

GENDER PROFILING AND UN/CHANGED MISOGYNISTIC LAND OWNERSHIP AND PRACTICES IN MBAISE AND AFIKPO SOCIETIES OF EASTERN NIGERIA

Anyanwu, Edith Ada, PhD

Department of Languages and Linguistics, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria
eanyanwu44@gmail.com

Eze, Maudline Adaora PhD

Department of Languages and Linguistics, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria

&

Obinna, Nancy Ngozi

Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana.

Abstract

In most African societies, women are considered and treated as second class citizens. Men dictate the norms that allow them to grab land to the exclusion of women. This study investigates land ownership along with several other misogynistic practices in Mbaise and Afikpo societies of Eastern Nigeria, with a view to ascertaining gender profiling and un/changed misogynistic dispositions as the base of the exclusion of Mbaise and Afikpo women from communal land ownership. Observation, oral interviews, focus group discussion and textual materials from library and internet are the data sources used. Qualitative method and descriptive and interpretive techniques are employed. The analysis shows that land ownership practice, like several other misogynistic practices, is gendered against women. These days, unlike erstwhile, women, who could afford land on their own, are allowed to purchase and own land. The unchanged gendered profiling of land ownership is that women are still denied communitarian free land portions, unlike men. The study condemns gender profiling and misogynistic dispositions against women. It submits that the change making the difference between land ownership as well as the like practices then and now implies the new reconstruction of land ownership and other erstwhile gender profiled practices in Mbaise and Afikpo. It calls for a sustained change through cultural reformation, attitudinal change and enactment of legislations outlawing all forms of gender exclusiveness.

Keywords: Gender profiling, Misogyny, Land ownership, Mbaise, Afikpo

Introduction

The unequal gender relations in the typical Igbo society are a product of patriarchy. Having been profiled on gender basis, women in most Igbo societies are not granted the right to free ownership of land in both their parental and marital homes. In what lends credence to the foregoing, Angya (2016, p. 20) states that 'unequal gender relations have been seen as driving factors behind women's continued disempowerment.' It follows that gender ills, such as the exclusion of women from the ownership of land, are clear indications of unequal gender relations between males and females in society. This study argues that gender profiling is the bane of misogynistic land ownership and use practices in Mbaise and Afikpo societies of Eastern Nigeria. The practices are both changing and unchanging in Igboland. It also argues that it is irrational and unjust to profile women on the basis of their gender or feminine compositions and traits. Thus, this study seeks to evidently show that patriarchal gender profiling, unequal gender relations and the marginalisation of women obtain in Mbaise and Afikpo societies of Igbo.

The situation of gender relations obtained in the aforementioned societies is that of gender exclusiveness on one hand and the violation of the rights of women on the other. As rightly argued by Acholonu (1995), Grimshaw and Fricker (2002), Adegboyega (2015), Emeka-Nwobia & Obianika (2017) and Balogun (2018), among others, in classical times, gender roles were profiled in Europe, America and other today developed nations, where feminism makes great wave these days. The gender-based ills or wrongs suffered by Western women then were much more than those suffered by African women (Acholonu, 1995). The proclamation of universal human rights and gender equality among all global cultures by the United Nations (UN) in 1948 fault such practices. Earlier, Mary Wollstonecraft had championed a liberal feminist movement against practices that abuse of women's rights in society. Also, at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women Forum, held in Beijing in 1995, the popular slogan was 'human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights.' In particular, the Platform for Action document that came out of the UN Conference condemned particular cultural practices that are oppressive to women: infanticide, dowry, child marriage and female genital mutilation. 187 governments attended, signed onto the Platform and agreed to abolish these practices. But since they are integral parts of cultural and tribal traditions, to give them up could be seen as kowtowing to Western ideas (Lorber, n.d.). This study makes a case that cultural practices that profile, relegate and marginalise women, as in Mbaise and Afikpo, should be given up in order to attain innovative and inclusive gender relations between males and females and for a meaningful development of the society.

Conceptual Discourse

Literally, 'profiling' means the act of recording and analysing persons' and/or groups' psychological and behavioural characteristics, as what determine their capabilities (competences) in certain aspects of life and which are considered their associate attributes that identify them in categories of people (Anyanwu, 2022). Put simply, profiling refers to the distinct psychological and behavioural characteristics that situate certain persons and groups in certain categories, based on their abilities perceived from their psychological and behavioural characteristics. Anyanwu (2022) argues that the human traits that form the base of linguistic profiling of gendered roles in society begin with the physiological and biological or natural ones. The natural traits are first considered, after which other traits are viewed from the former. The other traits include psychological and behavioural features.

The aforementioned features are combined with the natural features and considered the wholesome qualities for profiling roles between men and women. Upon profiling all these features, they are conventionalised into cultural and social norms (Anyanwu, 2022). According to Anyanwu (2022), the many definitions, particularly the lexicographic conceptual descriptions of profiling, point to the reality that profiling entails extrapolating information about some persons or a group of persons based on their commonly attested characteristics. The implication of this assertion is that since information is communication, communication is to language what book and chalk or board-marker are to the teacher; linguistic profiling involves recording and analysing the extrapolated information about women in a cultural setting, which draws from the commonly attested characteristics of women, as distinct human species of the female folk.

Roles are gendered or profiled linguistically when there is a gender-based division of labour and corporate social responsibilities between males and females on the basis of the sexual nature, compositions and traits (Trumbach, 1994). It is imperative to note that the various lexicographic descriptions of the concept of profiling make references to racial, criminal, age and consumer-commodity profiling. Reflecting on such references, this study argues that profiling gendered roles is discriminatory,

alienating, schematising and sexist. In the context of profiling gendered roles among the Igbo women under study, Anyanwu (2022) argues that the conceptual implication of profiling women with gendered roles includes:

- (i) Criminalising these women on the basis of their gendered sexual, physiological, psychological and behavioural traits;
- (ii) Contemplating their capabilities in spheres considered the exclusive preserve of the men, without empirical verification or proof that requires engaging the women in such activities;
- (iii) Making hasty generalisations about the psychological and behavioural characteristics of the women, amounting to gender fallacies about women;
- (iv) Excluding women from meaningful ventures, even though their inclusion would be beneficial to them and the society at large in various regards (p. 1).

Again, by linguistically profiling gendered roles, the focus includes categorisation, image scheming and analogical mapping on the basis of patriarchy and matriarchy respectively. It also includes ascertaining or adjudging proficiency, competency, profit and loss accounts or narrations (Anyanwu, 2022). Linguistic profiling of gender roles involves formulating, framing, expressing, producing, crafting, writing, marking out, composing or describing women and men within the confine of patriarchy or matriarchy in relation to their considered psychological and behavioural characteristics. These characteristics are used to categorise men and women of a given culture and their behaviour as well as other personality traits are predicted by the profilers of both ancient and present times. In English, examples of words related to profiling include mark, paint, write, caricature, chart, compose, delineate, depict, describe, design, draft, engrave, etch, express, form, formulate, frame, graph, limn, etc. (Anyanwu, 2022).

In addition, gendered roles are profiled linguistically to look out for and measure competence. Here, males and females are made competitors by the profilers. Vital details about each of them are collected and used to determine what constitute their competence and should thereby be their respective gendered roles. Based on the observed/perceived characteristics, women are suspected to be deficient in certain competencies and so certain roles are set aside for them and others for men. Profiling them as such is misleading, alienating, closed, unaccommodating, stereotypical and not allowing for innovation from diversity and cohesiveness, job redesign, teamwork, etc. (Etim-Robert, 2016; Besong, 2018). By gendering roles, the profilers single out women or men, depending on their own sex, for traditional or modern legal actions or procedures of law enforcement based on the observed or perceived psychological and behavioural traits of the individuals outside their sex folk.

Talking about linguistic profiling of gendered roles, Oha (1998) discusses male domination in Igbo proverbs, stressing that this domination is usually neglected and so proverbs are made to be the products of men alone to the exclusion of women. That is, for Oha (1998), patriarchal disposition in Igbo proverbs presents a situation that seems as if only men can produce and sustain knowledge through proverbs. Well, despite the fact that there are elements of patriarchy and sexist bias against women in some Igbo proverbs and other aspects of oral literature, Oha's assertion has no basis because there is no evidence to prove that all Igbo proverbs are produced or had been produced by males alone. It should be recalled that some proverbs and other folklores as well as some other works of arts never had names of their founders till date, even in Western world where writing had been in operation for ages, unlike in Africa. It is a

common trend to only hear people say this proverb or the other, without any recourse to the founder. Some proverbs, poems and other works of art have anonymous authors and artists. What the foregoing assertion means is that just as there are Igbo proverbs that could not be traced to particular male founders, who had produced them, so also there are proverbs with traces to female founders that take anonymity. It is difficult to identify and/or separate most of such proverbs.

Gender(ed) roles are the specific responsibilities assigned to males and females on the basis of gender profiling rooted in patriarchy and/or matriarchy. Every culture, including Igbo culture, has its socio-cultural and religious norms and values, which guide the behaviour of individuals (UNICEF, 2017; Robert, 2016). Within each culture, upon profiling males and females on gender basis, certain societal roles or responsibilities are assigned and divided between males and females. Upon dividing responsibilities and tasks between them, certain ones are assigned to boys and girls, and women and men respectively, as roles that fit each set of them, based on their profiled traits. According to UNICEF (2017), gender-specific roles are often conditioned by several factors. These include 'household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, occurrence of conflict or disaster, and other locally relevant factors, such as ecological conditions' (UNICEF, 2017, p. 5).

Gender profiling is described by Agbogu and Igbokwe (2015, p.1) as a practice of gender imbalance, gender inequality, gender bias and gender discrimination against women, whereby men are exonerated and given preferential treatment over women, who are victimised and marginalised because of their sexual, psychological and behavioural differences from men. Agbogu and Igbokwe's (2015, p.1) conceptual description of gender profiling reflects that of Okebukola (2008, p. 89), who holds that gender profiling means 'the practice of favouring and giving preferential treatment to males at the expense of their male counter parts.' The conceptual inadequacy of the above given definitions lies in the fact that both definitions do not describe gender profiling linguistically (Anyanwu, 2022). As such, contextualising their definitions in linguistics would offer a linguistic definition of gender profiling (i.e. linguistic profiling of gender(ed) roles).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Womanism, one of the strands of African feminism, among others like motherism. It stands out among other strands, just as liberal feminism stands out among other strands of Western feminism. Other strands of Western feminism include radical and development feminism. Essentially, the womanist theory of African feminism is a theoretical construct that engages in gender discourse and looks at the inherent issues in the discourse from African perspective. The womanist is defined by Walker (1983, p. xi) as 'a Black feminist or feminist of colour,' who expresses motherhood to children; 'appreciates and prefers women's culture;' 'loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually;' and is committed to the survival and wholeness of both male and female people of her society. By her description of the womanist, it is quite clear that the core African feminist differs from the Western feminist. It also implies that different strands of feminism apply to different parts of the world.

Kolawole (1997, p. 34), among others, has shown in their analyses, the unbearable situations the Black people in particular, especially women and children, were wallowing in US and Europe led to the formation of womanist theology and womanist feminism in these continents. From there, they spread to other parts of the world. The womanist, just like every other feminist, seeks to raise awareness to the plight of women who, as it were are struggling to co-exist in a man's world where they are regarded as appendages. The womanist actively engages in theorising and narrating the gender-based tragic experiences of the African woman and the man-tailored woes she is made to suffer perpetually as a result

of negative linguistic constructions, sexist gender constructions, the profiling of gender along with gendered roles, sexist history of women, myths and tales about women, and so on.

The womanist also narrates and appraises African women's glorious deeds in historical times, which are stereotyped on gender lane and thus neglected or left ever untold, their proven capabilities and their displayed innovations to gendered roles (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996, p. 144). Again, womanists are African women, who realised that feminism is Western rather than African, and thereby falls short of core explanatory adequacies in narrating and attempting to address the tragic gender-based predicaments and experiences of the African woman (Walker, 1983; Ogonnaya & Besong, 2018). According to Ogonnaya and Besong (2018, p. 447), womanists argue that besides excluding the African woman from feminist agenda, Western feminism does not consider the pride of womanhood in contra-distinction to manhood.

The womanists reject the partial consideration of what affect women alone in society. Rather, they advocate a two-side consideration of all that affects women and men in society on the basis of gender. As such, while looking at patriarchy, it is also imperative to look at matriarchy. That is what this study does. Womanists consider 'relations and interconnections as central to life and the science of living' (Wambui, 2018, p. 173). As such, for them, rather than having gendered roles hierarchy and separatist and stereotypical gender relations and roles, gender complementarity and equity should be made to replace them across generations. By considering as well as emphasising 'relations and interconnections', womanist theorists postulate that complementary gender relations and roles would do away with the gender gap (or gender imbalance) between men and women in society, while the otherwise would rather widen it or create an unresolved mighty problem that has various aspects and multifaceted phases. One of the areas in which the womanist differs from her Western fellow is that she admits the reality of natural differences between men and women and does not kick against traditional or (normative) sexuality and sexual ethics.

More so, the womanist advocates gender complementarity, which teaches that males and females are complementary opposite beings of inevitable necessity to each other in all they do. Men and women are meant to complement each other in all they do. Their complementary relations are to be the manifestations of 'two good heads are better than ones'; 'a tree cannot make a forest'; 'what a man can do, a woman can do, even better'; 'united, we stand; divided, we fall'; 'there is unity in diversity'; 'right hand washes the left, just as the left washes the right hand'; and so on. Thus, sexism, whether from men to women or vice versa, is a negation of the realities of complementary gender relations between men and women. Womanists do not use language radically to create space for themselves in the male preponderance African society. Finally, Womanism does not engage in the radical pursuit of gender equality and resorting to gender streaming and a turn-around gender-based fight, war or violence against men, as done by several strands of Western feminism like radical feminism. Therefore, given the foregoing on Womanism, it is aptly adequate for this study.

Related Studies

In their attempt to prove that gender profiling is a practice that favours men at the expense of women, Agbogu and Igbokwe (2015, p.1) argue that throughout the history of Igbo, no woman has ever been a queen or titular head and the position of Head of the clan (Onye isi ala) has always been assigned to men alone. The foregoing point highlights the case of gendered roles in the whole of Igboland in general and Mbaise and Afikpo in particular. However, this study argues that despite linguistic profiling of gender, there are shared roles and linguistic identities among Igbo people. For instance, 'onye isi ala' does not

linguistically indicate or connote male or feminine role. It is context that determines whether 'onye isi ala' is masculine or feminine. Besides, making the 'onye isi ala' a male thing only shows the gendering of the linguistic items to become socio-cultural gender constructions. Also, the existence of 'eze nwaanyi' indicates that there are shared linguistic identities that are not gendered. It suffices to say that while there are shared roles and linguistic identities, some are not. Rather, such linguistic items exhibit neuter gender status, usage and reference. In other words, while there are some linguistic elements associated with or specifically indicating males and females respectively, some others do not specify male or female in every context.

Feminism, which rose with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's book entitled, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, triggered some deserving changes in many societies, if not all societies of the globe. However, despite the changes, there are still continuities in gender issues across cultures of the globe. In developed nations, appreciable changes and innovations to that end have been recorded and sustained across ages. Despite the changes, conservative perspective still largely governs relations and gender roles among some cultures of the world in this contemporary era (Ityavyar, 1993). This perspective is informed by underdevelopment, barbarism, and aspects of culture such as patriarchy, religion worldview, perception and history, among other factors. Women across cultures are known to enormously contribute to every sphere of life in society (Robert, 2016; Adegboyega, 2015; Ochelle, 2014; Okpeh, 2007; UNDP, 1997). The plights of Nigerian rural women typify the pitiable gender-based situations that the Nigerian woman finds herself wallowing in perpetually.

Women in Mbaise and Afikpo are not left out. They are Igbo as well as Nigerian women, whose society is largely patriarchal. Ihimodu (1996, p. 1) observes that rural women are considered to be secondary actors in the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria. This assertion is a pointer to the place of women in the realms of public affairs and the well-being, growth and development of Nigeria. In particular, rural women are said to be significantly contributing to their national economies, despite being illiterate, ignorant, disease-ridden, the poorest of the poor, and correspondingly occupying low social economic and political status (UNDP, 1997, p. 9). It is important to note that although both rural and urban women are bound by their customs and traditions, the base of their respective cultures, the rural ones are more susceptible to unfavourable gendered practices than their urban fellows. While both rural and urban women are the same in matters of culture, the urban women differ considerably from their rural fellows because of influence of some factors on them. Such factors include civility, urbanisation, formal education, career impact, culture contact (i.e. cultural contact with people of other cultures), socio-economic status, access to and wholesome impact of traditional and new media, etc.

The plights of Nigerian women in general, Igbo women inclusive, are captured by the observation made by UNDP (1997, p. 9) on the contributions and the conditions of rural women. Similarly, Ityavyar (1993, p. 11) holds that wherever women are wrongly perceived, they are largely relegated perpetually and often discriminated against. Consequently, women barely 'occupy important positions in public services, politics and the economy' (Ityavyar, 1993, p. 11). This observation highlights what obtains in Nigeria at large and Igboland in particular, where patriarchy thrives. Gender relations among cultures are partly products of the linguistic constructions of gender among the respective cultures. The perception of a people is expressed using language. Their worldviews too are also expressed using language. According to Ityavyar (1993, p. 11), 'development policies affecting women, which are framed from this [conservative] perspective, tend to emphasise some issues like child bearing, family planning, agriculture, food, population control, child abuse and prostitution.' These noted issues have also been affecting Igbo

women of South-East Nigeria. As Nigerian women, they are in a conservative patriarchal country, with their Igbo cultural society being more conservative and patriarchal.

While many Igbo societies have been largely patriarchal, only a few are matriarchal. If considered in the proper sense of it, what obtains in Igbo society is quasi-matriarchy, because there is no part of Igbo that has women leading over men, as their subordinates. No particular kingdom or chiefdom is presided over by a queen in the whole of Igboland. Even before colonialism, when Igbo women had reasonable political authority, there was no queen of a real matriarchal society anywhere in Igboland. Within the context of culture, Igbo women leaders of whatever magnitude only rule(d) over women. Quasi-matriarchy is the system that does not involve or allow for the full practice of absolute or sovereign female leadership, in which a female ruler rules over both males and females as her subjects. In this system, unlike matriarchy (proper), there is no female preponderance but near-equal proportionate rights and opportunities are guaranteed for both males and females, with some preferences given to certain practices and ideals that are out of place in patriarchal societies.

It is quite obvious that patriarchy in Africa predated colonialism, but some scholars have traced patriarchy and issues of women marginalisation to the colonial era (Ityavyar & Obiajunwa, 1992, p. 2; Adegboyega, 2015, p. 1; Alu, 2016, pp. 191-201). They trace them to colonialism or the colonial era because the colonialists discriminated against African women. Before the non-violent (intellectual) revolution that changed the story of European and American women, gender inequality, gender stereotype, and women relegation and marginalisation were very pronounced in Europe and America (Acholonu, 1995; Grimshaw & Fricker, 2002; etc.). Scholars, such as Uduma (2018), Balogun (2018), Adegboyega (2015), Acholonu (1995), among others, maintain that African women neither suffered nor complained about gender stereotype and marginalisation before colonialism. Rather, the Western women in contact with them introduced African women to the heating gender issues and discourses. Meanwhile, male Westerners were molesting African women sexually, socially, politically and otherwise, including stripping them of their erstwhile traditional authorities.

Colonial gender misdeeds informed the gendered roles profiled linguistically for many years now. Acholonu (1995) and Grimshaw and Fricker (2002) have noted that the Westerners (colonialists) are to blame for negative gender framing of women as well as gender inequality, female relegation and marginalisation, and the consistent infringement on the rights of women in Africa. Acholonu (1995) argues that African women suffered little or nothing like misogyny (sexism by men against women) or gender woes and never complained of being marginalised until they had contact with their Western fellows, whose influence on them gave rise to their talks about and moves against gender issues. Grimshaw and Fricker (2002, p. 552) observe that there were times in Europe and America that andocentrism or misogyny [male sexism or chauvinism] was the order of the day, as women were not allowed to go to school and men were the only preachers, philosophers, doctors, historians, manufacturers, etc. therein. Igbo society is one of the African cultures that had contact with the colonial Westerners. The contact had exerted some significant impact on the Igbo people in terms of gender constructions, relations, perception, portrayal, and profiling, among other phases of the impact. The colonial era ushered in some changes that affected the right place of the Igbo women in the political arena.

Gendered roles in Igbo society as well as elsewhere had been created by male elite of the past, who then proclaimed the decisions and institutionalised them in such ways that they have remained binding on the

generations after them (Anyanwu, 2022). One major reason behind holding on to them and making such claims is the fact that the elite consider the advantages of these conventions to themselves. Serious policies on public matters were never made with women being part of the policy-making processes in Igboland. The Igbo traditional leadership structure is that characterised by patrilineage and primogeniture principles. Each Igbo community is independent and yet an integral part of a whole large community. Male heads of families make up the community leaders. Although women have their unions, they are realistically appendages of male unions. Their decisions and matters conveyed to the men (male unions) are at the mercy of the men (male unions). It is argued that if Igbo women were to be (among) the elite of the various generations of Igbo that had come after the one that made gendered conventions unfavourable to women, such female elite must have long ago changed the unfavourable conventions affecting women (Anyanwu, 2022).

Given the foregoing situation, it is quite clear that the Igbo women are recipients and sufferers of whatever laws, policies and conventions made almost exclusively by the males and passed on to them to obey. Since the women were not there, when what come to be the people's indigenous ethical principles and moral codes were made, even those that are unfavourable to them get institutionalised into systems constituting the given people's ethics and moral codes. Women are relegated with various negative linguistic constructions, such as dehumanising, degrading and denigrating expressions about women. Some are made conventions expressed in proverbs, idioms, figures of speech, remarks and so on. Thus, one hears constructions like 'A hen does not crow'; 'A woman does not own (or has no) land in Igboland'; 'A woman does not talk, or is not supposed to, when a man talks'; etc.

Igbo culture is affirmed to be patriarchal (Okonkwo, 2008). Thus, linguistic profiling of gendered roles is a common attribute of a patriarchal system or society like the Igbo society. Given patriarchy and culture, religion and such other factors, roles are gendered between males and females on these bases. Women in general, those of the areas under study inclusive, suffer some plights bordering on economic opportunities, secular and traditional political authorities, and access to good healthcare, among others (Chimakonam, 2018; Alutuhu & Ajakor, 2011; Okonkwo, 2008). Chimakonam (2018) refers to the educational gap between males and females in Africa as epistemic marginalisation of women. There is no doubt that the epistemic marginalisation of women, espoused by Chimakonam (2018), obtains in Igbo, Chimakonam's cultural society. The marginalisation obtains right from the sharing as well as ownership of resources at home before stretching to epistemic marginalisation in the education space of the society.

Methodology

The qualitative method is employed all through the research. The review of secondary literature involves the systematic review method. One hundred and twenty (120) participants were engaged in both oral interview and focus group discussion concurrently. That is, sixty (60) participants each were selected from Mbaise and Afikpo respectively.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Here, the primary data from the informants are presented descriptively in line with the adopted plausible methods. The data from the research participants, who were interviewed and engaged in focus group discussion, are interpreted, annotated and summarised for concise descriptive evidence.

Gender Profiling, Un/Changing Misogynistic Land Ownership and Deprivations

All the participants, representing 100%, testified that land sharing excludes female children, as culture had conditioned them to be deprived of the share of their (late) fathers' belongings. Females are not heirs per se. In Afikpo, females are heirs of their mothers, while males (sons) are heirs to their fathers. Female children do not own land and valuable property in both Mbaise and Afikpo, because they get married and move out of their paternal families into their marital families. However, these days, female children buy and own land and such other landed property, provided they have their money to acquire them. Till date, female children do not have any share of community land shared among male children. The kernel reason for not including them is because of marriage, as they would get married and leave their paternal homes. The wrong notions about these women are informed by cultural orientation, myths, tales, religious teachings, perception, worldview, and manipulative use of language and literature to portray women in bad light, to mention but a few.

The birth of male child is more celebrated than that of the female child in both Mbaise and Afikpo. This is a case of unfavourable cultural conditioning of the female child. This implies that the conditioning starts right from the birth of the females. In Mbaise and Afikpo, women are not given opportunities to make decisions concerning families, clans, villages and communities. The exclusion of women from traditional stools in Mbaise and Afikpo shows how culture and patriarchy have conditioned women politically, as they are excluded from significant traditional leadership. Obviously, religion, patriarchy, etc. have conditioned women unfavourably over the ages. For example, men are not punished for offences such as adultery, unlike women who are punished severely. There are no equivalent practices of widowhood for widowers in Afikpo and Mbaise as well as across the globe.

Changed and Unchanged Gendered Practices in Mbaise and Afikpo

The respondents affirmed that there are changes and continuities in gendered roles as well as various other aspects of their culture in general in the contemporary era. Although they are many, only a few cases shall be pointed out for evidential illustration and analysis. These days, unlike in those days, women buy land and build houses on their own in their fatherland; and do a lot of what were not permissible for them in those days. Women are now given equal education opportunities with men. The change of the mentality and myths about female education in modern and post-modern times has made it possible for many women in the study areas and beyond to be educated in large numbers. In fact, the number of educated women in these areas as well as beyond now competes considerably with that of educated men. Educating both male and female children is now competing.

Thus, female children are now educated equally with male children, except where parents are too poor to do so for both male and female children. Nevertheless, that change is still amidst the practical disposition of the notion of 'woman's education ends in the kitchen' by a good number of men in Mbaise and Afikpo and beyond. Widowhood practices have changed significantly amidst continuities. While some negative aspects of widowhood have been changed, others remain the same or have been sustained as continuities in the practice. The subjection of widows to various tough and hard conditions has become obsolete in Mbaise and Afikpo. Barbing, robbing ashes and wearing sack cloth(es) have changed significantly. Barbing is now at the will of the widow. However, if she is not barbing, she must pay her fellow women the demanded token she has to, including the amount of money and the material items she ought to have offered to those who barbed her hairs. Also, the mourning rites and payment of cultural demanded items to several sets of persons by the widow are aspects of continuities in widowhood practices. The changes and continuities vary considerably between Mbaise and Afikpo in terms of what obtained therein then and now.

The eating of gizzard, liver and the anus-joined bottom parts of a chicken by men alone in both Mbaise and Afikpo is a continuity that has remained an aspect of gender constructed continuity culture across all ages. Gizzard, liver, and the anus joint bottom parts of a chicken can never be eaten by a woman when and where there is a man. It is a taboo for a female to eat these parts of chicken. In a case where and when a husband is not at home, the woman is expected to give these parts of chicken to their first son, even if he is a very little child. Nevertheless, it implies that traditionally, a woman can only eat these parts where and when there is no man at all in the house. Well, this practice has been changed these days among women of these areas who live in urban areas. But the change does not obtain in Mbaiseland and Afikpoland till date.

Women in Afikpo still retain subservient status or role in the traditional setting – nothing has changed to end. The situation is still the same. That is, gendered roles still remain the same. They currently occupy no position. Till date, Afikpo and Mbaise women are perceived and treated as weaker vessels in terms of all that benefit men alone. But in terms of caring for households and spending on the family, women are not considered as such but left to take charge of such roles. Men shy away from such roles with huge economic or financial implications, without considering their women as weaker vessels in such regards. Considered as weaker vessels, the men are always making concerted efforts to protect their wives from any attack. For this reason, when going to the farm, the woman walks in front of the man, who rushes to defend her in case there is any problem.

In those days, Mbaise and Afikpo women were not largely educated. These days, they are. The major reasons for many of them not being educated then were: the people were suspicious of Western education; spending time on schooling would delay them from getting marriage when they supposed to and that would also affect the number of children they might intend to have; some girls/ladies were not interested in Western education; some parents were not interested and thereby saw no need to send their female children for that matter to school; lack of finance for sponsorship; they believed that Western education would make them wild– too wild for the kind of wives their men wanted then. That has changed significantly these days.

These days, most Afikpo and Mbaise girls are graduates. Thus, they are now largely educated. Also, the practice of male preference to the female child was pronounced in Afikpo society of Igboland until recently. This practice, which remains the same in Mbaise till tomorrow, is changing gradually in contemporary Afikpo society because: Afikpo women are realised to be more industrious than the males; and female children care for their aged parents much more than the males do.

Gender Profiling and Equality between Males and Females

Roles are gendered based on the profiled traits of the two sets of human beings, males and females. In other words, the sexual compositions of males and females and their biological, social, behavioural and psychological traits are the base of roles gendering or profiling in societies such as those under study. Accordingly, on equality between men and women, all the participants screamed out ‘No’, stressing that they have never been equal and they are bound to remain unequal on cultural ground. The answer highlights the fact that women in Mbaise and Afikpo are linguistically profiled as unequal to men on the basis of gender. This notion is what is made manifest in the land owner practice of excluding women from free land ownership. Women bred in the study areas are said to have known and got used to the disparities and inequality between men and women. The gendered traditions, which include the age-long gendered roles, are usually transmitted across ages.

Given the notion of eternal inequality between males and females in these two societies under study, which had grounded the linguistic profiling of gendered roles, being submissive to even the youngest male has remained a cultural requisition among the people of Mbaise and Afikpo. As Chris Anyanwu, one of the informants, revealed, 'In Mbaise, there is a very high regard for male sexual and biological traits.' This point highlights the extent to which gender is linguistically profiled in Mbaise. The high regard is usually made manifest in words and expressions about women in Mbaise, which put them below their highly regarded men. In Afikpo, the emphasis is not on the traits per se, though some roles are gendered and divided between males and females. There are more gendered and divided roles in Mbaise than in Afikpo. Rather, the emphasis is on the significance of the male child as an heir apparent or his father's representative. This belief is shared by both Afikpo and Mbaise people of Igboland.

In Afikpo, most roles are shared between males and females, while a few are gendered as distinct male-exclusive and female-exclusive roles respectively. Also, there is a common case of digression from roles by either sex into those roles that are supposed to be the exclusive preserved of the other sex. For example, the role of taking care of the family is shouldered without any complaint by Afikpo women, whenever the need arises. In the words of Dr Mrs Angela Iduma, a respondent for this study, 'Afikpo women are even more industrious and responsible in fulfilling parental responsibilities than their male counterparts.' This statement implicitly highlights the point that Afikpo women sometimes delve into carrying out male gendered (masculine) roles of taking care of the home, as industrious women who do not wait until they are being taken care of by their women.

In fact, a respondent wrote in his social media delivered answer to one of the questions thus: 'In Mbaise, 'a family or compound (*Ezi* or *Obi*) without a man is incomplete and lacks recognition and respect.' This implies that the male is the ultimate child in Mbaiseland. This point tallies with that given by many of the Afikpo respondents viz: 'Male child preference is prevalent in Afikpo, because the male replaces his father, while the female child gets married out.' Nevertheless, a few of them stressed that these days, some men now believe that female children take more care of their aged parents than the male ones do. Thus, such men now see the dire need to equally spend on their female children and give them equal opportunities with the male children.

Factors behind Gender Imbalance in Afikpo and Mbaise

The informants unanimously agreed that the factors behind gendered roles include patriarchy, religion, history, language, customs, traditions, worldview, perception, myths and tales about women, negative gender constructs, etc. In other words, culture with its systems such as religion, language, worldview, patriarchy, literature (most especially myths and tales), etc. do not favour females the ways they favour males in various regards. Inheritance rights are almost the exclusive preserved of male children among many cultures, including that of the Igbo, where the two societies under study are found. Cultural and religious embargoes to females do not apply to males, as in the case of the restriction of Afikpo women from making certain expressions.

Conclusion

Gendered roles have changed in Afikpo and Mbaise in several regards. In the first place, females are given equal education opportunities. Females are now allowed to go to school. These days, they are called upon in social and public gatherings to talk or carry out tasks which used to be the exclusive preserved of the males in the past. Women are now allowed to occupy public offices and carry out public functions that involve leading both males and females. The changes are gradual. Although they can buy and own any

portions of land they want, the practice of excluding women from free communal ownership of land remains unchanged misogynistic practice of land ownership and use. In conclusion, the obtained changes in gendered practices showcase their reconstructions in present-day Mbaise and Afikpo societies of Igbo.

References

- Acholonu, C. (1995). *Motherism: The Afrocentric alternative to feminism*. Afa Publications.
- Adegboyega, A. S. (2015, May). Situating the place of the Yoruba in nurturing ethical values. Paper presented at *Mable@50 Conference*, held at Wuse II, Abuja.
- Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. (1996). *The last of the strong ones*. Vista Books.
- Agbogu, A. E. and Igbokwe, B. (2015, May). Gender profiling in Nigeria: The case of the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. *International Journal of African Society Cultures and Traditions*, vol.2, no.2, 1-10, www.eajournals.org.
- Alutulu, N. U. and Ajakor, E. I. (2011). Reconstructing the Nigerian mentality on gender for sustainable development. In A. Chiegboka, T. Uto-Ezeajugh and M. Ogene (eds.), *The humanities & sustainable development*. Rex Charles & Patrick Ltd.
- Angya, C. A. (2016). Gender and good governance in Nigeria. In Anjov, T.K. (ed.) *Religion, feminism, gender issues and national development* (pp.20-32). BWright Integrated Publishers.
- Anyanwu, E. A. (2022). Linguistic profiling of gendered roles in Mbaise and Afikpo. Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to Department of Languages and Linguistics, School of Post-Graduate Studies, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.
- Balogun, O. A. (2018). Conceptual decolonization in African philosophy: Views on women. J. O. Chimakonam and L. du Toit (eds.), *African philosophy and the epistemic marginalization of women* (142-154). Routledge.
- Besong, E.N. (2018). Towards addressing kernel problems impinging on teamwork in Nigerian civil service. *International Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, vol.15, no.4, IJHSS.
- Chimakonam, J.O. (2018). Addressing the epistemic marginalization of women in African philosophy and building a culture of conversations. In J. O. Chimakonam and L. du Toit (eds.), *African philosophy and the epistemic marginalization of women*. Routledge.
- Emeka-Nwobia, N.U. and Obianika, C. E. (2017). Gender Dynamics and Domestic Violence Against Igbo Women of Southeastern Nigeria. In Adebayo Oyebade and Gashawbeza Bekele. (Eds.) *The long struggle: discourses on human and civil rights in Africa and the African Diaspora*. Texas, Pan-African University Press.
- Emeka-Nwobia, N. U (2021). Understanding Gender Complementarity in Igbo Society: The Role of Umuada and Umunna in Peacebuilding. *Kujenga Amani. A publication of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), New York*.
<https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2021/07/21/understanding-gender-complementarity-in-igbo-society-the-role-of-umuada-and-umunna-in-peacebuilding/>. Accessed on 7/ 06/2023
- Emeka-Nwobia, N. U & Ndimele, R.I. (2019) Cultural conceptualization of women in Igbo Proverbs– UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol 20 No 1.
<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ujah/article/view/188231>
- Etim-Robert, P.F. (2016). Effects of job design and staff training on employee performance in Nigeria. HND Project submitted to the Department of Accountancy, Fidei Polytechnic, Gboko, Benue; PDF upload on academia.edu.

- Grimshaw, J. and Miranda, F. (2002). Philosophy and feminism. In N. Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James (eds.), *Blackwell companion to philosophy*, 2nd ed. Blackwell.
- Ihimodu, I. I. (1996). *The impact of the better life programme on the economic status of women*. IFR.
- Itayaryar, D. (1993). *The changing socio-economic role of Tiv women*. University of Jos Press Ltd.
- Ityavyar, D. A. and Obiajunwa, S. N. (1992). *The state and women in Nigeria*. Jos University Press Limited.
- Kolawole, M. E. M. (1997). *Womanism and African consciousness*. Africa World Press.
- Lorber, J. (n.d.). 'The variety of feminisms and their contribution to gender equality.' 8-43.
- Ochelle, J. O. (2014). Women in the rural economy of Igede land since 1960. A research proposal submitted to the Department of History, Benue State University, Makurdi.
- Ogbonnaya, L. U. and Besong, E. N. (2018). The ontological foundations of gender (in)equality. In P. B. Bisong and O. J. Alexander (eds.), *Essays on feminism in honour of Prince Nico Mbarga* (446-460). e20Media Limited.
- Oha, O. (1998). The semantics of female devaluation in Igbo proverbs. *African Study Monographs*, 19(2), 87-102.
- Okebukola, F. O. (2008). Gender equity in Nigeria: A critical analysis of contexts and conditions. In *JONLAC*, vol.10, no.7.
- Okonkwo, N. (2008). Gender mainstreaming and the cultural values of the Anioma people of Delta State. *Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture (JONLAC)*, vol.10, no.1.
- Okpeh, O. O. (2007). Patriarchy, women's quest for political leadership and the democratization process in Nigeria. In O. O. Okpeh and P. S. Dung (eds.), *Gender, power and politics in Nigeria*. Aboki Publishers.
- Robert, O.S. (2016). 'Situating the Bekwarra woman's place in politics, ethics, culture and economy in Nigeria.' PDF Upload, *Academia.edu*.
- Trumbach, R. (1994). London's sapphists: From three sexes to four genders in the making of modern culture. In G. Herdt (ed.), *Third sex, third gender: Beyond sexual dimorphism in culture and history* (111-36). Zone (MIT).
- Uduma, O. U. (2018). Are women in African philosophy? In J.O. Chimakonam and L. du Toit (eds.), *African philosophy and the epistemic marginalization of women* (219-248). Routledge.
- UNDP (1997). *Nigerian human development reported 1996*. UNDP.
- UNICEF (2017, November). *Gender equality: Glossary of terms and concepts*. UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia.
- Walker, A. (1983). *In search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist prose* (1st ed.). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Wambui, B. (2018). Developing an afro feminist response to environmental questions. In J.O. Chimakonam and L. du Toit (eds.), *African philosophy and the epistemic marginalization of women* (167-188). Routledge.