

Soothing Igbo Women's Psyche for Enhanced Development in Contemporary Society

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Abstract

The experiences of Igbo women which are constructed by strong patriarchal culture and colonial disruptions seem to prop a passive attitude among women. Gender relations have favoured the men and active participation in the public sphere or community developmental strides are largely seen as men's affair. This has impacted the mindset of some women who just resign to fate. This mental suppression of the strengths and capabilities of Igbo women impacts negatively on development in society. Therefore, with insights drawn from Obioma Nnaemeka's indigenous feminist theory, "negofeminism," this qualitative paper investigates the impact of Igbo women's inglorious gender experiences on their psyche and how it impedes on development in Igbo society. This paper adopts the descriptive research design and draws data from interviews, participant observation and extant literature. Findings show that even though Igbo women are industrious and are revered, the gender inequity women live with in the society affects their mindset especially the rural dwellers. To enhance development among the Igbo in the contemporary society, therefore, the mindset of Igbo women need to be soothed through the instrumentality of gender inclusion in all fronts of community life. Women should imbibe the tenets of Nnaemeka's negofeminism so as to negotiate to include themselves in the scheme of things.

Introduction

Over the years, feminists and womanists have continued to struggle for women's rights, liberation from oppression and subjugation and their emancipation from oppressive structures, cultures and religious practices. They have continued to assert the humanness of all persons – men and women and the need for a critical look at the way women have been marginalized and treated inequitably in the society. Igbo women of south eastern Nigeria are not exceptions to this oppressive treatment and apparently, most of the scholars in the forefront, in the campaign against such oppression of women, using various indigenous models, are from the Igbo extraction of the country. They include; Catherine Acholonu, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Chimamanda Adichie, Obioma Nnaemeka, Chioma Opara, among others.

Admittedly, Igbo women enjoy some level of reverence, especially as mothers. Chinweizu (1990: 121ff) notes that women savour a "paradise of traditional privileges." He suggests that women actually have more advantages than men, claiming that, "feminism has succeeded, worldwide, in enlarging women's opportunities without reducing their traditional privileges." In essence, the status of mothers in Igboland is tremendously elevated as well as tasking (Jell-Bahlsen, 2011; Miller, 2012; Wariboko, 2020). She foresees and directs the affairs of the home and her children and the society respects her status. Her children are also accorded such respect in their maternal homes. The children also reciprocate to their maternal family members with the same degree of reverence they give to their mother. In Anambra State for

instance, children kneel in reverence to greet their maternal family members irrespective of the family member's age. More so, in some Igbo communities, it is a cultural practice for men, irrespective of age, to literally bow or kneel to show respect to the daughters in the family and are usually very protective of the daughters.

That notwithstanding, wife battering/abuse, girl/women silencing, inimical widowhood practices, denied economic and education opportunities, dehumanization, commoditization, subjugation and forced marriage have all been widely practiced and condoned in Igbo society. Derogatory naming practices, violence, pejorative songs/aphorisms that engender inferiority complex, negative stereotyping, humiliations, treatment as perpetual minors/dependants and many more obnoxious socio-cultural and religious practices that are misogynistic have bedeviled women in Igbo land. The plight of Igbo women and indeed, that of Nigerian women has been adequately documented by scholars (Ezeigbo, 2012: 4-10); Chukwuma, 2012; Ezenweke, 2015; Oduyoye, 2002). Most pioneer Igbo novelists and literary artists like Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa and Elechi Amadi graphically represents the above conditions of Igbo women, particularly during the pre-colonial and colonial times.

It goes without saying that some of the aforementioned experiences of Igbo women have greatly bastardized their mentality that they tend to reflexively accept and bear oppression silently in the guise of culture or even participate in fostering their own oppression or that of their fellow women. This pre-colonial state of affairs, scholars argue, was exacerbated by colonialism. Women were stripped of the considerable autonomy and power they wielded by the colonialists (Anikpo 1998; Osim 2014; Anikwenze 2021). Thus, Igbo women, just like women elsewhere, over the years, have received inequitable treatment in the society (Oduyoye 2002; Ezeigbo 2012; Smith 2019). It can be argued that some of the oppressions Igbo women faced in the past, like harsh widowhood practices and mandatory female genital mutilation are gradually fizzling out. Nevertheless, many have endured and others present in disguised or in new garbs. In Oduyoye's (2002: 157) words;

when I look at the mold in which religion has cast women, the psychological binds of socioeconomic realities that hold us in place, our political powerlessness, and the daily diminution of our domestic influence ..., I call what I see injustice. No other word fits.

In contemporary times, such patriarchal relics like the second fiddle position of women, culture of silence, subjugation in marriage, negative stereotyping of women and so on, have endured. These structures that have advertently or inadvertently made women think and feel less of themselves, have apparently limited them and their developmental and progressive prowess. This have directly and indirectly affected development in Igboland negatively as women are either excluded, passive or subdued; hence, women's inability to maximize their potentials and contribute meaningfully to the development of Igboland. Saadawi (1980) as cited in Ezeigbo (2011: 189) stresses this fact in the following words: "the underprivileged status of women, their relative backwardness, leads to an essential backwardness in society as a whole."

This paper investigates the level of laceration in the psyche of Igbo women and its relationship with development in Igbo society. The goal is to decipher the effects of the disdain, exclusion, lack of empowerment and culturally provoked melancholy of women on the

advancement of Igbo society and to chart a way forward from this age-long quagmire. This qualitative paper adopts the descriptive research design and draws insight from literature, interviews and participant observation. More so, Obioma Nnaemeka's 'negofeminism' is used as the theoretical basis of the paper. Consequently, in this paper, the plight of Igbo women is discussed, followed by the contributions and prospects of Igbo women to development. Finally, the need to mollify the frame of mind and state of Igbo women is campaigned for and conclusion drawn.

Theoretical framework

'Nego-feminism' was put forward by Obioma Nnaemeka in her meticulously researched 2005 paper titled: *Nego-feminism: Theorizing, Practicing and Pruning Africa's way*. She advocates that home-grown theories and models be used to address issues of gender and feminism in Africa. This is born out of the fact that issues of gender in Africa differ significantly from issues of gender in the West. Nnaemeka therefore proposes 'negofeminism' as a culturally apposite and compliant model. According to Ezeigbo (2012), negofeminism stands for 'negotiation' and 'no ego' feminism. Negofeminism espouses negotiation with cultural bottlenecks in the society as well as feminism devoid of ego neither from the women, nor from men in the society. She argues that African women should be ready to negotiate with and around men in differing situations in ways that are compatible with Africa's historical and cultural milieu. Nnaemeka espouses negotiation and mutual support which according to her, is normative in Africa.

Nevertheless, negotiation, in Nnaemeka's view, does not connote absolute non-belligerence. In her words, a woman should know "when, where and how to detonate patriarchal landmines. What this means is that she knows when, where and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts" (Nnaemeka 2005: 377-378). Nego-feminism is an indigenous model that advocates that all human beings, irrespective of sex work in partnership to keep society moving. Alkali, Talif and Jan (2013: 11-12) opine that, "nego-feminism surrounds issues of peace or conflict management, negotiation, complementarity, give-and-take, collaboration, bargaining, mediation, and arbitration."

Nonetheless, this theory has been adjudged inadequate as an African model owing to the fact that Africa as a continent is not homogenous. More so, the suffix "feminism" on "nego-feminism" is offensive to some African women who make conscious efforts to dissociate themselves from the term 'feminism' which they think is not congruous with African culture and lifestyle. They would rather coin an original term to drive the struggles of women in Africa.

Nego-feminism is significant to this inquiry on the relationship between the subdued state of women and advancement in Igbo land. Jell-Bahlsen (2011: 202) claims that, in his speech during the celebration of the 50th anniversary of his novel, *Things Fall Apart* in New York City in 2008, Achebe unequivocally "linked the decline of his culture to ignorance of one of its core values, namely respect for the female side of the universe". Therefore, negofeminism recommends the application of negotiation as well as no ego tactics to achieve inclusion, equity and gender sensitivity. This demands that steps will be taken by the society to unlearn the practices that are absurd and demean women. Alkali, Talif and Jan (2013: 11) note that "efforts are needed to proffer ways for women to achieve their objectives without recourse to injurious methodology. Nego.feminsim in this exact sense sets out to achieve just that."

The Plight of Igbo Women

Igbo women enjoyed a degree of autonomy and power before the advent of colonial administrators. Amadiume (1987), in her treatise, writes extensively on the powers and privileges of women in pre-colonial times. Amadiume writes about women who actually attained the status of men as male daughters and female husbands and were respected as such. She also reveals that priestesses of water goddesses and other deities commanded as much respect or even more than priests.

More so, the organization of Umuada or Umuokpu (daughters of a particular lineage) also exercised huge power in their families. Ezeigbo (2011) has written extensively on authorities *umuada* wielded in pre-colonial Igboland. They served as custodian of morality and culture and ensured peace and harmony in the community. They imposed sanctions on defaulters including men and had tactical ways of protesting against whatever they perceived as injustice or obstruction to the free flow of community life. Igbo women in pre-colonial times also had economic power to some extent through the proceeds from their farm produce which they used to support their families. Ikwuano women were known for assisting their male counterparts in politics and agriculture to boost the national economy (Ndubuwa and Oko, 2021:165).

That notwithstanding, since Igboland is a strong patriarchal society, men were still in charge and apparently perpetrated some unjust practices on the female folk. For instance, young girls were given to marriage without their consent, female children were named without much fondness like male children, polygamy, which Nasimiyu-Wasike (2001: 104) describes as a system that “exploits women for the benefit of men.” was in vogue, female children were seen and treated as commodities and appreciated less than their male counterparts. This is evident in the kind of names given to female children. They sometimes sound like commiseration or subtle show of disgust or a struggle to ‘reassure’ that the female has some value too. For instance, names like Nwanyibuife/Nwanyibunwa (a female child is also something/a female is a child), Nwanyikwa (a female child again?) and Ejinwanyimenini (what can one do with a female?) are far from liberating (Mbonu, 2010; Nwajiaku, 2011).

However, there appears to be a consensus among Igbo gender scholars that colonialism actually eroded women of the benefits and powers they enjoyed in traditional Igbo societies (Anikpo 1998; Osim 2014; Anikwenze 2021). Uchem (2002: 89) avers that “colonial policies upset the system, tilting it in favor of men and in the direction of the Western Christian cultural inferiorization of women.” The colonial administrators appointed only men as warrant chiefs, court clerks and messengers. According to Osim (2014: 220), colonial administrators educated men and appointed them as “local judges, chiefs, native authorities, police, medical assistants, tax collectors, and workers in mines and plantations, colonial power reshaped gender relations in their favour.” Describing this phenomenon, Osim (2014: 213) avers that “colonialism polarized most institutions along gender lines.” Thus, women’s political and economic powers were eroded and they were given gendered education that only prepared them to become good cooks, housekeepers, nurturers as mothers, sisters and wives. While the men studied courses like government, engineering, medicine and so on, women’s curriculum was in the most part, inundated with domestic courses such as home economics, food and nutrition, sewing and knitting, and so on. In the area of religion where women hitherto were somewhat influential as

priestesses, heroines, warriors (Achebe 2005, as cited in Okafor 2012: 5), and even divinities, Christianity, which is part of the package of colonialism, rebutted the authenticity of traditional religion and in fact jeopardized women's solidarity and by implication strength, by encouraging division and animosity between the 'light' (Christians) and 'darkness' (traditional worshippers). The Christianity they preached to Igbo people was one that, borrowing the words of Uchem (2002) 'inferiorized' women.

Thus, colonialism and its accompanying religion further strengthened patriarchy and the subjugation and invisibility of women in Igbo society. Igbo women were therefore silenced and relegated to the background socially, economically and religiously. An Igbo adage says; *aru gbaa afo obulu omenala*. This adage simply states that when an abomination or an abominable act is allowed or ignored for a year (simply indicating a long time), it becomes culture (the people's way of life). The suppression of Igbo women in its exacerbated state therefore, became the 'culture' in Igbo land.

For instance, even in present times, disparaging aphorisms such as *di bu ugwu nwanyi* (husband is a woman's dignity), which gives the impression that women are worthless in themselves or make women feel useless in themselves are still used (Wariboko 2020). Moreover, women and girls are expected to endure harsh treatments in silence and accept their pitiful lot (dressed in cultural and religious garb). Childless women are still derided and exposed to contempt and psychological onslaught. Bigamy is not considered an offence among the Igbo and in the case of a divorce, the woman takes all the blame and looses out. She will have to forfeit all she has built with her husband, including their children. It is forbidden for an Igbo woman to lead, especially where there is a male, even if it is a child. They are also deprived from inheriting from their family assets. Such assets are considered exclusive preserve of males. Hence, Igbo women are not sufficiently empowered to synergize effectively with their male counterparts for rapid and holistic advancement in Igbo region. Rather, they are socialized to live for and please men. The fact that the woman in Africa lives to serve and satisfy the male, irrespective of her numerous potentials is corroborated by Fanusie (2001) and Nwajiaku (2011). Furthermore, taboos in Igboland are usually targeted against women and most of them are limiting (Ume and Mbonu, as cited in Ezeigbo (2012: 34).

More so, modern Igbo female names like Kosisochukwu (as it pleases God), Njideka (holding or having something is better), Nkechinyere (that which God gave) are marginalizing. Kosisochukwu is a kind of expression of discontent and submission to God's will. While Njideka connotes passive acceptance of what is, against what is desired, Nkechinyere expresses that the female child is that which God gave, perhaps against that which is preferred. For Mbonu (2010: 75), these pejorative female names "represent a marker, which suggests ideologies of subordination and marginalization." These experiences of Igbo women have in no little way, stunted their salient contributions to the development of Igboland as they deal terrible blow to their subconscious and self-worth.

Until recently, with the help of education and the peddling of feminist ideologies that seem to have opened up some Igbo women's eyes to their rights and the need for feminine gender emancipation in Igboland, Igbo women, but for few exceptions, have largely been subservient, silenced, denied their basic rights under the pretext of religion or culture. The treatment meted out on Igbo women, to put it mildly, is incapacitating and numbing. More worrisome is the fact that this affects the productivity of Igbo women because their minds have

been conditioned that they are limited and are not given opportunity for self-realization in the society. As a result, they not only embrace, but foster the traditions that have held them down. They either believe it is divinely-ordained, natural or simply their fate. For instance, it is Igbo women that actually champion inhumane treatment meted out on widows in Igbo land. Ezeigbo (2011: 193) decries such actions in the following words;

There have been some outcries against the excesses of *Umuada* who have been accused of high-handedness in their treatment of fellow women in Igbo patriarchy. Some of their victims are widows who they have subjected to inhuman treatment especially during the painful moments of mourning their husbands.

As a result of the prevailing circumstances in the society, women have subconsciously accepted that they are inferiorly capacitated and lack the competence to do much for the society. Nnuego, in Emecheta's (1994) *The Joys of Motherhood* laments that the world is the man's; women can only help them build it. Such defeatist mindset absolutely limits the woman and by implication, progress in the society. The marginalization and domination of women disempowers them either as daughter, wife or even mother from engaging in serious developmental activities in the society. This is usually common among rural and uneducated women. More so, they are not given the opportunity to tap from their plethora of strengths and abilities so as to enhance development in the society. The problem of exclusion of women is therefore counterintuitive and plagues the society. This problem is not exclusively women issues. Okure (2013: 371) will rather call them "humanity issue[s]." Thanks to education and heightened gender sensitization which canvasses for gender equity and have made phenomenal impact in breaking some of the shackles of female marginalization, subjugation and domination in Igbo land. However, more is still left to be desired. Nnaemeka's (2005) negofeminism is handy to do more to alleviate the plight of Igbo women that inhibit progress in the society. Negofeminism makes room for social interdependence that is liberating and not oppressive.

Igbo Women and Development

The contributions of Igbo women to development in times past and even in present times cannot be overlooked despite numerous limiting factors and their depiction as powerless. Igbo women's doggedness and resilience in their developmental pursuit is still glaring even though they consciously or unconsciously nurse wounded psyches. Miller (2012: 300) argues that "women are the foundational structure of African society upon which their children and husbands build." Igbo women have contributed and still contribute immensely to the economic, social, and political wellbeing of Igbo people and the nation at large. Most times, their contributions are considered as mere gender roles of women and therefore overlooked or not appreciated. For instance, women's tremendous effort in rearing and nurturing their children (male and female) to responsible adulthood (womanhood/manhood) is a feat to reckon with. Diala-Ogamba (2012: 310) rightly states that in a patriarchal society, "only the achievement of the men counts." Diala-Ogamba praises Okonkwo (the hero)'s mother in the novel *Things Fall Apart* who took over the responsibilities of the home as a result of their father's laziness. She was strong enough to raise him (a strong man) and his siblings before her demise. Nneka! -

mother is indeed supreme in Igboland. Women are the ones that actually ‘make’ the men that deride them as weak and powerless because they are the ones that rock the cradle. Oduyoye (2002: 206) therefore states; “women’s demand for fuller participation is therefore not a self-serving call. Our accumulated wisdom of mothering can serve the nation by community building.”

Writing about Igbo women’s participation and contributions to religious development, Okafor (2012: 10) asserts that “in Igboland, women ... function as priests, mediums, oracles and other agents of the supernatural ... Allied to the profession of priesthood is that of divination and mediumship where women excel in varied functions as revealers, fortune-tellers, and counselors.”

Furthermore, Jell-Bahlsen (2011) tells the biography of *Eze mmiri*, Madam Martha Mberekpe of Orsu-Obodo, Oguta who was the rallying point of most Oguta indigenes in religious matters. She was a priestess of Oguta’s water deities and also possessed healing powers that attracted numerous clients to her. As a result, she was economically buoyant and supported her family and step children. Sadly enough, according to Jell-Bahlsen’s narrative, her death was precipitated by the same children she supported just because she didn’t have a surviving son. Furthermore, Miller (2012) succinctly states that women are the backbone of traditional African society. Economically and otherwise, they contributed to the development and wellbeing of the families and by extension, the society. In pre-colonial times, they engaged in farming and trading and in contemporary times, they take up white collar jobs and engage in diverse kinds of businesses to support their husbands, homes and the society. Little wonder Okonkwo’s wives in the novel, *Things Fall Apart* are described by Okafor (2012: 13) as strong women, “that are largely responsible for his wealth and the running of his household.”

Women in Igbo land have also organized themselves in groups such as the *umuada* (daughters) and *umunwunyeedi* or *ndi inyom* (married women) so as to participate in the smooth running of their communities. Until their activities were disrupted by the colonialists, they used to contribute meaningfully to the government of their various communities. These groups in the normal characteristic resilience of Igbo women have endured till present times but seem to have been affected by the earlier stated *alu gbaa afo obulu omenala*. They, according to Ezeigbo (2011), especially the *umuada* can also act as peace brokers. Naturally, men have been associated with aggression and conflict, while women in their motherly and tenderly hearts are associated with peace. Chungi and Mborong (2011) aver that “the motherly character of peace remains unavoidable as the struggle for durable peace in the world and Africa continues” (p. 112). Ezeigbo therefore believes that *umuada* can actually play conciliatory roles in Igbo society for enhanced development. No meaningful development takes place in the midst of conflict and crises. Hence, the need for women to come in to broker peace in Igbo land. In her words, “concerted efforts should be made to restore peace in all the crisis-ridden parts of Igbo land; and women have a strong role to play in achieving this” (p. 196). According to Nwaoru (2013), the capacity of rural women in conflict resolution, especially family conflict resolution, is next to none. Unfortunately, in contemporary times, Igbo women seem not to be adequately carried along in peace making and peacebuilding.

If Igbo people must break the jinx of retarded, parochial or slow human, economic, social and political development, then all hands (both men and women) must be on deck. Some Igbo women who are abreast with their rights as humans and perhaps, like Nnaemeka (2005)

suggests, know the art of negotiating with and around patriarchy and sometimes, detonating patriarchal landmines, are bold testimonies to what Igbo women can do. The numerous feats of Igbo women like Late Prof Dora Akunyili as the Director General of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a one-time Minister for Finance in Nigeria and presently the first female and first African to become the Director General of World Trade Organization (WTO), Dr Oby Ezekwesili for her admirable feats in politics and so on who have not allowed cultural constraints to limit them speaks volumes. Given the required support and an enabling environment, Igbo women contribute significantly to the development of society. It is worthy to note that it is just a fraction of Igbo women who consciously and deliberately exclude themselves from cultural interpellations that subdue women that have been able to make these meaningful contributions. Some of these 'feminists', (not by title or appellation, but in deed), employ various tactics in order to be relevant and contribute to the development of society. A greater percentage of Igbo women, mostly rural dwellers, fall into the class that needs reorientation and a reformation of their cultural outlook.

Soothing the Psyche of Igbo Women

This section espouses the inclusion of Igbo women in the scheme of things and conscious efforts to appeal to their melancholic state of mind which is occasioned by cultural restraints, that incapacitates and perpetuates passivity in them. It also campaigns for the acknowledgement and respect of Igbo women's humanity and the employment of gender equity and justice for enhanced development in Igbo land. Smith (2019) rhetorically asks: "why are women judged so stupid as to be unfit to hold important jobs or serve as political or cultural leaders? ... why are men still seen as smarter, more valuable, and deserving of more money and privilege than women?" (pp. 179-180).

Igbo women suffer cultural, religious and social limitations and drawbacks. This adversely affects their contributions to the development of Igbo land and the nation at large. It has also placed them far below their male counterparts and indeed in a sorry state. "Playing fair with women means that we not take it for granted that women are content with their situation" (Oduyoye 2002: 160). Feminism therefore, a term/practice that connotes a struggle for healing and self worth is germane in this instance. It must be noted that feminism as a practice in Nigeria and among the Igbo in particular, contrary to some opinions, is not a Western ideology. The term could be a Western import but the practice in Nigeria outlives the term. Smith (2019: 175) correctly states that "feminism has existed in many parts of the world since at least the late nineteenth century."

There is therefore an urgent need for a review of the cultural status of Igbo women, to deliberately include them in the scheme of things, amplify their voices and accord them a sense of belonging for a quantum leap in development in Igbo land. Oduyoye (2002: 158) notes; "to suffer and smile and say with resignation that nothing will ever change is to maintain that male-female relationships are beyond redemption ... Such a position does not lead to community building ... whatever does not create community is not in the best interests of humanity." Hence, the employment of Nnaemeka's negofeminism to cushion this badly tilted gender relations among the Igbo. It is high time Igbo women started negotiating their way with patriarchy for their proper inclusion, equity and demolition of the barriers to their self-

actualization. Fanusie (2001: 154) notes that “women are as human as men. So it is together that we should seek and work for the good of the human community.”

Igbo women’s psyche ought to be liberated and both men and women should synergize to liberate women from their marginalized position. Jesus Christ and even Apostle Paul for instance, even though they had patriarchal background, defied the convention and fruitfully collaborated with women and vice versa (Umoren, 2013). In like manner, negofeminism advocates for mutual support and partnership of men and women in Africa. For Nnaemeka (2005), this is normative in Africa and required for effective development.

Therefore, cultural, religious and social myths that have been used to authenticate the marginalization of women should be critically reviewed to provide a level playing ground for men and women alike to maximize their potentials for the betterment of Igbo land. Particular attention should be paid to rural women. Nwaoru (2013: 153) advocates for more emphasis on rural women who, according to him, are neglected. Nwaoru believes that the story of the ‘wise woman of Tekoa (a *village* woman)’ in 2 Samuel 14:1-22 who championed amnesty and rehabilitation as a panacea for the anarchy in King David’s family against the stipulations of the law “provides a fresh impetus to empower rural women.”

Specifically, segregations between men and women in jurisprudence and peace brokering, cultural prestige systems, inheritance laws, education and empowerment, religious priesthood, leadership positions and their likes that are simply social, religious or cultural constructs and not biologically determined can actually do better when men as well as women participate actively. Igbo women can and will do very well to enhance development in the society if the society deconstructs cultural bottlenecks, incorporates and mollifies them.

For instance, with the impression drawn from aphorisms like *di bu ugwu nwanyi*, a woman’s efforts are usually towards preparing herself for marriage and nothing more. More so, a female child that feels not needed or appreciated by her family may not make much out of her life. Their inability to take part in the assets of the family, participate in conflict resolution and peacemaking and enjoy dignity and equity in the society impedes on their abilities. However, against all odds, Igbo women have proven very industrious and quite handy in various ways (Mbonu, 2010; Ezeigbo, 2012; Ezenweke, 2015).

Nonetheless, if women can, amidst staunch patriarchy, contribute significantly to the development of society, when empowered and motivated culturally and otherwise, they can offer much more. The stranglehold of patriarchy, particularly on some rural and not formally educated women is counterintuitive. Such women are the ones who literally defend their own oppression and criticize other women who are struggling for emancipation. Such women are comfortable in their second fiddle status and scarcely apply themselves for societal development.

Therefore, to harness the potentials in Igbo women for enhanced development, women generally -old and young, married and single, urban and rural, educated and uneducated would have to form a common front. Oduyoye (2002) decries the fact that the inability of women to form a common peaceful front is often cited to deprecate their just demands or mute their voices. United, women can negotiate for their rights as humans and demand for their proper inclusion and integration so they can work in partnership with the men to achieve more in the society. A woman, Fubara (2012: 109) opines, should be “a rounded personality equipped to occupy leadership positions to effect the redemption of the nations.” This will be an uphill task

as it represents a renunciation of 'normality'. Quayson (2013: 585) notes that "women's existence is strung between traditionalism and modernity in ways that make it extremely difficult for them to attain personal freedoms without severe sacrifices or compromises. Negofeminism in its exact sense, encourages women to courageously make the 'severe sacrifices/compromise' for their freedom and indeed betterment of the society. Therefore, it is the duty of Igbo women themselves, to unite, define themselves, work on their own psyche and demand for a recognition of their humanity and their right to actively participate in all areas of life and in running of the society they belong.

Conclusion

Igbo women are a rare kind of breed. They are dogged, resilient, hardworking and supportive. They also champion complementarity. Thus they refuse to align with western kind of feminism that espouses views that are unAfrican. Much strength is embedded in Igbo women's femininity. However, they are either not given the platform to maximize their potentials and contribute to the development of the society, or not empowered to do so. Pitifully, some of these women have mastered the art of putting up with unjust structures at the expense of meaningful contributions they ought to be making to the society.

To enhance development in Igbo society therefore, the society needs to truly embrace women as contributing partners in all facets of her developmental strides. This can only be done if folklores, cultural practices, religious beliefs and rituals, aphorisms, naming practices and every other cultural norms and values that incapacitate women mentally and make them think less of themselves and their abilities are modified or even jettisoned to give way to gender inclusivity. Ultimately, Igbo women themselves should stand up to the challenge. They should synergize, negotiate with and through their culture so as to liberate their minds from every form of mental bondage and maximally contribute to development in Igbo land.

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