

Feminism: A Case Study of Traditional and Contemporary Igbo Society

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Abstract

Contemporary and traditional Igbo society is said to be patriarchal in nature. As a result, it is claimed to be a society where women are marginalized by men. While some scholars assent this contention, there are other scholars who contest it. This study therefore, examines the claims and counterclaims on the marginalization of women in traditional and contemporary Igbo society with specific reference to politics and culture. It specifically reviews the works of Gloria Chukwu and Theodora Adimora Ezigbo who shared a common knowledge concerning the active participation of women in the politics among traditional Igbo society before colonization introduced what they describe as gender equality of the pristine traditional Igbo Society. Some elements of Igbo culture were also outlined and examined. Four criteria were used to analyze and evaluate the reality of marginalization of women in the traditional and contemporary Igbo society. Based on the analysis, it was concluded that women were politically and culturally marginalized in the traditional and contemporary society. In the light of this finding, recommendations were made on how to better the political and cultural participation of contemporary Igbo women and by extension, of women all over the world.

KEY WORDS: Feminism, marginalization, Igbo society, women, politics and culture.

Introduction

The birth of human race cannot be traced with specific period in history (B. Mondin, 1985, 20). This lack in epistemic exactitude notwithstanding, certain truths about human nature and human history are known. The most obvious of these is that humans have existed for hundreds of centuries and that during the course of this long existence, they, unlike the lesser animals, developed features that made them highly knowledgeable. For instance, they understand the concept of existence, survival and cohabitation. Cohabitation gave rise to families. Families gave rise to communities and communities gave rise to larger groups of people, sharing the same or similar culture and

identities. These mini or major groups of people inhabiting an area and observing similar ways of life is what today, we call a society.

In these societies, different human activities were going on to ensure survival and longevity. Activities like farming, fishing and hunting saw to the provision of food for members of the society, while activities like sweeping, cleaning, washing etc saw to the maintenance of good hygiene. In the same way, various needs gave birth to various activities such that the human society became a busy one. As the years went by, these societies expanded both in population and geographical occupation. With the expansion in population and ongoing activities, issues like conflict arose. This gave rise to the need to delegate roles that would address issues like conflict resolution, moral upbringing and so on. The need for leadership and followership arose and gender roles were shared to ensure a habitable society embedded in peace and equity.

Over the years, it has however been discovered that these shared roles do not favour both genders equally. The feminine gender appears to be disadvantaged in most societies as these shared roles have not only placed them under their male counterparts as subordinates, but has also denied them the right to aspects of culture, activities, and participation in some societal constructs controlled by the men.

In the Igbo society, roles like farming, hunting, building and provision of needs were delegated to the male gender while the women were given roles related to home maintenance and child upbringing. The roles given to the male gender came with benefits like property rights, political participation and social exposure which put men in the best position to assume leadership roles. On the other hand, the roles delegated to the feminine gender confined them to their homes and made them dependent on the men for resources needed to run activities like home maintenance, food preparation etc. The male roles always put them out to the society while the female roles restrained them to the house thus the popular saying “the place of a woman is in the kitchen”. These limitations have encouraged a male dominated society. For this reason, women are said to be marginalized.

The word marginalization is not peculiar to women. To be marginalized is to be sidelined, subordinated, subjugated, dismissed, segregated or treated as being insignificant. One can be marginalized in different ways e.g. racially, politically, socially, religiously etc. Marginalization occurs when groups of people are socially excluded and experience inequalities in the distribution of resources and power (Vasas, 2005). In a bibliography of Oxford University Press, a couple of views were shared as regards the term marginalization. These views shared a similar idea of marginalization as a process whereby individual or groups are ignored or sidelined in a political debate, social negotiation or economic bargain. A critical examination of this view shows that this group of scholars sees marginalization from the perspective of an opinion that is not regarded (*Encyclopedia.com*)

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines marginalization as the state of being relegated to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group. This relegation could come in the form of an ignored opinion, a denial of participation in an activity, an ignored suggestion or a restriction to making suggestions in a gathering or a denial to certain positions. From these definitions, we can say that the term marginalization as it affects women in this study is the state of being politically and culturally powerless, unrecognized and unimportant (*Merriam-Webster.com*).

The quest to put an end to the marginalization of women is what we know today as feminism. Feminism is defined as a range of social movements, political movements and ideologies that aim to define, establish and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of all sexes (Mary Fulkerson, 1999). For years this movement has been in full force, advocating for the right of women such that in recent times women have succeeded in breaking some barriers limiting them to some rights and positions in the society. This quest however has not been fully achieved as women still face limitations in various sectors in the society. The feminist movement is still an ongoing quest creating positive awareness and taking necessary steps to put an end to the marginalization of women.

This study therefore explores the political and cultural aspect of the marginalization of women in the traditional and contemporary Igbo society. The study aims at examining the extent to which women of the traditional Igbo society were being politically and culturally marginalized compared to the women of the contemporary Igbo society. It explores and evaluates various claims regarding the reality of political and cultural marginalization of women in the Igbo society.

The following questions are put forward and answered in the course of this study:

- To what extent did the traditional Igbo woman experience political and cultural marginalization?
- What effect does colonization have in the marginalization of women in the traditional Igbo society?
- To what extent has political and cultural marginalization of women been resolved in the contemporary Igbo society?

Based on the concept and definition of feminism and our understanding of the term marginalization, the following criteria would serve as the yardstick for accessing and judging the claims regarding the marginalization of women in Igbo society with specific focus on politics and culture.

- Access –this entails the right of both genders to participate in the same political or cultural process without discriminating.
- Equal Participation –this means that both genders are given same opportunities, rights and privileges for public offices, including leadership positions.
- Equal Representation –this is when both genders are proportionally represented in decision making.
- Gender Equity – this is when both genders have equal rights that are when men and women are accorded the same rights and access to participate in the political and cultural process of the community.

The criteria would be used to determine if women are marginalized or not in the traditional and present Igbo society.

This study would be relevant to research scholars, media personnel, and individuals in the society at large as it would open a new perspective to their view on political and cultural marginalization of women in the traditional and contemporary Igbo society.

Generally, the work is divided into four sections. The first section is the introduction. It lays the semantic and syntactic foundations for understanding the other parts. Section two presents and examines the claims and counterclaims of political marginalization of women in traditional and contemporary Igbo society. Section three takes on the arguments both for and against the marginalization of women on the cultural level. Section four which is the evaluation, conclusion and recommendations, unpacks the claims and counterclaims presented in the other three sections in order to determine whether women are actually or apparently marginalized in Igbo society. The work is thus summed up and necessary recommendations made.

Women in Politics

Precolonial Igbo Society

Debates about the political power wielded by women in the traditional Igbo society have been ongoing for years. There is no denial that there were political structures through which women exercised power in the traditional Igbo society. Some of these political institutions as stated by G. Chukwu (2009) and Akachi Ezigbo, (1990) include: the Umuada, Alutaradi, Isi Ada, Otuodu, Ogbuefi, Loloanyi, Ogbaidi, Ogbunobodo, Iyamba, Ekwe, Onwene etc. The arguments built around these political institutions however, lie on whether these structures justify the claim of equality of men and women politically in the traditional Igbo society. While some scholars present these female political institutions as proof of women's political power and rights of equality with men in traditional Igbo society, other scholars still stand their ground on the claim that women of the traditional Igbo society were marginalized politically.

This subsection reviews the works of two seasoned scholars who attempted to debunk the notion that women were marginalized politically in the traditional Igbo society. The two works include: Chukwu (2009): *Igbo Women and Political Participation in Nigeria* and Akachi Ezeigbo (1990) *Traditional women's Institutions in Igbo Society: Implications for the Igbo Female Writer*.

G. Chukwu in her article, *Igbo Women and Political Participation in Nigeria* presents women politics in traditional Igbo society in four stages: (a) the precolonial period (b) the colonial period (c) the decolonization politics (d) post-independence politics.

According to Chukwu (2009), in pre-colonial Igbo society, social roles and responsibility were the channels through which power was diffused and gender equality was measured through comparative worth:

Hierarchical relationships in Igbo society were determined by age, experience, ability, marital status, and rites of initiation. Individuals earned power, authority, and respect as a result of their moral probity, leadership charisma, persuasive oratory, heroic military service or gallant prowess as well as intellectual and business acumen-attributes that were not the sole possession of one gender Chukwu (2005).

By this, Chukwu means that a person's gender does not determine the magnitude of power and authority within the person's command. In other words, the social, political or cultural responsibility of an individual was not dependent on gender but on personal qualities, qualifications and experience.

Chukwu goes ahead to list some female political structures through which women exercised power and authority. They are: The all-female age grade, the Women's Title Society, *Otu Odu* (Ivory society) in Onitsha, the *Ogbuefi* (cow-killer) society in Oguta (this is the highest and most important female society in Oguta), the *Ogbagidi*, *Ogbunobodo* (the one who kills in the town square) in Nsukka, *Iyamba* in Arochukwu, *Ekwe* in Nnobi, *Owene* in Onicha-ugbo and *Lolo anyi* (our queen) in Nsukka - Lolo is the highest and most important female title in Nsukka.

These titles, as Chukwu explained, gave social status, political power and religious power to women who were members. She stated that some of these women were seen as "men" and enjoyed certain privileges like admittance into exclusive men societies such as the *Ekpe* of the Aro, the *Ohafia* and the *Ikamuo* of the Oguta. Among these titles, the *Isi Ada* and the all-female age grade were the most powerful and most respected.

Isi Ada: She is the oldest daughter of a lineage. In some polities, *Isi Ada* played political, religious and judicial roles. These roles include: taking charge of all female deities in her lineage, performing cleansing and propitiatory functions, representing the women of her lineage, standing as the spokesperson and mother of the women in her lineage. She was the only woman who attended lineage meetings and, in some communities, the *Isi Ada* could take part in decision-making process while in others, she was just an observer. She relates the concerns of the women to the men in the all-male state or village assembly Chukwu G (2009).

All-Female Age Grade: The age grade system was one through which special social duties and responsibilities were assigned to different segments of the society's population based on the principle of seniority. The level of power and authority wielded by members depended on their advancement in age. Chukwu, citing John (2000) gives an example of the Ukeabua Ndinyom age grade (the women's executive arm) of matrilineal Ohafia society, where women performed both executive and judicial functions in the society. She explains that these political institutions buttressed above were in existence and through them, women wielded political power and authority before colonization set in.

Women in Politics: The Colonial Era:

According to Chukwu, colonization tampered with the channels through which women exercised political power and authority. Activities like masquerading, decision making, political, judicial and executive power were overthrown through the introduction of urbanization, commercialization, and introduction of new technologies. While men were trained to adapt to these changes for the purpose of enhancing the indirect rule of the Europeans, women were left behind. The colonial administrators imposed the western concept of state, family, and gender roles... the indirect rule also imposed on the Igbos, government through male authorities and formalized male institutions, Chukwu (2009).

This new colonial system rendered useless the women groups participating in checks and balances amongst other changes. Chukwu explains that with the intrusion of the British colonial rule, male

dominance became very pronounced relegating women to the side. Men were taught to communicate in English and this contributed to enhancing their social roles and educational experience. Through education, the men were taught special skills matching the use of new technologies. They were employed in native courts, the transport industry, mines, Christian missions, trade companies, etc. women on the other hand, had limited access to the newly introduced western education, which by extension limited them also in other social, political, religious and economic responsibilities.

However, women still demonstrated their power by opposing the colonial administration through various means like boycotts, riots, strikes, sit-ins etc. this resulted to some successful female revolutions like the 1916 demonstration in reaction to the colonial control of the market place; the 1925 *Nwaobiala* movement to restore societal order and preserve Igbo heritage; the 1929 Water Rate Demonstrations; the 1929 Women's War; the Anti-Fax Demonstrations of the 1930s, the Price control and Produce inspection protest and the pioneer Oil Mill Demonstrations of the 1940s-1950s, Chukwu (2009, 203-36).

Decolonization Politics

Chukwu presents a number of female political organization that played active roles in the decolonization process. They include: The Enugu Women Association (EWA) and The Aba Women Association (AWA) under the leadership of Margaret Ekpo. Political parties allowed platforms that accommodated women and this way, few women were able to hold political positions. Women like Mrs. E. Iheukwumere and Mrs. Mary Nzimiro became members of the National Executive Council (NEC) and the Central Working Committee (CWC) of the NCNC in the 1950s. Mrs. Margaret R. Nwogu contested for the Orlu southern Constituency but she lost. All these, to Chukwu's understanding were clear indications that in spite of the perversion of Igbo heritage by colonization, efforts were still made during the decolonization period to uphold the original equality of men and women in Igbo land.

Post-Independence Politics

In the post-independence politics of Nigeria, Chukwu argues that the imbalance between the military and civilian leadership was disadvantageous to women. According to her, the military frowned at women's participation in politics and while the civilian government permitted this, northern women were disenfranchised leaving only southern women with the right to vote and be voted for. The few southern women who contested were not elected into office. Women therefore did not occupy any significant position in the Nigerian government. In the southern region however, Janet Mokelu and Flora Azikiwe were elected to the Eastern Working Committee of the NCNC between 1957 and 1965. Chukwu (2015) presents a list of other women who got involved in politics during this period.

On the whole, Chukwu's analysis implies that the women of the traditional Igbo society were politically active before colonization set in. In other words, she is of the view that the issue of the marginalization of women was an imposed culture on the Igbo society by the Europeans. It could also be understood from her argument that despite this colonial influence upon women participation in politics, women still exercised power through various means. They remained politically active through the colonial, decolonization and post-colonial periods irrespective of the limitations they had to face as a result of colonial influence.

Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo on Igbo Women in Politics

Akachi Ezeigbo, quoting Mba (1982:36) states that: “The strength of Igbo women in the traditional society lied in their forming their own strong organizations where they controlled their own affairs and possessed political influence on the basis of their collective strength.”

Thus, Akachi Ezeigbo, in agreement with Chukwu’s claim about women’s participation in checks and balances, states that though women were excluded from participating in political decisions affecting the community at large, they had complete control of the affairs concerning themselves. They were therefore not completely submerged or tyrannized.

In agreement with Chukwu’s claim about women exercising power through female groups and organizations, Ezeigbo presents two strong women organizations that cut across every Igbo society. They include: The *Umuada* (organization of patrilineage daughters) and the *Alutaradi* (organization of patrilineage wives). The *Umuada* was more powerful than the *Alutaradi*. They were influential in their natal homes and their advice and decisions were accepted with little opposition from the male members of the patrilineage. The *Alutaradi* was less influential however, their strength lied in their cooperation and their ability to make their voices heard.

Ezeigbo also discussed other women political organizations like the *Nluikwa*, an institution of patrilineage daughters who remain in their father’s house and bear children (hopefully males). They had rights to their father’s property till their sons grew of age to claim right to these properties.

A Critical Look at Chukwu and Ezeigbo’s Claim

Chukwu and Ezeigbo appear to support the claim that women had an active participation in the politics of the traditional Igbo society. In other words, they imply that women were not marginalized politically in the traditional Igbo society. For Chukwu, women were more active politically in the traditional Igbo society than in the contemporary Igbo society. According to her argument, marginalization became a reality during the colonial administration. Prior to this period, women were politically active as the Igbo society operated on a dual-gender system of association that enabled women to maintain certain economic, political and social organizations that protected their interests. With the down of colonial administration, a new system was introduced and women’s active participation in politics was marred, such that the current political system in Nigeria favours men more than women.

It is however, important to point out some lapses in their argument supporting women’s active participation in the politics in the traditional Igbo society. With reference to access, equal participation, equal representation, gender equity and gender relations as the criteria to be employed in evaluating these claims, we can decide whether or to what extent Igbo women are being marginalized. In reaction to Chukwu’s claims, it is important to note that having one woman participate in some male functions (as was the case of the *Isi Ada*), does not justify women’s active participation in politics. The term “all-male” or “men exclusive” state or village assembly indicates gender dominance in decision making. Women are restricted from attending these assemblies. They are rather being represented by one person who speaks not for them but on their behalf. Their inability to take part and speak for themselves or make their contribution is a clear

sign of marginalization. In some cases, as Chukwu explains, the *Isa Ada* is just an observer. This reflects the Merriam Websters definition of marginalization as "... being relegated to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group."

Other instances of traditional groups and organizations that gave women access to exercise political power, as stated by Ezigbo and Chukwu do not portray them playing a major role in decision making and political representation as it affects both gender in the community. Most of the decisions they were allowed to make were decisions affecting women alone. The power they exercised was exclusive to women.

These claims therefore fail in the criteria of equal participation, equal representation, and gender equity. This is because though women were allowed to exercise power on certain levels, their political rights were not equal with the political rights accorded to men.

Cultural Marginalization of Women in the Traditional and Contemporary Igbo Society

People in every society have traditions, customs, values, norms and ethics peculiar to them which they observe. The observation of these written or unwritten rules molds them into who they are and what they are known for. These rules give them a trademark such that the actions and inactions of an individual can be traced to a particular group of people. This is why today; one can correctly guess another's hometown from the person's behaviour, observations, speech or actions. The totality of these traditions, customs, values, beliefs and observations is what we know today as culture. Therefore, Iwuobi (2008) defines culture as the integrated sum total of learned behaviour patterns which are manifested and shared by members of a society. These also include the shared beliefs, values, traditions, outlooks or characteristics of a particular social population (42).

Different aspects of culture were created to checkmate different aspects of life. Cultural observations checkmate and manage occurrences related to violence and conflict, maintenance of morality, promotion of respect, maintenance of orderliness and observation of hierarchy. All these in turn ensure a peaceful communal living. When respect, peace, morality and orderliness are maintained, a healthy communal life is ensured.

There are so many cultural observances that have been established to implement these purposes stated above. Some of these observations come in the areas of marriage, religious practices, customary practices etc. In drafting the rules that guide the proper observation of these customs in some societies, it has been discovered that some of these cultural observations favour one gender over the other thus raising the issue of gender bias. Such is the case in the Igbo society. Women are believed to be marginalized in the area of cultural observations and practices. These claims would be reviewed and from the reviews, a decision would be made on whether women are indeed being marginalized culturally.

Cultural Practices Relating to Infidelity in Marriage

In a dialogical interview conducted by this researcher with a woman married to a man from Nsukka in Enugu state, this researcher asked the woman about customs that guided the institution of marriage and her response was unbelievable. According to her, any woman married to a man from Nsukka stands the risk of running mad if ever she gets sexually involved with another man. In other words, the punishment for a woman who commits adultery according to the Nsukka tradition is insanity. When asked the punishment for a man who did the same, she said there was none. This

implies that in Nsukka community, the grave punishment for adultery was exclusive to women leaving the men to go scot free from the same action. This cultural practice is not limited to Nsukka town alone; it extends to a good number of Igbo communities. This is unfair for women who are victimized by this custom. The practice is marginalization as it gives men a freedom to sexual preferences while it keeps women tied to their spouses. The cultural implication for similar crimes should be equal not biased.

Widowhood Practices

Widowhood practices are one of the cultural observations that are very detrimental to the women of the traditional Igbo society; and to an extent, it still affects women in some communities in our contemporary Igbo society. Upon the death of her husband, a woman is exposed to many cultural observations that do not help but add misery to her poor emotional and psychological condition. This must have prompted Donbraye in her submission that the low status of women has resulted in subservient treatment of widowhood (1999). Some of these observations are stated below:

Appearance: when you see an Igbo woman recently widowed anywhere in the Igbo land and in some scenarios outside Igbo land, one would know she just lost her husband. She doesn't necessarily need to have puffy eyes as a result of constant tears for one to identify her as a widow. Her physical appearance gives her out immediately. For the period of 12 months, a widow is expected to shave her hair and dress in black or white coloured dresses till her period of mourning is completed. This is not the same for a man who loses his wife. He mourns his wife as it pleases him and the few observations, he might choose to adhere to are not strict and stringent as it is in the case of a woman (Uchendu, 1965, 86)

Proof of innocence: In most communities of the traditional Igbo society, a woman is expected to undergo some barbaric traditional rites and practices to prove that she has no hand in the death of her husband. It is well understood that people do weird and unbelievable things as it concerns cases of death and murder however, imposing barbaric and unhealthy practices like bathing or drinking the water used in bathing a corpse is extreme. In the end, some women who undergo these rites turn out to be innocent. The case of a man who loses his wife is not the same. He is not subjected to rites of this nature. In an unsaid manner, the implication of this bias is that a woman worth nothing in death and so, a man has no business murdering his wife while for the woman; the death of her husband could mean a lot of gain to her male children especially when the dead husband possessed a lot of wealth and property. This practice is very inhumane and amounts to not just marginalization but oppression too (Ibid).

Ikombara: The Ikombara is another cultural practice that reflects marginalization of women in the traditional Igbo society. Ikombara is a practice common among the Ngwa people of Abia state. Meek (1937) gives a description of this practice as one in which a husband allows a friend or acquaintance to sleep with his wife regularly on a night of the eight-day week after which the man in question gives two jars of wine, a leg of an animal, a chicken and some cash to the husband as gifts. He is also expected to assist the husband in farm work when called upon. This practice is said to be common in the cases of elderly men married to young women. From Meeks description, it can be deduced that this practice portrays women as sex currencies used to buy workforce and acquire gifts for her husband.

To some scholars however, the Ikombara is a favourable practice to women. Adimora (1990) sees it as one of the channels through which women exercise power as they are left with the option of picking the man of their choice. She also believes it is an advantageous outlet for women to derive pleasure and satisfaction from younger men. Uchendu (1988) as cited by Adimora (1990) states the following as the advantages of the Ikombara: “A woman depends on her iko for new dresses, clearing the bush, educating her children and raising trading capital...” He further explains that the ikombara is advantageous for women with impotent husbands as it helps her bear children and through them have a right to her husband’s property.

Despite these justifications, the fact still remains that it is still the initial decision of the man to put out his wife as a concubine to another man. She remains under the obligation to fulfil her husband’s decision with little choice of deciding who she prefers to lie with. What happens to a woman who has no preference amongst the men in question? Or a woman who has no interest in sharing another man’s bed besides her husband’s? This is abuse and should not be sugar coated.

Other Cultural Practices that Discriminate against Women

Generally, Igbo women are denied participation in a lot of cultural practices which men enjoy. Participation of women in activities of this nature is considered taboos in Igbo land. A taboo is anything forbidden or disapproved for religious or by social custom, Mariri (1998).

Agbogu and Igbokwe (2015) citing Anozie (2003:157) and Iwuchukwu (2006:205) list a number of activities considered taboos for women in Igbo culture.

- Women are not allowed to eat the gizzard of a fowl
- A woman must kneel or squat if she must take palm wine before men. In other words, women are not permitted to take palm wine in the presence of men and if they must, it must be taken kneeling or squatting (a sign of submission).
- A pregnant woman should not eat egg or grasscutter meat. It is important to note that egg and grass cutter meat are proteinous meals which are in no way harmful to a woman or the child in her womb.
- Women do not touch a kola nut tree. This can compel one to ask if a kola nut tree is gender sensitive too.
- A woman should not be the first to taste the fruit of any plant.
- Women do not break the kola nut when a man is around. In other words, the prayers or blessings said by a woman during the breaking of a kola nut holds no water when a man is around.
- Women are not shown a kola nut during its presentation.
- Women are not allowed to enter the obi (elders section of the compound) during her mensuration.

There are other cultural limitations for the Igbo women not listed by Agbogu and Igbokwe. For instance, In Igbo land generally, when a cock crows at an odd hour it is considered to be a misleading informant and as such, the cock must be killed. When this happens, the cock is eaten by men only. Women do not participate in eating it. Finally, an Igbo adage states thus: *a si na e jide anu egbe n'aka, a juba ma nwaanyi aga eri?* (When a kite is caught the participation of a woman in eating it is questioned). This adage implies that it is a taboo for a woman to eat the meat of a Kite. It is a bird to be consumed by men only. These cultural observations silently attach more importance to men over the women. It sends a message of male dominance over the women and this boils down to marginalization.

The Present-Day Realities of Igbo Cultural Practices

With the enthronement of Western civilization which in turn has introduced various groups, organizations and bodies fighting for the rights and liberation of women, most of these rigid cultural practices have been mitigated. Unhealthy widowhood practices are not as popular as they used to be. Today, some Igbo communities do not compel women to cut their hair. Wearing of white or black mourning clothes for a period of time is still common but the duration of time is no longer as lengthy as it used to be. All these are as a result of modernization, Christianity, and various women liberation movements of present-day society. Most of these cultural practices, especially the ones that give preference to men over women still exist and need to be permanently eradicated. The existence of these practices still confirms the marginalization of women both in the traditional and contemporary Igbo society in the area of culture.

Findings and Conclusions

Based on the arguments presented and reviewed, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Women of the traditional Igbo society were marginalized politically and culturally compared to the women of the contemporary Igbo society. Though there are claims that the society created outlets for women to exercise power, they were excluded from making certain decisions that affected the community at large. As stated by some of the works reviewed in this study, some gatherings were “all-male” or “exclusive to men” and the women who were permitted to attend these gatherings (as in the case of Isi Ada) were mere observers. Their opinions were not important.
- Colonization had a worsening effect on the political marginalization of women in the traditional Igbo society however; it cannot be seen as the origin of marginalization of women in the traditional Igbo society. It also has no effect on the cultural marginalization of women. Marginalization had been in existence and this is why it was easy for the Europeans to work with the men more than they did with the women.
- Political and cultural marginalization is still a reality in contemporary Igbo society. There are improvements as women now participate in politics and decision making that affects the nation; however there are still limitations to how far a woman can go in politics. We are yet to have an elected female governor in the Igbo states in Nigeria; we still do not have women as traditional rulers, neither do we have women among the council of elders in various Igbo communities.

In conclusion, neither women of the traditional Igbo society nor those of the contemporary Igbo society meet the criteria of equal access, equal participation, equal representation and gender equity in the areas of politics and culture. Therefore, we can say that the women of both the traditional and contemporary Igbo society are politically and culturally marginalized.

Recommendations

Marginalization of women is a reality and women of the Igbo society are victims of political and cultural marginalization. Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made. Firstly, Women should be given the opportunity to explore higher leadership positions in our society. There is no personal quality in men who occupy these positions that cannot be found in a woman. Some women are talented leaders and should be allowed to spread their wings and explore their capabilities. Secondly, more awareness should be created to curb unfavorable cultural practices that affect women. Thirdly and finally, more research should be done to explore other areas in which Igbo women and women in general are still marginalized. Some of these areas include: economic marginalization, social marginalization, gender preference and educational marginalization.

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