



And the
keynote speaker
in CHICAGO
is?



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION DEADLINE MOVED TO JANUARY 31, 2016

THE 14TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE IGBO STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Theme: NDI IGBO IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Dominican University, River Forest (Chicago), Illinois, USA

May 12-14, 2016



The Igbo Studies Association (ISA) invites scholars and professionals working on all aspects of the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria to submit paper, panel, poster, and/or roundtable proposals for its 14th annual international conference to be held on May 12-14 at Dominican University, River Forest (Chicago), Illinois, USA. Through this annual event, scholars and experts gather to deliberate on diverse facets of the Igbo experience and explore ways of advancing the rich Igbo heritage. The conference theme for 2016, Ndi Igbo in the Global Context, is timely; it will give participants the opportunity to reflect on Igbo consciousness as well as the numerous economic, social, political, and security accomplishments Ndi Igbo have made and the challenges they still face both at home and abroad. The place of Ndi Igbo in Nigeria and the world today demands closer examination especially in the face of threats to their lives and wellbeing from xenophobia, ethnic conflicts, terrorism, economic anxiety, human and drug trafficking, investment dilemma, youth restiveness, educational crisis, brain drain, political violence and marginalization, kidnapping, and unemployment. This conference explores how Igbo indigenous cultural values, attitudes, and worldview could serve as a vehicle in constructing a more positive and meaningful relationship among Ndi Igbo and with their neighbors within and outside Nigeria.

For this conference, the ISA welcomes proposals that assess the engagement of Ndi Igbo with the ever-changing and complex world. Igbo efforts at national and international integration present both risks and opportunities. How Ndi Igbo could maximize the opportunities and minimize the risks in the globalized world of the 21st century is the overriding question for this conference. Presenters are encouraged to propose topics that advance the conversation on the contributions the Igbo have made and could still make in (re)shaping both Nigeria and the world in which equal access to social, political, and economic opportunities could be

guaranteed. We hope that your presentations will incorporate original research in understanding and proffering solutions to the obstacles and challenges facing the Igbo people.

Guidelines:

Submit an abstract of 250-300 words with your paper/poster/roundtable title, name, current position and institutional affiliation, mailing addresses, email, and phone number. Your abstracts must discuss the scope of the paper, the research methodology, possible sources, and tentative thesis or hypothesis. Those whose abstracts are accepted will have to pay a \$50 non-refundable part payment for conference registration.

Deadline:

All proposals must be submitted online and submission deadline is January 31, 2016. Completed papers are due by March 1, 2016. To submit your proposal, click on this link: <http://igbostudiesassociation.org/index.php/submission>

Notification:

You will be notified on the status of your submission and other program details by email. Selected papers will be considered for publication and inclusion in either the Igbo Studies Review or a post-conference edited book. You should, therefore, write your papers as if they are being prepared for publication. Presentations can be made in English or Igbo. Participants are responsible for the conference fee and their travel and lodging costs. It is important that those who will require U.S. visas submit their proposals and completed paper early since they will need them for the visa interviews. For more information on the Igbo Studies Association, including membership and other matters, please visit us at <http://www.igbostudiesassociation.org/>

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CHICAGO 2016

AND THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER IS?



Guess who gets the podium as Keynote Speaker of the 14th Annual International Conference of the Igbo Studies Association holding on May 12-14, 2016, at Dominican University, Chicago, Illinois! **watch out for the next issue!**

DI-FEMINISM, AN INDIGENOUS FEMINIST THEORY WITH BROAD CLAIMS FOR *NDI IGBO*

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ABSTRACT

A paradigm shift to the prefix ‘di’ (meaning master/leader/head; pronounced “dee”), as in *dimgba* (master wrestler), as opposed to the prefix ‘umu’, as in *umuada* (daughters of the lineage) and *umunna* (sons of the soil), could be the panacea for the endemic unequal gendered power relations in Igboland. This article will examine construction of maleness and femaleness in Igboland, with a view to redressing the masculinity and femininity imbalance, and redefining social power relations, labor roles, activities and expectations. Obioma Nnaemeka’s clarion call to indigenous feminist theorists to embrace a homegrown “Akataka”, read synergistic, feminist theory furnishes us with a radical theoretical framework that we can use to help modify earlier indigenous African feminisms and gender inequality in Igboland. Our theory, di-feminism, targets both women and men as gender performers and so discourages male gender invisibility. Then, because Igbo society assigns roles, responsibilities and expectations, a redefining of social division of labor in these postmodern times is also in order. Finally, given that Igboland currently going through post-civil war economic stagnation is in dire need of (re)development and for women to reach their full potentials as human beings, needed are redistribution of power relations, erasure of gender inequality, and awareness and recognition that gender opportunity differences are neither natural nor inevitable and hurt both men and women.

INTRODUCTION

In the nineteenth century, the central moral challenge was slavery. In the twentieth century, it was the battle against totalitarianism. We believe that in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality around the world.

Kristof, N and S WuDunn: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide. i

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES GIVEN TO WOMEN, FEMALES, just like men/males, will enable all to be the best that they can be as human beings and so contribute their optimum best to society. Many, who imbibe the idea of cisgender, would agree that women and persons of the female gender do not have it nearly as easy as do men and persons of the male gender. Even though gender is a spectrum of flexibility and fluidity, a social construction that has no single or fixed state, it imposes the yardstick for behavioral expectations and role performances. Indeed, it is the incongruous nature of sex and genders that conditions division of labor in the social institutions along the lines of gender roles for males and females. Moreover, the misunderstanding of gender and gender identity exaggerates gender differences and causes gender inequality and male domination in

society. Then, descriptive norms cast women as lacking in self-esteem and self-confidence, as untrustworthy, weak, dependent, mere followers, incompetent in leadership positions, but men as self-confident, worthy of trust, hard-working, aggressive, independent, leaders, ambitious, and dominant. Such opinions are from the past and should belong there.

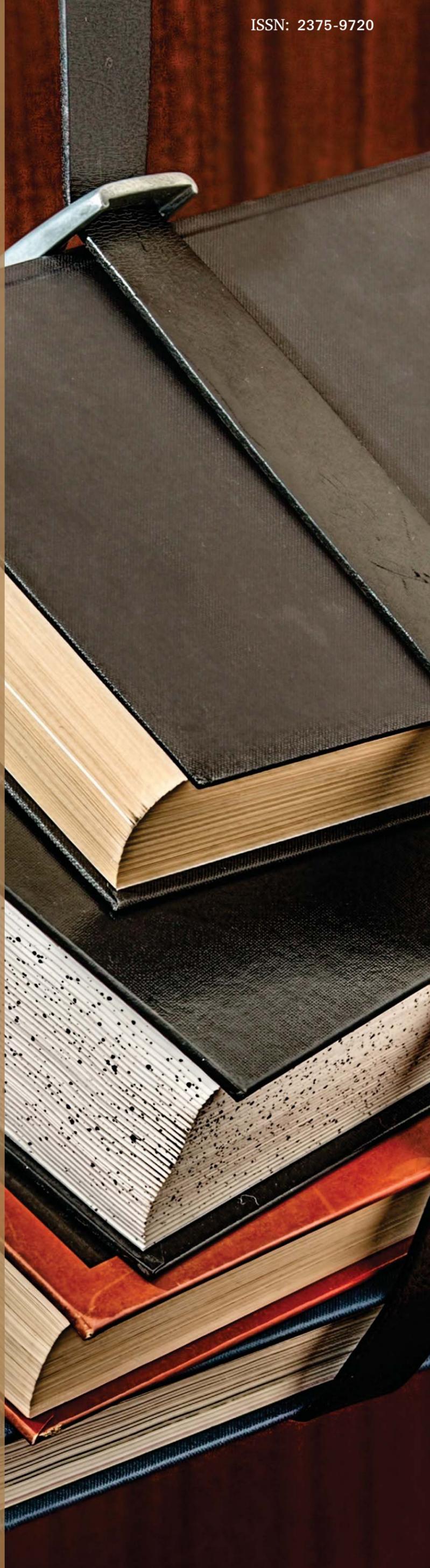
In this essay, we argue that in these contemporary times, such opinions are fit for the archives, and that gender equality in opportunities should go hand in hand with human development. Surely, women have suffrage now in most cultures of the world, though it was not always so. Many women also can get educated now, for parents in particular and society in general no longer believe that a woman’s place in the home should be limited to the triangle of bedroom, sitting room, and kitchen. Many women now working outside the home for pay are not about to give up their careers to go back home and sit down doing domestic chores. The question, though, is how much respect, freedom and regard do women have in carrying out their daily routines and activities.

RELEVANCE OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN FEMINIST THEORY TODAY

As the epigraph above suggests, the second decade of the millennium calls for intensified feminist activism. As a movement and a social theory free of socially constructed restraints and obstacles, feminism needs to reflect the reality of women’s and men’s lives in this epoch and in particular cultural spaces. Furthermore, there should be strength and ability in followership or leadership positions and equal opportunities and shared responsibilities for men and women, with an aim to recognize especially women who are downtrodden, in order to give them a sense of their worthiness as contributing and effective members of society. There is no better opportune moment than now to seek equality of opportunities for men and women, in order to enable them to be the best that they can be and so contribute their optimum best in society.

This study proposes to change the situation of lack of equal opportunities between the genders, to call off anger where it exists against the male, stop the demonization of women by men, and finally install a new dawn of understanding of the real problem as sexism, gender inequality and male domination. It will examine the relevance of feminism today, review the present situation of African feminism, the historical contexts, precolonial, colonial and contemporary, reflect on the shortcomings of the indigenous feminist theories and theorists, contemplate the possibilities and probabilities that di-feminism, a new approach this article suggests could bring, and finally attempt to suggest some practical considerations.

But, why propound a feminist theory to frame the Igbo woman’s situation at this



present time with so many issues and concerns about the female condition waiting to be treated? Are feminist theorizing and theories still relevant in view of the social, political and economic urgent needs of urban and rural women in Africa? What would be the value of a feminist theory to carry the details of gender imbalance in Igboland? These are cogent questions that need answers, for theory due to its abstract nature can many times become a distraction from seeking solutions to the task at hand. Still, theory can help to frame problems better, so that adequate solutions can be found. I am favorable to theorizing on the question of gender and development in Igboland, because I believe that the present disparate energies in the land need to be harnessed for a better future for all. I do not intend to cause further mystification of the female condition by bringing forth yet another theory. The contrary is the case; simplify and aid simplification. Put simply, the value of theory is to make abstractions of empirical material and to use them to deal with the issues and concerns of the people from whom the materials are collected.

Feminist theorists should ensure that theory generated will tackle the problems of sexism, gender inequality and male domination in a way that will make sense to the people whose issues and concerns are theorized. Theorists make use of indigenous material in the lives of the people they know and understand. For these reasons, theory should not intimidate the people, nor should it obstruct their view of reality. On the contrary, when closer to reality it should be more appealing to the women and men the theorists want to reach and serve. Observe that because sociological issues and problems are forever multiplying, changing and modifying, theorists should also be ready to change their minds with new awareness, for theory should do more than merely protect the vulnerable, weak, subjugated and submissive women. That would be tantamount to mere survival, maintenance of the status quo, and inability to change anything. That way, development and progress would continue to stagnate and elude society.

Pertinent, therefore, is the caution by philosopher, Paulin J. Hountondji, on the need for theory that would steer Africans from merely condoning traditionalism, but rather towards theories that would in themselves generate other debates and theories, in order to move Africans forward towards change. He says, "if theoretical discourse is to be meaningful in modern Africa, it must promote within African society itself a theoretical debate of its own that is capable of developing its themes and problems autonomously instead of remaining a remote appendix to European theoretical and scientific debates". ii

The various indigenous attempts at African feminist theory so far have various faces, as the thinkers grapple with what it means to be a man or woman or male or female in postmodern times. Yet the problem with the pioneers of Igbo feminist thought is that they have merely rationalized what is observable, that is, how Igbo women employ ruses, read trickster strategies, to navigate their way through the rugged terrain of rigid social structures, mind-sets and attitudes by men in keeping them submissive and subjugated. This strategy, "playing the male game" in Nigerian speak, keeps women and men in perpetual, endless loggerheads or merry-go-rounds of no escape, of absurd normality. If women want to just keep reacting to negativist views from men, views that see all women as a subjugated and submissive unit of weak, fickle, inferior second class citizens, then they are in for a long period of continued subjugation and submission to men and males.

Poststructural and postmodern theorists seek to deconstruct the status quo and de-essentialize male impositions that define women as subjects with rigid

identity from nature that cannot be transcended through free will and choice, just like men are privileged and able to do. Helen Chukwuma, one of the foremost Nigerian feminist scholars and critics, for example, examined feminism as women's reaction to denial of their human rights in *Women's Quest for Rights: African Feminist Theory in Fiction*, saying:

Women's rights and women's beings have always been taken for granted, nicely and safely tucked away under the bed of patriarchy. Silence was the virtue of women and passivity their garner, but it was not always so. Traditional societies in pre-colonial times had spheres of power and influence for women in closely-knit organizations that helped them maintain a voice. Colonialism has its merits but its new culture of ascendancy through education, white-collar jobs and money-driven economy relegated women down the ladder.

With women's education came exposure and awareness and the inevitable reaction.

Feminism is a reaction; it is an assertion of being, rights and status. Literature has proved a worthy tool in interrogating the female condition. The silence was broken by women writers in the mid-sixties on the continent which correspondingly was the era of political independence of quite a number of African States. The decade, that followed, witnessed shades of feministic writing by African women and has advanced the women's cause of recognition and relevance. iii

Feminist theory is, therefore, sympathetic to women's yearnings for gender equality, while opposing sexism, racism, ageism, and all other intersections of unjust and discriminatory practices. For Ifeoma Odinye:

Women traditionally had been regarded as being inferior to men, physically and intellectually. Nowadays, women have started showing resentment on the limitations meted on them by society. As a result of this, they have become consciously aware and have started asking questions. iv

Observe that rejection of traditional stipulations that are inimical to women's rights does not mean not embracing those that foster women's strength and fulfillment. From this angle of vision, Katherine Frank's assertion that tradition works against the interest of individual women, because it caters to the group of women, should be reconsidered. v We believe there should not be a dichotomy between tradition and feminism, for both work for individual women as well as groups of women. Individual women and groups of women have had their dawn of awareness in history, dawn which ushered in their self-assertion and revolt against the oppression of their gender identity.

Development is also worthy of consideration, for what is the value of gender equality if it does not lead to development in the land? Feminism in Africa is less about sexual revolution than it is about economic revolution and ability to participate in the political systems of the nation as a gateway to alleviating endemic female poverty, lack of adequate healthcare

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and bogs of tradition and customs that keep women down. Such a custom as female circumcision or excision appears to have had its usefulness in the past and does not seem justifiable today. Given that time has passed and eroded with it any justifications there were for it, nothing these days justifies this age-old rite of passage for young girls. To wit, the Nigerian federal government's recent outlawing of female circumcision throughout the country is laudable. vi Such nation-wide laws are needed to oppose customary practices that are harmful to women, which could be inhuman from one pocket of culture to another pocket of culture, such as rites of widowhood and the caste system. Inheritance

laws that prevent girls from inheriting their fathers, and bars women and wives from inheriting property from their dead husbands also need to be revised. Women have always been against these rites, but have not had the power to go against them. Indeed, many women caught in a viscous cycle, unable to shake off their shackles, have supported these rites, as well, for so-called generational continuity as elderly menopausal women carry out the expectations of the rites and initiations for women. Catherine Acholonu sums up adequately these development issues when she says:

The tragedy of our underdevelopment, dehumanizing poverty, institutionalized and malignant sexism, as well as the degraded status of womanhood, have continued to bog down the life-cycle of the average female, who whether as a daughter, sister, wife, mother or worker is often harassed or denied equal opportunities to enjoy the full benefits of her human rights. vii

Clearly, the struggle for female empowerment and gender equality, through advocacy for women's rights, relief from poverty, all manner of discrimination, and enlightenment about how stereotyping and exclusion could be harmful to individual identities and the integrity of women is intrinsic to gender and development. So long as girls and women are not empowered to realize their full potentials as men are, for so long will human advancement in all spheres be hampered, for indeed many women have a lot to offer society.

The United Nations Agency for Development (UNAD) has its three key areas of focus as sustainable development, democratic governance, and risk prevention and resilience. These areas of focus include women's access to justice, fairness, and reparations when wronged. It would also include creating jobs that women would be allowed to join, such as the police force, often the exclusive preserve of men, adult literacy programs, vocational training to allow more women into the workforce to earn their living, economic policies that enable all citizens equally to realize themselves, and the prevention of violence against women, violence in the form of rape and domestic battery. These measures are especially important to a country like Nigeria still suffering from the throes of the brutal three-year civil war of 1967-1970 that saw over two million citizens dead and many more physically and psychologically maimed. Although there have been a measure of post conflict reconstructions, yet not all damaged infrastructure have come back to normal. Although the citizens are steadily recovering, yet issues still remain, including the callousness with which citizens treat other citizens, due to the brutalizing effect of the war. There were, for example, the Bar Beach state-approved executions in Lagos by firing squads for the least offence, kidnappings by gangs of unemployed male youth, whose only avenue to recover their masculinity is through gun violence, rape, robbery and abductions of law-abiding citizens. Many girls and women have taken to covert or overt prostitution to make ends meet. So, therefore, needed are methods of recovery that must take into account the needs of male youth and those of female youth affected by the traumas of the civil war. Clearly, one-size, no doubt, does not fit all, for whereas the men carried guns and killed to avoid being killed, women, though effaced, also played active support roles during the war. That is to say, men's and women's experiences of the war were quite different, and any worthwhile post-civil-war efforts at reconstruction should have and now should take gender-specific needs into account.

As Becky L. Jacobs states in her essay, "Unbound by Theory and Naming: Survival Feminism and The Women of the South African Victoria Mxenge Housing and Development Association," time has come for feminist theorists to question practices that degrade African women:

The emergence of a uniquely African formulation of feminism is one of the most energizing developments in feminist theory and discourse in recent history. As African women confront unprecedented economic and political challenges, they also are questioning, and, in some instances, redefining, individual and societal orthodoxies of gender and family roles.viii

A redefinition of masculinity and femininity is needed in Igboland, because punishment in the way of arrests and killing has not worked to deter kidnappers and would-be kidnappers. It is important to try other measures, including negotiation, counselling, in order to stem the belief that the youth are excluded from society as poor, jobless, unwanted and violent persons. The same goes for girls and females with regard to education, career, marriage, sexual abuse, including harassment and rape, STDs and HIV/AIDS, and sex-trafficking. Men and women suffer differently from joblessness, are differently allowed access to land, property, especially property accumulated during a marriage, finance and bank credits and loans. They are also differentially impacted by the negative environment, such as customs, courts and general business administration guidelines in which they are not savvy and that forbid them to do certain types of business. Women, more than men, suffer when development in the private sector is hampered in this way.

This study promotes equal opportunities for the genders, and calls off anger where it exists against the male, the demonization of women by men, and finally installs a new dawn of understanding of the real problem as sexism, leading to gender inequality and male domination.

STORIES OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT AND RESILIENCE

Three anecdotes encapsulate gender issues presented in the opening pages. First, on personal history, growing up, I just knew from all happening around me that there were some things I could not, did not take. With advanced education and awareness, those reactions now appear to be feminist. One was the incessant nudge to cut my formal education too early, so that my siblings coming after could go as far as I have gone. That was to affect my high school level and with extreme difficulty higher school level education. The attempts to have me stop all these years actually went hand in hand with endless streams of suitors coming to marry me away. A girl from a poor family was always a target for early marriage, since her bride wealth was badly needed to take care of the male offspring in the family. I simply knew that I did not want to enter a man's house without skills enough to paddle my own canoe, should the situation arise. Then, I was not aware of Section 34 (b) of the Nigerian Constitution's provision to the effect that "no person shall be held in bondage or servitude..." The Golden Fleece earned, I soon realized how afraid men could be of the so-called 'acada', read university-educated women who seem to peer into men's souls, so-called 'daughters of Flora Nwapa,' meaning academic women to be boycotted. I understood. And I was preparing myself for life-long spinsterhood, with some two children, to keep each other company while I pursued my career as an educated, employed, happy, and self-fulfilled woman. But then, love came my way, and that changed everything.

In the recent past, I had to function as a general contractor to finish the building of our village house. It had dawned on us that things had to change or we might go bankrupt and never finish building the house. What you did not want fellow villagers to say was that we could not build us a house, not what led to the house not being completed. As the woman, you would be blamed for not helping your husband adequately enough to build a house. Everything bad is always blamed on the woman (such as the house not being completed), and good things (like the house being completed) are credited to the man. I felt compunction to go down and finish the house, and what a great opportunity that opened my eyes further to gender perception.

Older men saw my womanly intervention as forage into the domain of men, something that should not be. I persisted. Other men threw quips when they could, making allusion to the fact that most of the work had already been done and that I was merely doing the finishing work, reaping glory from work I had not started: "Nwoke nusia ogu Nwanyi enwelu akuko" (literally, a woman telling the story of her battle exploits about a war that a man had waged, successfully). I persisted, rejoicing that "nawnyu bi ife" (a woman also accomplishes feats). I persisted. It was interesting that as the weeks went on and I did not appear to be sinking under the weight of the burden I was bearing, comments also became friendlier. For example, a near relative conceded that what I have done is really great. He then proceeded to add that not a woman he knew could have been able to do it. I responded by saying he should have said that not many women 'would' have done it, because they know they are not expected to do such things. Coming from the outside the community, as it were, I did not feel bound by the mores, and besides, we had come to a point where we did not have any more money to throw away from the work on the house. I persisted. Comments are now from my co-wives. Sometimes, they were downright envious or jealous, saying that it was a 'short hand' that prevented them from doing as much I have done. If they were given money by their husbands to do this kind of work, they said, they could have executed the building of their own houses. At other times, I saw solidarity of sorts from other women who subtly urged me on, saying that with the kobo here and kobo there they earn selling peppers and leafy vegetables in the open market they could 'buy' the men in their lives over and over again.

Second, on clan history, towards the late 1940s and early 1950s, in Ogidi village of Anambra State of Nigeria, there lived a person that would be described in the current language of sexuality and gender today as a cross-dresser or at best a transsexual. ix Ifegulu-onye (the one-who-does-what-s/he wants-to-do), as s/he named herself or was named by the community, was a paraphrase that described her radical, perhaps even revolutionary, gender performance when she changed her female gender to match her male gender identity, according to how she felt within her body. Ifegulu-Onye rose up one morning from bed and decided to realign her biological sex that nature gave her to match her perceived male gender. To achieve this gender conformity, Ifegulu-Onye slashed off her two mammary glands, her breasts with her kitchen knife, donned a male garb, thus ending her ordeal of a 'man' trapped in a 'woman's body. For Ifegulu-Onye, living with her biological sex, which did not match her male gender was a daily torture. Thereafter, Ifegulu-Onye wore male clothes, and conducted his affairs in the family and the community as a male. Ifegulu-Onye never backed down and never looked back.

Why did Ifegulu-Onye do this, one might ask? Was it to 'pass' for the opposite sex? Second, was it to gain freedom to do things, for it was always men who did lofty things in the community? Third, did she take to her carving knife for economic reasons, to escape poverty and lowly birth, through becoming adventurous and so able to travel far from home to fend for self as men did? Fourth, was it so that he could inherit family property, which was the exclusive reserve of men? Was taking the path to a man's life an option to escape the fate of a married woman or face life as a prostitute, a free woman in the community?



Finally and fifthly, did turning into a man allow Ifegulu-Onye to transcend her female condition, a lowly state of being that made femininity second-class to masculinity? By refusing her female identity, therefore, did Ifegulu-Onye signaled to the community that she understood that both genders were not equal, and that one gender, the male gender, got to dominate the other gender, female, exaggerating gender differences that should not inevitably lead to the oppression of the female gendered persons? At first, her community was stunned and aghast, but over time it learned tolerance and eventually acceptance. Secretly, many applauded Ifegulu-onye for courage in making the choice to live up to his conviction.

Ifegulu-Onye's story, like my personal story, is a streak of lightning, a burst of energy by an individual to accomplish a gender performance that many women had they not been fettered by traditional customs, mores and expectations to the point that they had become pervious to them and incapable of action would have liked to do. Ifegulu-Onye in particular was a victim of thoughts that prevailed in her days that one had to be a man or male to get things done, to gain 'real' respect in the community. Had it been possible for her to affirm herself otherwise, Ifegulu-Onye might not have taken the drastic and radical measure of slashing off her breasts, which came with possibilities of womanhood and motherhood. Had Ifegulu-onye had the opportunities she craved to perform her gender in a masculine way, sometimes, although possessing a woman's body, there was the likelihood that she would not have operated on herself and would have been a full contributing member of her community in leadership roles and other aggressive roles perceived to be masculine.

Third, on colonial history, a group of Igbo women in 1929 is another case in point; they rose up as a unitary woman would and with one voice and a single-mindedness of purpose waged war against the oppressive measures put in place by the conquering British colonial government. Through the three arms of the military, the executive and legislative powers, the British administration's District Officer (D. O.), the Church (the clergy) and the School (teachers) and the Court (judges), incessantly taxed the poor. This resulted in the de facto removal of the husbands from their

homes to work in the cash-crop farms to support the British economy. Back in Europe, it was the era of industrial revolution, and in effect Igbo men slaved on their lands as laborers working for their masters, and paying taxes from whatever little they earned, leaving them weak, spent and with not enough to take care of their families. Under the circumstances, they were often unable to perform their conjugal obligations with their spouses in their matrimonial homes.

On the fateful day, in 1929, the Igbo women of Aba marched on government hill. They stoned the District Officer, who was forced to call for reinforcements. When the reinforcements came, they too were again stoned by the women. The enraged women would not back down or leave government hill until their demands were met. The people called it the Igbo Women's 'War', but the British called it the Igbo Women's 'Riot'. What was unclear at the time was that what took place was a strategy, albeit on a grandiose scale, which many an Igbo woman would usually employ to bend a recalcitrant husband for dereliction of duties and obligations to wife and family. They called it 'sitting on a man'. Therefore, the Aba women at war with the British had employed the Igbo women's radical strategy of 'sitting on a man' when aggrieved. Such a recalcitrant woman would 'sit' on her abusive husband's homestead, refusing to cooperate with food preparation, sex and emotional company until her husband promised to change his ways. Sometimes, it was a group of wives that 'sat' on their offending men. Felicia Ibezim described the phenomenon very succinctly in "The Concept of 'Sitting on a Man'", when she wrote:

Sitting on a man is a punitive traditional method of disciplining a man or a husband who has strayed from the right path and who has mistreated or abused his wife or another woman. Sitting on a man is a punitive way of getting a man who has violated the norms and rules of the village to meet the Igbo women's demands. If for instance, a woman complains that her husband has been hitting her, abusing her and mistreating her or a man was found to have broken the women's market rules, the women may decide to impose a fine on the offender. If fines for violations or repeated requests to the offending husband to comply

with the women's demands fails, the women may decide to sit on the man or go on strike. The women may decide to ostracize the man, that is, all women will decide after deliberations, not to talk to the offender or have anything to do with him until their demands are met.

To sit on a man is to make war on a man, to force him to comply with the rules of the village especially as it pertains to women. If, after, he fails to pay the fine, the women would gather at the offender's compound at an agreed upon time. The women would begin singing, dancing and insulting and deriding the man, calling him denigrating names and banging loudly on his door with wooden pestles and big sticks. In some extreme cases, they may pull the roof down. While singing the sarcastic song, the women would make known their grievances against the man. They would stay at the man's house all night and all day, if they need to, until the man shows some contrite and promise to correct his ways and meet the women's demands. Sitting on a man is therefore the ultimate weapon or sanction used by Igbo women to enforce their judgments.

The sitting on a man or making war on a man concept or going on a strike shows that the Igbo women's social, political and economic institutions existed before the British colonized Nigeria and changed the course of things in southeastern Nigeria. In a household a woman may decide to sit on her husband by refusing to cook for him, to take care of him or have sex with him. x

From the present perspective of our study, we posit that if more women, individually and in groups, would exhibit courage, audaciousness and ability to follow their dreams as Ifegulu-Onye or the Aba women in 1929, there would soon be more and more women to applaud for their contributions to social, political and economic development in postmodern Igboland.

It was the contact with the British Empire, along with its Christian teachings of subordination of the female to the male, of woman to the man that bolstered female subjugation in Igboland. Starting



directly with the issues that led to the Aba Women's war of 1929 (Ibezim 2013: 16; 65-74), which disrupted the near-perfect gender dualism that existed in Igboland; the British colonial idea of womanhood was seriously challenged. Nonetheless, the 1929 Aba women's war also has the benefit of showing that women of Igboland could turn into activists when the situation demanded that of them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON EARLIER INDIGENOUS FEMINIST THEORIES

As stated earlier, this article aims to articulate di-feminism as an indigenous feminist theory, which challenges customary laws that contribute to gender inequality in Igboland. It shall examine earlier indigenous feminisms, which grapple with the sordid condition of women, questioning its continued reliance on survival strategies, redefining their efforts to liberate women from sexism, and center women, just as men are centered.

The review of literature on feminism tends to draw a divide between western (North, Developed, Advantaged nations) and non-western (South, Under-developed, developing, and disadvantaged nations) feminisms. Whereas western, privileged and bourgeois women fight for equal pay and equality with their men at home, in the workplace and in other public institutions, non-western women are more preoccupied with survival as human beings and are less enchanted with the preoccupations of their western counterparts.

First, non-western women tend to levy adverse criticism on the westerners whom they see as theorizing in an empty, meaningless fashion, just because they would prefer to see activism that would mean a lot to their lives. bell hooks has criticized extensively liberal feminism, due to its advantages to the western women and disadvantages to the non-western women. xi On the contrary, non-western

feminism engages in performance, doing, joining practice to theory, whereas western theory tends to be aloof and abstract, and seeming removed from the reality of the lives of women it is intended to improve, as Obioma Nnaemeka has proffered in "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way". xii

Therefore, our attempts to redefine gender in Igboland must necessarily take into account the global-local equation, how to adapt the global to the local in a way that it makes sense to the people without destroying the people's culture. Still that does not imply in any way swallowing the bitter pill of condoning the status quo, in order not to rock the boat, for that would mean accepting that change is not inevitable. Second, non-western feminism rejects a global sisterhood that puts all women of the world on the same level, refusing to see the obvious material advantages that women of the North have over those of the South, women who daily battle cultural norms and laws that put them down as inferior, inconsequential and secondary citizens. For example, Anthropologist Ifi Amadiume accuses western women of practicing imperialism, using the non-western victims to promote their own elitist and abstract feminist theory.

Feminism at the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and colonization and its effects then and now become relevant in discussing women's experiences from non-western regions of the world. Marxist feminism has grappled with the triple oppression of women in matters of gender, race and class, but not always with success, given the variety of women in the world concerned, women who are not all at the same economic status or have had other and the same experiences of life.

No wonder many African writers have distanced themselves from feminism as such, even when what they do is clearly feminist. Flora Nwapa, for example rejected the label, contenting herself with defining herself merely as a woman who knows something about the lives of women she writes about. Buchi Emecheta had a good laugh on a man who thought he knew Nwapa very well as a serious woman who did not want to wallow into the feminist debate, when Buchi knew that feminists were paying for Nwapa's visits to London to give talks. Even then, Buchi described herself as a feminist with a small f. Ama Ata Aidoo also rejected the label, although one can see from her life and work that the label very well fits her. The list could go on endlessly. But, suffice it to say that the indigenizing of feminism in Africa started with the denial, first of western one-size-fit-all feminism, second the denial of prominent African women writers that are to be seen as feminists, and third the attempts now by prominent scholars to theorize a feminism that would take into account their culture, country and a particular gender issue that gnaws in their entrails.

It is from this angle that I have attempted to propound di-feminism, a feminist theory that dares to depart from the norm, by questioning it and putting it up for examination, so that social change on gender could occur in the land for continued development of all the people, male and female. One cardinal aspect of culture examined is the notion of motherhood so dear to African women. This is not the idealized 'Mother Africa' trope made famous by Senegalese Senghor, which has little or no relevance to the ordinary African woman. Here, we examine the fact that many Africans, contrary to women of the North, proudly identify themselves as the mother of so, so and so. It is not uncommon to be addressed as the "Mother of ..." before you are called by your first name (which is still an insult to a grown up woman, mother in Africa). Not many African women would seek liberation from motherhood, for indeed they embrace motherhood as liberating.

We have seen earlier above how Igbo women galvanized into a formidable force as wives and mothers to successfully overthrow British oppression under colonialism. Today, women still wield their strongest a tout as wives and mothers, for the African is marriage inclined and pro-natalist. So, any feminist theory worth its salt should take into account these cultural traits that the people are not about to forego. Clearly, it has become difficult to define feminism, because it has to cater to too many experiences, situations, color of skin and women in different locations in the world. For example, how does one merge the desires of lesbian feminism with motherism? How does one merge black feminism and its rancor against race and class issues in the West with African feminism that has different class and ethnic issues? The fact that African women are now attempting to theorize feminism shows their disenchantment with black feminism that does not often speak to them, just as white feminism did not represent their values. xiii

The doyen of black feminism by a large breath is, of course, Alice Walker, who propounded “womanism” in her essay, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, in 1983, to get away from the stigma of ‘black’ in defining the kind of feminism that makes meaning to her. As an African American woman, she was able to interject race and class issues into a discourse that would ordinarily have ended with skin color. Thereafter, to be a womanist and to adhere to womanism became a matter of ‘shades of color’, of nuance, for “womanist is to feminist, as purple is to lavender”. Womanism as a theory, therefore, attacks patriarchal attitude that sees the female gender as weak and subservient, replacing it with women’s strength, competence, courage, audaciousness, sense of responsibility, knowledge, and the list goes on.

To be womanish, says Alice Walker, is to assume the attitudes of a woman, to be ready to respond and cope as situations dictate. This way and manner of behavior is observable with female black children even from an early age, she adds. A womanist, then, is one who is an activist and an advocate of women’s capabilities. Flora Nwapa, for example, in her life, literary, communal and national works was one. Her first novel, *Efuru*, mirrors the psychological and spiritual itineraries of the heroine of the eponymous title, from her initial call to adventure to her apotheosis as a human goddess fit to be an example of empowerment and pillar of strength for all women. A womanist, concludes Alice Walker, is not a narcissist that separates women from men and children. On the contrary, she rather works towards the wholesomeness of all men, women and children, for peace and harmony in the community and the nation. Deborah K. King surmises the sterling qualities of the womanist in this way:

The concerns of the womanist perspective are the survival, affirmation, and empowerment of all persons, male and female. Womanism encompasses a black feminism and has also been applied generally to feminists of color. Yet, as Walker asserts, given the complexity and dynamism of black women's lives, womanism has a greater scope and intensity than feminism. A womanist is spirited and spiritual, determined and decisive, committed to struggle and convinced of victory. A womanist acknowledges the particularist experiences and cultural heritage of black women, resists systems of domination, and insists on the liberty and self-determination of all people.

xiv

Walker chastises white women’s biased mode of thinking in *Gardens*, saying: “It is apparently, inconvenient, if not downright mind-constraining for white women scholars to think of Black women as women, perhaps because “woman” (like “man” among white males) is a name they are claiming for themselves alone. Racism decrees that if they are now women ... then Black women must, perforce, be something else”.

xv

Walker’s statement above, led Barbara Smith to see Womanism as criticism of white females who think that they alone are women. African American Barbara Smith says “Womanism makes a connection between race, culture and politics. It is also Black women’s ability to function with dignity, independence and imagination in the face of total adversity...” as noted by Tuzyline Jita Allan in her illustrious work, *Womanist and Feminist Aesthetics: A Comparative View*. xvi African American Patricia Hill Collins, for her part, sees a humanist vision in Womanism: “a commitment to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female”. xvii

A decade later, in 1993, Clenora Hudson-Weems extends the definition of womanism in her treatise. xviii First, she deduces that one does not become a feminist, just because one is concerned with gender issues. Next, she proffers that black women are not feminists because they are of African descent and cherish motherhood. Finally, she adduced that because women of African descent are family oriented, at least more so than western women, therefore they cannot be feminist, but can only be womanist, African womanists, who are not about to eschew motherhood, in order to fight for the gender issues they cherish. Hudson-Weems’ views are decidedly separatist, for she sees all scholarship before hers as tied to white patriarchy and white feminism, due to their single-minded focus on “the woman, her sexuality and her culture.” xix Hence African Womanism is totally unaffiliated with Euro-American feminism and not annexed either to black and African feminisms. On the other hand, it privileges an oppositional (read black and Third World) womanist consciousness.

With Alice Walker and Clenora Hudson-Weems, Black/African feminism had clearly separated itself from the general feminist struggle in the global world, a fight that women had been waging for some time. In the more recent times, African indigenes as such have attempted to push the discourse further, starting with redefining womanism to the reality of life on African soil to grapple with other forms that might capture the issues at stake.

Among the latter-day indigenous feminists is first in the rank and file Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, who states that only Africans can lay claim to African womanism. xx She asks rhetorically, “What after all, is the value of sexual equality in a ghetto”, adding that her brand of African womanism unlike Walker’s that allows sexual and non-sexual love between women is an “inclusive, mother-centered ideology with a focus on caring-familial, communal, national, and international. xxi It is, therefore, at the intersections of economic considerations, class, race, regional location, experiences, cultures and so on. Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi’s ‘accommodationism’, stems from the ‘womanist’ theory, follows in the footsteps of

Walker, rejects separatism, but speaks of “black womanism”, “black roots”, “ideals of black life”, all in reference to observations in African novels she studied. Okonjo-Ogunyemi’s essay, “Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English”, although drawn from readings of African fiction, still remains mainly an interpretation of fiction that does not always bear out the actual reality on the ground. Indeed, she somewhat celebrates the black world of Alice Walker, in which womanism is about the celebration of “black roots, ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom.” Not surprisingly, a decade later Okonjo-Ogunyemi went through a period of soul-searching, leading her to a change of mind and newer ideas on the African, rather than the black, world. That was when her community became African, no longer ‘black’ and Womanism sought to “to establish healthy relationships among people, despite ethnic, geographical, educational, gender, ethical, class, religious, military and political differences”. xxii African men and women, Okonjo-Ogunyemi argues, should embrace the four Cs of consensus, conciliation, collaboration and complementarity.

Mary Modupe Kolawole’s work builds on Ogunyemi’s work, insists that African women have always named themselves, and adding that African women have never been voiceless as one is wont to believe. Womanism for her becomes, therefore, an attempt by African women to define their own reality and embodies the “totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion in positive cultural ways”. xxiii

When Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie attempted to define feminism, she formed a different term, “Stiwanism”, an acronym of Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. Ogundipe hopes that Stiwanism would help the indigenous theorist get to the roots of women’s problems in Africa. Ogundipe-Leslie talks about six ‘mountains’ on the backs of women, women oppressed daily, and women owned as property, women worked like horses, mules and donkeys without gratitude or adequate pay, if even they are sometimes paid. According to Ogundipe-Leslie, ‘Stiwa’ proposes to discuss her agenda for the African feminist. She continues:

STIWA is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa. (...) Women have to participate as co-partners in social transformation. I think that feminism is the business of both men and women anywhere and in Africa. xxiv

Catherine Acholonu proffered ‘motherism’ as an ideal of African feminism, basing her theory on the well-known fact that Africa is the mother rock of Gondwanaland before a cataclysm broke it up, causing the existence of the continents of the world as they are known today. Furthermore, Acholonu sees motherism as a true alternative to feminism, adding that it neatly sets African feminism apart from global feminism:

Afrocentric feminist theory (...) must be anchored on the matrix of motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of the survival and unity of the black race through the ages. Whatever Africa's role may be in the global perspective, it could never be divorced from her quintessential position as the Mother Continent of humanity... Africa's alternative to western feminism is MOTHERISM and Motherism denotes motherhood. xxv

Hence, Acholonu, like all the other indigenous feminists after her, would advocate a feminist view that radically separates the ‘west’ from the ‘rest of us’, theories that would countenance the peculiar situation of Africa in the Third World and with that the experiences of the women vis-à-vis their western counterparts of the First and Second Worlds. Acholonu interrogates the fact that traditional women in rural areas have always known about feminism from the way they live their lives, than by the way the theorists describe their reality. Acholonu has based her motherism essentially on the situation of the rural woman. Development issues, therefore, come full circle in motherism, with Acholonu believing that the rural woman daily struggling to eke out a living should be more of a concern to feminists than the suburban, educated woman with her career, job, car and house. The insinuation, albeit it a debatable one, is that the rural woman feels more the impact of colonial disaster and the subsequent effects of decolonization and neocolonization than the urban woman. There are frequent references to ‘African’ and ‘Afrocentric’, showing the work as removed from a particular people. Furthermore, the work reduces the totality of women’s experiences to motherhood, when it substitutes ‘motherism’ for ‘feminism’. This reduction of womanhood to the earlier discredited ‘Mother Africa’ trope is quite incomprehensible, unless seen in the realm of abstract theory. When it says, “The rural woman is our link with mother earth and with her rests our last hope for reunification with the indispensable mother essence,” one almost sees and hears a line from Senghor. Obviously, Acholonu’s motherism does not only seek to replace feminism, it also is not nearly feminism. It does not include the emancipated, liberated, aware, politicized and educated woman, the presumed postmodern engine of social change and development and dialogue and negotiation with men on equal footing. This theory of motherism, therefore, cannot serve the purpose of all women in Igboland towards gender equality. It is an abstraction removed from all the women and distant from them. If the being of the female is reduced to biologically determined motherhood, then what happens to the numerous able and capable women who cannot be mothers, biological or communal? What happens to all the other laudable capabilities that women and females might have, even when they are not mothers?

Acholonu's theory is not inclusive, and appears to see the world from a man's lens.

For these reasons, it is not a theory that would very likely promote gender equality and shared power relations between males and females in Igboland. Obioma Nnaemeka in her monumental work explains this debate on theorizing:

The majority of African women are not hung up on articulating their feminism, they just do it. In my view, it is what they do and how they do it that provide the 'framework'; the 'framework' is not carried to the theater of action as a definitional tool. It is the dynamism of the theater of action with its shifting patterns that makes the feminist spirit/engagement effervescent and exciting but also intractable and difficult to name. xxvi

Modupe Kolawole, for her part, notes lucidly that “ (...) many African languages have no synonym for feminism as it is defined in the West, the concept of group action by women, based on common welfare in social, cultural, economic, religious, and political matters is indigenous and familiar to a majority of these women” . xxvii That is to say that the women's experiences show them as constantly struggling with issues in their lives as feminists would want them to do, without really naming what they do. It is a question of survival, through negotiation and dialogue with men and social systems and structures too rigid to move. In that kind of situation, where survival is the key word, women only get by with what they can, for there is no structure in place to help them go beyond mere survival.

Needed is a new theory to help women go beyond mere survival alone, to taking charge of their lives from a position of strength, which alone will change them from reactionaries to activists, openly. Society can only gain from such equal opportunities accorded men and women to be the best they can be. Indeed, feminist views that tie gender analysis to development indexes take their cue from Danish economist Ester Boserup whose work led to considerations of women's lot at the level of the United Nations Organization, through Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and finally Gender and Development (GAD). The consideration ran the gamut of inserting women into development issues, to according them trickle down capital to help them fend for themselves, to now considering gender inequality as the crux of the problem that keeps women down. In sum, Jacobs put it well and succinctly when she summarized the concerns of African women in this way:

African women, particularly black women, are concerned with issues as basic as access to clean water and housing, issues that have generally not been the focus of theoretical feminist inquiry. Faced with all manner of crises, women in Africa have begun organizing their responses to concerns that are relevant for Africans, including extreme poverty. Women in Africa are fighting for access to land, the right to own property, control of food distribution, living wages and safe working conditions, improved education and healthcare, and a more active role in the political process. With their collective responses to these economic, social, and political issues, ordinary community women also are quietly challenging existing conditions of gender inequality. This process is an important part of finding a uniquely African feminist voice and involves not only the academic effort to reconcile the plurality of feminist theories but also the survival imperative to seek creative solutions to the

many problems facing women, their families, their communities, and their states. xxviii

Chioma Opara's 'Femalism', for all it returns us to looking at feminism, not motherism, disparaging Walker and Okonjo-Ogunyemi's efforts, is still on the African pedestal and distanced from the Igbo reality and world. Opara posits that Femalism accentuates the body. It is not just the 'body' that smacks of foreign loan, but also other terms from western theories of feminism, like 'liberal' and 'radical' that tumble out. Introducing Femalism as her “modest attempt at deconstructing the fixed polarity of wild, inert nature and dynamic culture”, a “thesis (that) will be a negation of Beauvoir's repugnance of nature”, Opara adds that:

The female body, as an essential biological site will be foregrounded as a transcendent mechanism of constructive and generative nature. The incarnation of transcendence will in consequence be hinged on the Other, the matrix of nature and nurture. Applying the theory of femalism, a variant of African feminism, the female body as well as mothering will constitute the systemic site of discourse and hermeneutics. Parallels will be drawn between the lacerated female body and the mutilated African nation jostled by wars, poverty, disease, colonialism and postcoloniality. Simply put, the feminized African country evokes Mother Earth, Woman Earth - an abstract projection of the African female body. The scarred body not only aligns with the spiritual in the representation of the natural and the cosmic but also manifests the dents of a scrambled and ailing nation. In the mothering of texts, we shall limn some African writers, transcending to embrace the Sartrean concept of freedom. The existent may, however, in spinning the web of transcendence in a utopian precinct subordinate reproductive maternity to productive creative art. xxix

Clearly, in this theorizing to raise eyebrows, theorizing at a distance, which might be useful in university promotion portfolios, there is nothing derived from raw materials of the lived lives of a people whose problems the theorist intends to tackle. Just how useful it would be in dealing with the reality of the Igbo female vis-à-vis the male begs the question. This, therefore, is at best a theory that leaves us still searching for a theory that grapples with Igbo women's issues, a theory born and bred on Igbo soil for Igbo men and women and children.

A workable indigenous feminism is not apparent in 'Snail-Sense Feminism' by Akachi Theodora Adimora-Ezeigbo, essentially because it sacrifices women's respect and freedom at the altar of practicality and functionality. Like the other indigenous feminist predecessors, Snail-Sense Feminism advocates negotiation with men, although unlike the theorists before her she has come down to the Nigerian level, even to Igboland. Nonetheless, although employing the snail imagery of the Igbo world that says, “Ile oma aka ejuna ji aga n'ogwu” which, broadly translated into English, says “it is through negotiation with the thorns in its way that the snail is able to glide through them unscathed”, Ezeigbo asks a rhetorical question and answers it in order to define her theory:

What then is snail-sense feminism all about? The theory derives from the habit of snails which most Nigerian women adopt in their relationship with men (...), a conciliatory or cooperative attitude towards men. This is akin to what the snail does with the environment in which it moves and exists (...). It goes steadily forward. It does not confront objects, but negotiates its way past any obstacle (...). xxx

But, that is just where the gender inequality

problem lies. The image of a woman as a crawling snail, bending, bowing, cajoling, conceding, and negotiating her survival, her destiny, with sharp thorns that symbolize the men, is not an acceptable strategy of dialogue from a position of strength. For how long can the development of the Igbo motherland put its destiny on hold, put up with this style of living that subjugates 51% of a section of its citizenry? It is almost unbelievable the contradiction between the definition of snail-sense feminism and its author's explanation of how she came about the idea for the theory in the first place. If most Nigerian cultures continue to denigrate women, despite their submissiveness, effacement and negotiation with all and sundry, it is a clarion call to try a different strategy. Why would one continue to employ a measure that does not work ad infinitum? Ezeigbo thinks that a woman who is swept behind constantly should continue to pally with her oppressors for 'survival'. Ezeigbo could not have been farther from the right path, therefore, when she says:

A woman cannot but behave like a snail in our patriarchal society. Most Nigerian cultures devalue women, consider them fickle or untrustworthy. (...) the Igbo have a plethora of proverbs that denigrate women. Here are just two of such proverbs: “ajo nwa na-aza aha nne ya – meaning “A bad child that answers his/her mother's name” (Yakubu, 10) and “Nwanyi lelia di ya, ekwo akpo ya nku” – meaning “A woman who disregards her husband becomes wretched or destitute” (Ezeigbo, Gender Issues in Nigeria 28). What does a woman do when she knows she is not to be trusted and she is not as highly valued as her male counterparty? In such cultures as these, the woman must learn survival strategies to be able to overcome the impediments placed before her and live a good life. She has to be proactive and strong. xxxi

Clearly, snail-sense feminism runs counter to proactivity and strength. For how long would she continue this so-called 'negotiation', 'doggedness', 'resilience' and show of 'wisdom' from a weak stance? Is there any doubt why for centuries on end this investment strategy has not paid the woman in good dividends? Ezeigbo does not think that these virtues are signs of weakness, but they really are the reasons women and persons of the female gender remain weak and subjugated. xxxii

I remember well Ezeigbo's rejoinder at Marquette University, while trying to defend her theory as a pact for negotiation and survival, during question and comments time following my maiden presentation of di-feminist theory at the 13th annual Igbo Studies Association conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the United States of America in 2014. She erroneously misrepresented 'akataka' (energy), the framework that carried my di-feminist theory, as 'katakata' (violence, chaos, riot, trouble). Indeed, not only is it a misrepresentation to think that a woman who seeks to negotiate from a position of strength, who therefore embraces di-feminism, is seeking to break ties with men, is a man hater--far from that-- it also is unreasonable and unacceptable to urge women in this postmodern era to continue to live their lives the way their mothers and grandmothers lived it, as Ezeigbo concludes her explanation with reference to her grandmother's archaic era; Ezeigbo could not have done a worse damage to her daughter and granddaughters:

From my findings, one thing is clear: the strategy was applied by our foremothers in their interactions with people in their communities. Therefore, if women of the past adopted the strategy of the snail to survive, today's Nigerian woman should do no less as





*she negotiates and renegotiates her way in her dealings with the men and the society at large.*xxxiii

An indigenous feminism that avows rootedness in the unchanging past is certainly not viable for the changing present.

Unlike Ezeigbo, Onyeka Iwuchukwu's 'Focus Feminism' directs its angst against the women, consumed with self-deprecation, in-fighting, conflicts and oppression, all of which hinder them from 'focusing' on their common enemy, the men. What moral justification, Iwuchukwu implies, do women have to complain about men when they do not and are not capable of putting their house in order? xxxiv

It is from this point of view that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's call for awareness in *We Should All Be Feminists* takes its relevance. Take note that her inclusivism and awareness feminism argues for female awareness and empowerment, as well as change in the way the world sees issues of gender, justice and fairness, boy-children and girl-children, and the warped view of masculinity and femininity, all of which are at the root of most gender inequality and other social problems. Adichie would like all peoples, including men, to become feminists, saying: "We teach boys to be afraid of fear, of weakness, of vulnerability. We teach them to mask their true selves, because they have to be, in Nigerian-speak, a hard-man". Adichie blames history for the social advantages of men over women, men's tendency to erupt in violence to defend their manhood and frayed egos when they find that they are defeated. Women, on the contrary, suffer from lack of ambition, having become over time conditioned to not do and dare, thanks to African patriarchy in collusion with western colonialism. To get anywhere, Adichie adds, women perfect the acts of seduction and telling lies in the name of pretense, as they play the male-game that allows them to see a little light of the sun from the shadows. Adichie blames society for putting men in a situation of perpetual threat from the women, thanks to exaggeration of biological differences, gender inequality and unequal power relations. Men's invisibility also does not allow them to see the real problems of society which, paradoxically, allows them to say that that is how things have always been and

should continue to be. Hence, proclaims Adichie, men are part of the problem; men do not want to see change nor do they want to change themselves. xxxv

I am reminded that my mother could have been married to a man other than my father, a man that did not meet her standards, if she had just merely acquiesced to the wishes of her poor parents who wanted her to go and get married, so that they would have fewer mouths to feed. Three times, my mother fled from her 'uri', an Igbo custom that allowed her to go for a few days' visit to the home of the prospective suitor to see if she could integrate into his family. Three times, my mother fled. In her days, she was seen as a 'strong-headed woman', the kind that would never have gotten married, because men would not have stood her. Never mind that she was not quite seventeen years of age. Already, she was getting too old to get married. That was how it was in that distant past, when young girls were given away into marriage to lessen the burden on the parents and family. They arrived at their new marital abode handicapped and were treated like pariah, at best useful animals starving at their place that had come to deplete the resources of the new family. Such a thing as food, which should be a matter of course, took center stage, was a big deal. The sisters-in-law meted mayhem on the new competitor, a mere "Nwanyi a na anu anu" (a-girl-who-had-come-to-be-married; the transliteration is mine), held to be nothing until she arrived. Perhaps she was really nobody, if her parents were poor. That was how Igbo women developed an attitude of 'cooperation', 'conciliation', 'cajoling', and 'negotiation' in order to be let survive in their new and conjugal home. Needless to say, the newly married woman lacked the ability to stand up for her woman's rights, let alone her human rights. Luckily for my mother, she had an innate rebellious side quite uncommon in her days. She always knew who she was, was full of self-esteem and self-confidence, poor or not, educated the western way or not. She did eventually get married to a suitor, my father that pleased her.

All that has changed now and there needs to be a new way of looking at womanhood in Igboland. What is needed is a theoretical framework, to enable the collection of diverse and sporadic revolutionary

streaks from Igbo women yearning to make their voices heard, which voices can only become a formidable bundle of energy that can help the education, development and transformation of Igboland towards a more just, fairer and equal opportunity society for men and women. To fully understand the impact of the new infusion of energy from indigenous Igbo theorists into the gender ideology in Igbo cosmology, it is important to survey, not just the indigenous Igbo culture, but also the colonial intervention and its modifications of Igbo culture through its extensive legislative, executive, and military powers, added to the state of things in the post-independence era, an era that some would see as modern cum postmodern, an era of nationalism and western style politics.

How does one put an apparatus in place that reflects the reality of the lives of citizens as they seek better social, political and economic structures that support nonviolence, gender equality, fairness and justice for all? Much as the Igbo believe ardently in the goddess Ani and her protective and nurturing capabilities, one needs a strong sense of spirituality to attain her powers of healing and providence. Then again, the age-old "Mother Africa" trope cannot work in this day and age, due to its impersonal nature. Nor can the feminisms of the black world, the Third World and the African diaspora work, due again to their distance away from the Igbo people and their realities here and now. These earlier indigenous African attempts at feminist theory fail the litmus test, due to their "... willingness and readiness to negotiate with and around men in difficult circumstances (...), due to their ability to 'negotiate' their woman's position, without any form of ego (no-ego)", what Obioma Nnaemeka has called 'nego-feminism'. xxxvi

We posit that a serious-minded woman and her 'Id' wanting to negotiate with men would at least have some 'Ego' to be tempered by the 'Superego'. To this end, recall that it is in the nature of the Id to crave creature comforts of food, shelter, pleasure and so on, and it will stop at nothing to demand these things. That is why the psyche needs the Ego, her rational and problem-solving part to control some of these impulses, through translating them into strategies of effective gratification that tame and discipline the cravings and



impulses. It searches for possible and acceptable sources of gratification that will also keep the Id out of trouble. Then, the Superego kicks in with its array of moral questions as it lays out socially appropriate and legitimate ways to fill the desires of the Id without getting in trouble with society. In addition to the three aspects of the psyche, the external world, the environment, is also worthy of consideration in all psychological studies of gender and gender identity. xxxvii

Suffice it to say that the indigenous feminisms noted above might have served the purpose of gender redirection in Igboland, had they not seen Igbo women as bogged down by 'survival' needs alone; they have failed to take into account all the elements of the psyche plus the environment. As a result, they have not taken an appropriate proactive feminist attitude that would end gender inequality and male dominance. Because gender is a social construction, whose meaning, definition and scope continue to change throughout the days on one's life, it is imperative that the social institutions of the environment be studied fully for a comprehensive understanding of the observable gender differences between males and females. How do individuals become gendered? The division of labor assigns gender roles to individuals and groups, through conflating sex with gender. An understanding of history and society is needed to explain how roles are assigned and gender identities constructed.

Some notable Nigerian male writers, imbued with false representations of manhood, have gone anti-female, and have disparaged the pioneer-African feminist theorists, due to considerations of history, environment and social institutions. That is an opportunism that merits condemnation by both men and women of goodwill, essentially because it casts the men as victims of sexism who could care less about the women's sense of their subjugation. Do they understand how the prevailing notions of masculinity are harming men? Do they see how the current understanding of femininity is hampering development, through limiting the capabilities of women, who are more than fifty percent of the population of the world? xxxviii It is hard to say. Clearly, from the nature of their

attacks on flagellant indigenous feminist voices from Igboland, they imagine women as enemies and attackers of the male ego. For Charles Nnolim, the work of the early indigenous feminists is disparate and disorganized, what he calls some "furious dance steps of feminism gone mad". Chimalum Nwankwo sees the feminists, simply and callously, as dissidents. For Femi Ade-Ojo, they are an "aberration" and "imitations" of western women and their attitude towards their men. Obviously, Ade-Ojo thinks that Igbo women did not know anything about feminism until they came in contact with the white world. The history of precolonial Igboland, however, represents true reality differently. xxxix

Chinweizu (Ibekwe)'s intervention is poignant, because he does not mince words in stating that his strategy is masculinist; he sees the early indigenous African feminisms as "cries," as "senseless" cries at that, given that matriarchy, not patriarchy, reigns supreme, from time immemorial. Female power over men's, says Chinweizu, is already evident in the fact that a woman is boss, mother, wife in any man's life, at any given time, unless women and men fail to realize the situation. In terms of power, he continues, there are three types of women: the matriarchists, the tomboys, and the termagants. The first, the matriarchists are bored, for they realize their power, but must be contented to make men believe they are in power, and then they manufacture ruses and wiles to make men do their bidding. The second category of tomboys is those who missed their road to being men and who continue to wish they were men. They are frustrated at not being what they would have liked to be, men. The third category of termagants is that of show-offs, who want to flaunt their advantage and power, when they do not delight in diminishing men. Feminism, Chinweizu concludes, is a ruse, for women do not wish to give up the power they have traditionally, but only want to add to it. On the contrary, he continues, feminists want men to give up what they have and become puns in the hands of women. Gains for women, which win their support, are educational, political and economic opportunities, greater freedom in their conjugal homes, sexual freedom in and out of marriage and divorce when marriage does not work for

them. He accuses women of wanting it all, taking it all from men and giving up nothing. Even more interesting is the second part of Chinweizu's argument on masculinity. He divides males again into three types—Machos, Mushos, and Masculinists. The first category of machos englobes almost all men, who are conditioned to believe they are strong, but who in reality serve women, the custodians of power and control. The second category of mushos, alas, "are that breed of diffident men who have been bullied, guilt-tripped, ego-bashed and penis twisted into pram pushing, diaper changing, and breast envy", what he calls the classic "mangina". Then, in the third category are a few men, who see marriage as "nest slavery" and who seek to avoid it at all costs; they are devoted to their freedom and liberty. Hence, masculinists recognize that the world is matriarchal, not patriarchal, based on the fewer male sperms that are fertilized in any given time period and era. So, there are always more women than men on earth. Chinweizu would rather, therefore, see all female power dismantled, so that women can do the kind of hard work and dangerous jobs that men do—firefighting, trench digging, fighting in battles and wars, and the list goes on. In conclusion, Chinweizu would like to see the 'best' of female males and the 'best' of male females work together, what he calls a merger of "tomboy feminism" (of women seeking equal opportunities with men, and with whom men can work) and "termagant feminism" (of man-hating, supremacist women) to wage a revolt against matriarchy, dismantle it, and so establish a better world of equal gender opportunities all around. xl

Clearly, a lot of accusations and opinions have been traded back and forth between men and women on the usefulness of feminism in Nigeria. We are wont to tow the middle path and conclude with the words of bell hooks on the need for "feminist masculinity", which treasures and respects all men, women and children, even as it seeks changes that will uplift the situation particularly of women.xli Accordingly, says bell hooks:

Feminist thinking teaches us all, especially, how to love justice and freedom in ways that foster and affirm life. Clearly we need new



strategies, new theories, guides that will show us how to create a world where feminist masculinity thrives. xlii

Talking about 'feminist masculinity', it boils down to, for example, an Igbo woman who has three girl-children being under pressure from herself, her husband and his extended family, to keep going with pregnancies until she makes the priced boy-child. She can take a stand to continue, or to marry another wife for her husband, for if she does not he might really go ahead and do it any way. She has another option, which is to call the bluff, reiterate the value of her girls, and damn the consequences. The first scenario is that of the traditional woman, shackled by bogs of tradition, customs and mores that hold her in bondage. The second scenario is postmodern, forward-looking and educated of a woman with self-esteem and self-confidence, and aware of her rights as a human being and a woman, what bell hooks would call 'a vision of feminist masculinity'. Feminist masculinity' promises to erase female dependence, submissiveness, weakness and subjugation, but on the other hand engenders strength, freedom to dare and to excel, and lack of fear to achieve and succeed. It also teaches men that their sense of identity does not need to come from domination of others, male or female, that their ego should not go bunkers with contemporary social ills, such as lack of employment, under employment, under payment for jobs done or the so-called 'desertion' of family homes for workplaces by large numbers of women and counting joining the work force.

That assertion reminds me again of an anecdote by a colleague in the audience at the 13th Igbo Studies Association annual meeting at Marquette University. A woman, a wife and a career woman earned enough money to buy herself a brand new Volkswagen car. Her husband took offence, and for the sake of peace and tranquility in her home she handed him the keys to her car and took over his jalopy 304. Eight years passed and the cars are getting old and troublesome. The career wife and mother, she buys herself another car, this time a 'v-boot', in the popular Nigerian parlance. The jealous and domineering husband comes again, swearing heaven and hell to swallow him, if anyone should ever find him in that car. After all, it was understood, his wife was his property and had no right to indulge herself unless he permitted it. His wife ordinarily would have seen doomsday coming, if her husband should refuse to take rides in her car. But, this time, her temerity had subsided; she had found her self-confidence, self-esteem and voice over the years. Does wine not get better with age? She was prepared for a showdown, if need be. It was only then that the bullying husband calmed down and asked to be given her keys to run some errands. She refused, reminding him that he had sworn he would die the day he drove in her new car, and adding that she did not want his curse to take effect, kill him and leave her prematurely a widow! She had rubbed in the lesson so well that thereafter she lived happily ever after with her husband and her new car. Clearly, the first time around, she played her traditional card and lost, but the second time, she dealt her postmodern card and won. Is there any doubt about which way postmodern women should go in dealing with sexism, gender inequality and male domination? It is our belief that difeminism can unequivocally put the Igbo female back on equal footing with the male, and thereby end all speculation as to who is using who to advance her or his group's lot when the other group has their eyes turned away.

PRECOLONIAL IGBOLAND SOCIETY FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

What exactly was pre-colonial Igboland like for both men and women? What roles did they play and how did they contribute to the development of their communities with their dynamism, overtone to new ideas and change, freedom, independence, and sense of democratic ideals and achievement? The dual-sex political system in pre-colonial Igboland allowed political autonomy and ability for men and women, such that each category had authority and power to run its affairs without hindrance from the other.

It was the contact with the British Empire, along with its Christian teachings of subordination of the female to the male, of woman to the man that bolstered female subjugation. Starting directly with the issues that led to the Aba Women's war of 1929, xliii which disrupted the near-perfect gender dualism that existed in Igboland; the British colonial idea of womanhood was seriously challenged. Nonetheless, this war also had the benefit of showing that women of Igboland could turn into activists when the situation demanded that of them.

In Okonjo's 1976 book, *Dual-Sex Political System*, there was His Sphere and Her Sphere and individuals could belong to their

association and earn titles of distinction. Women included, therefore, could earn titles and break the kolanut in their exclusive women's domain. In other words, women like men had influence, power and privilege. And both male and female longevity was celebrated with the honor accorded to the oldest of the clan from time to time. Women could sanction wrong doers with their moral authority, through fines, boycotts or ostracism, which strategy invariably brought the parties in conflict to the negotiation table. xlv

How did the women organize themselves to meet up with their responsibilities? They usually organized in groups of interest, as wives or co-wives married into the same clan or as daughters of the clan. Such an association of co-wives married into a clan, the *ndi nwunyedi*, gave women power of the group association. Such was also the case with the group of daughters of the clan, *umuokpu* or *umuada*. xlv

In Amawbia, my natal village, for example, the *umuada* are a force to be reckoned with and they would flaunt it at funerals and social activities of all sorts. They punish a man whose evil deeds towards his wife or wives have marked him as 'a dog and dung eater'. As the Igbo wise saying explains, although all dogs eat excreta, yet it is the one who has neglected to wipe its mouth clean after eating that is branded with the unflattering title of *shit-eater*. Such a vile man, therefore, who is brought to the attention of the *umuada*, could find himself 'sat on' (read *wagged war* against) for days on end, as we have seen above, until he promised to become less abusive and quit his dominating attitude and control. He was presented with a list of the grievances against him and the women encircled his abode ridiculing him, cajoling, singing, insulting and verbally abusing him until they extracted repentance from him. There are reports that sometimes the women assumed the manly stance of tearing down the man's hut. Raphael Njoku summarized this gender balance in Igbo culture when he wrote:

In the precolonial era, this group acted as the police force against the patrilineal wives, as well as ritual and purification specialists, and family psychotherapists. They met regularly, rotating their assembly between their natal and married villages. The umuada also played important roles in creating unifying influences, settling intralineage disputes and quarrels between natal and marital villages. When the need arose, the umuada also supervised various rites of passage, rituals and sacrifices on behalf of their communities. In some communities (...) it was the umuada leader, the Ada ebo, who performs the final ablution rites for new brides. xlvii

In effect, an aggrieved woman used her female power and privileges in the Igbo community to an extreme point when she would 'starve' her man of food, nourishment and sex. That was the ultimate weapon to resolve breaches of the dual-sex system that balanced out powers and privileges in the community. No matter how powerful a man was, he deferred to the group when necessary, for an individual could not be seen to be more powerful than the group, if we go by the story of Okonkwo and the goddess of the earth Ani in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Agbala was the lone voice that could call Okonkwo to order, no matter his high esteem in the community. For breaking the rules of the Peace Week by beating his wife, he was leveled with a stiff fine.

Sometimes, *nwada* is not married. This could be either because she chooses not to, is not lucky with suitors or is chosen by her father to remain in the household to shore it up, due to her distinction and sterling qualities. In effect, her father elevates her to the rank of a male. She then garners all the powers and privileges due to a male. She can inherit ancestral lands



and conduct her affairs as if she were a man, just as male daughters do in their father's clan. She can take lovers or her father, if he were still alive, could send his intimate male friends to sleep with her when they visit the household. If she has children, they would vicariously become children of her father.

Now, the other category of females, married women in their households, can also assume the male gender as 'female husbands', when for any number of reasons they choose to marry other women. They become 'husbands' to the said married women. It could be a case of childlessness and anxiety about inheritance, lack of boy-child, concerns about family real estate inheritance, or simply an older woman who has come into means needing to marry a younger and less economically-endowed girl to help her keep up with her household chores and business responsibilities. The female husband could designate her husband to sleep with the younger woman or allow her to choose her lovers. Her children would be children of the female husband, where she is merely the biological mother. xlvii These points were clearly enunciated by Flora Nwapa in *Efuru*, which was her counterbalance of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, to show that women were not always weak and crying as portrayed by her countryman, Achebe.

In the novel, *Efuru*, Nwapa introduces the reader to the phenomenon of 'female husbands' and 'male daughters'. Adultery, perhaps the singular 'crime' a woman could commit, is condoned in Nwapa, so long as it results in motherhood. Prostitution, where the woman employs money earned to such a useful end as paying school fees for her children, was not looked at as an abomination either. Clearly, polygyny was not a big issue of concern, for Igbo women accepted that somewhere along the line of their marriage they would have to deal with it. It was a way of growing the numbers and a large family of many kinds of human beings to play various roles. Moreover, it was as if men felt it was in their evolutionary nature to spread their seeds and have them multiply over and over again. To be denied the chance to propagate their genes in as

many females as possible was the ultimate wrong that an Igbo man could endure. It was such that women willingly or unwillingly saw the rationale to do something to protect the man's immortality every time children were not coming into the household.

Needless to add that motherhood is very important, for Igbo women and men. In a pro-natalist society, it was a status through which children were born into the families and clans for generational continuity. A married woman felt doomed, if children were not present in a marriage, especially male children. Such a woman placed the value of her child over her husband, especially in polygynous homes in which competition for a social claim was high. It was through the child that a married woman could hope to inherit her husband and other goods accumulated during her marriage to him, should her husband pass before her.

A 'good' woman, then, was she who knew her husband's yearnings and responded to them. Her husband could give her the praise name of 'Obi-di-ya' (the-woman-who-understands-her-husband-well). If she grows in her marriage to become not merely wife and mother of his children, but also partner and friend, she could earn herself the title of 'Enyi-di-ya'. She could be surnamed 'Odozi-aku' or 'Aka-di-ya', if she excels in managing her husband's business and affairs in general. Some wives have been called their husbands' love 'Okwu-di-ya', if they became wives and loves of their men. In other words, a woman invariably carves out a name for herself in her marriage abode, depending on her accomplishments and how the husband's lineage sees her. In general, Igbo women enjoy motherhood and look forward to it for fulfillment of their natural endowments.

Hence, Igbo maidens looked forward to their seclusion at puberty in the 'irumgbede' (what the early colonialists mistranslated as 'fattening room'), where a rite of passage and initiation prepared them for their transition from girlhood to womanhood. The rite of passage lasted about four weeks of four market days each. Seclusion of girls in the same age grade sometimes lasted for longer periods of time, three,



and six or even twelve months, during which period the neophytes underwent a radical transformation. A maiden was pampered and given lessons on the meaning of sex as a way to pregnancy and motherhood. Other lessons covered wifecraft, mothercraft and communal living and responsibilities as a female. She was deemed thereafter ready to be a wife, mother and take her place as a socialized female in the community. By the same token, Igbo young maidens look forward to being 'taken', 'chosen' in marriage as the ultimate boon of their young adulthood. You do not want to be the ear of corn left standing on the corn stem after all the other ears have been plucked.

A marriage negotiation starts, first and foremost, with the young man and his people coming to the young maiden's home to 'knock on the door' of her father's house, by way of introduction. Second, he makes presents to the family, the girl and her mother. If his presents are accepted, it is a sign to go forward. Then, the young maiden is summoned by her father to be briefed about the visitors and the reason for their visit. Her consent is solicited, and if she gives the go ahead by accepting the offer of marriage, the negotiation goes to the next level. Third, the bride wealth will be paid and accepted, what is called 'imego'. The higher the perceived worth of the maiden, in terms of ability, industriousness, beauty and intelligence, the more expensive and higher the prize. Observe in passing that some parents have 'diplomatically' rejected a suitor they did not like or approve of by simply naming an exorbitant prize that they knew would be near impossible for the young man to provide. Fourth, the proper betrothal takes place, after the maiden's character, virtue and sociability have been checked out, tested and approved of by the extended family, given that the marriage is a family affair and not just between the two individuals. Fifth, during the 'igba-nkwu', the marriage, the young man and his family carry wine to the home of the would-be bride. At the end of a lavish feast and celebration, the young bride is released to begin her long journey of adventure as a wife and hopefully as a mother. Is she still a virgin at this time? It depends, for she may have earlier in the courtship gone to the suitor to test his manhood; no one wants to get an impotent man for husband. It is, therefore, not clear up to what point Igbo people expected a young girl to keep her virginity before marriage. There have been instances when a young man rejected a maiden, if on the marriage night he found out that she had already been with someone else. Still, there are also pockets of culture, like people from Nsukka, who expect the maiden to become pregnant before the final marriage rites are concluded. Hopefully, it would be her would-be-husband's child. But, in the eagerness to become pregnant, some maidens might throw morality aboard and get pregnant by whichever male was available to do the job. There are also Igbo societies where girls prematurely in the family way are quickly, almost clandestinely, married off to older men or poor men, before anyone noticed their protruding stomachs from pregnancy. Again, that would make all the difference between a 'good' girl and a 'bad' girl.

Nonetheless, Igbo women have a role and responsibility to contribute to the development of their nation, if only their energy, intuition and natural ability can be tapped into. Unfortunately, their cultural, spiritual, economic, social and political contributions in pre-colonial times are frequently forgotten and they are not given the chance to reenact the prowess they had exhibited once upon a time.

Gender in pre-colonial, indigenous Igbo culture was flexible and fluid, as we have seen above, meaning that men and women alike saw their gender identity as flexible. Biology did not determine the entire being, nor did family upbringing. Men and

women could cross gender boundaries without being stigmatized as sissies or tomboys. Clearly, men and women did gender as the occasion demanded. And gender performance continued throughout their earthy existence. As a result, some Igbo women could become 'female husbands', when a family compound needed children, male children, extra hands to do farm work or trade and the wife is not able, willing or too old to cope. Such a woman needing support could do the male gender and could go ahead and 'marry' another woman as 'her' wife, sometimes for her husband, or simply to be her extra hands and legs to help stabilize the family compound. In effect, the female husband controlled and managed the affairs of her compound, giving instructions to the new wife and their common husband. By the same token, a distressed woman could leave her husband's house and return to her father's compound. In her place of birth, she became a 'male daughter', a de facto 'man' and is viewed as such for all intents and purposes in the community. If she was never married, after a certain age, a woman could be consecrated to live out the rest of her life as a 'male daughter' in her father's house. Any children she might bear would bear the name of her father, just like herself. Sometimes, a girl of value was chosen by the father to not get married, but live as a man in her father's compound to help shore it up. In that particular case, the father would have seen the sterling qualities of the girl in question, including intelligence, ability to reflect, maturity, and responsibility and so on. The wives of the compound deferred to her.

Those were instances of powerful agency by women, albeit in peculiar circumstances only as daughters or husbands. It is noteworthy that a daughter in one household could become a married woman in another household and vice-versa. But, why did the ancients privilege daughters and husbands over wives? Di-feminism promises to redress this error, and to empower and grant privileges to all women equally.

DI-FEMINISM: A TWELVE-POINT THEORETICAL APPROACH TO GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT IN IGBOLAND

Now, what is di-feminism all about? Firstly, di-feminism, a twelve-point theory for gender equality, is an alternative form of gender construction that ensures gender equality in opportunities in Igboland. The prefix 'di-'denotes a manager of sorts as in di-mgba, meaning master wrestler, di-oka, meaning master artist. Di-feminism, therefore, is at once a blend of inclusivity, awareness and 'open-eye' that compulsorily demands to be seen and to be heard. It calls on Igbo women to take ownership of their beings and claim their rightful place as women and as human beings beside the men. Men are also called upon to embrace di-feminism for the good of all genders in the society.

Secondly, di-feminism borrows light from the 'akataka' in Igbo tradition, a genre of 'mmanwu' (mmonwu or nmo), a masquerade, at once in human and spirit forms, indeterminate and ambiguous, capable of seeing through the secular world and the supernatural or imaginary worlds. Akataka, therefore, crosses boundaries and genres, for it is at once nowhere and everywhere. In performance, as well, the akataka maintains control of its environment in the village ilo or square, for as soon as it appears everyone takes to their heels to safer spaces. To watch the akataka appropriately, therefore, you need to move as it moves, and it is constantly moving, thanks to its drive, great store of energy and strength. As Obioma Nnaemeka opines, when she suggests that future indigenous feminist theorists embrace the image of the akataka:

The Akataka, with its energy and agility, is the most disruptive, "fragmenting" and



Image of Akataka as a bundle of boundless energy
By Renowned Igbo Artist Obiora Udechukwu xlvi

subversive of masquerades. In its conceptualization, construction, inner/outer workings, and appearance on the scene the akataka "deconstructs" and decenters everything, sending subjectiveness, multivocality and representation flying in all possible directions. The Igbo say "adiro akwu ofe ebe enene mmanwu"/one cannot stand at a spot to watch a masquerade"- a proverb that raises profoundly the issues of perspective and subjectivity.xlix

Hence, di-feminism is deconstructive; it erases gender differences and gender inequality, even as it brokers equal gender power relations. From an alternative and different perspective, it does not give women and men the opportunity to be invisible.

Thirdly, with di-feminism women's issues and access to wealth, titles and power come to the forefront, showing how gender impacts individual identities and how the individual interacts with other individuals in the political environments of the family, clan, village, town, and beyond. Di-feminism also borrows from Ifi Amadiume's monumental work on gender and sex, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, in which following the fluid gender system of her indigenous Nnobi society, she asserts that:

There was a direct link between the accumulation of wives, the acquisition of wealth and the exercise of power and authority. The ultimate indication of wealth and power, the title system was open to men and women, as was the means of becoming rich through control over the labour of other by way of polygamy, whether man-to-woman marriage or woman-to-woman marriage.l

Amadiume goes on to say that title-taking is involuntary, adding that the "Ekwe" title phenomenon in Nnobi, for example, is associated with the Idemili river goddess. The woman does not choose the title; the title chooses her. The woman to be honored is chosen for the title for her dint of hard work, discipline, good neighborliness and other sterling qualities admired in her community. Nonetheless, it is a title-taking with a base in economics, open to women, regardless of age:

People were quick to notice thrift, industriousness, a money-making ability and leadership qualities in a woman. They would begin to point out such a woman as a potential candidate for the Ekwe title. Even a young girl could be identified as a candidate and thenceforth she would be encouraged in her economic ventures. (...) a potential Ekwe

candidate had to have the material or practical support of her co-wives at all levels of social organization, from the extended family to the major patrilineage. li

After the ceremony of coronation, an Ekwe chief is given a name, perhaps one chosen by herself, which describes her chieftaincy and the circumstances of her choosing by the Idemili as an Ekwe. What we take from Amadiume's story is that Igbo women have not always been powerless nor have men always been oblivious of the ability of women or failed to acknowledge female strength in all fields of endeavor. Thanks to the flexibility of gender construction in Igboland, gender keeps evolving throughout the days of individual lives. Moreover, the genders can possibly switch because they are not inevitably tied to sexual identity, Amadiume explains in her own words the phenomena of female husbands and male daughters in Igboland:

(...) a flexible gender system affected women's access to economic resources and positions of authority and power through the institutions of 'male daughters' and 'female husbands'. This flexible gender system resulted not only in role ambiguity, but also in status ambiguity. In the political system there was flexibility in gender classification which allowed the incorporation of certain categories of woman into the male category, giving them positions of authority in the power structure. Daughters, for example, were regarded as males in relation to wives. Consequently, sex, in this context, did not correspond to gender. lii

Indeed whether as umu-okpu (daughters of the original obi or ancestral home), umu-di-ana (children of the daughters of the patrilineal lineage), or umu-ada (daughters of the lineage) daughters wielded a lot of power, for had they been men they would have had the same level of authority and power as the men of the lineage, the umu-nna (sons of the lineage). Although there were 'his spheres' as opposed to 'her spheres', yet the gender fluidity did many times than not lead to gender symmetry and convergence. The dual sex boundaries are mediated, seen that some categories of women can function as males in a society where females are subordinate to males.

Even under the British subjugation of Igboland during colonialism, there is the very interesting case of female masculinity of the Ahebi Ugbabe who would be appointed female clan head, then warrant chief and finally King, who was treated in every way as a male although a woman; it was something that had never been done before and has so far not been repeated in Igboland. Ahebi Ugbabe commanded such distinguished qualities, including intelligence, ability, poise, self-confidence and self-esteem that the British priced her over all the men with whom they worked. According to Nwando Achebe, who collected the oral histories that she turned into the book titled *The Female King of Colonial Africa: Ahebi Ugbabe*, liii she would be the only such female King in the whole of colonial Africa endowed with enormous political power. Nwando Achebe reports:

Moreover, cases that previously went to the onyishi council were now decided before Chief Ahebi. "When cases were tried, Ahebi did not travel to the onyishi's residence because she was king. The onyishi did not go to Ahebi's palace either ... However if a person committed a crime, Ahebi usually charged him or her to court for the appropriate action to be taken against the person." Another oral history collaborator put it like this: "Before Ahebi became [warrant] chief and king all cases were decided at the place of the onyishi. Yes, she usurped the powers of the [male]

elders". liv

Indeed, Ahebi Ugbabe was so powerful that she 'buried' herself alive to ensure that everything was done to her approval give her the utmost honor at her death, death which occurred a few years after she had done her funeral by herself, the ikwa onwe ya na ndu.

Clearly, both in precolonial and colonial Nigeria, women sometimes performed masculinities, and both women and men approved of them. The big question is how to extend the power and authority of the few women to all women, so that all Igbo women can be similarly be as strong as the men in gender, power and equality.

The akataka perspective of gender relations empowers women to relate with men from a position of strength, not from that of weakness. Women go for equality with men, rather than merely hope for survival. Ifi Amadiume has seen the rational for fluidity of gender in the Igbo language in the use of genderless terminologies that stand for the English 'him' or 'her' without distinction. There is third person 'o', which applies to male and female alike. The third person singular of the possessive pronoun 'ya' stands for both his and hers; thus there is no reminder in speech to distinguish between the sexes. lv

This distinction in the language, as far as gender is concerned, leads us to explore the gender roles that males and females are assigned, especially females as male daughters or as female husbands, the two occasions in the Igbo world when women are heads of family. Why can we not generalize this pattern, such that at any time and any place, any Igbo woman can be in leadership by dint of qualification to be so, just like men? Amadiume explains again:

The Igbo word for family head is the genderless expression di-bu-uno. The genderless di is a prefix word which means specialist in, or expert at, or master of something. Therefore, di-bu-uno means one in a master relationship to a family and household, and a person, woman or man, in this position is simply referred to as di-bu-uno. In indigenous Nnobi society and culture, there was one head or master of a family at a time, and 'male daughters' and 'female husbands' were called by the same term, which translated into English would be 'master'. Some women were therefore masters to other people, both men and women. lvi

It is important to be noted that wives were not accorded the kind of power that daughters of the lineage wielded. But, why we ask? After all, the wives are themselves daughters of the lineage in their own father's houses and natal villages. This shows the outright ambiguity of these practices and the need for reform.

Fourthly, Igbo women need energy and goodness to function fully and with fulfillment. As di-feminists, they will not find it odd to sometimes match in front of the men, if they happen to be the better ones, the more intelligent ones to do so.

Fifthly, di-feminism empowers women to go for what they need or want, get it and keep it. With that attitude, men would give way to women, when necessary for the overall good of everyone, and if need be, seeing no longer any obstacles or barriers in the path of women towards freedom and self-fulfillment.

Sixthly, di-feminism brings to the forefront women's issues, such as access to wealth, titles and power to match those of men, who have undue advantage thanks to patriarchy and colonization. It examines how gender impacts identity, that is, who the individual becomes (male or female), and explores how the individual interacts with other individuals or groups (masculinity and femininity) in the institutional environments (family, clan, village, town, school,

church, and beyond).

Seventhly, di-feminism empowers the Igbo male, to stand beside the female and not develop undue fragile ego.

Eighthly, di-feminism sees the girl-child as equal to the boy-child in value, and so no longer sees as tenable the infamous Igbo dictum, "O mee nti ka o mulu nwanyi", (he pretends not to hear you, like one who has given birth to a baby girl) when a man whose wife has put to bed tacitly pretends not to hear you, in effect refuses to hear you, out of shame to divulge that his wife has only a baby girl, upon being asked what the sex of his new born child is.

Ninthly, di-feminism valorizes female intuitiveness for social development. Women have this inner power that men do not often have to tap into unquantifiable sources of knowledge that are akin to scientific knowledge. It is common knowledge that no Igbo man worth his salt would prepare for a big event without first whispering it to his wife in bed at the dead of the night, in order to elicit her wisdom for guidance.

Tenthly, di-feminism revolutionizes how men and women see women, i.e. that gender inequality is the reason for gender differences and male domination not the other way round.

Eleventh, di-feminism refuses the current media view on gender issues, to the disadvantage of women.

Twelfth, di-feminism rejects compulsory patrilinearity, which is at the root of women's disinheritance and devaluation of girl-children. It upholds the notion that equality of opportunities in Igboland will lead to social, political, cultural, and economic development. Install gender equality and banish gender differences and unequal power relations.

Di-feminism, which is in the domain of poststructuralism and postmodernism seeks to decenter and deconstruct such mind-sets. We want di-feminism to be about negativism. The Igbo feminist is engaged at once in self-affirmation as wife, mother, and career woman in the community or society and showing off self as strong, responsible, courageous and audacious. That way, she shall not merely challenge Igbo men's binary views of men and women, but also in addition the views held in general about them. By seeking to go above biological determinism and social notions of womanhood and manhood, therefore, our goal is to put the Igbo female on equal footing with the male as opportunities go. Obviously, men and women cannot be ever equal, if one is thinking about physical strength. Furthermore, this will be far from advocating a counter culture of strong females, where the males will be weak. On the contrary, it will be recognizing that a human being can play many roles in ever evolving spectrum of genders, well beyond what society currently assigns to males and females. That, coincidentally, was what precolonial Igboland knew very well and abided by in the large part, but which was lost in the course of colonial history.

Di-feminism, propounds a new theory, with possibilities of engendering equality of opportunities between males and females. Hence this essay searches for a feminism that is no longer a mere reaction to the unacceptable situation of women. It does not condone the regular litany about women as weak, dependent and incapable, and rejects stereotyping of women as inferior, quiet, gullible, dependent, vulnerable, baby makers and raisers. It is inclusive of men and women seeking change for the good of all. It is neither anti-male, nor does it hate men, for it speaks out on the subjugated, downtrodden, and for social justice for all, be they male or female, not from an angry standpoint, because it does not see men as the problem. On the contrary, the problem is sexism and the patriarchal system that teaches men and women from the early developmental stages of childhood that gender

differences are necessarily signs of inferiority and superiority, depending on which one is talking about. The patriarchal system teaches that female is weak and inferior and male is strong and superior. It also teaches men to dominate and women to be subservient and submissive. Women, therefore, collude with the men in maintaining and condoning the status quo. It is important to note, therefore, that women, perhaps inadvertently, foster sexism and the rule by men for men and by men. All that men need to do as 'partners' to women is to cease to be invisible, but rather recognize the need for attitude change and the fact that patriarchy hurts men as well. Patriarchy imposes extreme, even overwhelming, masculinity on men, stripping them of their rights to grieve, mourn, cry and be weak from time to time as the situation demands. Chinua Achebe inadvertently made this point eloquently about the Igbo in the character of the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart* who, in spite of himself dealt the last and deadly blow to Ikemefuna, his beloved ward, when it came to sacrificing him, so that no one would ever say that he, Okonkwo, was afraid to shed blood.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined strategies that could end sexism and male domination and contribute to the (re)development of Igboland, through equality in gender opportunities. Through enhancing the situation of women, who were once upon a time on the same pedestal as men, but who over time, thanks to history, lost their rightful place beside the men, the Igbo nation only stands to gain. There are individual and group efforts by women that show that gender inequality is not inevitable. What di-feminism offers is a structure, a framework that would be useful in harnessing these individual radicalisms and women's strength. We believe that this new indigenous feminist theory could make and/or transform these energies into a system to serve all women and men in Igboland.

Some Practical Considerations

So much has been said on and around the topic of gender and equality of opportunities and development in Igboland that it behooves us to give some practical guidance or recommendations as to how Igbo men and women should go about realizing the desired ends.

a) Clearly, the concerns and interests of women are different from those of men. Hence, it is important that the dual gender or sex be recognized in the political administration of Igboland at all levels, and this all the way from the family to governorship of states, while passing through the local government level.

b) The said dual-gender or dual-sex system should institute women's title taking just like men do, all the way through the four levels of title-taking to the highest title. Women need not take the very same titles as men; they can name their own titles differently.

c) Women should be able to fill seats for women, just as there are seats that men do take in local government administrations.

d) Families should begin to count women in when sharing family property. Daughters should be able to inherit from fathers and mothers at the same level as sons do.

e) Women should go to court to defend their rights. Any infractions, injustices or unfairness should be litigated.

f) Women, who know, such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, writers and so on, should undertake activism to bring awareness to those who do not know. Indeed men and women should be involved in the exercise of educating the populace.





g) Attention should be drawn to the citizens' fundamental rights in the nation's Constitution, which Constitution supersedes the dictates of all other legal institutions of the land, including customary courts, magistrate courts and the Supreme Court.

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Merry Christmas!





EMERGENCY EXIT
Alarm Will Sound

NIGERIA AND ITS FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

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I have listened to and watched with keen interest discussions and activities in Nigeria for years; I followed up the recently concluded National Economic Summit. I have been bothered by Nigerian affairs and have done a lot of introspection as regards the country's past, present and future. My experience and observation make me think, like have done many Nigerians, that Nigeria is richly blessed with human and natural resources; with the best minds, brains and hearts black Africa would ever have. I also think that Nigeria stands out among all black nations and can confidently be referred to as the hope of Africa. I have also noted issues that have been raised in the past and present as Nigeria's pressing needs and areas of attention, ranging from political instability, social unrest, sectional uprising, religious/terrorist insurgency to corruption. Chinua Achebe had brought together the whole summation of the Nigerian problem under the title of leadership; an opinion that many Nigerians bought into. In as much as these issues are tangible, they seem to have blocked the view of Nigerians from the most fundamental question that needed to be asked; the point of departure of a people and nation. It was Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu who had identified this fundamental question; who had asked that question and received the most brutal reply history has ever witnessed in Africa. That question is: "Who is a Nigerian?" Simple as it may seem, that question contains the reason why the fundamentals of the Nigerian nation is wrong. When Ojukwu received the answer to this question through the observation of unimagined inhuman and bestial treatment meted out to fellow 'Nigerians', he dared Nigeria to a combat to affirm or deny being Nigerian. That move fetched him and the people of his race thirty months of strife, incarceration and genocide; in addition to the stigma of rebellion and defeat which even his death could not redeem. Emerging from that horrific experience, he gave an existential answer to that troubling question: "Nigeria is an amorphous group of individuals busy pretending to be a nation". Forty-eight years after Ojukwu had posed this question, neither has there been offered a working/workable answer to it nor has the reality dawned on this 'amorphous group of individuals' to address this fundamental question.

In her 2009 Tedtalks speech – "The Danger of a Single Story" – Chimamanda Adichie alluded to the fact that she never identified as Africa but was cajoled into that consciousness studying in America. She and the rest of us may realize that we never and do not identify as Nigerians, at least by reflex; that consciousness at best appears and disappears. Every 'Nigerian' easily gives himself/herself or is given away as 'Onye Igbo', 'Omo Yoruba', 'Dan Hausawa' or the likes. In other words, the average 'Nigerian' lives a tribal consciousness; national consciousness is a matter for conferences and intellectual activities. The bitterest part of all is that this stubborn fact is flatly denied in all national engagements. Why will an Igbo man/woman be born, live and die in Lagos and

identified as Anambraian or Imolite but the day a child is born in America, he/she becomes American for all it is worth? Why will national character mean a process of denying a merit to an individual because there are other tribes that have not partaken of what he/she merited and who needed to be awarded that for the mere fact of being from that tribe? Why are regions of the country identified by tribes? There are very many questions like that and they can only point to the supremacy of the tribe over above the nation.

Nevertheless, it is not as if The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is not clear on this matter. The constitution has proved to be the most delusional effigy of our national pretense. Undeniably, Nigeria is a piece of British art crafted for British entertainment and enterprise; Nigerians are people who wittingly or unwittingly struggle to play a role in that art which is a melodrama or who vie for a rented space in the market place of that British enterprise. Like the rest of Africa, Nigerians easily key-in to global issues – green house emission, environmental degradation, economic downturn, insurgency and so forth; downloading them and filling ourselves with their frenzy; leaving the fundamental question unattempted.

The current APC (All Progressives Congress) government came into power with this agenda of fighting corruption which majority of Nigerians connected to. Beautifully crafted but the first corruption to be fought is 'Nigeria as presently constituted'. That was the sense I thought the National Conference convoked by the Goodluck Jonathan administration would have made; going back to the basis; restructuring and reconstituting Nigeria by Nigerians and for Nigerians. Different regions of this country at different times have spoken or demonstrated the rejection of the Nigerian state most times in the conviction that Nigeria had always not cared for their regional needs. An intent ear to the body language and spoken words of leaders and stakeholders of North-Eastern and entire Northern Nigeria bespeaks even Boko Haram as resulting from the neglect of the welfare of North-Eastern Nigeria by Nigeria and Nigerians for a very long time. The monstrosity bedeviling Buhari's Nigeria resides in the process, system and institutions that brought him to power; in the operations of that nation whose very foundation is built on corruption and deceit. Going back to the basis will generate a people and nation who, agreeing together, will formulate a workable, credible and formidable social contract.

Li Kuan Yew, in rebuilding Singapore, priced the reconstruction of the mind and consciousness over above mega structures and cities. We may fight corruption, achieve constant and adequate supply of electricity, good roads and efficient transport system, nuclear power and even plant Nigeria's flag on the moon but not before we fight the British monster called Nigeria which has menaced Nigerians; renewing and reforming it into a beloved fatherland that Nigerians can believe in, trust and be proud of.



NRI CULTURE, TRADITION AND HISTORY: A TALE OF AN ANCIENT IGBO AND WORLD CIVILIZATION

[Part 2 - Begin on page 9, vol. 2, no 1, winter 2015]

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Nri civilization is a super civilization; exceptionally distinguished, systematically operated with time-honored practice for over a millennia. Nri civilization surpasses the definition stated in the dictionary and by extension demolishes the speculation of coming from somewhere.

For centuries, since the 1420s, many attempts were made by several European nations to touch down on Nri, for the purpose of forming political bloc. Nri was first known to the Europeans in their legend as “the kingdom of Prester John, an immensely powerful Christian kingdom in Africa”. (Stride G.T. and Ifeka, C. *People And Empires of West Africa* 1977, Pg. 176). For approximately 500 years several European countries made frantic effort to discover Nri. In 1906, Rev. Fathers Vogler and Duhaze met with the Eze Nri Obalike, the then Eze Nri that passed on in the year 1926, and his cabinets. Rev. Fathers Vogler and Duhaze were convinced that Nri was more Christian than they had thought, and judging from what they had heard and seen, in Nri, God the creator (Chukwu Okike) is above all gods. This justified their assumption that Nri was civilized and God fearing people without rivals in the southern Sahara and indeed West Africa. The presence of orthodox churches from 1900s and the recent heavy presence of Pentecostal churches in Nri with the attendant loud preaching, second collection (offering) syndrome and prosperous prophesy services are true indications that there is little love lost between Nri civilization and the churches.

In a crisis of confidence and culture shock, those who had internalized their experience with foreign religion began to tongue lash and blackmail Nri civilization and culture. In 1911, as if the blackmail was not enough, they formed unholy alliance with the colonial masters, dragged the Eze Nri Obalike to the old Awka District Headquarters in an attempt to force him to abolish Nri spiritual ties with other Igbo settlements (see, Onwuejeogwu, M.A. *Nri Kingdom And Hegemony*, 1980, pg 15). Without that unholy alliance against Nri, the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorate of Nigeria in 1914 could not have been realized as quickly as it was by the colonial masters. Nri civilization has been an envy of Islamic rulers, British slave traders and colonial masters as well as missionary imperialists to this present day. On the local scene, Nri is today envied by Aguleri, Enugu-Ukwu, Igbo-Ukwu, Arochukwu, Okigwe, etc. Nri artifacts found and dogged out on a parcel of land owned by Igbo-Ukwu through the conquest of Oteri (an offshoot of Nri) said it all (Shaw, T. *Unearthing Igbo-Ukwu*, 1977).

The 17th century history and social memory of the Diaspora further validate Nri as a classical civilization. Igbo slaves preferred to die rather than become slaves in the New World (Chambers B.B, the *Igbo Diaspora in the Era of the Slave Trade: An Introductory History*, 2013, Pg. 38). Ebos Landing is one of the big events leading up to the abolition of transatlantic slave trade in 1807.

Nri civilization and those of other civilizations in America (USA) have sparked up the noble ideas of George M. Cochran, a prominent Lawyer, state politician and justice of the supreme court of Virginia to found a new museum in his native Shenandoah Valley in Staunton dedicated to telling stories of the people who settled or passed through the colonial backcountry, the original American frontier. Nri is eminently important as the cultural bearer of the Igbo people, and with the understanding and knowledge of Nri history, tradition, culture and civilization, Professor Chief Douglas Chambers was appointed an advisory scholar to the frontier culture museum at Virginia for the establishment of an African Farm to add to other farm holdings by the museum.

On September 18th 2010, the Igbo Farm Village was launched with the historical specifics and attention to details of the expressive material culture and civilization of the culture bearers of the Igbo people. The Igbo Farm Village is lying side by side with American farms depicting the three key periods in its southern history; the 1730s colonial farm, the 1820s early national-era farm, the 1850s antebellum era farm alongside with the Tudor England Farm, the Ulster Irish Farm (and blacksmith shop), and the Palatine German Farm. Thanks to justice Cochran, John Avoli and Eric Bryai. Also our own professor J. Akuma-Kalu Njoku (JAK-Ohamadike Ndi Igbo), Drs. Ejikeme Obasi, Kanayo Odeluga, Chinyere Odeluga, Dr. Nwachukwu Anakwenze, whom the author know by reputation, and indeed our own *nwa Nri* Professor Chief Douglas B. Chambers (Okwulu Nri O kaa o mee), for all their accomplishments towards the establishment of Igbo Farm Village. In the same vein let me also appreciate the





founding fathers (foundation and finance members) of Odinani Museum Nri in the persons of Hon. Chief M.A.Mebuge, Pius Okpoko, R.N.Tabansi, G.A.D.Tabansi, D.C.Nwosu, G.D.Nwejiaku, M.O.Mbolu, I.O.Ikeagu, A.T.C.Nnoli, B.C.Moneke, D.O.Ifezue, G.A.Onuora, S.U.Okafor, P.I.Okeke, Isaac Udezue, etc., who are mostly members of Ifediora, Amakekwu, Abakari and Atigwe age grades of Nri (those born between 1910 and 1920) and some of their wives, Professor M.A.Onwuejeogwu and wife who hailed from Delta State (Chambers, B.D. *ISA International Conference Paper*, 2011; Mebuge-Obaa II, Prince P. N. *Nri Kingdom at Daggers Drawn: Traditional And Custom Vs Catholicism in Historical Perspective*, National Vision Newspaper Monday - Saturday, September 3 – 9, 2011, Pg. 28).

Viewing civilization from the world perspective and in support of Nri phenomenal exploits in Nigeria and in the Diaspora, I am convinced and I concretely propose that Nri is not just the center of an Igbo civilization of note, but indeed a world-class civilization.





HAPPY 2015



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