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RESEARCH ARTICLE

GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND DEVELOPMENT IN (AFRICAN) IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS SOCIETY: A CRITICAL OPTION FOR THE NEW WORLD ORDER

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ABSTRACT

Gender issues have become a critical concern of all humanity today. The case is that women are marginalized, more especially in Africa. Thus part of African underdevelopment is attributed to this discrimination. The major factor that makes the study of gender problems in Africa complex is that African traditional society, particularly, the Igbo society of Eastern Nigeria, anchor their development, social organizations and political structure on their religion(s). So their religious belief defines and controls all social arrangements. However, the picture of women marginalization in Igbo society seems to be representing the Igbo society of the modern era rather than the Igbo of the pre-colonial period. This paper therefore contends that the assumption that women in the Igbo traditional society were sidelined into the private sphere is tinged with historical bias. Thus through sociological and historical survey, this paper discovers that women have been in the frontline of social development in the Igbo traditional society. It notes also that most positions of power are not inherited rather they are acquired through achievements. Therefore, both men and women have open space to compete for such positions. It observes that there are two major means of entering into societal leadership in Igbo society, these are technically called the: 'Invited' and 'Invented' spaces. In the invited space, anybody who attains a level of achievements through industry or special ability is invited to the cult of elders, which is the leadership class and many women attained such positions in the traditional society. In like manner, the women form the endogenous social group, which becomes indispensable pressure group in Igbo political setting, influencing all decisions and actions. This paper therefore concludes that the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria have been gender sensitive in their social arrangements and this influenced their development before the colonial era.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the oppression and marginalization of the womenfolk in almost all sectors of development and economy has become quite obvious in the contemporary period. This assumption is sustained by the assertion of Sanga (2008), thus, 'It is a widely acknowledged fact that gender is not only a moral issue but also and more importantly, a development issue., hence, despite this recognition, insufficient progress has been made in addressing gender issues both nationally and internationally' (101-124). It is in recognition of the critical issues of gender mainstreaming and development in contemporary period that United Nations has been addressing issues relating to the advancement of women and gender equality since 1970's. This process according to Booth (2008) has led to greater international recognition of the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in all goals of United Nations (Political, Economical and social) including poverty eradication, human rights, good governance and environmental sustainable development (1) Therefore the Beijing Platform for action, which emerged from the fourth world conference on women in Beijing in 1995, reinforced the various efforts undertaken previously and established gender mainstreaming as a global strategy for promotion of gender equality (Hannan, 2011: 1-7). As an outgrowth of the 1995 fourth world conference on women, technically known as Beijing 1995, development agencies agreed to adopt gender mainstreaming as a new strategy for ensuring the incorporation of gender perspective in all areas and sectors and at all the levels with the aim of promoting gender equality (Sadik 2006:1) Accordingly, this strategy aims at crisscrossing the traditional area of

considering women in isolation but to consider both the men and women as actors in and beneficiary of development and how their rights, obligations and privileges are defined relative to each other. Against the backdrop of the foregoing strategic policy, African continents began to witness within the closing decades of the last millennium the emergence of a number of invitations intended to improving the social, economic and political conditions of Africans. These initiative according to Danga (2008) included a number of national, regional and international development plans such as Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRs), the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) (102). These initiatives form what today is called African Development Agenda. While on the track to developing such laudable African Development Agenda, it became obvious that such development could not be achieved in isolation of the different gender that constitutes the human family. Thus Sanga (2006) reiterates

The pursuit of the development agenda, it has been widely recognized that women and men have different socio-economic realities, there is therefore a need to take into account the gender dimension in policy decision making process and in monitoring and evaluating the progress made in the development agenda (102-124)

Thus paragraphs 58 of the Beijing Platform for action calls on the government to analyze from a gender perspective, policies and programmes including those related to macroeconomic stability – structural adjustment, external debts problems, taxation, investment, employment, markets, in fact all relevant sectors of the economy – with respect to their impact on poverty, on inequality and particularly on women. Hereto, paragraph 164 addressed gender mainstreaming when it states inter alia:

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In addressing the economic, political and independence of women, government and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effect on women and men respectively (Hannan 2000:2). Accordingly, the Beijing Platform for action simply succeeded in creating a global awareness of the negative impact of gender inequality in all areas of socio-economic life of the world. It also brought to the limelight the obstacles to the economic empowerment of the women and the seeming impossibility of eliminating poverty in African Continent (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2008:1). The Beijing Platform for action also observed that among other developmental neglects of the new world, is the less recognition of the importance of gender perspective in other areas of macroeconomic policy and institutions (General Assembly 2000: Para 21, 53 – See also Hannan 2000:3). Thus, it is observed that despite all the blood splitting efforts of International Community to put African socio-political and economic vehicle on track to achieving the desired development, it still remains obvious that poverty, marginalization and gender inequality still loom large. Though as a matter of policy, many African countries within the last two decades have enshrined gender equality in their constitutions and also at the regional and the global levels, most African countries have ratified regional and international instruments and have made other commitments towards promoting gender equality, resulting to more girls being enrolled in all levels of education, more women employed in various sectors of the economy and the level of women participation in various arenas of governance being on the increases in many African Countries (African Union 2004:1). However, the general observation is that all the efforts to reduce the gender inequality in the world and African in particular have not been successful. This occasioned Amartya (1994) to assert:

Without equivocation, it is a known fact that the world in which we live in is characterized by deeply unequal sharing of the burdens of adversities between women and men. Gender inequality exists in most part of the world, from Japan to Morocco from the Uzbekistan to the United States (13). It is on the note of the seemingly failure of the modern Africa society to having a genuine gender sensitive programme that this paper is designed and carried with the aim of proffering a lasting solution through the traditional African (Igbo) method. The work observes that the traditional Igbo society of South Eastern Nigeria had a genuine development before their experience of Western Colonization. In this society, though patriarchy was the basis of relationship but women had their genuine contribution to the development of the society not as subordinates but as authentic individuals worthy of all self attainment and achievements. Afisi (2010) sustains this sublime truth when he writes

There is no gainsaying the obvious that women have played leadership roles in the development of various African societies in the pre-colonial period. Even though the patriarchal system in African cannot be denied, yet the African women possess the power that binds the society together... The contribution of women towards social, economic, political and educational development of African traditional societies attached no importance to gender issues because every individual had a role in the family, as well as in the larger society (229-238)

Thus, this paper reevaluates the nature of gender mainstreaming in African traditional societies, the Igbo example with a view to adopting/adapting the model as an option for the modern African society in search of genuine development through the equal participation of both gender in all spheres of socio-political and economic life of the society.

General Perspective on Gender Mainstreaming in Current Literature

As already noted in the introduction, the idea of mainstreaming gender issues into both the public and private spheres of the society

received a global recognition as a strategy for promoting gender equality at the platform for action adopted at the United Nations Fourth Conference on women, held in Beijing (China) in 1995. This conference highlighted the necessity to ensure that gender equality is the primary goal in all areas of social and economic development of all countries. Consequently, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) agreed conclusion 1997/2 on gender mainstreaming defined the concept of gender mainstreaming as follows:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implication for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concern and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality (report of Fourth World Conference.. 1997: No E96. Vol. 13)

In his own contribution, Dr Sadik Nafis, the team leaders on UNDP evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in 2006, while observing conceptual and technical ambiguity in both definition and analysis of the basic concept of gender mainstreaming, among researchers and social workers adopted the UNDP definition as he asserts that “gender mainstreaming is a new strategy for ensuring the incorporation of a gender perspective in all areas and sectors and at all levels, to promote gender equality. According to him, the strategy will go beyond focusing on women in isolation to look at both women and men as actors in and beneficiaries of development and how their rights are defined relative to each other (1). Overtly, gender mainstreaming in the idea of Poswayo (2013) translates to the promotion of gender equality (1-7). According to her, the concept has both technical and managerial dimensions as well as the political, economic and socio-cultural aspects of creating equality between women and men as partners in the quest for social justice. Thus, mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, relating the concept of gender mainstreaming to the present information age. Powayoo (2013) opines that mainstreaming gender in public participation is of paramount value, as it enhances men and women’s access to various resources and ensures that greater social value as given to their contribution lies within the domain of policy makers and planners. Ordinarily, gender mainstreaming means identifying gaps in gender equality through the use of gender – disaggregated data, developing strategies to close those gaps, putting resources and expertise into implementing strategies for greater equality, monitoring and implementation and holding individuals and institutions accountable for results (Hanekokon 1987:14). Therefore, mainstreaming includes gender specific activities and affirmative actions whenever women or men are in particular disadvantageous position. Gender-specific intervention can therefore target women exclusively, men and women together, or only men to enable them participate in and benefit equally from development efforts. Accordingly, there are necessary temporary measures designed to address the direct and indirect consequences of past discriminations (Hanekon, 1987:14). However, Sango (2008), with regard to gender sensitive data, maintains that gender sensitive data represents more than just a “sex” disaggregated data. He consequently avers that sex refers to relatively fixed biological differences between men and women, while “Gender” refers to socially constructed differences between sexes (103-124). According to him, unlike gender differences which can be changed by adopting different attitudes or by any policy implementation, biological differences are by definition fixed and unchangeable. Against this backdrop, Sadik (2006) in UNDP technical paper notes that the objective of the Fourth World Conference on Women on gender mainstreaming is quite clear but however bedeviled with a lot of conceptual and practical problems (1). He further notes that in UNDP understanding, there is a wide

spread tendency to conflate “gender” with women. In this light, some regard ‘gender’ merely as another way to say ‘women’ Thus in UNDP programmes design, gender mainstreaming may simply mean adding an activity for women to a project and in the evaluation stage counting the number of women who have benefitted from the programme. In another direction Sadik (2006), notes that some UNDP staff consider “gender mainstreaming” a simply human development with gender equality in the organization’s management of human resources (1-2).

Furthermore, many in the management cadre of UNDP and her partners do recognize that gender is about relations and about analyzing gender roles and responsibilities, which are determined by social and cultural factors and which are therefore changeable. Notably, it is the basic fact that development assistance in whatever realm, must be rooted in social analysis that includes an understanding of gender based roles. In this respect, the most contested dimension of these gender-based roles relate to the political dimension of gender analysis (Sadik 2006: 2-3). Challenging discrimination, exclusion, oppression or subordination are all political acts, gender relations are also a concern for development because they are relations of inequality and injustice – and accepted definitions of sustainable human development encompass respect for human rights and justice (Latego 2004:26) In this regard, gender mainstreaming puts in context the continuing subordination of women as gender but it is often necessary to address men’s gender roles and identities to make impact on women’s subordination or violence. Other basic problems in the conceptual analysis of “gender mainstreaming” are the word “mainstreaming”. In the first instance, like “Gender” mainstreaming does not translate easily into most languages. The word mainstreaming is a recent concept used in relation to so many development themes e.g environment, HIV/AIDS, ownerships, governance, which have perhaps be causing the term/concept to be losing its meaning rapidly. In the same vein, there is the tendency to confuse gender mainstreaming for human development with gender equality in the organizations human resources management. In this respect, it becomes imperative to make a clear distinction between the strategy of gender mainstreaming and its goal, which is to support gender equality in UNDP’s work. Thus, effective gender mainstreaming should translate into improved human development - that is development, which both enhances gender equality and removes gender related impediments. (Sadik 2006:3) However, in many UNDP reports and papers, this goal is not made explicit and this has resulted into a situation that gender mainstreaming has become a mere technical approach without (seeming) clear direction and targets. This situation therefore has resulted to UNDP adoption of Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) definition of gender mainstreaming as a working paradigm. The definition reads thus:

...The process of assessing the implication for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, programmes in all areas and of all levels. It is strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experience an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (Sadik 2006:3)

In consequence, of this hazy conceptual definition of gender mainstreaming the UNDP evaluation team lead by Sadik Nafis took up the task of reshaping the general understanding and implication of gender mainstreaming across the range of activities that cut across the range of responsibilities of UNDP, including corporate and institutional policy, contribution towards shaping development policy at a national and international level and the implementation of development programme and projects in regions and countries. The evaluation team came up with three major points that summarized the basic idea of gender mainstreaming. There are as follows:

- (a) Ensuring that gender analysis is an integral part of all activities undertaken by UNDP, including but not limited to country assessments, baseline research and project/programme design, programme/project implementation and all monitoring and evaluation. This must be consistent with ESOSOC definition ensuring that UNDP activities do not have negative impact on gender equality and that women and men benefit
- (b) Making support for gender equality a key element of all policy dialogues with partners, including government, other donors and civil society, organizations taking due cognizance of United Nations commitment to gender equality, Partner’s government’s own commitment to gender equality (for example EDAW) and the Beijing Platform for action) and Local Perspective and priorities regarding gender equality.
- (c) Developing and implementing institutional strategies to ensure that UNDP develops and maintains appropriate capacity to achieving gender mainstreaming, including policies, expertise, human resources, policies and sufficient resources for effective implementation (agreed conclusions 1997/12).

In this wise, gender mainstreaming strategy compliments rather than precludes targeted women-focus interventions providing the strategic framework in which they operate (Sadik 2006:4). It therefore suffices that to effectively mainstream gender into all sphere of the society, much more however is involved than the increasing of women’s participation. It involves therefore the identification of the linkages between gender and different sectors (Hannan 2000:1-7) Therefore, the World Bank mapped out framework on how to achieve the project of mainstreaming gender in all facets of the society in 1979. A report on the situation of women titled, “Recognizing the ‘Invisible’ Women in Development: the World Bank’s Experience” identifies the contributions of women, the problems they face and how they are affected by development (CAFRA/WIDE 1998:1-5).

Collorary to the observation above, the World bank (WB) acknowledged the importance of the issues concerning women and development and made a call for further studies on the subject of gender mainstreaming, which they anticipate will lead to the eventual recognition by the WB of the relevance of attention to women for poverty alleviation and economic growth, on the grounds of improved efficiency and equity(WB. 1995:7) In this direction therefore, the World Bank made her first policy framework public in her 1994 Policy paper, “*Enhancing Women’s Participation in Economic Development*”. This was embedded in the Bank’s (WB) operation directive 4.20. “*The Gender dimension of Development*” (WB 2005). This thus became a scale towards understanding and implementing gender mainstreaming (W.B 1996:3-6). It thus becomes the most significant milestone during the 1990s as it recognizes the need for engendering macroeconomic policy and the recommendations that macroeconomic framework sensitive to gender be developed in order to serve as guide for an understanding of the gender implications of different economic restructuring packages (world Bank 1996:3-6). The rationale for the World Bank project on gender mainstreaming hinges on the manifest evidence that gender inequalities is ruinous to the peoples’ well being, destroys economic growth, have negative effect on governance and affects productivity adversely. The World Bank project on gender mainstreaming also underscores the fact that there is a positive correlation between gender equality and economic growth. The assumptions above, the World Bank’s 2000/2001” *World Development Report, Attacking Poverty*” identified gender as a central issue affecting three (3) facets of the fight against poverty, opportunities, security and empowerment. The Bank’s more recent policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming (WB 2002) further makes the case that gender equality is a question of development efficiency. Thus, its operations include monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming, fund collection and integration of gender concerns into pertinent analytical works and through the implementation of the process to ensure that its staff and member countries make rational choices about gender responsive development

actions (W.B 2012: 18). Here WB outline three main strategic areas in which gender mainstreaming and development become critical concern for world citizens, thus:

- (1) The development co-operation agency, the development programme and countries itself, (Shalkweght and Woronulk, 1996). Here the community ownership mainstreaming strategy is an essential component both within an agency and the country for successful gender mainstreaming, conversely, the "ghettoization" of gender" has been identified as a factor contributing to the failure of gender mainstreaming efforts (Danellelam, 2004).
- (2) The activities essential for both country and agency ownership are: the generation and use of gender analysis, capacity building, education and training of professionals and staff in gender studies (Krievattar, 1999).
- (1) The establishment of partnership and strategic alliances (with women organization, other NGO's and social movements and among other development agencies) for knowledge, co-operation and resources sharing (Wells and MeEwan 2004).

Despite all the efforts, projects, programmes and strategies put in place by the world bodies, we still notice that even up until now that there is no such effective and effectual gender mainstreaming operative in the world, more especially in Africa, and this has been spotlighted as been part of the bane of her developmental efforts. Against this background, this paper have taken serious interest in finding a home grown strategy that can affectively mainstream gender into modern African society.. This strategy is found in Igbo traditional culture and development

The Igbo People of Eastern: A Brief Historical Survey

The Igbo people (Ndi Igbo) as an ethnic group found in South Eastern Nigeria have a great historical and cultural pedigree. This is widely attested to by world class scholars (Uwalaka 2003:2). The Igbo country covers an area of over 15,800 square miles lying north of the delta swampland, the position of the country, east of the Niger River and west of the Cross River is a low tableland. In the south, it is cut into three unequal parts by the Imo and Kwa Ibo Rivers, while in the north; it rises gently to the Awgu-Udi-Nsukka hills, which run in a south-north direction. In the north-east, it is bounded by the Anambra River, the most important tributary of the lower Niger and in the east and south-east, by the Cross River, whose general basin covers the Nigeria-Cameroun boarder (Ifemesia 1979:15). Demographically, the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria are found in seven states of Nigeria namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Delta and River States. Prominent towns and cities in Igbo land include Aba, Owerri, Enugu (Enugu is considered the Igbo headquarters) Onitsha, Ababaliki, Afikpo, Agbor, Nsukka, Orlu, Okigwe, Umuahia, Asaba, Port Harcourt among others (Nwachukwu and Uzoigwe 2004:8) According to Nwachukwu and Uzoigwe (2004) the official population count of the Igbo people has remained controversial as there is the allegation that the government deliberately deflates the official population of one-group to give the other group numerical superiority (8). However, the 2010 edition of the CIA world Fact Book put the Igbo population (including the various subgroups of the Igbo) at 18% of a total population of 152 million or approximately 27 million. In the same vein, the 2012 edition retains the 18% figure but gave the total population of Nigeria as 170 million so that if the 18% figure is accurate, the Igbo population of Nigeria would roughly be put at 30 million as at 2012 (Nigeria 2013:1-27). Accordingly, with 18% population and about 30 million numerical strength, the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria or rather South-Eastern Nigeria form the third largest ethnic group of Nigeria, following the Hausa Fulani (when the Hausa and Fulani are counted as single group) at 29% and the Yoruba at 21%. Notably, the south eastern Nigeria, which is primarily homestead of the Igbo people is the most densely populated area in Nigeria and possibly in all of Africa (IITA Report 1988:8).

However, to trace the origin or the historical past of this great adventurous people is an uphill task. This is because of severe scarcity of written information of their migration expedition. This is akin to any preliterate society, so the Igbo case in no exception. It is in reiteration of this assumption that Iyoma (2002), subsumes as follows, "For a historical perspective of a people for a period spanning several millennia, the task is certainly not an essay one. The exercise is further confounded in the case of Igbo, where there is a dearth of written material for a period before 19th century" (39 - 54).

Overtly, the Igbo people happen to have been among those pre-literate peoples of Africa the material for whose history was not committed to writing in any appreciable form before the 18th century (Ifemesia 1979:16). In this respect therefore, they were in the same situation as their neighbours in eastern and central Nigeria - The Ekoi, Takur, Agoi, Ibibio and others of the middle and lower Cross River, the Juken, Tiv, Idoma Igbira, Igala and others of the middle and lower Benue, and the Nupe, Kamberi, kamuku, Kakanda, and others of middle Niger. Though an idiograph (sign language), known as "Nsibidi", was used by the Eastern Igbo people and other people of Cross River basin, literacy, as it is known today, was introduced into Nigeria from north and south Sudan. Against the backdrop of literate level of the Igbo people, Jones (1976) described the Igbo history as a neglected and very unattractive area of inquiry (541). Therefore all about the Igbo people historical past is gleaned from unwritten sources. Hence Ifemesia (1979) situates that some of the aids to reconstructing the Igbohistorical past are 1. Linguistics, 2. Archeology, 3 Oral Traditions and Ethnology. Ijoma (2002) depending solely on, the three paradigms sources of Ifemesia notched the theory of Igbo origin in three dimension as follows:

- The Oriental hypothesis
- The Niger-Benue confluence area theory
- The Igbo heartland hypothesis.

In our survey, we shall make a synthesis of Ifemesia and Ijoma's paradigms to see the possibility of arriving at the near true historical origin of the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria. We shall start with the theories.

The Oriental Theory

Evidences from archaeological survey/excavation of the Igbo land reveal that it was already under occupations, at least the plateau and upland section, by the third millennium B. C. The artifacts left behind by the occupants of those days, which were recently recovered seem to lie in the same line of ethnographic development as the cultural artifices of the present day Igbo occupants of the region (Afigbo 1981:6-7). Accordingly, in the study of Igbo history, notice should be taken of the fact that the Igbo people were established in their present habitat about two or three millennia before the Christian era. Hence earlier scholars of Igbo history situated the oriental lineage of the Igbo people. Afigbo (1981) is quite vocal in this matter as he says;

...until recently most of those who tackled the issue (of cradle land from which the Igbo ancestors migrated to what is now eastern Nigeria) fell easy victims to what has been described as the 'oriental mirage' that is the tendency in West Africa for most ethnic nationalities to trace their origin to east, especially to either Egypt, Yemen or the Holy land (5.6).

It was a Christian Missionary, the Rev G. T Basdan, who was one of the foremost to advance the view of oriental origin of the Igbo stock of West Africa. According to him, the Igbo people were a branch of the Hebrew nation or at least that their culture history could satisfactorily be explained in terms of Jewish impact (Afigbo1981:6). Ijoma (2002) was more explicit on the matter when he affirms, ' ...

Some commentators had speculated that the Igbo were either one of the lost "tribes" of Israel or Egypt and that for some inexplicable circumstance they left the east and wandered across until they finally came to their present abode' (40) .

The exponents of this theory based their assumption on the fact that the Igbo people are deeply religious, practice circumcision, and mummifications and also have sentence structure commonly found in Hebrew construction. According to the exponents of this theory, the similarity between the eastern culture and Igbo culture is so striking that one cannot help juxtaposing their relationship. Notably, before Basden, an Igbo ex-slave, Olaudah Equiano, had already made the observation in his autobiography that the Igbo people have a Jewish origin (Olaudah 1974: 25). This idea informed the earlier Igbo scholars of ethnography, in this century to affirm that their ancestors were Jews. These scholars gave credence to the assumption by noting that the word “*Uburu*” (the name of a number of Igbo towns) and Igbo are the corrupt version of the word Hebrew (Afigbo 1981:16). Therefore, Jeffrey M.D.W, who wrote extensively on the ethnography and ethno-history of the Igbo people, especially the Igbo people of Nri-Awka Area, was of the opinion that ancient Egypt is quite relevant in the understanding the Igbo origin and history. The greatest fascination that made him draw such conclusion was what Afigbo called “*the dual division in Igbo social structure*” (7). This is a phenomenon which corresponds to the division of Egypt into upper and lower moieties and as such must have been brought or leant from Egypt. He also attributed the origin of Igbu Ichi (the incision of facial mark) mostly practiced among the northern Igbo people and other features of Igbo tradition to Egyptian origins and impact (Jeffrey 1946:5). In the same line of thought, Jeffrey (1956) asserts that the Aro in particular were believed to have derived from the alien stock because of the level of socio-political organizations the Aro people had reached at the time of British invasion (122-3) In justifying this assumption, Afigbo (1981) writes, ‘*A local historian of the Aro also traced Aro origin to Egypt*’ (6) Afigbo (1980) concludes that the ideological and other significance of these claims to Oriental origin belong to the wider framework of West African history and ethnology as the claims are widely distributed there (6). However, this theory is no longer realistic in the light of modern scholarship. This is because it is evident that the Igbo people are a branch of the Negro race and this knowledge is important to the question of the Igbo origin. Thus available archeological evidence suggests that this race may have originated in the area along the latitude of Assellar and Khartoum that is more or less on the northern fringe of the savanna. One possible meaning of this is that the original homeland of the Igbo people cannot possibly lie north of this latitude that is as far north as Egypt, the Holy land or Yemen (Afigbo 1981:6). Therefore for the cradle land of the Igbo people we have to focus attention on the area south of the latitude.

The Niger-Benue Hypotheses

According to Ifemesia (1979) Igbo as a language belong to the kwa sub-family of the Niger-Congo family of languages (17) Linguists estimate that the language ancestral to the Niger-Congo family cannot have been spoken more recently than 10,000 years ago and that it probably lies much deeper in the past than now (Ifemesia 1979:17). Evidently, some other Nigerian languages, such as Edo (Bini), Yoruba, Nupe, Igala, Idoma and Ijo etc also belong to the Kwa sub family group. Therefore, the speaking of the Igbo language just as other West African languages has great time-depths. Thus Igbo must have been spoken though with greater or lesser variations due to time lag in or near its present homeland for thousand years. Since the language is not spoken anywhere else in Africa or for that matter any part of the world as mother tongue, the implication therefore is that there is great doubt that the Igbo people would have migrated from any other place to the present location within the human memory. Nevertheless, the other possible implication, owing to rough word counts of basic world list, is that the Igbo, Edo and Yoruba peoples may have begun to diverge from a parent language not much less than 4,000 – 6,000 years ago (Ifemesia 1979:78). Therefore, assuming that the ancestors of the Igbo people came down from the region of the Niger-Benue confluence which belong to the Kwa sub group of languages, the next important question is that of their first settlement

here in Igbo land and the pattern of their subsequent dispersal. Here Afigbo (1981) threw a hindsight to our survey as he spotlighted that the first portion of the Igbo land to come under effective occupation was the Plateau region known to scholars of physical geography as the Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta (17). According to him, this Plateau runs in a more or less north-south direction from Nsukka in the north to Okigwe in the Igbo heartland with south easterly ridge stretching to Arochukwu. Here the Awka-Orlu upland forms part of this north-south highland area first settled by the Igbo people. It could also be noted that Igbo communities have the most attenuated history of migration from any point more than a few miles from their present occupation sites. In fact, because of the lost of the memory of the past, most Igbo people claim that their ancestors either came out from the ground (Nfu n’ ala or osi n’ ala puta) or fell down from Heaven. However, in some part of the Igbo land the situation is different in this regard. In the second place the vegetation here is much more drastically reduced than elsewhere in Igboland and the soil much more exhausted in most part except along the river valleys. It is so exhausted to the extent that the inhabitants have in the course of centuries turned from dependence on agriculture to other professions, which they have developed to a high degree (Afigbo 1981:7) Here, there are for most part specialist traders, medicine men, smiths, potters and weavers (Henderson 1972:37) Further, there is the reason to believe according to Afigbo (1981) that the plains which surrounded the Plateau region would have been much wetter in those far off days than they are now. In his own words, Afigbo (1981) notes

Even today, some portions of these plains are so wet that the sparseness of their human population can be attributed to the difficulty they present to human settlement. On a logical grounds, they would have been even more forbidding as settlement sites in the last few millennia before Christ than they are today (8)

It is therefore safe to postulate that the early Igbo migrants would have preferred the plateau regions, which is most likely drier than the plains. The occupants of this plateau region are now known as the Northern Igbo. It is also safer to assume that this early population, moving south along the plateau, overflowed into the plains immediately to the south and multiplied there and grow into the Uratta, Ikwerre, Etche, Asa, Ndoki Igbo of today. This group form today the main clusters of what culture historians know as the southern Igbo people. Accordingly Afigbo (1981) maintains that the basis for this assumption is that these Igbo (Uratta, Ikwerre, Etche, Asa and Ndoki) have, like the Northern Igbo, completely lost all memory of early migration from anywhere outside the general area in which they now live (8). Therefore, cultural historians assume that their migration into the southern plain came next in time to the Igbo settlement of the plateau. This general north-south settlement stretched from Nsukka into Nkwere established what may be called “demographic sphere” of Igbo land and is said to constitute the first phase in Igbo occupation of the area in which they now live (Afigbo 1981:8) Following this two points on the north- south “*population ridge*” therefore Igbo people set out to occupy the region of west and east.

The Igbo Homeland Hypotheses

Through oral traditional, though with recent archeological supplement, ethnologist conclude that there was an early Igbo homeland in the North Igbo plateau. This present location covers part of Awka, Orlu, Owerri and Okigwe area. This is evidenced in conversion of the natural vegetation of a great part of this whole region from the rain forest to derived savanna. This suggests early settlements and protracted utilization. According to Ifemesia (1979) it is from the heartland that the people dispersed at different periods in various direction – to the south and south east, towards the eastern delta (and to the Cross River area, to the north and north east, towards the Awgu-Udi –Nsukka highland to the west, down the hinterland and south east, to its western delta and back to the left bank (21-22). This

tradition maintains that the Igbo participated in both voluntary and enforced gravitation towards the coast after the arrival of the European from the fifteen century onwards. A critical observation of such movements caused Prof Kenneth Dike to call the Nigerian coast, "The frontier of opportunity" (Ifemesia 1979:22). Ifemesia also notes that these movements converted the fishing villages of the Niger Delta into large city states. (22) The movements were intensified forcefully by the escalation of slave trade, which came to involve all the people of Nigerian hinterland, however the number decrease by the fact of distance from the coast, nevertheless the Igbo people being numerically predominant in the near hinterland were very much involved in the whole movements (Dike, 1956:19-46). However, from time tested tradition it appears that early Igbo occupants came in as hunter – gatherers. The tradition of Nri would justify this assumption. The Nri tradition suggests that agriculture and iron technology penetrated the plateau region before any other part of Igbo land (Shaw 1996:37-46). Accordingly, one would expect this to be so on the basis of the general held view that agriculture and iron technology penetrated the forest of West Africa from Sudan. However, an extensive archeological exploration of the plateau region will aid us in establishing the date of the dawn of agriculture and iron technology as well as its impact on Igbo society. The Nri tradition however and what we gather from other sources concerning the impact of the two revolutions on the sub sahara societies substantiates the fact that the two revolutions (Agriculture and Iron technology) wrought tremendous impact on the plateau of the Northern Igbo land (Afigbo 1981:9). Part of the most positive changes the revolution introduced were the mastery of the land, the growth of population, the elaboration of the archetypical Igbo social system in which the earth (Ala) now deified, occupied central place as the ordainer and guardian of morality, the source of law and custom (Afigbo 1981:9). The greatest impact of these revolutions manifested itself first among the present day Nri-Awka zone. This helps to explain the rise of the institution of Eze Nri, a development probably made necessary by the increased problems of maintaining law and order, especially with regard to the control of the land. The demographic impact will also help it explain why the next phase of Igbo dispersal had to start from here. It has been noticed that it was from Nri Awka area that the Niger-Anambra plain and the Asaba upland to the west of the Niger were populated. This assumption is made evident from the traditions of Ika Igbo. Nonetheless it is hard to date this migration episode but one thing seems very clear and that it must have taken place long before the rise of Bini kingdom. This was a period in south-central Nigeria (the former Biafra and present Edo and Delta states), when the Igbo must have enjoyed an overwhelming advantage over their neighbours by the force of their numerical superiority (Afigbo (1981:10) However, the west ward flow of the Igbo people from Awka upland could be placed within the millennium that lies athwart the birth of Christ. The reason for the estimation is given by Professor Shaws as he suggests that Igbo Ukwu culture dated 9th AD may well have been connected with the institution of Eze Nri.

Against this backdrop, Onwuejeogwu anthropological survey of Nri reveals the necessity of the connection between Igbo Ukwu culture and the institution of Eze Nri (Onwuejeogwu, 1972:16-32). The richness and artistic sophistication of Igbo Ukwu bronze, according to Onwuejeogwu (1972), suggest a culture that had already attained maturity rather than one that was still in the process of development (16-39). Thus, the level of the culture requires at least a millennium to evolve in an agricultural community, where institutions and ideas tend to evolve or rather change gradually. From the above assumption, it is therefore safe to postulate that it must be the same population expansion which made the rise of institution of Eze Nri necessary that led to the migration of land hungry peasants to the region lying west. It is unlikely that the migrants left in one massive wave. This is because the fragmentation nature of Igbo political system and also the pressure could not have been built overnight. Thus we assume that the migrants left in little groups of close related kin, with the region adjoining already existing settlements being

occupied before the one just beyond it (Afigbo 1981:11) This process would take a long time to carry Igbo population as far as west as it had gone before it was checked by the rise and expansion of the Bini empire. It is therefore safe also to assume that the colonists carried with them the basic culture of the northern Igbo plateau. This meant that though they had gone far west, they continued under the ritual hegemony of Eze Nri and his priestly aristocracy (Afigbo 1981:11). Thus some scholars like Ifemesia and Dike had also argued that it is possible that before the rise of Bini empire and even after, the influence of Nri went further west than the area effectively occupied by the Igbo people (Ottenberg 1939:5). It is also noted by scholars that the core of Nri ritual hegemony comprised the northern Igbo plateau and the Igbo people, who had gone west from this cultural home. It is observed that it was the northern Ika Igbo area that these colonists first occupied at least effectively and it was largely the encountered pressure from Bini, which in time checked the tip of the Igbo drive from the west. The first and probably the most important impact in the opinion of Afigbo, on the Igbo race of the Bini Empire and its subsequent expansion eastward was to stop Igbo migration westward. The result of which was that some population of the Igbo curved southward to settle in the place now known as the southern Ika and Riverine area south of Asaba – the region subsequently dominated by the Aboh kingdom. In the same direction, some population which had gone farthest west came under the direct pressure of Benin and consequently fled eastward. The fragments of them fled so far east that they recrossed the Niger and formed the community now known as Onitsha. In this latter group, were the Umueze Chima groups of villages. It is this general recoil of the Igbo people who had gone west that has survived in the traditional of certain Ika, Riverine and Onitsha Igbo communities in the form of origins of migrations or flight from Benin – the Obodo Idu-na_oba or Ado-na-Idu of Igbo oral tradition.

Another tradition as observed by Ifemesia (1979) maintains that traditionally the link and relationship between Onitsha and other Igbo communities celebrated in the circumstances that today west of the Niger, local tradition refer to Eze Chima, the reputed founder of Onitsha, as also the founder of Onicha Ugbu, Onicha Ukwu, Onicha Uloma, Isele Ukwu, Issele Asagha, Issele Mkpitime, Obio, Ezu, Obamkpa and Agbor clans located in Ozarra (23). Similarly, the Ogolu lineages found on both banks of the Niger are said to indicate the dispersion of Ogoli Nri migrants over part of eastern and western Igbo land. Therefore, we have Ogoli-Eke (in Onitsha) in the east and ogoli-Ibusa (Igbuzo), Ogoli Issele Ukwu and Ogoli-Abala in the West (Onwuejeogwu, 1992:29-34). In the same vein, we find that east of the Niger, the word onicha or its derivatives is occasionally used in many diverse localities and communities. Thus we have onicha – Mmiri (Riverine Onitsha) the present Onitsha, Onitsha-Ihembosi in Ihiala, Onicha-Enugu-Ezike in Igbo Eze, Onicha in Afikpo, Onicha-Uboma in Etiti, Onicha-Ezinihitte in Abo Mbaise, Onisa (onucha) in Nkwerre, onicha in Ohaozara and Onicha-Ngwua in Obiomangwa. There is also Isu Aniocha in Njikoka and OgwuAniocha in Ogbaru (Ifemesia 1979:24). Whatever these traditions mean, the major implication of this is that there is a serious migration exercise within a remote period of Igbo history. Thus this same factor- Agriculture and the invention of iron technology also led to the population growth in the Orlu section of the Awka-Orlu uplands. It appears that much of the surplus population from here went east instead of west. Thus the Niger flood plain to the west of Orlu area is a large expanse of territory and was not attractive to settlers except those who had no other choice. Therefore, this tradition of the Isu-ama Igbo (meaning the Isu who had gone abroad) made up of Mbama, Mbieri, Ikeduru, Osu, Ehime, Ugboma and Mbaise) of the Ohuhu, Ngwa and of many Cross River Igbo group indicate that they migrated eastward from the general area of Orlu. To many communities in this group of Igbo speaking people, Ama-Igbo in Orlu is a sacred spot (Afigbo 1981:13). There is also a tradition that claims eloquently that it was here at AmaIgbo that Isuama, Cross River and Ohuhu-Ngwua Igbo originally settled before dispersing to their present locations. However, it is

impossible to give a precise date of this movement; it could be assumed that it did not predate the development in the Awka section of the uplands. The two movements overtly may have taken place about the same period as among the Igbo people who went east, we also come across, especially in Ohuhu-Ngwa complex, fragments of claims to Nri or in any case Awka origin. It is noted that Orlu and Awka are not quite far apart for the agricultural and technological revolution which integrated these dispersal to have affected the two areas at the same time and to lead to the growth of their population about the same period. We also encounter in some of these communities fragments of tradition referring to origin or migration or flight from Benin. However, this could be taken to mean that this movement to east to be speed up with the sealing off of the western frontier by Benin pressure which forced not only the Igbo people to recoil eastward but also Igbo to move further east (Afigbo 1981:13). This assumption is substantiated by the preliminary archeological work in Bende of eastern Igbo area. Here a site which an Igbo family is said to have occupied for twelve generation and then abandoned about 1904 was excavated and found to yield artifacts Carbon dated to AD 850 + 95. Therefore, if we take into consideration the character of this migration and the time it would take to carry the Igbo people as far east as Bende, it becomes clear therefore that it will reasonable to posit that it was more or less contemporary with the dispersal that took the Igbo people of the same plateau to Asaba uplands.

However, the movement from Orlu in a general eastward direction soon encountered opposition in the form of the westward expansion of the Benue- Congo-speaking people. (Afigbo 1981: 13-14). This opposition had an important implication for the Igbo people. The first implication was that the Igbo expansion was deflected northward leading to the founding of the Ada group of the Cross River Igbo (Aka-Eze, Edda, Nkporo, Afikpo, Amisiri etc) and of the large northeast group also known as the Ogo-ukwu group. The oral traditions within the group indicated a general northward movement population. The Edda and the Afikpo, for instance, point to Okigwe-Arochukwu ridge as the home land from which they migrated. Further it appears that some of the Igbo people who encountered these Benue-Congo people were made to move westward. This assumption is justified by a tradition that the Uturu clan in Okigwe (Northern Igbo) came from Enna on the Cross River. Again the traditions of Ohuhu-Ngwa, Eastern and Northeastern Igbo contain rich account of fierce encounter with various sections of the Benue-Congo speaking people, who appear in their tradition as the Ego, Nkaku and Igbo (see Ottanberg 1939:47). This conflict reported in the Cross River Igbo area may have been a continuation of clashes which characterized the meeting of Igbo and Benue-Congo people further south. The report of such conflict dotted the traditions of eastern-Ngwa. Similarly, Arochukwu is reported to have been founded after one of such wars in which the Igbo people drove out the Ibibio. Again in the north eastern Igbo area, the same conflict continued unending until the imposition of British rule, with the Igbo people sweeping all before them (Afigbo 1981:14). This assertion is substantiated by the detailed work of Rosemary Harris, who studied the Mbembe people of Ogoja (See Rosemary Harris 1966:83-90). Similarly, in the north-eastern Igbo area, the northward flow of the population appears to have taken some of the non-Igbo people from the rear, thus, even today, we find small parchment of them, such as the Orri, Ntezi and Effum within the area. These are probably, no more than a surviving reminder of non-Igbo population, which were outflanked, enslaved and then either systematically killed off or absorbed in a ruthless struggle for a living space. The above brief narrative of the historical survey of the Igbo migration expedition is in fact the main pattern of Igbo dispersal. This broad outline of population distribution as discussed above could be modified in many places and in varying degrees by small movements within the various communities and sub groups, who migrated either out of choice or in response to some disaster or pressure. One example of such movement as reported by Afigbo (1981) is connected with the disturbances of the middle Cross River region invaders (Ukwa Onyeocha) arrived with firearms, stories

about which are found in Edda and the Ano for instance. These later movement though small in size compared to those discussed above were quite important. At least they have helped in filling of some empty spaces between major groups. They served as means of carrying cultural tracts from one region to another. It would also appear that by the time of British advent in the sixteenth century, major movements were more or less completed and that the basic character of Igbo culture and society had been completely formed, with differences between various Igbo sub cultural groups becoming increasingly noticeable in consequence of the cultural impact of non-Igbo neighbours. It therefore suffices that before the advent of the Europeans, the Igbo people had fully organized their society, defined their socio-political institutions and charted their developmental course, which though not gender insensitive but abhors gender discrimination in all spheres of their socio-political and developmental arrangement.

Gender Mainstreaming and Development In Igbo Traditional Society: A Critical Option for the New world Order

It is a historical fact that the new emphasis on gender and development which incorporates the women's perspective on the global scale and aimed at involving women into the mainstream of socio-political and democratic development of the contemporary world, came into been as an outgrowth of the second development decade. According to Soetan (2001), this phase in the global development agenda placed its premium on the issues of equity and redistribution as well as the meeting of the basic needs of the people (3) This period actually coincided with the publication of Ester Boscup's path breaking work on women's role in economic development in 1970. This work gave impetus to the ideas of Women In Development (WID), while a major impetus for WID had resulted in the 1995 Mexico City UN women's Conference. It resulted to 1976-85 UN Decade for Women. However, the Women In Development (WID) in all their efforts and success had failed to account for the existing power structure codified in sexual division of labour (Pretan 2001: 3) It was revealed in the Second Development Decade at the UN women Conference held in Copenhagen in 1980 that despite all efforts to integrate women into public sphere or the social-political and economic life of the modern society, that there is an increased deterioration as well as the worsening condition of poverty amongst women of the entire world community, more particularly sub-Saharan Africa. It is on the note of the colossal failure of the initiatives of the first and second Development agenda that the human development approach which involved investment on the people and the human central development paradigm were proposed by both World Banks and UNDP as a means of alleviating poverty and mainstreaming of women into mainstream global public sphere. However, It is noted that the World Bank Human Development Strategy has been founded on faulty structure of being hinged on Western developmental paradigm, without considering the socio-political economic realities of the indigenous people of Africa and Asia. This being the nature of gender mainstreaming that has not eventually yielded the expected dividends; we therefore propose an alternative gender mainstreaming and development based on the indigenous people's socio-political and economic realities. Here we note that the definition of gender roles, which facilitates development, is influenced by the nature of the socio-political structure that is in place within any given society. Thus with regard to the gender mainstreaming and development in the Igbo traditional society, we are therefore akin to first of all consider the socio-polity, that was in place in the Igbo traditional society. Accordingly, Uwalaka (2003) defines the Igbo political structure as purely democratic. In his own words, the passionate dedication to democratic ideals and the opportunity for every individual (male or female) to fully participate in the affairs of the community are precepts from Igbo political history. The work ethics of the Igbo people is revived and revitalized based on the democratic principles openly preached and practiced in all Igbo Communities (157). Here Uwalaka enunciated that the socio-

political and the community life of the Igbo before the colonial era were purely democratic (Okoro, 2011:331-350) In agreement with Uwalaka, Mbete (1994) tied the Africa political and community arrangement to kingship as he situates "African community and political system revolves around a deep sense of kingship with all it implies (104). The institution of kingship is one of the strongest structures in African traditional society, the Yoruba and Benin kingdoms stand as a witness today. The institution governs natural laws and customs and determines the behaviours of individuals towards one another. In most places where it is practiced, the office is either hereditary or acquired through sheer dint of hard work (Okoro, 2011: 331-350). Mbete (1994) observes that it could be acquired through blood and betrothal (engagement) and marriage (105). The sense of kingship binds together the entire life of any society, where it is practiced. Hence, Okoro (2011) reiterates that almost all concepts connected with human relationship can be understood and interpreted through the kingship system (331-350). However, amongst the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria, there is great a debate whether there is any such kingship institution that wields such preponderant powers as described above. The result of such debate is almost a general scholarship consensus that the Igbo people are bereft of strong kingship institution. "Igbo Enweghi Eze" (The Igbo People have no king) However, current researches into the Igbo traditional history and politics have yielded resounding evidence of the institution of kingship in most parts of Igbo society. Hence Onwunwa (1990) queries, when people say "Igbo Enweghi Eze" probably meaning "Igbo have no kings" One is tempted to ask, at what time in their history and which places in particular had Igbo (people) no king or which sub-culture area? What of Oba of Abor, who welcomed the Lander Brothers in 1830, who was like a Yoruba King, who had earlier on welcomed Clapperton at Badagary. Onitsha, Oguta, Nri and Arochukwu had history of kings that date far into history long before their contact with Europeans (39). Here Onwunwa questions the idea of "Igbo Enweghi Eze" and argues that such idea might perhaps be referring to the primordial period before the 9th Century AD.

An alternative argument forwarded by scholars of Igbo socio-political anthropology is that though the Igbo people may not have had defined kingship institutions as we see among the Yoruba, Benin, Hausa-Fulani Empires, yet that is not to say that the Igbo people are anarchic society, for they have leaders whom they listen to and look up to at any point in time. "Igbo Enweghi Eze" does not mean that the Igbo People do not have leaders who stand out as symbols of authority and unity in the traditional society. Here, Uwalaka (2003) asserts "Kingship is not the same as leadership, while kings are leaders, not all leaders are kings, hence in Igbo traditional society, leadership is embodied in the elders, who come by age or ascription (achievements, hard work and enterprise). It is this recent ideology that gave birth to what is called today amongst scholars in the field of Igbo political anthropology, 'Naive Republican System'. This system according to Okoro (2011), permits that the leadership of a community can be embodied in the eldership of the community. Igbo republicanism refers to the political features which had continued to exist in a redefined and modified nature in the contemporary period (331-350). Accordingly, this system is characterized in the emergence of all ages and clans which form federalism and confederations (Onunwa 1990:40). The Idea of Igbo federated state implies political tolerance, compromise and deep sense of how to balance individual rights and duties. The Igbo republicanism helps to limit the monarchy in the centralized and middle range types, which exist in places like Nri, Onitsha, Oguta, Arochukwu etc. The Igbo republicanism produces a society which protects individual persons and property. It gives the individual a say in how he/she is governed and a chance to better his/her industry. The Igbo republicanism is a prototype of the classic republicanism, which has its central tenets in the civil virtues, where citizens are motivated by some sense of common concern for public good (Uwalaka 2003:32). In this socio-political arrangement, citizens are properly motivated to participate directly in the civil affairs, identify their own goods with the common good and care for

and sacrifice for the public ideal. The republican virtue was also seen as a sense in the citizens that enables them to pursue the common good of all in the community. The traditional Igbo republican virtue makes it possible for interest and public virtue not to be disjunctive. The republican state generates public affections and mobilizes solidarity in feeling and behaviours. Through this system, the Igbo traditional society organizes itself in such a way that the values of the state are communally harmonized for the interest of all and at the same time ensures the autonomy of the individual members of the community (Okoro 2011:331-350).

The most pertinent question here with regard to the issue of gender mainstreaming is, how the gender differentiation fits into the system to ensure that both gender are naturally represented without discrimination in the mainstream administration of the state, particular on the side of the women. The Igbo Republicanism as a political structure does not discriminate against any gender nor does it aim at assimilation of any of the gender. It is also not gender neutral. The political system promotes individual achievements in whatever chosen profession regardless of the gender specie. Against this backdrop therefore, we observe that the Igbo political structure, which is not strictly monarchial preserved the ideas of gender sensitive in both public and private sphere and if anything the feminine gender species is accorded a supreme position in the Igbo administrative structures. This idea is highlighted by Afisi (2010), thus:

The fact remains that no degree of stereotyping against women existed in traditional Africa. The women possessed the powers to organize the family and the society at large. This was an enormous task and responsibility conferred on womanhood. In fact the responsibility of both men and women were seen as complimentary to one another. There was a co-dependence and a balance that existed (229-238).

In the strength of Afisi's argument, it could be therefore concluded that the Igbo woman, just like other African women posses the power that binds the society together. Notably, the survival of the family and the future of marriage depended a great deal on the Igbo (African) woman. Leith (1967) emphasizes this fact thus, 'Culturally, African (Igbo) women were the transmitters of the language, the history and the oral culture, the music, the dance, the habits and the artisanal knowledge. They were the teachers and will be responsible for instilling traditional values and knowledge in children' (34) However, with regards to ascending to the leadership cadre of the society, the Igbo people do not merely give people positions of authority just because of their gender species, rather people in traditional society achieve any position through hard work and conscious impact they made to their society. Classically, there are two spheres through which the Igbo people mainstream the gender into their socio-political and economic state. These spheres are technically called the "Invited" and the "Invented" spaces.

With regard to the "invited space" Soetan (2001) defines the criterion for attaining recognition and be invited into the eldership forum without regard to gender as he writes:

The history of many African and Nigerian societies...contains ample evidence of capitalism. The simple traditional egalitarianism flaunted is a smokescreen for beneath the veneer of the so called communalism lays the pursuit of individuality, industry and thrift. Many studies, for instance by Africanus Hortons (1967:147) and Ekeindare (1975:22), have shown unmistakable proofs of this capitalist tract (8)

In citing Ajisage (1948) Soetan (2001) presented a maxim that succinctly portray the work ethics of typical African society, particularly the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria as he writes, 'When day breaks, every tradesman betakes to his calling. The spinners takes up the spindle, the weavers bends over his shuttle, the farmer takes up his implement, the hunter picks up his weapon and the fisherman wends his way to the waterside (9) Generally, The Africans and more particularly the Igbo people dispassionately hate

laziness and extol hard work. Thus position are not as such given but merited. Description of Soetan (2001) of how the Yoruba people of Western Nigerian hates Laziness is also typical of the Igbo people. Here Soetan (2001) presented a lyric verse composed in the early 1960's by Adeolu Akinsanya of Lagos, which portray a classical rejection of laziness in their culture thus,

The mother of the lazy bone had got no child. The laggard covers himself with shame. The lazy has hands; he does not work with them. The suffering of the lazy are immense the mother of the lazy has got no child, she's got no offspring, she lives in vain. The lazy person sleeps and covers himself with shame, Don't be lazy time rolls by (9)

Here, it becomes evident that Africans, particularly the Igbo people instill the merit of labours, industry and thrift among the citizenry from youths. Thus the content and lesson of traditional education hinges on the value of industry, diligence and determination. Okoro (2010) in describing the content of African (Igbo) traditional education underscores this salient point thus "African Philosophy of traditional education was quite pragmatic and aimed at providing a gate way to the life of the community. It was based on the philosophy of productivity and functionalism (136-159). Okoro (2010) further enunciates the content of the traditional education thus,

'In respect to vocation, children were taught farming, fishing, weaving, coking, hunting, knitting of local farm implements' (136-159)

Okoro (2010) having underscored the basic occupations of the Igbo people in traditional African society, therefore goes ahead to point out that most people attained places of honour through the creation of wealth through hard work and diligence in peasant cultivation of food and cash crops and trading. Actually, the general observations of scholars are that traditional economic activities, owing to its manual nature were largely divided along sex/gender lines. However the division does not place any limitation on any of the gender. Hence Soetan (2001) using the Yoruba example writes

Traditional economic activities among the Yoruba were largely divided on the basis of sex, that in cultivation, men did the cutting, heap making, hoeing, planting and weeding and at their spare times foraged for game/bush meat. Women participated in planting and often had their own stages of cultivation, harvesting and processing of farm products. Women predominated in the gathering and collection of forest and farm products such as pepper, mushroom, fruits especially kolanuts. They predominated in local and long distance trade. They keep chicken, ducks, pigeons, pigs, sheep, goats, cats etc. These economic activities brought wealth, respect, fame and social and economic powers to the individual (10)

Notably, a people like the Igbos, with capitalistic economic structure have a way of promoting wealth creation and as well as social equality. Thus the traditional Igbo society, was a stratified society but not on gender line but on the basis of value-money making and possession or non-possession of economic asserts – on the top where the wealthy - successful men and women in their various acquisitions of status symbol. By the possessions of wealth, such individual regardless of age and gender were invited into the cult of leadership of the Igbo traditional society. Therefore the Igbo traditional anthropology is dotted with figures and personages who acquired fame through hard work and became leaders of their society. Some of these personages (women) were Ukpa Nweke of ancient Uburu Kingdom of northeastern Igbo land, who records had it that she possesses about 2,000 slaves on her farm. She probably went into food processing and trading activities. She was conferred with the rare title of "Ogo Mmadu Ibeya" "A buyer of other human beings" This was a period in the remote history, when Uburu was a slave depot for the whole of Western Sudan. Another notable woman in this sub-culture Igbo was Nwankwo Nne Udu, who through the combination of industry, uprightness, spiritual qualities and divination earned herself the title "Onyibe" which is the sole reserve of

successful men in Uburu land. Thus at early stage of her life, she joined the cult of elders and late became the spokesperson for elders forum in Uburu. In Okpana community of Ika (Delta) Igbo, though still a patriarchal society, there is the case of woman being the traditional Royal King with all its duties, obligations, privileges and appurtenances. Even among the Yoruba people of western Nigeria, Soetan (2001), gives a historical brief on them thus:

Efunsetan Aniwura of Egba origin was a big time farmer and producer of food crops in Ibadan. At a stage in her rise to wealth and fame... she was said to have had 2,000 slaves on her farms. She was conferred with the title of Iyalode of Ibadan and in the early 1870 ranked among the social, economic and political elite of the society. Similarly, Madam Tinubu an Owu-Egba made her fortune in Abeokuta, Badagary and Lagos in the 1850's and early 1860's and was conferred with the title of Iyalode of Egba in 1864. These two wealthy women invested heavily in business enterprise, attained prosperity, high chieftaincy and political power (11)

Even in the so called sacred vocation – priesthood – women in the traditional African (Igbo) society were known to have attained the status of priest in several Igbo and non-Igbo communities. Okon, Ojua, Archibong, Umo writing from Efik background substantiate the fact thus

Central to this position was vocation in the African traditional religion, where female deities worshiped by male and female also served as priest to these deities raising female to a position in which they can collect tribute and sacrificial items from men. This automatically placed men in subordinate condition to female.

It is noted therefore among the south eastern Sub-culture, the Efik stock dedicated religious vocation to the women and this gave them advantage over the male counterparts. Thus it was widely accepted in this tradition where most of the deities are goddess, that females priests man oracular vocations, give spiritual directions to men. We discovered through a painstaking survey that in Igbo tradition, being a stratified society most people, who achieve great heights in their chosen career join the eldership forum and direct the affairs of their community. This justifies the maxim, Nwata kwocha aka osoro ogaranya rie nri (Literally, if a child washes his hands clean, he will join the elders in meal)

Invented Space: Besides being invited to participate in the decision making body of the society, different gender species form organizations like the current pressure groups to influence the leadership direction of their community. This idea informs the formation of different age-grades and societies like the Ekpe, Ikoru etc who act upon the eldership forum as relevant positive pressure groups. On the side of the women, we have Umuada/Umuokpu and for the young girls we have Umuagbogho group. It is against this background of Umuada/Umuokpu or Otu Otualutaradi roles in the Igbo traditional society that Okoro (2013) situates that the Igbo women in pre colonial era had direct involvement and considerable interest in the public sphere (58-69). The public sphere on the one hand is defined as the socio-political arena through institutional provisions (Odoemena 2008:1). In his own argument Okoro (2013) in justification of the positive role of women in the administration of justice in Igbo traditional society avers that a re-examination of Igbo political sociology reveals that women had had a prominent role in the daily administration justice in several Igbo communities (58-69). The women of the Igbo stock therefore enter the public sphere as a group besides those who entered on their merits of being invited. Thus, Okoro (2013), situates that in the Igbo political system, women had their own meeting or assembly and such assembly has been portrayed as the base of women political powers. Odoemena (2008) describes the nature of the assembly in vivid terms thus:

Women formal leadership roles by which they become politically significant in the traditional society were at two inter-related levels namely Umuada and Otu-Alutaradi levels (11.) The former refers to the exogamous union of daughters married away to other village but

retain their ties with their communities of birth. It is the collectivity of all daughters of particular clan, village, town or states, whether old, young, single, married, separated or divorced (8)

In this same regard, Otu- Alutaradi refers to the wives of men in the village, who have come from diverse socio-cultural background (Green 1964: 216 – 232). It is observed in the Igbo society that women form groups or rather societies based on the membership not only in the villages into which they were married but also in those into which they were born (Ene 2007, 1-12) The women associations gave the Igbo women strong and powerful voice and symbols. Green (1964) in her critical study of the Aba women riot (war) of 1929 in relations to the Women associations in Igbo land obviates that there is a massive political and social powers which the Igbo women manipulate to their advantages and that of the general public. She maintains that the Otu-Alutaradi association provided the Igbo women with collective bargaining powers to safeguard them against excessive male dominance and to deal with men who jeopardize women interest (189). Therefore a critical reflection of the interrelationship between the Igbo domestic and public spheres will reveal the fact that the contributions of the women in the public sphere are quite significant. It is noted that the roles of the women in domestic spheres crisscrosses and sets the parameters of assessment of the activities that take place in the public sphere (Okoro 2013:58-69, Odoemena 2008:11) Through the invented space, the women in addition to being part of the powers which sets the parameter of public life, the Igbo women operate as political strategist within the family, the neighbourhood and as well as among the kin-people (Odoemena, 2008:12). Besides the two spheres of the 'Invited' and 'Invented' spaces of mainstreaming gender into the socio-political life of the Igbo people, the Igbo democratic principle, which is based on democratic and republican principles warrants that the general welfare of the citizens be discussed openly in an assembly. This idea gave impetus to Igbo village assembly as a recognized democratic institution. Hence in the assembly all adult members of the community irrespective of gender is expected to participate in the discussion and decision making. In the words of Odoemena (2008), 'Indeed the institution epitomizes the Igbo public sphere and matters discussed in the arena were such that concerned everyone' (11). Fried (1975) notes with regard to the constitution of the village assembly that men may likely be more visible in such assembly, however old women were frequently noticed and respected, age being one factor which mitigates sex differences in every tradition. Generally, women were actively involved in the socio-political life of their community either as individual or as groups. This discovery caused Uchendu (1993) to underscore the fact that Igbo Women were politically important and relevant in the scheme of things in Igbo politics (17). To this Anyakaoha (2008) echoes by maintaining that women in the southeast Nigeria wield enormous powers by virtues of being the daughters of the village (2).

Conclusion

The paper has taken a critical survey of the role of women in traditional Igbo Society in relationship to Gender mainstreaming, which has become a cliché in the contemporary times. It discovers that Igbo tradition being not gender neutral, structured both the public and domestic sphere to accommodate the gender species of mankind in such a way that none of the gender species will be subordinated or assimilated by the other gender specie. The modern idea is that women are discriminated and sidelined into the domestic sphere of the community and such has hindered proper holistic development of Africa. The paper discovered that unlike the modern society, that in the traditional society, the women were treated with an unparallel respect because they were seen to be closer to the creator than the men. This is because women themselves have the ability to create due to the fact that they were able to give birth. As creators of life, they were charged with the sacred responsibility of caring for the needs of the next generation and because of this, they can be regarded as the

originations of the ideas that is now known as sustainable development. Thus it could be noted that the Igbo theory of life reckoned with the positive value of the input of the female to the achievement of the desired goals. It also reckoned that female-male visibility or participation in each aspect of Igbo life and culture was such that stresses the inevitability of the values of both sex. The Igbo gender mainstreaming becomes a challenge to the modern society based on the hierarchy of the socio-political ladders, competition with the other gender and oppression and subordination of the weaker gender. Igbo gender mainstreaming is based on complementary role of one sex to the other as both are relevant creation of God for human peace and development.

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