 'African ethics is a branch of African philosophy which deals with the critical reflection on the manner or nature of life conduct, behavior and

character of the African. He contended that our basis for this conceptualization is premised on the fact that morality is the basis for ethics and morality is cultural and societal. Thus, African ethics is the conceptualization, appropriation, contextualization and analysis of values within the African cultural experience. It is the reflection on African experiences that pertains to the good to be done and the evil that should be avoided. This sum up what scholars have christened African ethics. Ozumba reflecting on African ethics affirmed that African ethics is said to hinge on ontology. The configuration of all entities in existence constitutes ontology. The African ontology on its part is one that consist interconnection, which results in a massive chain of inter-relationship. He submitted that the African is highly religious in the sense that everything he does is guided by the hopes and fears of not only the living but the departed, the gods or divinities and the omnipotent Being, God. His everyday life is pervaded by thoughts that are directed by taboos and the sacred, all in keeping with the desire to be in line with the entire existence (ontological structure) (Uduigwomen, 1995).

The second concept to be clarified is abortion. Though its meaning is somewhat clear, it is noteworthy to describe or explicate the sense with which this work seeks to appraise or situate it. The term as used in this work is simply the deliberate and conscious termination of a pregnancy. It is important to take note of two words; 'deliberate' and 'conscious'. This presupposes that abortion that results from or by natural inducement is not our object of focus in the justification of the act as good or bad. Thus, abortion resulting from miscarriages is outside the context and appraisal of the act. Hence, it is the interest of this work to evaluate the morality of abortion and the various arguments from the ground of purposeful and premeditated acts.

What is Abortion?

By and large, abortion means the planned and impulsive termination of pregnancy. It can manifest in three ways. The first is when abortion takes place unexpectedly and spontaneously to the surprise of the pregnant woman. It is this form of abortion that is often referred to as miscarriage. The woman feels sorrowful, unhappy and sad that she has lost the chance of having an expected child. This loss also affects her psychological state which in many cases requires consolation from her spouse, families and relatives. This type is referred to as **spontaneous abortion**. The second form of abortion occurs when a pregnant woman deliberately, voluntarily, intentionally, willfully or consciously remove or terminate her pregnancy for reasons that best suit her. These reasons popularly or often range from rape, unwanted babies, incest, poverty, psycho-disfunctioning or damage, social or economic hardship etc. unlike the spontaneous abortion; the woman does not feel sorrowful for the loss of an unexpected baby, neither is she psychologically affected by the loss of the baby. This type is known as **induced abortion**. The third one is known as **therapeutic abortion**. This form of abortion is often carried out to safeguard the life and health of the pregnant woman. The pregnancy is terminated following medical advice when it is perceived that the pregnancy poses health challenges or risk to the life of the mother. Once the fetus poses risk to the life of the mother; it is recommended in order to save the life of the pregnant woman. Here, the woman may feel unhappy, sad about the loss of the baby but she does not have a choice.

Ways of carrying out abortion include Dilation and Curettage, Suction Abortion, Dilation and Evacuation, Saline Abortion, Prostaglandins Abortion, Hysterectomy and Self-induced Abortion. The likely effects or damages caused by

abortion may comprise; increase chances of complications that may lead to the death of the woman in the process, psychological and traumatic effect on the part of the woman and the physician, incidence of torture, severe pain, discomfiture and injury which may become regular experience or occurrence on the mother, high risk of loss or damage to the womb which results in future infertility, increase chances of future birth to be delivered by caesarean operation especially hysterectomy and high risk of infection (HIV & AIDS) and hemorrhaging.

What is the Problem with Abortion?

At this juncture, it is incumbent to delve into the problem with abortion. We shall commence by stating the problems.

Problem one:

Basically, there are two opposing positions with regard to the permissibility and impermissibility of abortion. The first is the pro-life position. The pro-life position maintains that the fetus or *conceptus* has an absolute right to life from the moment of conception onward. This position is anti-abortion and holds strongly that an entire human person exists from the moment of conception. And, to terminate the *conceptus* is morally bad and amount to murder which is a criminal act. Under this circumstance, abortion becomes impermissible (Author, 2012).

The second position is the pro-choice (abortion-on-request). According to this position, the women have absolute right over their own bodies and lives. For this position, pregnancy may be seen as an obstacle to the freedom and autonomy of women. Here, the absolute right to life of the *conceptus* is shifted to the mother who is under no obligation on what to be done to her body. Abortion becomes permissible for whatever reasons advanced by the women. Thus, the first problem here is the complicatedness of clearly determining which stand to be taken from the aforementioned two

positions in order to ascertain strongly the permissibility and/or impermissibility of abortion (Author, 2012).

Problem Two:

The second problem arises from these two conflicting values; the value of life and individual freedom. According to Jacques Thiroux (1995):

Two basic principles come into conflict in the abortion issue: the Value of Life principle (basically in reflection to the unborn life, but also in relation to the life of the mother and the Principle of Individual Freedom, that is, the mother's right over her own body, procreativity, and life.

Problem Three:

The third problem is the question, when does human life begin? And, "perhaps more importantly, at what point it is to be valued and protected to the same extent as the lives of human beings who already have been born" (Jacques, 1995). The perturbing nature of this question stems from the complexities or intricacies in the biological process-cum-explanation relating to the *conceptus* which has in no way be of help in the abortion debate, hence the problem.

From the foregoing statement of the abortion problem, it will be observed that the rightness or wrongness of abortion cannot be thoroughly examined from one ethical theory. To do appropriate justice to it, it will require us to x-ray the issue from many ethical theories. Nevertheless, this is not the main focus of this work. However, it is vital to discuss each of the problems in detail and the arguments used to support them in order to place the abortion debate in proper perspective. First, we shall begin with the third problem, perhaps the most important in the issue of abortion.

When does Human Life Begin?

To answer the question it is imperative to understand or clarify two key words in the question; 'human' and 'life'. 'Human',

according to the English Advanced Learner Dictionary means characteristic of people that is contrasted with God, animals or machines, while 'life' means a state of being alive as a human being. The term 'life' can be contrasted with death, meaning the loss of life. The answer to the question, 'when does human life begin?' will be dissected from the views of three schools of thought in the abortion debate. They are the pro-life, pro-choice and the moderate view.

ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

The Strong Pro-life Position

According to this view; "human life starts at conception, that is, as soon as the chromosomes from the sperm of the father and the ovum of the mother are united, then a human being exists that must be valued in the same way as if 'he or she' were already born" (Jacques, 1995). Thus, human life clearly begins at the fusion of the sperm and ovum, i.e. during fertilization which gives rise to the zygote. This means that, sperm and ovum have not the potency to become a fully functioning human being except a zygote or fetus. A lucid account of the right to life position is given by Emmett Barcalow (1994) thus:

... that at conception, the fertilized egg (called a zygote until the second week, when it is implanted in the woman's uterus, an embryo from the second week until the eight week when brain waves can be detected and a fetus from the eight week until birth) is a living human being.

Noonan (1987) upholds this view when he opined that "if you are conceived by human parents, you are human"¹³. He added that the decisive moment of humanization is at conception when the new being (fetus) receives the genetic code: a genetic information which determines his characteristics, thus a being with a human genetic code is a human being (Noonan, 1987).

It is fundamental to ask at what point does a genetically human being has a soul? In other words, when is the embryo infused with a soul? The religious view held by the Roman Catholic churches (championed by Thomas Aquinas and Christian authors) suffices that *en soulment* occurs at the moment of conception (Emmett, 1994). However, it is not easy to accept the view expressed by the church because many people and scholars have disagreed over when precisely does the soul enters the body. Secondly, there abound debates on the nature of the body and the nature of the soul, which is prior? In a nutshell, the position of the strong pro-life proponents is that "... there is human life either in potentiality or in actuality from the moment of conception" and thus many anti-abortionists argued that human life is an actuality at any stage after conception" (Jacques, 1995).

The Strong Prochoice Position

This view maintained that human life begins at birth. The reasons among others advanced by the proponents of this position are that the fetus is not a social being, not a rational agent and not a person. The criteria for personhood set by the philosopher Mary Anne Warren seems to solidify or strengthened the position of the prochoice. According to Warren (1995) for a fetus or embryo to be regarded as a "person", it must be capable of or possess the following traits:

1. Consciousness (of objects and events external or internal to the being) and in particular the capacity to feel pain.
2. Reasoning (the developed capacity to solve new and relatively complex problems)
3. Self motivated activity (activity that is relatively independent of either genetic or direct external control)
4. The capacity to communicate, by whatever means, messages of an indefinite variety of types-that is, not just with an indefinite

number of possible contents but on many indefinite, possible topics.

5. The presence of self-concepts and self-awareness, individual or racial or both.

Also, added to the point at which life begins, is the stage of viability in the development of the fetus. Viability, which is the capability of the fetus to survive outside of the uterus with or without artificial support is regarded as highly valuable. At this stage, the fetus can be likened to an adult. Thus the full rights accorded to an adult can also be accorded to a fetus.

The Moderate Position

The moderate position in the argument; when does life begins seems influenced by the stand of the ancient Greek Philosopher Aristotle, who asserted the theory of virtue in the determination of moral action. In his *magus opus, Niccomachean Ethics*, Aristotle affirmed that virtue lies in the middle. Thereby, moderation becomes the *panacea* for judging an action to be right or wrong. This being the case, the moderate position emphasizes 'viability' as the point from which we can begin to talk about the answer to the question when does life begin. According to this view, the point at which human life begins is neither at conception (as argued by the pro-life) nor at birth (as championed by the pro-choice), rather it is at some stages in the development of the fetus.

The position of the moderate is that while the fetus may not be regarded as a person at conception but it however becomes a person or human being as it comes closer to the ninth (9th) month of pregnancy. Thus, when the fetus reaches the stage of viability, where it is able to survive outside of the womb of the mother, then it is taken to have life.

The argument for and against abortion as well as its permissibility and impermissibility can be clearly seen from the line of thought of three groups: the conservatives, the liberalists, and the

moderate views. We shall begin with the conservative view that took a radical objection against abortion.

Argument against Abortion

The Traditional or Conservative Position/View

The conservative or traditional argument against abortion stems from the fact that 'human life' or 'personhood' are terms synonymous to the fetus, that the fetus is worthy and valuable with right-to-life. Insofar the fetus is a human being, it is valuable. To terminate it, is immoral and illegal. For instance, "the conservative would ask what morally relevant differences there are between an adult human beings and a new born baby. What makes it morally permissible to destroy a baby, but wrong to kill an adult?" (Karsten, 1975).

The conservatives who may comprise moral philosophers, humanists, religionists, etc are those who hold a strong anti-abortion view. They maintain the strong prolife position, that the fetus has life at the moment of conception and that to terminate it is immoral and illegal. The conservative position is premised on the following;

- That the life of the fetus or unborn child is sacred
- That the life of the fetus has value
- That the human fetuses have a right to life and be given due protection.
- That life is God's free gift as no one can choose arbitrarily to live or die.

Furthermore, having rendered the conservatives' argument on the need to value the life of the fetus on the ground of;

- (a) The recognition of the right of each human being to the most basic conditions of life and to life itself.
- (b) The protection of the right to life especially by those who have co-operated with the creative love of God.
- (c) The preservation of a right understanding of motherhood.

(d) The ethical standard of the medical doctors as one who protects and cares for human life and never becomes an agent of its destruction (Harring, 1972).

More so, for the conservatives, “a genetically human zygote is a very valuable organism because it has the potential to develop into a fully functioning human being that can think, feel, live, hate, laugh, suffer, dream, and plan” (Emmett, 1994). Thus, “the right to life is the most fundamental right, it overrides a mother’s right to decide whether to terminate a pregnancy if it is not necessary to preserve her life or health” (*Ibid*).

The conservative rejects absolutely the liberalist’s position which permits abortion, and maintained that on no considerations or reasons whether economic, psychological, rape, incest, over-population, etc should abortion be procured or permitted. Abortion is wrong, immoral and should be kept illegal by legislation. The conservative emphasizes strongly that the life of the fetus at any stage of development is more valuable to any reason by the mother to terminate it. So any action that will violate the right of the fetus should be prohibited and deemed as immoral. However, the only exception to the position of the conservatives is that abortion should be procured if and only if it is to preserve the life and health of the mother. The exception is stated thus:

... from the moment of conception abortion is immoral, unless it is necessary to preserve the life and physical health of the mother, therefore, from the moment of conception abortion should be illegal unless it is necessary to preserve the life and physical health of the mother (Emmett, 1994).

Thus, the stage of viability in the development of the fetus should not be taken as the point to proscribe abortion as argued by the moderate position,

rather, abortion is forbidden from conception onward.

Argument for Abortion

The Liberal Position

For most liberalists, abortion is always morally acceptable, regardless of the stage of development of the fetus and regardless of the reason for desiring abortion (Emmett, 1994). The liberal position is premised on the absolute right to of the mother, and this position is shared by almost all feminists. Margret Sanger, a feminist argues that “no woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body” (Echekwube, 1999). Another unfaltering feminist is the French philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, who “conceives of pregnancy as “slavery of reproduction” and the greatest obstacle to female liberation” (*ibid*).

The liberal position is that women have a moral right whether to continue or terminate a pregnancy. “They insist that at no stage of its development does a fetus have a right to life that overrides a woman’s right to control her body” (Emmett, 1994). Here it is held that the fetus cannot be equated to the status of the mother because the fetus is not strictly a person, accounts for some of the reasons why the liberals have argued in favor of abortion.

On the issue whether the fetus is a person or not, Emmett (1994) clearly stated the view of the most liberal thus:

They agree that a fetus is alive at conception and that it is genetically human, but they claim that only people have moral rights, including a right to life, and that a fetus is not a person . . . that the conception of a person is not based purely on biology or genetics.

Hence, it is only a fully functioning human being that has right to life and not a fetus. A fetus is stripped-off of the characteristics of a person such as self awareness, self-concepts, capacity to communicate, self motive activity,

reasoning and consciousness. Emmett (1994) presented the argument thus:

There, at no point in fetal development does a fetus have any of the characteristics definitive of personhood because its brain and central neuron system are not sufficiently developed. Therefore at no stage of its development is a fetus a person with a right to life.

The Moderate Position in the argument for and against Abortion

One would observe that the arguments of the traditional conservatives and the liberal positions are both extremes. The moderates therefore set viability as the limit or point at which one may refer to abortion as morally acceptable or morally unacceptable, permissible and impermissible, legal or illegal. Viability here implies the ability of the fetus to stay alive outside of the mother's womb. This is the stage where the fetus does not depend anymore on the mother to exist or survive. When this stage is reached, the fetus is perceived as a fully functioning person with a right to life.

The argument of the moderates is that "at some stage of fetal development abortion is morally acceptable but that at others it is not" (Emmett, 1994). This view is defective in two ways: first we might maintain that while a fetus is not a person at conception it becomes a person at some point before birth. Secondly, that the thought a fetus is not fully an actual person before birth, the closer it comes to the ninth month, the closer it transforms from a potential person to an actual person. Hence the more valuable its life and the more deserving it are of respect and protection (*ibid*). They claim that the permissibility of abortion is depended on the stage of development of the fetus.

It seems that the moderate view is the most amicable way out to resolving the conflicts between the right and the value of the fetus and of the mother.

The Bini's Concept of Abortion

In order to position this work appropriately, the analysis of the nature of abortion in traditional African thought shall be approached from the Bini experience and world-view. The Bini constitutes an integral ethnic group in Southern Nigeria, a West African country. In response to the view of abortion, this paper proposes the use of African conception of abortion as exemplified in the Bini understanding, as an alternative way of resolving the controversy that engulfs in the morality of abortion between the prolife and prochoice. The Bini maintains a strong ethical position when it comes to the question of morality. This is inspired by the way the Bini treats human life and everything in their environment. Besides this, the Bini has a rich and dignifying cultural heritage. This informs the reason why an average Bini person is full of pride, as reflected in the way he carries himself, the way he speaks, what he does etc. This may be mistaken as a pride of the self. Whereas, on the contrary, a close observation will reveal that the average Bini person is proud of his culture.

Culture cannot be separated from morality though it may be argued, for the Bini, culture underpins everything. The Bini ethical colouration is a reflection of their culture. It sums the way of life, the experience and interpretation of reality, belief system, the perception of the environment, ethos and customs, intra and inter-personal relations, thought system, to mention a few, of the people and these have enormously influenced their civilization hitherto. Thus, the Bini custom/or norm is priceless. It is believed to have been handed down by our ancestors and it is covetously guided, as a violation of any sort comes with grave consequences. In order to trace the ontological root or foundation of the Bini ethical system, it is germane to have an insight of their world view.

The Bini World-View and Belief-

System

World-view is the configuration and totality of the belief-system, philosophy, religious idea and thought-pattern of a particular people with the same racial or geographical origin, or with the same historical or ideological inclination. In other words, "it is a perception or philosophy that a people or group of people embraced or shared about the nature of things in their social cultural milieu. It is thinking, an attitude or a belief-system which a people hold about their empirical and meta-empirical surroundings" (Author, 2011). The most systematized and conceptualized description of the African world view may be attributed to Placid Tempels on the Bantu people of east Africa.

However, given that the traditional African thought as opined by Diddier N. Kaphagawani can be grouped into three: the force theory (by Placid Tempels in his *Bantu Philosophy*), the Communal theory (by J. S. Mbiti in his *African Traditional Religions and Philosophy*) and the Shadow thesis (by Alexis Kagame in his *The Problem of Man in Bantu Philosophy*) (Coetzee, 1998), it is not out of context to affirm categorically that the Bini shared the same comparison to that of the Bantu as shrewdly systematized by Placid and Alexis. It is essential to note this point in order for one not to be misguided on the question of semblance between the Bantu and the Bini notion of world-view.

Like the Bantu, the Bini world-view is hinged on their metaphysics. Here, a description of this world-view is paramount to the understanding of the Bini ethical system. Prevalent in the metaphysical world-view is the idea of life-forces. Everything is characterized by life-forces; material or immaterial entities. This phenomenon is akin to that of the theory of energy in western conception of matter and its properties. Describing the nature of these forces further, Jim Unah (1996) explained that they are in hierarchy and constantly interacting with one another. At the apex

of this hierarchy is the Supreme Being, God (*Osanobua* in bini), the source of all creations. Next is the domain of the gods, spirits, ancestors and divinities. Following this level is the realm of humans, animals and plants. At the base of the hierarchy are organic and inorganic entities. Stronger forces have the ability to influence the weaker ones but not vice versa.

A typical feature of the African world-view is the concept of holism. All existence is taking as one. The universe and all created things are one organic whole. "The whole hierarchy of being, from the inorganic beings to the spirits, is inter-connected; and this inter-connection provides the possibility of interaction between the different kinds of being" (Omoregbe, 1990). Therefore, "the worth or value of individual entity cannot be assessed from an isolated perspective. In other words, the worth of a thing is adjudged by objectively evaluating the action of that thing or by assessing the action in relation to the whole" (Author, 2011).

The Morality of Abortion and the Bini's Conception

Prior to western contact or influence, it may be argued that the act of abortion was alien or strange to the Bini traditional society. The modern analysis of abortion to involve miscarriages though prevalent in the Bini traditional society, it was not conceived as termination of life but as an omen or message from the gods or ancestors of a taboo secretly committed. Besides this, understanding, the phenomenon of miscarriage (spontaneous abortion) could also be perceived as a supernatural intervention by the gods or ancestors to forestall evil. In this case, the destiny of the child may have been seen to be the one that would have inflicted pain on the parents and society. To forestall this from coming to pass, the ancestors may end the life of the child at conception. One may raise the question that does this action not amount to act of murder? The

gods or ancestors are seen as powerful moral agents. They are not to be blamed or scolded for their actions. They are morally upright and would not permit evil. To attain *ancestor-hood*, one would have lived an impeccable life, be truthful and just, committed to good conduct and the well-being of all in the community. Other requirements are respect for traditions and custom, lived to a well old age, be given proper burial at death, and raised or given birth to children. It is on this premise that the ancestors are qualified and known as custodians of traditions and customs. Hence, their actions are not to be judged as wrong or bad. They are invincible, forthright and possess fore-knowledge. They perform the role assigned to them by the Supreme Deity or Being. However, they can be influenced and this is mostly through sacrifices and offering.

The Bini conception of abortion is clear, as indicated by the following ethical practices;

Respect for human life.

Life in all respects, whether as fetus, is greatly valued. It is believed that it is only the Supreme Deity or Being that can give life. By this, no one has a right to take or terminate it. In this regard, for the Bini, Life is sacred and as such should be treated with utmost dignity. The process of conception (pregnancy) is treated courteously. This is seen as divine orchestration or passage ordered by the Supreme Being through which all human beings come into this world. Consequently, with regard to the Bini view on when does life begin, the argument that life begins at birth as championed by the prochoice proponents is nauseatingly inconceivable and unfounded. This presupposes that they shared the prolife view that life begins at conception. In sum, the Bini holds life as sacred so also the process leading to it.

The premium placed on children over wealth

The worth the Bini placed on children clearly suggests their stand in the abortion controversy. Children are seen as gifts and blessings from God to the parents and the community. First and foremost, a clear distinction must be made between the bini understanding of the cause of infertility and fertility. The former is seen as a punishment for wrong committed. It could also mean the hand-work of the evil spirits (such as witchcraft) or black magic to withhold the gift of God to the parents affected. This can easily be solved by appeasing the gods or ancestors to determine the cause of infertility. The latter clearly depicts the sign of acceptability of the parents by the ancestors. It means that the ancestors and deities are well pleased with the lifestyle of the parents. With this in view, children are not things or instruments. This is why in the bini circle; wealthy parents without children are seen as poor. Property, assets, money etc, can never be equated with the value of a child. This obviously informed the reason why the binis call their children by the following names; “Omorowa” (Child is house), “Omosefe” (Child is wealth), “Omosigho” (Child is more than money), “Omorodion” (Child is first in all), etc. children are the hallmark of riches and relevance of the parents in the society. Hence, the traditional bini person would never opt for abortion for whatever justification.

Children are key to primogeniture and ancestor-hood

The Bini virile practice and emphasis of primogeniture points to or reveals their take on the abortion debate. This practice of primogeniture stems from the kingship system of the Benin Kingdom. For example, the first son of the Oba is seen as the heir apparent to the throne, so also, the first child of every bini man in the issue of inheritance. On this basis, children are taken as heir or successor. To this end, children are seen as survival of race (i.e., the preservation of family names and lineage) and assurance of

personal immortality. The practice of adopting a child is completely unfamiliar and prior to western influence, it was non-existence in the bini tradition. Though children are seen as everyone's own because of the communal way of life, yet to adopt a child is alien and conceives as western imported value.

One of the essential pre-qualifications for ancestor-hood is the bearing of children. The bini recognizes the influence of ancestors and their existence. They are regarded as the most eldest members of the family ('edions' in the Bini phrase) who lived and have transited from this empirical world into the metaphysical ancestral world. They are canonized as ancestors having given proper burial rites by their children. They are believed to live though dead, with the family. Thus, in the bini world-view, death is not seen as the end of life but continuity. Generally, the Africans believe in the continuity of life. Though they are dead, their actions still affect lives in the physical world. This fact of ancestor-hood and primogeniture of the Bini are irreconcilable with the practice of abortion.

Polygamy as a value and its contradiction to the act of abortion

The practice of polygamy among the Bini is a pointer to the non-existence of abortion. The Bini tradition/norm allows a man to have many wives (and even concubines). In traditional societies, the marrying of many wives precipitates the need to have many children as possible. This is also predicated on the Bini love for children. The act of terminating or procuring abortion was unthinkable and visibly absent. Marrying many wives and raising many children have a way of elevating one's social status and class. The deliberate termination of pregnancy on the ground of 'unwanted baby' is a sharp contradiction to the Bini norms and values. The ability of a young girl to conceive is considered as a blessing bestowed on her by the ancestors. By this, a man's worth is measured among

other things, by his ability to impregnate a female. Pregnancy is treated with joy and not as clandestine act. The payment of dowry is not in any way constricted by pregnancy, in fact among the Yoruba people, where the Bini are believed to be an extraction, hold pregnancy as a fundamental necessity for the observance of marriage rites. By implication, this African practice discourages the act of abortion among young girls and boys which is so prevalent today in modern societies. Accordingly, the act of abortion, as for murder, suicide, rape, etc in traditional Bini society constitutes a grave taboo.

Communal obligation over children's well-being

For the Bini, as with virtually all African societies, the love and care for children extend beyond the nucleus family. In traditional bini society, the well-being of children is not only the responsibility of their immediate family but also of the immediate community. The way and manner a new baby is welcomed into the world buttressed this fact. The birth is greeted with joy and fulfillment as indicated in the many ecstasies; elaborate rites and ceremonies that accompanies it. Even children outside wedlock are treated in the same manner. As J. S. Mbiti (1970) puts it, "Children are the buds of society, and every birth is the arrival of 'spring' when life shoots out and the community thrives." The assertion of Fr. Bonaventure Turyomumazima (2013) of Uganda perfectly captures the main thrust of our argument here thus:

The birth of a child is, moreover, the concern not only of the parents but of many relatives, including the living and the departed. For it is the community which must protect the child, feed it, bring it up, educate it, and in many other ways incorporate it into the wider community. The child cannot be exclusively 'my child' but only 'our child'.

The communal well-being for children transcends the physical realm to the metaphysical world of the ancestors, who oversee the mental, spiritual and psychological welfare of the child.

Further Reflection and Argument

The excuse or reason for procuring abortion on the ground that women have right over their bodies is not only myopic but mischievous when arguing from the African perspective. The natural (biological) configuration of the female's body reveals their special purpose by nature. To deliberately terminate a fetus on this basis is not only anti-nature but also inconsistency with the entire process their whole body is designed to perform. It would be rational and arguable to talk of the right of women over their body, if nature has not bequeathed such to them. The body of the male is different from the female and both have their specific functions. In the African view, the process beginning from conception to birth is sacred. Once the fetus is implanted in the womb, the issue of right ends, the fetus must be allowed to fully grow. On the foregoing, the argument that women are enslaved by nature is unfounded, since nobody can choose his or her sex prior to birth.

More so, the prevailing right of a mother over her body conspicuous in modern societies could be seen as a product of over-exaggeration and unmitigated mis-priority by the feminists. In the African world-view, there is no such distinction between the right of the mother and the unborn baby. In fact, the mother and the unborn baby are seen as one. There is no isolation. Just as the mother does not have right to take her life, same way it is for her not to terminate the life of the unborn. The same way, it is not possible for her to harm herself, same with the unborn. Everything in the African world-view is perceived as one. Everything shared or participates in one force. In the Bini conception, the pride and respect of a mother is the child. That is why barrenness is completely detested. Thus,

the issue of over-lapping of rights or conflicts between the mother and the unborn is non-existent.

As a matter of fact, a careful analysis of the current argument by the feminists with reference to the right of the woman over her body reveals the over influence of the dogma of individualism and liberalism. Perhaps, it is the inordinate application of these principles to life that has resulted to the myriad of social maladies and indecent behaviours such as "gay", "lesbianism", "homosexualism" etc in our modern societies. It is the symbol of independent living. It could just be propaganda, employed by global gladiators/capitalists to propagate and enshrined the principles of capitalism. Again, this culture is completely alien to the Africans. Traditional African societies are communalistic in their attitude to life. This orientation has significantly influence their perception of life and reality. The disconnection that exists in western thinking over right of the mother and the unborn is therefore non-existent.

CONCLUSION

So far, we have been able to articulate the issues surrounding abortion and raised objections from the light of African world-view, precisely the Bini. We started by saying that the controversy engulfing abortion remains unresolved. Consequently, many countries have decided to approach it from different ways, especially as it relates to their ideological, social inclinations and religious beliefs, however, the last is yet to be heard. The global spread of the phenomenon and the contemporaneous legislation, for and against it, continues to pose grave problem to the practicability of our ethical system. This is, more so, compounded by the fact of *perspectivity* and relativity of norms. The core of the argument is hinged on the fact that abortion is alien to the African traditional

societies owing to their perception of reality, as further buttressed by the theory of life forces. To end with, we provided arguments to support the position that the argument of the pro-choice cannot be reconciled with the Bini conception and as such this can be taken as an alternative solution to the dilemma of abortion.

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