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Traditional Society in South-Eastern Nigeria: Implications for Women's Health

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Property in Igbo traditional land and culture refers to wealth in the forms of houses, lands, money/cash, fruit trees and animals. These are transferred from the father to his children at the man's death. Property inherited from the family usually forms part of a person's wealth in Nigeria. However, in Anambra, Igbo, women are not allowed to inherit property either from their father or their husbands. Under this arrangement, a woman is seen as an inheritable property and, therefore, not expected to own properties. The paper examines the practice of women as inheritable property of the Anambra, Igbo; analyses how these practices have impacted women's health; and ascertains whether there have been changes in these practices. The paper concludes that women as inheritable property impoverishes women and constitutes a barrier to women attaining their full potentials in Igboland, which has serious implications for their health.

Keywords: Women, Inheritable Property, Health, Traditional Society, and Feminism

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically and globally, most societies had marginalised and subordinated women. In many societies, women's place was in the home to serve and obey men because they were not regarded as full-fledged human beings. For instance, in the 1830s, the Texicans built a Baptist church at independence, which had two doors: one for white males and the other door for women and other creatures (Baptist Standard, 1993 quoted by Trull (1997).

In Nigeria, most societies have always been organised along patriarchal values and practices with its subordination and oppression of women. This patriarchal organisation mingled with colonial administrators' patriarchal views to relegate women completely to the background. As noted by Afonja (1980), capitalist incursion by colonial administration proletarianised women's labour, increased

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their workload in agriculture and altered pre-colonial intra-household dynamics to the disadvantage of women. The Aba women's war of 1929 and Egba women's revolt against colonial administration were instances of women's resistance to oppression.

In Eastern Nigeria, of which Anambra is a part, most communities are organised along patriarchal lines. Eastern Nigeria is made up of Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, and the Abia States. Anambra State is considered the gateway to Eastern Nigeria because it is the first state one encounters before going to other eastern states. In Anambra State, which is the focus of this paper, gender relation is such that a woman is supposed to respect a man even when the man is younger than her. In fact, the day a male child is born in Anambra State, he becomes older than all the females in the state. A man is the head of the family, and even when a man dies, his son will become the head of the family, and if there is no son, his brother will become the head of the family. As such, there is no time in a woman's life that she will be regarded as the head of the family. The Anambra people speak the Igbo language, and they are traditionally farmers, traders, hunters, and fishermen. They are widely travelled and highly dispersed globally and regarded as the wealthiest group in Nigeria. They are also respected for their business acumen, and there it regarded as an egalitarian society where all men are equal, but women are not included in this equality. Also, women are not seen by society as people who should have their own property or personal money, and women are not allowed to participate in decision making both at the family and society level. Any woman who is ambitious or fails to be subservient to mens' will or views is regarded as bad. Importantly, the customary laws in the state support the inferior status of women, and these laws are still being applied even though it differs from the Nigerian constitution and other international protocols that Nigeria belongs to. All these made the state an important context for this paper.

Among the Igbo, specifically the Igbo of Anambra State, women are conceptualised by society as inferior to men, thereby making families prefer male children to female children. It speaks volumes about the status of women in society. They are subordinated and excluded from sharing important family resources and are regarded as inheritable property. Inheritable property, in this paper, is a term used to describe an item that can be owned by a person and can change hands from one person to another over time. Women as inheritable property, therefore, means that in this culture, women are conceptualised as items that can be owned by another person and this ownership can change from father to brother to husband, to husband's brother, and to son. Women as inheritable property becomes problematic because, with such social status, women do not inherit any property from anywhere, which we refer to as economic injustice. This

is because it brings about total impoverishment of the women and makes them perpetually be dependent on men for livelihoods, which has severe implications for women's health and who women eventually become. It is important to point out that women as inheritable property is not just about the late husband's brother inheriting a widow. Women as inheritable property spans throughout a woman's life--whether widowed, married or single, which has implications for their achievement of personhood, full citizenship status, and health. The paper's focus on the health implications of these practices stems from the fact that all the disadvantages suffered by women in Anambra society culminate into poor health status; considering that health is wealth, it becomes pertinent because unhealthy people cannot contribute effectively to the development of their society.

Moreover, the right to education is a fundamental human right, and denying a person such right on the basis of sex is a breach of this right, which has been recognised by many international treaties that Nigeria subscribed to, such as the African Charter on Women (2003), and article 12 which specifically is on women's right to education without hindrance. Also, articles 2 and 3 stipulate the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and women's right to dignity, respectively. Furthermore, CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1995), and articles 2 and 18 all harp on the elimination of discrimination against women. Importantly, the Nigerian constitution (1999), section 42 subsection 2, states that there shall be no discrimination against anyone based on sex, religion or ethnicity. Women's role, as partners in development, was also noted by the African Charter on Women (2003), which reaffirmed the principle of promoting gender equality as enshrined in the constitutive act of the African Union and the new partnership for Africa's development. The stipulations in the above protocols were unanimous in condemning discrimination and marginalisation of women. However, despite all these protocols, the Igbo customary law still persists in Igbo land, of which Anambra state is a part. In the Igbo customary law, as in many other tribes in Nigeria, a woman is regarded as inferior to a man, and as such, there is discrimination against women in terms of property inheritance, education, dignity, and other life chances.

Women as inheritable property is topical/problematic because it denies women full citizenship rights and brings about women's inferior social status, which further results in women's poverty, low educational attainments, poor health, and total powerlessness. With this heavy load of disadvantages, women in the study area cannot be able to be participating effectively in the development of society. Indeed, this situation breeds perpetual conflicts in society. These conflicts remain invisible due to the patriarchal gender relations- a scenario described vividly by

Scott (1990) in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. As noted by Scott (1990), "I noticed how I measured my own words before those who had power over me in some significant way and I had to choke back responses that would not have been prudent. Only then did I fully appreciate why I might not be able to take the public conduct of those over whom I have power at face value." It is exactly the situation in the study area. The women have to pretend most of the time to be happy, but when they are alone or with fellow women, they begin to murmur to themselves or one another. Indeed, Scott (1985) captured this in the book- *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, in which he observed thus "most subordinate classes throughout most of history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open organised political activity. Most subordinate classes are far less interested in changing the larger structures of the state or the law than in what Hobsbawm (1973) has appropriately called working the system to their minimum disadvantage." It is what women in the study area do in order to negotiate their way through the system.

This paper becomes important in the light of the fact that several studies had been done on women's lack of inheritance, widowhood practices and widow inheritance in Igbo land (Popoola and Agbabiaka-Mustapha 2017, Obioha 2003, Okorafor 2011, Ayoha, Chikaire and Nwakwasi 2015). For instance, Okorafor (2011) submitted that within their lineage, women are deemed to have no right to inheritance because they are expected to marry and benefit from their husband's property. As married women, they are considered to be strangers who have no part in inheritance. In the same vein, Popoola and Agbabiaka (2017) indicated that various cultures in Nigeria favour male children, grant males' higher rights to land and other properties, and promote abuse of inheritance rights against women. Obioha (2003) and Ayoha, Chikaire and Nwakwasi (2015) had similar conclusions. However, despite all these studies, not much had been done on women as inheritable property that affects every female child, whether married or not. Furthermore, previous studies had not paid much attention to the implications of this practice on women's health and how this practice has translated to women's impoverishment among the Anambra Igbo. This paper intends to fill these gaps. It is believed that this attempt may engender effective intervention programmes towards the improvement of women's health, economic attainment and achieving sustainable development goals in the study area.

This paper, therefore, examines the inheritance system in Anambra traditional society, the practice of inheriting women, impacts of these on women's health and level of income, and ascertains whether there have been changes in these practices. To do this, relevant literature was reviewed and the paper also utilised authors' personal accounts.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SPHERE THEORY AND BLACK FEMINISMS

The theoretical framework for this paper is the sphere theory and black feminisms. These theoretical perspectives are part of the feminist orientation which is a theoretical position as well as action/advocacy against the subordination of women. In many parts of the world, women had been subordinated and treated as second class citizens. It took quite a while for people to begin to condemn traditional views and to posit that women should be entitled to citizenship and political rights as men. On their own part, women had resisted and struggled against this oppression. These struggles were known as the women's movements and the beginning of feminism. Feminism embodies activism, advocacy, methodology, and theoretical orientation. Apart from having strands of feminisms, historically, there are different waves of feminism that represent the different focus of the women struggle at different times. The first wave of feminism was the women's struggles and activism which saw the enfranchisement of women and the inclusion of women in education, especially higher education. The second wave of feminism of the 1960s took liberal views and discussed the reconciliation of the achievement of personhood with the opening up of work and public spaces while continuing the central importance of the family in women's lives (Friedan 1963). The third wave of feminism of the 1970s saw the establishment and proliferation of women's liberation movements which was activism against the oppression of women.

Feminism represents the realisation that women are dominated and marginalised, that something is amiss about the way women are treated, something that is there but difficult to pinpoint; no wonder Betty Friedan (1963) described it as a problem without a name. Bunwaree (2010) maintained that feminism is a movement as well as a theoretical orientation. Feminism is a counter ideology that has arisen to challenge sexism and patriarchy and seeks independence and equality for women (Whittier 1995). Friedan was right because women as inheritable property in Anambra State is indeed a problem without a name in Anambra state because it is so embedded in the activities of daily living to the extent that it looks normal even to the women that are being oppressed. Women's oppression in Anambra State is so systematic that it is only evident to people with a gender lens. It starts as soon as a girl child is born making it difficult for the girl to notice any anomaly.

As noted by Connelly, Li, Macdonald and Parpart (2000), the liberal conception posited that people are governed within certain limits generally defined in terms of the public and private spheres in which the government can regulate the public but not the private. The issue of government regulating the public sphere

and not the private sphere in the study area has brought about the deepening of women's oppression in the study area in that whenever any woman complains of any maltreatment from her husband, she will be told that it is a family/private matter and that she should go and put her house in order. As a result of this, many women in the study area continue to suffer in silence and some even to the point of death. To crown it all, society has also made a source of stigma against any woman who is not living in peace with her husband because, in the study area, a man does no wrong in his house. We, therefore, tend to agree with Stanley and Wise (1983) that the personal is political because this issue of family/private matter is a systematic way that has been used in the study area to keep women in perpetual subordination.

Also, the sphere theory posits that society divided activities into the public and private sphere and assigned women to the private sphere and men to the public sphere. Also, that this societal assignment has made it difficult for women to realise their potentials in the public spaces and has constituted a big problem to achieving sustainable development. The gender roles were assigned in such a way that women would be working for the maintenance of the system without earning any income or social status for themselves while men would be working in the public sphere that gives them income and high social status. In the same way in Anambra society, men occupy the public space of politics and paid work and enjoy the income/wealth, power and prestige that accompany the public space while the women occupy the private space of homemaking, washing of clothes, cleaning, cooking and general maintenance of the family for the comfort of men and the children. The women in the study area are unpaid family workers and all these things that they do are not regarded as work, and they do not generate any income. This sort of division has resulted in many women in the study area ending up poor, illiterates with poor health status.

Furthermore, Black feminism is particularly relevant in this paper because black women experience oppression in such a way that it interacts with racism to mean a different experience from the experience of white females. In Nigeria, the case is not about racism but colonialism and patriarchal tendencies. As such, the burden of being female and at the same time being black become a double burden for African women. Black feminism is used in this paper to explain the specific social, historical and cultural conditions and sexism under which Anambra women have experienced this oppression and lived their lives. Black feminism has added a powerful voice to those advocating for a more experientially grounded approach to the study of women (Connelly *et al.* 2000).

Black feminism is used here to explain the specific socio-cultural and historical conditions under which Anambra women experience this oppression.

Socio-culturally, due to the inferior status of women in Anambra State, they are mainly poor and illiterates with poor health status and are regarded as properties to be inherited. This general image of women in the study area has generated blatant oppressions that Anambra women go through in their daily lives. Women are excluded from land ownership and traditionally, land and its resources are the mainstay of the economy in the study area. As women are regarded as property, they do not inherit any property from their fathers or from their husbands. The societal view is that women should be satisfied with their sons inheriting from their husbands. Importantly, this culture does not give any thought to a woman without sons or childless women. There are also many taboos against women in the study area such as that women cannot talk about land matters, women cannot climb palm trees or cut palm nuts even when standing on the ground and that it is also a taboo for women to harvest kola nut. Interestingly, palm nuts and kola nuts are the two major cash crops in the study area. This is how this culture has circumvented and impoverished women from generation to generation.

In Nigeria, there are feminist thoughts and activisms that have spanned over several years on women locations. Afonja (1980) maintained that women's autonomy and inequality had coexisted since pre-colonialisation. Afonja posited that gender power relations in the local culture had to be addressed in order to understand women's identity, that research protocols must target women and men to understand and change patriarchy and inequality (Afonja 1980). Nina Mba, Oyeronke Oyewumi, Bolanle Awe and others have written extensively on Nigerian women. Importantly, the Aba women's war (1929) in Eastern Nigeria went down in history as one of the greatest resistances to colonial rule in the West African region, and the Egba women's revolt represents women struggles and resistances to these oppressions.

Historically, colonialism added its burden on women in the study area. As noted by Ihejirika (2020), the Igbo pre-colonial society/culture and language had a flexible gender system which gave women access to economic resources and power. At that time, the women were producers of food staples and they provided for their children which in the western context would have been considered as an act of breadwinning. This role of provider and breadwinning gave women the freedom to create their own financial independence. Ihejirika further noted that the colonial administrators brought a rigid binary and patriarchal concept of gender which marginalised Igbo women. The title system which once allowed women to hold power wealth and freedom was severely diminished and with the implementation of the warrant chief system, political institutions became increasingly dominated by men (*Ibid* 2020). The post-colonial era, therefore, saw the disempowerment that women in the study area are experiencing today.

As such, feminism is not just about women's oppression but also about resistances and change. Black feminism is used here to explain the Anambra women's experiences of these three eras- the pre-colonial period, the colonial period and the post colonial period; the oppressions these women encountered and how they reacted and are still reacting to these oppressions. For instance, the women have reacted to being regarded as inheritable property and lack of inheritance in several ways: formation of village women's cooperative groups and encouraging one another to have little business of their own. There are also few women lawyers who render free services to help widows fight for their husband's properties. Furthermore, there are individual women who made up their minds to resist being inherited.

However, in the course of these resistances, women have encountered new challenges such as having only a few lawyers who can render free services to women in need of their services considering the fact that women are very poor in the study area. Women also lack awareness of their rights in the Nigerian constitution and many of them fear being killed by their in-laws if they pursue the case. The women also battle with the fear of being branded a witch for fighting her in-laws over her husband's properties. In this paper, therefore, we argue that the practice of women as inheritable property has generated poverty, illiteracy, poor health status, and powerlessness for women which have made it impossible for them to change their situation for the better and contribute effectively to sustainable development. It is also our argument that if this practice is not changed, the study area will not experience real sustainable development and this change is what feminism advocates for.

It is noteworthy to acknowledge the fact that the women's struggles and resistances have yielded some fruits. For instance, even this low level of women's participation in public spaces (which we now take for granted), politics, work and higher education were fought for and won by women and this becomes an indication that women's subordination was not put in place by God, that it can change and it is indeed changing gradually. Whether or not this wind of change will blow significantly in the direction of discontinuing treatment of women as an inheritable property is yet to be seen but feminism is advocating for change.

This paper employed a review of articles (Content Analysis), and secondary sources were used. Women, inheritance, and Igboland were used as parameters for data search. Books, journals, google scholar and daily newspapers were employed as databases. Also, the authors' experience as members of the Anambra society were used. The review/analysis was conducted on themes.

III. WOMEN AS INHERITABLE PROPERTY IN IGBOLAND

Before the advent of the Europeans in Igboland, women had some power and autonomy despite the patriarchal nature of many Igbo communities, while some were matriarchal. The colonial incursion disempowered Igbo women by bringing their more deadly patriarchy on Ndigbo, which mingled with Igbo patriarchy to make matters worse for Igbo women. Kies (2013) indicated that the British colonizers imposed their patriarchy on the Igbo culture by imposition of their beliefs of what women's role in society should be. In the same vein, Allan (1972) opined that Western influence weakened women's autonomy and power without providing modern forms of power or autonomy in Igbo land. This situation has made women proper second-class citizens, subordinated and made them voiceless and powerless and just to be existing for others- all these made women as inheritable property a reality among the Igbo.

Women as inheritable property are an offshoot of patriarchal ideology in which women are viewed as property. This view stems from the idea that women are not full-fledged human beings and should be under a man's authority throughout their life span. For this, in Igboland, a woman is under the authority of the father; if the father dies, this authority reverts to her brother. When she gets married, the control reverts to her husband, and if the husband dies, his brother will inherit her. This is the life of a woman in Igboland, and it means that there is no time in a woman's life that she is allowed or expected to take important decisions. Since a woman is not a full person, she cannot have any share in the family property, whether the property is her father's or her husband's. After all, how can a property own another property? According to Okigbo (2015), female children are neglected and excluded from their father's inheritance in Igboland due to the belief that women are temporary children. It is important to bring out the fact that women as inheritable property is not just about widows being inherited by their husband's brother. It is also about the fact that women are not regarded as full persons and full citizens, which explains the inferior social status of women in Igboland. This inferior social status debar women from inheriting their fathers and husbands' properties. As noted by Okigbo (2015), a female child has no hope of inheriting from her father's property, and as such, she must get married. In her husband's house, she is also deprived of her husband's estates in the event of his death, especially if she has no male child or that her children are still very young. Importantly, the issue of not having male children brings untold hardship on Igbo girls and women. Below are some narratives in the *Daily Tide Newspaper*, 20 February 2015:

I have two daughters that I have single-handedly trained to be women after we were driven out of their father's house. Unfortunately, on the day of my first daughter's marriage, I was denied access to witness the celebration of the child I carried in my womb and gave birth to, I suffered to train them but I thank God the marriage ceremony was a success", she sobbed. (Daily Tide Newspaper, 2015).

This narrative has exposed the fact women's lack of inheritance has a multiplier effect. It is not just only about inheritance. It comes with so much humiliation for women. For instance, in the above narrative, women trained their children during a ceremony that has so much meaning for mothers, the marriage of her child, the woman excluded from participating in the ceremony. One can then imagine how she felt and this is the plight of many Igbo women.

Also, another scenario was that of Azuka. Azuka, being the first child of her mother from a polygamous home said her mother, Madam Florence, though now late, had three daughters. Their father had houses both at home and in Port Harcourt city where they all lived till the demise of their father but her mother was denied any of the property because she only had female children. Before his death in 2009, he shared his landed properties among his male children which he had with another wife and left nothing for my mother and her children because they are all female children. My father refused to share the property in Port Harcourt to anyone, saying that the resources generated from it would be used to care for his wives and his eight children. But after my father's burial, my step-brothers laid claim to the house with support from his sibling. All efforts to compel my step-brothers to allow us to be part of the sharing of that house proved abortive (Daily Tide Newspaper, 2015).

Also, the narrative above shows the plight of the girl child in Igboland. The stepbrother has forgotten that these girls do not have any other father, that they are his siblings and that naturally, they have the right to education and welfare, and he had denied them all of that in the name of culture. Importantly, we have realised that people define culture to suit their selfish interests. In the Igbo culture, it is the responsibility of the stepbrother to look after every member of the family. In practice, this does not happen, especially in recent times in which people are a lover of themselves. The dead man knew that his son would not consider his stepsisters when he dies. As such, he was an accomplice in making sure that his daughters did not get anything from his estate; this is what happens to many female children in Igboland. Interestingly, it is usually the female children who take care of their parents, a paradox that no one thinks about. This could explain why many Igbo women who had rich fathers are suffering in their husband's houses if their husbands are poor because nothing comes to them from that rich father if he dies. It is noteworthy that it does not touch the brothers of many of these women suffering in their husband's houses to help their sisters and give part of what they

inherited from their fathers. Rather, the brothers view it as normal that they live in affluence from their father's estate while their female siblings suffer in their husbands' homes.

Another narrative goes thus:

When my mother died, we rushed to the village only for our kinsmen to tell us that my stepbrother must give approval before any arrangement could be made on my late mother's, burial. At that point, I wept and wished I or any of my siblings was a male child. (Daily Tide Newspaper, 2015)

This is what happens on a daily basis in Igboland. The female child is constantly exposed to the humiliation that she is powerless and cannot do anything no matter her level of success in her endeavours. These humiliations are backed by so-called traditions. The narrative above had also happened in my village where a step-brother refused that the late stepmother could not be buried beside her late husband in the family compound because she had no male child. The dead woman's daughter wept bitterly while the villagers watched on with no one saying anything to the stepbrother, and he had his way. The villagers could not say anything to the step-brother because he is the eldest male in the family and whatever he says stands, and it is always the case that a male family member must approve before a person is buried in the family compound. This is because it is believed that he is the owner of the compound and every person in that compound is under his care irrespective of the fact that there are females who are older than him in the family, but the females are not counted. There are no exceptions to this practice, and the argument behind this is that the male is the head. Any argument against what the man said is considered disobedience to the ancestors.

The lady had to take her mother's corpse to her maternal home, where they buried her. If the lady was unable to take her mother back to her maternal home, she could bury her in a nearby public cemetery. This form of discrimination and exclusion goes on daily in the lives of many Igbo women, and it is said to be the culture of the people.

From the foregoing, it is evident that it is not only widows who suffer this humiliation, every Igbo woman suffers the same fate, whether widowed or not. An Igbo adage says that the day a male is born, he has become older than all the females in Igboland. The implication of this is that he is superior to every female irrespective of who they are. This is always the case. For instance, no woman can break a kola nut if there is any male child in the vicinity; the woman must call the boy child to come and touch the kola nut before she can break it. It is important to note that this practice has not changed over time because society has a way of re-enforcing it by calling any woman that dares to be different bad names and most of the time, it is even the woman that punishes a fellow woman for trying to fight

such retrogressive tradition. However, many educated women tend to fight it by acquiring their personal property and such women also ignore them and shun them and their kola nut.

In this practice, a female child is the property of her father or her brother whether junior or senior if their father is late. At marriage, she becomes the property of her husband, and if the husband dies, she becomes the property of his kinsmen. The implication of this is that there is no point in time in the life of an Igbo woman that she is free to exercise her right as a full citizen and take critical decisions concerning her life. This questions the full citizenship status of the Igbo woman. Commenting on the impoverishment of females in the Southeast, the founder of integrated anti-human trafficking and community development initiative Okoye, Hope Nkiruka said that:

The culture of depriving female children of their father's property has so much impoverished women in the Southeast and that is why the girl child and women are vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of abuse. Anybody still holding firm in the name of tradition or culture to this discriminatory practice against the girl-child is irresponsible and selfish. (Ibunge, 2015).

IV. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women as inheritable property has serious implications for women's health in the area. This is because if a brother-in-law, who inherited a widow, is infected with any sexually transmitted infection, the widow will get infected too. Milka *et al.* (2014) noted that widow inheritance is a sexual risk behaviour that predisposes those involved to infections. In the same vein, Durojaye (2013) asserted that harmful widowhood practices undermine the fundamental human rights of Nigerian women. According to the Kenya Taskforce Report (1998), Women have to be inherited to keep any property after their husbands die. The women who experienced these practices told Human Rights Watch they had mixed feelings about them and that it was not voluntary, but they succumbed so that they could keep their property and stay in their communities. All these give insights into the lives of women inherited and how much humiliation they had to bear. This is apart from being infected by a man that has sex with several women.

Apart from widow inheritance, in some parts of Igboland, widow cleansing is practised. In such communities, four days after the burial of her husband, a widow expected to have one-night sex with the priest of the village deity as a way of cleansing her of the husband's evil spirit. Any widow that refuses to do this will not be allowed to stay in that community. This has serious implications for the spread of HIV/AIDS. This is because the priests usually have sex with every widow, including those whose husbands died of HIV/AIDS, making it likely that

the priest will get infected, and he begins to give it to subsequent widows that he will have sex with. This is how these widows will suffer for what they know nothing about. Importantly, inheriting a disease by a widow in her husband's absence could mean a lot of suffering for such widows and their children. This is because the men who inherit the widows do not really care for them how they care for their original wives. In fact, many of these men inherited the widows in order to have access to their late brothers' properties, and they take away these properties and leave the widows and their children to their fate. This was also noted in the Kenya taskforce report (1998). The man that it is his responsibility to have sex in the Kenya report had this to say:

I don't use condoms with women. It must be body to body. I must put sperm in her. If no sperm comes out, she is not inherited. I don't do anything to stop pregnancy. Two widows have had my children. I don't act as father or give assistance, but I am considered as father.

It is important to point out that besides inheritance and cleansing, there are other widowhood practices that subject Igbo women to poor health. It was observed by Okigbo (2015):

Most Igbo women are often subjected to the widowhood tradition where they are forced to drink the bathwater of their husbands' corpses, especially when they die under mysterious circumstances. They are also forced to sleep with their husbands' corpses on the same beds during the night of the wake-keep and afterwards swear before a village shrine to prove their innocence or otherwise.

The fact that a widow is subjected to drinking the water used to bathe the dead husband is very traumatic and can cause depression and even death, especially for a widow who is already traumatized due to the death of her husband. Also, sleeping with a dead person and swearing before a shrine can push the widow to mental illness, and when this happens, the community will conclude that the widow was guilty of killing her husband. When all these are happening, no one cares about the widow's feelings.

Also, the original wife of the man who inherited the widow is always not happy that her husband brought the widow into their lives and would begin to fight this widow, and this affects the widow psychologically. One can imagine a relationship in which a widow did not enter voluntarily and, at the same time, she is being fought by another woman who feels she has come to share her husband with her. It affects the widow psychologically and may predispose her to some form of depression or mental illness.

Furthermore, inheriting a widow means that all her late husband's property will be in the hands of the man that inherited her, thereby making the widow fully impoverished. It means that she will only eat food when the man gives her, and

such a person cannot be said to be healthy. There is no self-expression and no self-confidence, and there is really no feeling of being loved.

Apart from the health implications of this practice for widows, there are health implications for other women who are not widows. The fact that women do not inherit from their fathers or husbands impoverishes women; with such poverty, the women suffer all the hardships associated with poverty, including poor health. For instance, many women do not have money for medical treatment when they are sick. It means that they die avoidable deaths due to poverty. Also, most of them must obtain permission from their husbands before going to the hospital for treatment due to patriarchal gender relations. A situation where someone is sick and another person takes the decision and defines whether that sickness is serious enough for doctors' attention is faulty and could mean untimely death for women.

V. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The practice of regard women as property among the Igbo of South-East Nigeria has immense implications for sustainable development, which the modern world is driving to attain. Women as inheritable property as a practice connotes women exclusion from any venture that will bring about women's progress and empowerment as full-fledged human beings. As such, it debars women from attaining a high educational level, having high profile jobs and acquiring valuable properties. It, therefore, results in poor development of women and this half of the population living in abject poverty and end up not having anything of their own. This is why many of them are perpetually dependent on the men, resulting in living a subservient life throughout their lives. As Ayoha *et al.* (2015) noted, these discriminations are caused by cultural and religious laws that restrict women from fully utilising their potential and lead to increased poverty levels among women. Obioha (2003) corroborated this and maintained that with the continued practice of this customary inheritance, Igbo women are continually dispossessed, tactfully disempowered and deeply impoverished; this trend widens the existing gap between women and their male siblings in the same family and society. This economic injustice unfolds in the form of women's lack of resources, poor educational attainments, lack of skills, confidence and general poverty, which perpetuates the vicious circle of poverty and continued subordination. With this scenario, it is difficult for the Igbo people to achieve sustainable development. It is because a development programme that left half of the population behind cannot be sustainable.

Women experience has exacerbated the women's situation in Igbo land as women in the first place and as blacks, a double tragedy in a patriarchal society. Igbo women's experience of colonialism made their already bad situation worse as

the colonial administration did not hide their patriarchal tendencies. They excluded women from any form of administrative office and work, created the housewife syndrome among the Igbo and disempowered women, and edged them out of development completely. It means that Igbo society would have developed more had it been that women carried along in the development process. It is only when the Igbo women are able to break free from these traditions that Igbo people can talk about sustainable development.

VI. CHANGES AND PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

In looking at the changes that have occurred in these practices, one must revisit the position of feminism. Feminism as theory and activism asserts that there is marginalisation and subordination of women. These practices are not natural as patriarchy tries to make us believe; these practices were manmade and can be changed and should be changed. As such, women have resisted these oppressions in several ways, both as individuals and as groups. However, these resistances were usually in situations where the oppression is too much for many of them to recognise it because part of the problem is that even most women do not see it as oppression, they regard it as normal; it is our culture, they would always say. In recent times, women groups such as women lawyers and other groups have taken up the fight (Ibunge 2015) reported that the international federation of women lawyers and other groups are taking up widow's disinheritance and women's deprivations of their fathers' properties. These efforts are ongoing. As noted by Ibunge (2015), Barr Ifeoma Katchy, FIDA chairperson in Anambra State, explained that FIDA Anambra has struggled to assuage the plight of womens' co-sponsored laws such as administration of criminal law 2010 of Anambra State and the widowhood law of Anambra State 2005. Also, CEDAW has been domesticated in Anambra through the widowhood law of Anambra state and which is in line with provisions of the procedure to the African charter on the rights of women in Africa.

In discoursing the changes that are taking place in this area of interest, one would not lose sight of the resistants of women against these practices. The women have always resisted in several ways. However, these resistances are subtle and have not been able to yield much fruits in the form of significant changes. The only significant resistance by Igbo women was the Aba women's war of 1929 which was against the colonial administration in Igboland. Often, the women resist by pleading half of their way because most women in this area cannot put their feet down over any matter. It is because of the power relations between men and women, which looks like a master-servant relationship. Indeed, Scott (1990) captured this relationship in his book dominations and the art of resistance: "it is

in the interest of the subordinate to produce a more or less credible performance speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows are expected of him. It is in the public domain that the effect of power relations is most manifest, and any analysis based exclusively on a public transcript is likely to conclude that subordinate groups endorse the terms of their domination and willing to even enthusiastic partners in that domination". This is exactly how most Igbo women handle their subordination, and this does not mean that they are happy about it, but many of them are so incapacitated that they have resigned to fate. Their unhappiness was noted during my interaction with some of them who told me that they wished that government can come to women's aid in the area. Apart from this, there have been few resistances where women have gone to court to challenge this practice. These cases got to the attention of the Supreme court of Nigeria.

The recent lawsuits and judgments by the Supreme court of Nigeria have given favourable judgment to women who dared to be different. The Court, on several occasions, ruled that the girl child has the full right to inherit her father's property just as the boy child. For instance, in *Ukeje v Ukeje* (2014), the Supreme court of Nigeria, sitting in Lagos, ruled that the girl is entitled to her father's property the way her stepbrother is entitled to his father's property. In this case, Miss Ukeje had gone to court to challenge her brother for taking over their father's estate without giving anything to her and her sisters. Their community leaders ruled that the male child was correct in taking over everything without giving the females anything, and the young lady went to court and was able to sustain the court action and followed it to the level of the Supreme court; the court ruled the case in her favour. Justice Bode Rhodes-Vivour, who read the judgment, held that no matter the circumstances of the birth of a female child, such a child is entitled to an inheritance from her late father's estate. The Igbo customary law that disentitles a female child from partaking in sharing her deceased father's estate is a breach of section 42(1) and (2) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, a fundamental right provision guaranteed to every Nigerian. The Supreme Court, therefore, declared this discriminatory customary law void. According to *Anyanwu and Anyanwu* (2017), the Supreme court has taken a bold step in Ukeje's case to remove the impediments on the judicial protection of women's right to property in Igboland, and this is very important as the Supreme court is the last hope of the common woman in Nigeria.

In the same vein, as noted by Kuforiji (2015), in *Anekwe v Nweke*, the Supreme Court Judge, Justice Ogunbiyi, said: "I hasten to add that the custom and practices of Awka people (Anambra State, Nigeria) upon which the appellants have relied on is hereby out rightly condemned in very strong terms. A custom of this nature in the 21st century societal setting will only depict the absence of the

relatives of human civilization. It is punitive, uncivilized and only intended to protect the selfish perpetuation of male dominance, which is aimed at suppressing women's rights. Any culture that disinherits a daughter from her father's estate or wife from her husband's property by the reason that God instituted gender differential should be punitively dealt with. For a woman to be thrown out of her matrimonial home by her late husband's brothers on the ground that she had no male child is indeed very barbaric, worrying and flesh skinning." These court verdicts were very significant, as they have opened the door to women emancipation from this practice. Indeed, the Anambra women association, Lagos, a socio-cultural organisation comprising women representative of 177 communities of Anambra State, has commended the supreme court judge for judgment in favour of the daughter of the deceased in *Ukeje v Ukeje*. The court ruled that the daughter is entitled to a share in her father's property (Poopola and Agbabiaka 2017). This commendation represents an indication that Anambra women are not happy about this oppressive culture, and this judgment has opened an avenue for Anambra women to wriggle out of this oppression. However, the number of women in Anambra State and Igboland, who can avail themselves of this opportunity, is still very minimal due to low economic and educational status, because sustaining a case to the level of the Supreme court is no mean feat. It takes money and gut for a woman to do it.

It is also important to note that these Supreme court verdicts are being resisted by men in their communities, which are usually far away from the supreme court. Moreover, many of these men keep on hiding under the umbrella of culture to oppress women who, on their own part, are mainly illiterates, poor, and powerless. It makes it possible for the vicious circle of oppression to continue. However, this does not mean that the efforts of the Supreme court and NGOs and women groups are in vain.

These efforts have yielded some fruits as many women, especially the educated ones who can stand up and challenge these practices. Also, recently, the human rights group established a centre in our village (our village is Umuoji in Idemmili local government area of Anambra State) and sensitized all the women to come and report any molestation or discrimination. Whenever any woman goes to them to report a person, they will follow the woman with their policemen and even lawyers, and the police arrest the culprit. It is actually looking good, and it seems that with time, things might change drastically. In the same vein, there had been some lawsuits which reversed this practice and called it a bad tradition but not many women are aware of it and not many women in this area can afford lawsuits due to poverty and illiteracy.

In fact, for the majority of women, nothing has changed. Many of those women do not even know that there is any law against these practices, let alone trying to avail themselves of the opportunity. Also, many women are afraid of their husbands' relatives because they are illiterates and poor. This is why it looks as if nothing was changing. From what is going on now in terms of women groups creating awareness and trying to get women empowered, significant changes will come. It buttresses the fact that education continues to be the silver bullet for women emancipation and empowerment. That is what Igbo women need to break free from these strangling traditions.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion is that women as inheritable property impoverishes women and constitutes a barrier to women attaining their full potentials in Igboland, which has serious implications for their health. The challenges faced by women are still issues in patriarchal values and practices, and it is very difficult to change. This means that women's experiences have not changed despite modern globalisation. As such, feminism continues to be relevant to women's struggles as there is a need to change women's experiences in their societies, thereby changing women's lives. It is only when this is achieved that we can really talk about sustainable development. As it is now, the struggle is far from over; instead, it is beginning. It is left for women to come together to re-strategize to consolidate the gains made and chart an effective course for the future. As noted by Machel (2015), women are too strong to be ignored in any society, they must, therefore, rise up and take their rightful positions as they would not get it on a platter of gold. This precisely is the transformative ways in which African women have to act. We need to be organised, and we need to know how to do it. Ten years from now, we need to take African women to another stage. What we are doing is not good enough because we are leaving millions behind. As such, we have to re-strategize knowing exactly what we want to change. Importantly, we realised that even the so-called new challenges are the product of the old challenges.

The recommendation is that there should be a concerted effort on the part of women to change their world. Lest we forget, feminism is not just a theory for explaining women condition; it is also a call for action and advocacy. As such, women as inheritable property and their exclusion from inheritance are phenomena that call for action, and women must rise up to upturn this table through action to strengthen existing laws of equality by enforcing implementation, fighting harmful traditional practices, lobbying, advocacy and anything within their power and, most importantly, women must try as much as possible to empower themselves in any way they can because if you do not raise your hand, no one will see you.

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