

The Status of Women: Social and Religious Roles of Women in the Pre-Colonial Igbo Society

Precious Chinecherem EDEMADU¹

Abstract

Igbo women at every historical juncture have played crucial roles, especially in the social and religious aspects of their various families, localities or communities. While they may not have held formal political titles in pre-colonial times, their influence reached far beyond the family space. They were caregivers, healers, matchmakers, and custodians of spiritual order. Indeed, they stood at the centre of rituals, ceremonies, and the moral life of the community. Karin Barber's studies on African women, especially her work on Yoruba cultural practices, show how women often carry artistic and religious traditions. This study draws inspiration from her insights. However, it moves the discussion into the Igbo world, focusing on how artistic, social, and religious practices in Igbo society rested heavily on women both before and after colonial contact. Nevertheless, many practices survived, adapted, or merged with new realities. This study examines those changes. It explores how women maintained influence through religious duties, social alliances, and communal leadership even when formal authority structures changed. The goal is to highlight how their skills, traditions, and networks shaped Igbo society across different periods. The paper adopts qualitative historical methodology in conducting in-depth oral interviews, Focus Group Discussions, as well as content analysis based on data extracted from relevant literature. The findings demonstrate that revisiting women's historical roles is crucial for shaping contemporary policies on gender, rights, and social development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Igbo, women, pre-colonial, religion, Nigeria.

Introduction

In the pre-colonial Igbo society, the women held some social and religious positions which included and not limited to diviners, healers, and caregivers. They also maintained family alliances through marriages and as well participated in most rituals as intermediaries between

1. Department of History and International Studies, The University of Nigeria, Nsukka; precious.edemadu.241056@unn.edu.ng

the gods and the people as they were seen as the gateway to the spiritual realm. Scholars like Baber Karin when addressing the Oriki of the Yoruba ethnic have argued that women are the vital channel of communication with their gods through mediums which include chants. Women are the main mediators between the devotee and the Orisa, in Karin's voice they are "Oriki of Orisa" (Karin Barber, 1990). Igbo women are treasures hidden under the wings of the men but are powerful to bring down the hedge built by the same men. This implies that their status in society has a tremendous effect on all as they are seen as the holders of the family as well as in the religious, political and economic sphere. Their status has been influenced by a variety of factors, including the impact of colonialism, modernization, and globalization. However, this paper explores the historical and cultural context of Igbo women's social and religious roles and how these roles have been shaped by the forces of history, with a comprehensive understanding of the experience of Igbo women while addressing the questions on how the social and religious roles of women encourage the generation of creativity at this particular juncture in history.

The Igbo-speaking people are found in South-eastern Nigeria made up of Abia, Anambra Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo States and some parts of Delta State. They are one of the three major tribes of over 200 ethnic groups in Nigeria (Rose N.Uchem, 2001). The social structure of Igbo society is based on the extended family unit, known as the "umunna." The umuada, or daughters of the extended family, held an important role in this social structure and were responsible for maintaining the social and religious traditions of the community. They played a key role in marriage and child-rearing and were considered to be the guardians of morality and cultural values. In pre-colonial Igbo society, women had several important social roles. They were responsible for domestic activities, such as cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, and caring for the elderly. They were also responsible for maintaining the community's religious and spiritual traditions. In addition, they were active in the markets, where they bought and sold goods, and were also involved in the village's political life. Although they may not have the same status as men, they were respected for their skills and knowledge, and they played a vital role in the functioning of the community. However, the thrust of the paper lies in the daily life experiences of an Igbo woman and will be discussed through the lens of marriage, child-rearing and the religious positions of Igbo women in the society with the sole aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the creative process associated with the roles of women in the present through the lens of the past. These phases would go at length in appreciating women's creative roles in the preservation and maintenance of families, traditions and the communities at large.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative historical approach to investigate the social and religious roles of women in both pre-colonial Igbo society. The methodology integrates three main strategies: oral interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and analysis of existing literature.

Oral interviews were conducted with cultural custodians, traditional practitioners, elderly women, and community historians, who provided valuable insights into women's social and ritual duties. These interviews produced narratives that elucidated the community's understanding of practices like healing, marriage brokerage, and ritual performances. FGDs were organized in select Igbo communities and workshops, allowing participants to share experiences, challenge individual recollections, and collectively comprehend the evolution of women's roles over time. This approach enhanced the reliability of the findings and highlighted differences across generations. Lastly, literature from scholars and African cultural historians was reviewed to trace artistic traditions, religious roles, and the changes introduced by colonial interactions. Consequently, the integration of oral testimonies and documentary evidence enabled the identification of patterns, the validation of historical assertions, and the demonstration of how women's influence endured despite political transformations.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Reviews

This paper utilizes several theories emphasizing the importance of recognition regardless of culture, race, colour, or gender, challenging some prevailing ideologies and cultural foundations. It specifically employs African Feminist Theory to explore three key ideas: the social and religious influence of Igbo women despite lacking formal political power, the impact of colonialism on their agency, and the role of women in artistic and ritual practices as systems of knowledge and cultural strength. African feminism arises not from a single individual but from a collective of African women thinkers who assert that Western feminism does not adequately represent the realities faced by African women. These theories aim to present feminism through an African cultural lens and to accommodate alternative perspectives that emphasize women's unique experiences and circumstances (Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye, 2022:7). The concept of Womanism, introduced by Alice Walker in her 1983 book "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose," emerged from the early feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s and remains a significant force for change in the 21st century.

This theory emphasizes the experiences and contributions of Black women, tackling issues of both sexism and racism (Broone Laura, 2024). Ogunyemi and Kolawole, in Naomi Nkealah's "(West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges (2016)," argue that Womanism is the most widely used and often contentious theory in literary criticism, placing the feminist perspective within the context of Black women's struggles against culture, colonialism, and other forms of oppression influencing the lives of African women. Womanism emphasizes the importance of women's culture and emotional strength, along with a commitment to community's wellbeing (Broone, 2024). Conversely, Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye (2022) views Womanism as a social theory that reflects the everyday experiences of Black or African women throughout history, aiming to restore harmony between women and their environment (Ifeoma, 2022:4). The theory of Motherism broadens the understanding of women's roles in Africa by assigning the nurturing of society to rural women (Naomi Nkealah, 2016:62), supporting Womanism by highlighting the cultural influences on African women's lifestyles.

Additionally, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's "Snail-Sense Feminism" advises women to pursue self-assertion, empowerment, and liberation through patience and diplomacy, drawing parallels to the characteristics of snails. In a highly patriarchal society, a woman must be hardworking, resilient, tolerant, and accommodating, qualities reminiscent of the snail's existence (Ifeoma, 2022:6). Nkealah (2016) highlights a paradox within African feminist theorization: its focus on cultural specificity can unintentionally lead to the cultural alienation of women from other backgrounds who feel marginalized by the dominant culture that informs the feminist framework. African feminists assert that the oppression faced by women in Africa is fundamentally different from that of Western women, with each group experiencing unique and culturally specific forms of oppression (Ifeoma, 2022:7). Reflecting on her own experiences, Nkealah states, "I have often felt alienated from the Igbo culture and worldview on which feminism, motherism and snail-sense feminism are modelled, this notwithstanding the fact that I am married to an Igbo man and grew up in a society greatly influenced by Igbo cosmopolitanism" (Nkealah, 2016:69).

Furthermore, Postcolonial theory enhances African Feminist theories by illustrating how colonial systems disrupted indigenous structures and altered gender relations. This theory focuses on analyzing the political, aesthetic, economic, historical, and social ramifications of European colonialism during the 18th century (Daniel Elam, 2019). When approached through Cultural Studies, it becomes a complex framework examining the effects of colonialism on both colonizers and the colonized, while addressing the intricate power dynamics that developed during and after the colonial period. It aims to challenge the dominant narratives imposed by colonial powers, highlighting the importance of acknowledging diverse perspectives and the voices of historically marginalized groups (Christiansen, 2021). Postcolonial theory has shaped our approach to reading texts, understanding national and transnational histories, and recognizing the political implications of scholarly knowledge (Daniel, 2019). In Igbo society, women wielded influence through various means, including ritual authority, responsibilities tied to lineage, market networks, roles related to fertility, and spiritual mediation. The concepts of Womanism, Motherism, and Snail-Sense feminism illuminate how African women's power is rooted in community, spirituality, and non-hierarchy, despite historical changes across Africa. These frameworks emphasize that Igbo women should not be viewed as "second-class citizens"; rather, they acted as custodians of rituals, artistic expressions, cultural heritage, healers, builders, and mediators of social order within their communities. African feminist theories recognize these roles as manifestations of indigenous female power rather than mere secondary responsibilities. This perspective allows us to interpret women's artistic contributions, such as child rearing, ritual chants, diviners, and healing practices, as authoritative actions rather than mere obligations. The advent of colonialism brought Western gender binaries, Christian moral standards, and new political systems that overlooked women's status, thereby enforcing male-centred leadership structures. Postcolonial theory sheds light on how colonialism misinterpreted indigenous women's roles and replaced Igbo gender norms with Victorian ideals, while also

examining how Igbo women adapted to or resisted these transformations. Collectively, these theoretical frameworks illustrate the continuity, adaptation, and resilience of Igbo women's roles throughout different historical contexts.

To buttress further, Egodi Uchendu in her 2002 article "Culture: The Obstacle to Active Female Participation in Governance among the Igbo of Nigeria" contends that the Igbo society is termed a village republic due to its decentralized structure. She emphasizes that the non-material culture, known as omenala, encompasses the norms, customs, and traditions of the Igbo people, many of which are gender-biased and disadvantageous to women, allowing men to reap the benefits of this cultural framework. Uchendu highlights the gender disparities ingrained in Igbo culture that hinder women's involvement in politics and the acquisition of titles. Although women participated indirectly through their male relatives, acting as secret advisers, her focus did not encompass their artistic and spiritual contributions. Nonetheless, she argues that, in addition to illiteracy, poverty, and colonial influences, culture plays a more significant role in obstructing women's participation in governance than any other factors.

To further support the argument on women's involvement in governance and politics, Adebisi Ogunmusire examines the public perception of female politicians on Face book through his works "Social Media, Gender and Politics: Public Perception of Female Politicians through Face book (2021)" and "Women in Energy Sector in Nigeria: A Survey of Gender and Leadership in the Workplace (2023)." He utilizes content analysis of social media interactions to argue that while gender bias exists, there is also a growing awareness of this issue. Adebisi acknowledges the political engagement of women but highlights that colonialism exacerbated gender bias and fostered a male-dominated political environment. Adebisi emphasizes that women in Nigeria have lacked the opportunity to hold crucial positions, such as the presidency, and reflects on the historical presence of Yoruba female kings who ruled despite systemic bias (Adebisi, 2021:27). His research reveals that women are underrepresented in Nigeria's energy sector, particularly in technical and leadership roles, and identifies barriers to achieving gender equity in that field (Adebisi, 2023). While the study predominantly focuses on contemporary politics and perceptions rather than spiritual or traditional institutions, it offers insights into gender and social change in modern Nigeria. Although limited to the Yoruba perspective and not including the Igbo, these works provide valuable context for understanding how historical gender dynamics influence current perceptions and inform policy implications for gender equality, even if they do not directly address the central focus of this study.

In their 2023 article on, "The Nigerian State and Affirmative Action on Women Empowerment: The Igbo Experience 1999-2015," Alex Amaechi Ugwuja and Mfon Ekpootu examine how government initiatives aimed at promoting gender balance have included rural women in some benefits. They acknowledge that while the government has made efforts to enhance women's status through various empowerment programs, these measures tend to favour urban women over their rural counterparts, leaving gender inequality unresolved. The authors highlight the disparities between men and women and suggest that addressing these

through empowerment initiatives is crucial for resolving urban-rural issues. They argue from a cultural feminist perspective, advocating for a woman-centred society rather than universal male oppression, but do not delve into the specific roles of these women or their status within Igbo culture. They also note that the empowerment programs during Obasanjo's administration were primarily focused on urban areas and did not reach grassroots levels (Alex and Mfon., 2023).

Furthermore, Oha Obododimma's work, "The Semantics of Female Devaluation In Igbo Proverbs (1998)", highlights that language is fundamental to all cultures, including the Igbo traditional languages and proverbs. It has been noted that proverbs within Igbo culture often perpetuate gender bias. From a literary perspective, Oha pointed out the inherent discrimination and negative terms used in proverbs that foster gender imbalances and inequality in Igbo society, which have become entrenched customs. She stated, "the representation of womanhood is mainly negative; women are typically depicted as senseless, morally corrupt, devilish, childish, and weak. The fact that these stereotypes are embedded in a form of communication that is highly regarded in Igbo culture underscores the extent to which rhetoric in Igbo society has been masculinised" (Oha, 1998:87). Oha further categorized her findings into two phases and utilized various poets to support her argument about the gender disparities entrenched in Igbo proverbs. She emphasized that the constrained roles assigned to women have become a permanent aspect of the culture (Oha, 1998:97). Nevertheless, Oha mainly concentrated on the negative consequences of these proverbs for Igbo women, neglecting to highlight how women adapted and fulfilled their roles before colonialism, even though she did indicate the necessity of reinterpreting and positively revising or entirely eliminating those proverbs.

The documented roundtable discussion titled "Thinking with Feminist Biography," featuring the topic "The Day I Met Ahebi Ugbabe, Female King of Enugu-Ezike, Nigeria (2009)" by Nwando Achebe, explored the life of Ahebi, who was offered to a female deity as a form of reparation for her father's wrongdoing (Nwando, 2009:135). Following her forced exile, she became a prostitute but learned multiple languages, which eventually allowed her to connect with the attah of the Igala kingdom and the British divisional officer who helped her return to Nsukka, where she became a warrant chief. Nwando noted that Ahebi was mentioned only five times in colonial documents despite her significant historical role. She referenced Obododinmma's argument that these overlooked historical contributions should be shared globally to raise awareness of women's vital roles in societies, highlighting the societal disregard for women even as they contributed to community advancement (Nwando, 2009). The paper concentrated on the often-ignored contributions of Igbo women, using Ahebi as a focal point during colonial and postcolonial periods, but did not address their roles in pre-colonial times or their spiritual and social significance.

In his 2013 paper "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward," Makama Godiya Allana examined how gender inequality and discrimination contradict democracy, which Nigeria claims to uphold. He argued that despite the country's strong

patriarchal tendencies, these issues can be addressed within a functioning democratic framework. Allana explored various aspects of gender inequality and discrimination affecting women in education, politics, law, religion, culture, trafficking, health, and broader human rights violations. He identified several key factors contributing to this discrimination, including cultural, economic, and political influences. By connecting these issues and their root causes, he suggested potential solutions that could mitigate gender inequality, even in a patriarchal society (Allana 2013). However, he did not address the role of Igbo women and their artistic contributions during the pre-colonial era and thereafter.

Bolaji Olaronke Akanni's work, "Yoruba Women and Politics: A Postcolonial Feminist Perspective from Ijebu Women, Southwest Nigeria," explores the political involvement of Ijebu women within a postcolonial and indigenous feminist context. The study examines how tradition, colonial histories, and gender influence their participation in governance. It advocates for Yoruba women to transcend colonial and Eurocentric standards and labels while prioritizing local experiences and indigenous feminist concepts (Bolaji, 2025:166). While the paper focuses on Yoruba women, specifically from the Ijebu region, it does not address the roles of Igbo women in pre-colonial society. Nevertheless, it provides a valuable postcolonial feminist framework and highlights the interconnections between gender, tradition, and colonialism in relation to governance and the participation of Ijebu and, by extension, Yoruba women.

Women During Marriage

Marital status is an important period in the life of every woman which marks a change of status amongst all. In Igbo land, it is no exception as every girl child waits for that day as it was believed that "a woman's honour rests in her husband's house" (Geraldine I. Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2022). Marriage comes in various forms for instance there is the woman to woman, father or mother to daughter marriage and the man to woman marriage. The marital rights and responsibilities of a woman entail the maintenance of peace, unity and preservation of the family lineage and community at large. This metamorphosed into the formation of associations or institutions such as the Umuada, Alutaradi, Umuokpu, Nwuyedi, and Ndiyom depending on the dialects, whose works are for the benefit of women while addressing the society's well-being. During this period there were a lot of rituals and rites performed which accompanied the tradition. In Igbo cultural values, marriage is not merely an emotional stance but an honour ushering one into full adulthood and respect given in society. It is also a means of unifying or peace-making process between two communities or families and as well a means of generational preservation. Marriage is the focus of existence, the point where all the members of a given community meet and these include the departed, the living and those yet to be born. It is an intertwining of both social and religious positions in Igbo culture. Marriage is known as Alàmdi na Nwunye while the traditional marriage is called Igba Nkwu Nwanyi in Igbo language.

The concept of woman-to-woman marriage in Igbo land has nothing to do with the present homosexuality or lesbianism but rather this was an improvised means of preserving the

generation of the family. The tradition was based on the mystery of two female deities in Igbo land ‘Ogugu and Wiyeke’. Ogugu, being the chief female deity in Ohambele and neighbouring towns in the Owerri District, was popular for giving children to its female worshippers. In another town, Akwete resided another female deity, Wiyeke. Wiyeke asked Ogugu to be her wife with the condition that Wiyeke would come and live with her at Ohambele. Ogugu accepted the condition and Wiyeke joined Ogugu as one of the female deities of Ohambele, assuming the status of Ogugu’s husband. It was this legend, which gave credibility and divine authority to woman-woman marriage in Igbo land (Egodi Uchendu, 2006). Justifying the myth, this represents the importance of longevity of lineage, peradventure Wiyeke has thought about how the deities will continue to be there for her people. As a patriarchal society, the Igbo people cherish male children more as they believe that they are the holders of the lineage and when a woman cannot produce a male child it becomes an issue for her as she will not be respected and some privileges will not be given to her.

A woman who needs to protect her identity, face and status in society has to marry another woman into the family. This concept of woman-to-woman marriage was a substitute for a woman to be able to protect her status and their lineage by having a male child in the family (Onukwube .A. A Anedo Obiefuna, 2020). This role elevates the woman to the status of men, that is; any woman who pays the bride price of another woman is regarded as a man and as such has the right to exercise authority as men do. Igbo women during this period paid the bride price for their sons, brothers and for their husbands. With this, she assumed the traditional status of a man and a husband before society and the gods. Although during the traditional marriage rites, the female husband still needed a male relation to front for her or speak on her behalf before her in-laws (Kenneth Chukwuemeka Nwoko, 2012).

The father or mother-to-daughter marriage created an avenue for the mother who had only female children to allow one of her daughters to stay at home and bear male children for her, which would preserve her status in her husband’s house. This system was more prevalent during this period not until the contact with the Western cultural systems and Christianity was this practice curbed. However, in the present-day Igbo society women still stay at home to give birth before getting into their own homes. Most of them do it intentionally just to preserve their father’s name and as well regain his properties especially if their mother is dead or both parents are dead. The fact remains that despite all the changes that have occurred in history and still occur, women are still fighting to be recognised and heard in society. Karin (1991) in her work “If I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki Women and The Past In Yoruba Town” opined that women hide their miseries in songs, their words and performances and that the quality of their actions leads to historical narratives which are transmittable and serve as a link through which the past is captured in the present.

The woman-to-man marriage system entails the union between a man and a woman. Through this process, a woman goes to live in another home, family and community; unlike the father-daughter marriage where she remains in her father’s house. When a woman gets

married, there are so many expectations from both her side and the husband's side of which first she has to prove her fertility, she has to prove that she is well trained by her mother in terms of cooking, farming and pleasing to the gods of the family. This back home ups the importance of the ritual rites performed throughout the marriage process. This includes Iku Aka, Ihe Umunna or Ijå Ese, Ime Ego and Igba Nkwu. These rites are done in secret but the Igba Nkwu is done in public after which a woman will be said to have married completely (Toni Akose Ogobegwu, 2024). Most times they swallow the sways of their husband's house by hiding under the shadows just for peace to rain. Karin (1991) puts it right when she said that "Marriage is a revelation of the fundamental weakness compared with the man and also the beginning of a long subordination to another family's interest."

In pre-colonial Igbo society, various institutions were formed and accepted in the society because of the roles they played. The 'Umuada' as one of the institutions consists of all married daughters of the family, and the 'Alutaradi' consists of the immediate wives of the family. These institutions were enshrined by the women to curb the excesses of the male folk and also some women with unruly characters thereby ensuring stability (Rose N. Uchem, 2021). Women are powerful even though they are subordinated by men, they have always proved and made their presence known in society especially when or where they are married. The association of Umuada and the rest are all for the sake of accommodation and acceptance into the community as well as ensuring stability, peace and progress in the community for instance, they made the rules guiding the local or domestic markets' days. Then a woman's status was determined more by her achievements than by the achievements of her husband (Judith Van Allen, 1972). Presently, most women rely on the wealth and affluence of their husbands and this singular act has led to their demise both in exerting authority at home, they lost their respect in the society and are not regarded as one capable of handling any political or leadership positions. However, there are some exceptions like 10% out of 100. Before colonialism women knew their worth and they stood up for it. Even when colonialism came and battered them, they fought for their rights which led to the burning down of the colonial edifice during the 1929 Women's War. All these were possible through these associations formed as married women, they were able to sanction any man who dealt with their wives carelessly for instance, when a man maltreats his wife there is a rule they called 'sitting on a man' where they will drag the man and beat him while sitting on him, sometimes they will defecate in front of the man's house or sing some songs filled with hatred and anger (Robynne Healey, 2024). These groups have interacted with colonialism, modernization, and Christianity and have proven the creative abilities that lie in the salient nature of women. Women in contemporary Igbo society stick closely to these associations and institutions which have existed over time. Despite the changes and influence, the system metamorphosed to accommodate while holding the essence of its establishment.

Women During Child-Rearing

In the traditional Igbo culture, to be recognised as a full woman and member of their association the person must be married and have children. Though the man is the breadwinner, and the head of the family, the woman is the pillar of the household; and the owner of the house. She is valued as a mere property of her husband but her roles in the home and society are well delineated and deeply rooted (Geraldine I. Nnamdi-Eruchalu,2022). The discussion on how women expressed their views about life and experiences is mostly encapsulated in their songs sung to their deities. Karin puts it well by opining that they are bound up with domestic or compound life when she was referring to Obinri Orile an Oriki chants done by women from Okuku (Karin Barber, 1994).

A woman expressing her pains of not having a child was encapsulated in the song to her god below.

“Olisa nye m nwa nye m ego Olisa nye m nwa nye m ego
karia I ga awo m nwa wo m ego mgbe nwa m toro ego m abia
mgbe nwa m toro ego m abia.

God give me a child and give me money
Instead of denying me a child deny me money
When my child grows up, money will come”(Egodi Uchendu, 2006)

“Child rearing is a process by which parents transmit, and the child acquires, prior existing competence required by the culture to assume valued future tasks in the society”(Chinyelu B. Okafor, 2003). Bearing and rearing of children have been influenced greatly by colonialism, Christianity and westernization. However, a typical Igbo woman never loses her guard. It was believed that a woman who performs this responsibility has not only fulfilled herself but has served her community well. She would be held in high esteem in the family (Ubani U. Anozie, 2013). Karin Barber (2007) rightly said that “Things do last, but they are made to last through instance creative efforts...all cultures have their own unique forms which could be referred to as local but in all are ‘art forms’.” She used the story of yam to explain the purpose of making things stick. During this period in Igbo history, women developed different unique ways of ensuring that their children behaved in alignment with the traditions of the land as it is always said that

Nwata nwere ezi agwa bu nna ya muru ya, mana nwa gkpa furu akpafu bu nne
ya nwe.

The child that has good character belongs to the father; the child with a bad character belongs to the mother.

Hence no woman wants to be referred to as a bad mother. Women used various strategies in raising their children which include but not limited to folktales (akuko ifo) and proverbs (ilu)

to teach children important values, the use of songs (abu) and storytelling to encourage children to behave well, and the use of traditional gender roles to teach children how to behave appropriately. I shall discuss this chronologically with instances. Just like the *Itan* folktales stated by Karin, Igbo women told their children some folktales (akuko ifo) like:

Mbe Na Ewu Jere Ohi

Otú ụbóchị mbe gwara ewu ka ga na be otú nwoke were akwụ n' ulo ya. Ga zute nke ha ga ata. Si te ụbóchị ahụ ha malitere ile anya mgbe onye nwe ulo ga apụ. Ha gara n'uló nwoke ahụ wee malite ita akwụ níile odebere. Ka ha na eme nkà, mbe taa nwa ntí oga le ma oga gafee mpio ha siri were bata. Mbe agwa għi enyi ya ewu ihe o na-eme. Ewu nō na akuku na ata puru chi ya akwụ. Nwoke nwe ulo batara were hu ihe Mbe ná ewu mere ojiri iwe ka ojide ha, ha gbawara oso, Mbe gafere ngwa ngwa ma na ewu toro na mpio ahụ n'ihi na afo ya buru ibu nke ụkwụ. Nwoke nwe ulo jidere ya. Mbe bidoro chi kwara ewu ochi.

Translated in English:

Tortoise and Goat went to steal

One day, the tortoise told goat that they should go to a man's house to steal the palm fruit they would eat. They started looking out for when the man would be out of the house. They eventually went to the man's house and began to eat all the palm fruits he kept for himself. Tortoise being a cunning one always went to check if he could pass the opening they passed through when entering the house but he never told his friend Goat who was by the side eating as much as he could. The owner of the house came in and saw them, he was very angry and he began to chase them. Tortoise ran and passed through the opening freely but the goat couldn't cross because of his fat stomach. The man caught the goat and the tortoise began to laugh at him.

Moral lessons from the story, choosing friends wisely. From the story, the tortoise was a bad influence on the goat and was also a wicked friend who refused to tell his friend what he was doing so that they wouldn't be caught by the owner of the house. Secondly stealing is an omen in Igbo land, anyone caught stealing will be disgraced and most time killed by the gods of the land. This singular act can also bring a bad image to the family, especially the mother. This was the central theme of the story. Thirdly from the story we can see that being cunning and deceiving others is not good. Tortoise deceived the goat into stealing and when he was caught he started laughing at him. Deceiving people is a bad behaviour which must not be found in the life of any child. A Typical Igbo child listens to the folktale from infancy to adulthood. Stories like this above have had a tremendous impact on children's lives because it is a reflection of daily experiences in their immediate environments. The stories not only entertain but also

have some purging effects, teaching them morals by exposing the effects of bad characters and the benefits of virtuous living (Mercy Nnyigide Nkoli and Adaobi Ngozi Okoye,2016).

Furthermore, women use proverbs in educating their children. Some proverbs used during this period include but are not limited to these below:

Ugo chara acha anaghÈ echu echu

{A matured eagles feather will remain pure forever.}

Adighi agwa qchi nti na agha çsu

{You don't tell a stubborn child that war has begun.}

Anoghi otu ebe ekili ma qbu eti mmuq

{You don't watch a masquerade standing in one place.}

Onye buru chi ya uzo ogba gbo onweya na qsq

{Anyone who goes ahead of his god will never stop running.}

Ijiri maka ego luq enwe, ego ga agwu mana enwe ga-anq

{When you marry a monkey for its money, the money will finish but monkey remains.}

These were always used daily to guide the children. These proverbs came out of pain, love and experiences. The first proverb explains that a well-trained child lasts long on earth. This also means that one has to be sure of something before putting hands into it. The second proverb means that someone who refuses advice or has paid deaf ears to the advice given will surely be trapped. The third proverb means that one should not limit oneself with one thing, stretch out to other things because you never can tell where your blessings are. The fourth proverb means that you can never outsmart the process. You have to take things easy and with patience you will get there. The fifth one means one must refrain from engaging in ventures devoid of precise delineations or compelling rationale, solely driven by pecuniary inducements, without due consideration. That kind of wealth kills and the person or people that lured you into it will not be affected. These proverbs have deeper meanings depending on the context it's used for. Women used deep words as this to guide, educate and cultivate values into their children as they grow. This proverb amplifies the endurance, losses and gains that can be derived from life. Some songs such as:

Onye na akq ede?

ede mara mma qkukq

Ngqzi na akq ede

ede mara mma qkukq wdgz.

Who is cultivating cocoyam?

Cocoyam is good for the cultivation

NgÍzi is cultivating cocoyam

Cocoyam is good for cultivation etc.

The song tells the importance of hard work. It encourages the children to work hard on the farm. Farm here stands for anything they find to do, they should do it well. It's important to note that the song has its own performance or dancing style just like the Ìriki, Ifa or Fuji genres. In Karin's discussions in her book, *If I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki Women and The Past In Yoruba Town*, opined that the helplessness of women lies in her chants (Karin Barber, 1991). These chants can be performed, sung or spoken but in all convey one message to the listener encoded in a simple word 'advice'. A woman's life time is filled with lessons that can save, build and sustain generations to come.

The Religious Positions of Igbo Women in the Society

From the historical development, women held pivotal role in interpreting and interacting with the gods of the land easily than men which was why in each family, there must be a female that serves as a link to a priestess or goddess for the family. There is always a woman who performs at the funerals, traditional marriages and festivals. This statement aligns with Karin's discussions on the Ìriki chants performed by the women during death, marriage and ceremonies such as 'Rara Iyawo performed by a girl during marriage and the Opomulero Chant during funerals or burials which has stages, the overlapping chants are performed by groups within the family (Karin Barber, 1991). These roles evolved based on the ceremony. For instance, during marriage and funerals, women often assume embodiments of divine virtues of their gods, dancing and singing harmonious chants such as:

“Ì kacha mma nwa lie nne ya
 Ì kacha mma nwa lie nne ya
 Nwa mara ihe ya lie nne ya
 Ì kacha mma nwa lie nne ya
 Mge nne ya kara nka!
 It's good for a child to bury the mother
 It's good for a child to bury the mother
 A sensible child to bury the mother!
 It's good for a child to bury the mother
 When the mother has grown old!” (Onyebuchi Nwose, 2019).

There, intimate involvement in mourning practices, such as lamentation and praises chants, putting on mourning attires, and dances etc., points out their indispensable role in upholding the continuity of religious observance and preservation of the cultural heritage through generations. They passed on their history, cultures through these stories and performance in marriage, burials and festivals etc just like Karin explained in her works on Oriki. It is important to note that their presence and involvement in these rituals are believed to invoke divine blessings and serenity to the bereaved and as well as the soul's journey to the other world. Igbo culture is preserved through transference from one generation to another through the

process of child rearing. Although in the contemporary times with the presence of Christianity, a lot has been distorted but the system remains till date.

Conclusion

Creativity entails the whole activities of man's character, work and attitude towards something birthed from the mind through the power of imagination. The English dictionary says "It's the ability to produce a novel idea or product." This implies that creativity can be limited and at the same time uplift. This summarizes humanity. This paper passes the message that we are the personalised "creativity." What we do with our lives, time, wealth and knowledge creates new things. But the problem is that most time we don't see, hear or feel it. Karin rightly puts it "Only history permits a narrative of human actions, turning multiple potentialities into particular actualities" (Karin Barber, 2018). These women's potential was never based on the peripheral cause but it is rooted within. Igbo women have a long and complex history, one that is often overlooked and underrepresented in traditional historical narratives. Women are in charge of generational preservation of cultures, traditions and customs of the land. The modernity, urbanization etc. only limited them, thus has led to the truncating challenges and questions on the status of women. Having gone through the processes of marriage and child-rearing, one would have seen the ways in which they have navigated the complexities at this particular juncture in history. However, this paper has been able to identify some interesting creative roles of women which they applied to their daily lives to ensure that they are well protected even while preserving the traditions of the land. Karin made it clear that if one needed a better understanding, look beyond colonialism and post-independence Africa. Dig from the root to understand the forms and shapes the society portrays in the contemporary world.

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