

## The Influence of Globalization on the Female Gender: The Igbo Example

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### Abstract

Gender issues, as contemporary discourse, may be said to be relative according to the understanding of its studies with emphasis on the meaning attached to it by those who study them. Nevertheless, it will be relevant to examine how globalization has effected or influenced the environment in which they exist. For example, gender issues in Europe may or may not be the same as in other countries due to a lot of factors. But looking at the universal nature of globalization and the subject of female gender, differences are bound to occur without disparaging the universal nature of basic human traits that make us ethnic, traditional or tribal men and women; the existence or disappearance of racial differences is paramount to interaction and relationships.

This study looks at Igbo female gender and its relationship with proponents in the outside world. It scores the global female environment and the possible barriers faced by some cultural groups and how it helps to form new groups: that make social change positive towards cultural growth. Suggestions are made on how globalization could promote culture and positive governance without sacrificing traditional traits, status or values.

**Key words:** Globalization; Gender; Socialization

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### INTRODUCTION

Globalization in the context of this study means characteristics that unify all the human races into a single family; where language, custom or race is no more a barrier to human relationship; behavioural patterns seems to be uniform on a worldwide scale. There are many factors that are responsible for this and some of them are the Information Communication Technology (ICT), Migration, Trade and transport. Modern education is another important factor to globalisation and then the general development of nationalities. The modern woman may be said to be relatively different from the traditional woman partly because of the influence of globalization—exposure to a world-wide scale. This is as a result of many factors. To have an easy assessment, the modern woman can be classified into a set of groups. A major criteria for assessment may lie in her exposure to the environment. For example, (1) the rural woman, (2) the sub-urban, (3) the urban or the metropolitan woman. These groups have ways of behaviour that may not be too distinct. Also, is the literate and the non-literate. The ICT world had given women non-formal education. There is nothing that the urban woman is experiencing that the rural woman does not know but may not experience; often there seem to be more poverty on the urban woman more than the rural woman in modern times. Most urban women may prefer to reside in the rural area but for one reason or the other they are bound to stay in town. There are facilities in the rural settlement as in the urban. The only difference is the hustle and tussle of city life, the infrastructure and the stress. There may be room for healthy agro-based environment in the rural setting than the urban.

Although most urban women go into small-scale agriculture, especially at the city outskirts majority live the city life. Most rural women are more healthy and wealthier than the urban woman. It is a fact, that, for the first time in Nigeria, a woman governor was recorded in Igboland. Also, they are found among the group of

leading ministers. It is also a fact that the Igbo women led the Aba riot in 1929 when they protested, naked against payment of tax and for their right of hearing by the government. Today, the Igbo woman has lived in the western world of Europe and America and elsewhere in the world. Most of these women had also trained their daughters and majority have come back to live in Nigeria. Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and Akachi Ezeigbo or Onwuna Tessa may be included as amongst these women elites influenced by globalization. A majority of these are educated. But there are also those whose education are non-formal as had been stated who have Contributed immensely to the development of the society. Such women may not have known how to read and write or acquired what we could call book "education" but because of their exposure to the ICT, or migration they may be regarded 'as highly educated. An Igbo proverb has it that, "the he-goat said that traveling is good, that is why he went to his mother's kindred and learnt how to raise his lips to sniff his nose." Intermarriages have taken place amongst these women and they have carried their environment to wherever they pitch their tents as women. Others may have various kinds of experiences in a global scale although they may not have traveled far. This paper specifically interprets their influences, contributions and contradictions in the society. We have chosen the Igbo woman as a typical example of the modern woman in Nigeria representing womanhood. It looks at the issues of marriage, socialization process, education, and employment and general relationship to the society. Here are what seems Common in Gender Issues regardless of Cultural differences.

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## **GENDER CHANGING ROLES**

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- Men are now oliaku or obiageli. Women are becoming breadwinners. Jobless men marry women workers.
- Position of Authority: Governors and very high positions which women do not occupy previously are now prevalent among women.
- Women merchants
- Education
- Decision makers: women influence policies and decisions of the state. Intermarriages have a way of settling differences between tribe, ethnic groups, or nations.
- Women are more free these days to make their choice in marriage. The man could return dowry money if need be in some instances. This makes marriage an open system.

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## **FEMINISM**

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This is one statutory issue in gender parity that automatically changed the views about tradition towards

women. It is about women empowerment. It saw the women suffrage and participation in world government.

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## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE RURAL AND THE MODERN IGBO WOMAN**

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### **The Rural Modern Woman**

Majority of this group are non-literate. They are closer to the culture and agriculture. They are more domestic. Whether or not, they adhere strictly to literacy habits, they adhere strictly to the rules of traditions that keep the community in harmony with each other yet do not overlook or reject, but imbibes the information communication technology and other electronic media knowledge provisions which have made information dissemination so versatile that you do not have to be in a particular or special place to participate in any activity or be a pro active donor of such activities. The television, the radio, the cell phone and variety of other gadgets have enhanced participation of individuals in a lot of activities. It is easy to locate an idea or perceive a feature that inadvertently releases its own information that could be assimilated subconsciously. Knowledge explosion provides active public education. However, positively or negatively the individual is influenced. In this way the world has become so small to all and sundry that boundaries continue to become slim to the extent that the new world often finds it difficult to identify a cultural group except when conscious effort is made. Language, which is an epitome of a people's culture, is becoming more centralized. We could talk about central Igbo, central Yoruba or Hausa and others. Even foreign languages like English are interwoven with local Nigerian languages that it becomes part of the people's culture. The Niger Delta is an example of culture with such alternation of language. An Igbo woman cannot speak a sentence without elements of English or other language which he must have come in contact with. We can see such cluster in the Hispanic, Spoken in a place like Canada. Hispanic contains elements of Portuguese, English, Spanish and French.

In Nigeria, especially with the Igbo stock whether she is educated or not she is influenced by what she thinks is superior to her socialization. For example, the Igbo, in the rural area will look on to the people that live abroad like, America, Europe or elsewhere in the world. But this does not mean that one's own culture is neglected instead they use such alien influence to enhance some aspects of what they think is important to them.

### **Dressing**

The ethics of the culture often prohibits some rural behaviours that may be alien but in as much as the people are influenced by others from abroad, they still maintain aspects of the tradition. What an urban woman will wear

comfortably outside the house, a rural woman may not wear because of her lack of exposure to such dressing which to her may seem irregular or embarrassing or against her tradition. It is only the young ones that could rebel against any opposition to stop them from behaving like people that live abroad. In this case they look timid because of lack of confidence in the presence of those from abroad. But take the same female outside that environment; with time she would begin to be comfortable with the new environment abroad. In Igboland one can now talk about dressing the Caribbean way, the American or the European way and this is seen as the vogue

### Religion

The acceptance of Christianity and Islam has changed modern woman in Nigeria greatly. The Christian religion is a typical example. It grew from the Universal Church in Rome (in 4C AD) to the orthodox: the Baptist, Methodist, spiritual church to protestant and from protestant to the Scripture Union and the Pentecostals and back to house fellowship and to other groups that preach a typical faith. The general tendency is that there could be a modern Christian and a traditional Christian. Lagos is an example of a metropolitan area in Nigeria that contains all groups or classes of people. People from various cultures of the world can be seen here. There could be a Lagos Christian. "Every Christian in Lagos is a born again."

For the modern Igbo woman, the rural Christian seems to be more conformist than the urban or suburban woman in character. The urban woman seems to be freer to associate with other variables in the norms of the society. She is more exposed to other women from other cultures in different faiths. For example, a non-literate Christian living in a, "face me — I face you," yard, kind of settlement usually found in the city. She is more disposed to small scale church assembly found scattered around the streets. Here, she is free to associate with other women from various cultural or religious backgrounds. The whole essence of her life and behaviour is usually dependent on her husband whose faith she not only copy but profess whether she is in tune with it or not. She is often in disarray with her husband if she refuses to conform to her husband religious faith or secular bias. Nevertheless, the particular nature of the society demands that for her to be a good, responsible and obedient wife she must follow her husband taste or else strife or marital conflict might occur. To many, this is one reason for divorce. Only recently, couples from different churches can marry and maintain their church after wedlock. The wedlock can take place in either the husband church or wife's church. Each partner respects the others faith; a Christian can marry a Muslim or vice versa or a traditionalist. "Living in lovers," are so rampant that notice is often made known when trouble emanate and people begin to ask questions or when the law or tradition takes its effect on such relationships.

The literate woman that can be found in such reserved area like the GRA seems to be in tune with her husbands' faith also. However, there is usually an understanding when her faith differs. This is silent, for the husband seems to allow her stake on such issues for peace to reign provided it does not disturb the progress of the home. There are also exception to non-literate, economically balanced Igbo women who could also object to the religious preferences of the husband but are more tolerable than the non-literate who may not be economically balanced. Often the issue of economy places the modern Igbo woman on a balanced scale; the reasons being that the piper dictates the tune.

### Marriage

Women of these days are bread winners. Men who are not too successful in life, especially, financially look for successful women to marry. Such women are eager to get a husband and many of such women have been duped by men who are only after the woman's wealth. A lot of such men claim to be pastors. For this reason, many modern Igbo women struggle to be successful in order to get a husband of their choice. Most of such husbands do nothing. In Igbo society of today, a greater percentage of the women are more educated than the men who are popular business men. Such men who are not educated marry educate women for balance.

Before now strict attention seems to be paid to ethnic groups where one decides to marry. But the issue of love and affection is now so universalized and diversified that it overrides most cultures around the Igbo Stock. Before that time "Ime mkpuke" (Child birth out of wedlock ) was frowned at . Such a girl is usually banished to her grandmothers home, away from her mothers' until she gives birth. The child is usually referred to as a illegitimate. No man would want to marry such a girl. She can only be given to an old man who had lost his wife, or to a family of a demised man who never had a child before death. The girl could be married to such a family where the child and other children from the her represents the man's children. These situations are no more taken too seriously these days. The concept that a child is a child of the society overrides such cultural beliefs. However, young people could have children before wedlock although there are consequences in the case of disaster or unforeseen circumstances, it does not stop relationships between men and women.

Children from incestuous relationships are rampant these days. The global influence is that tradition that harbour these measures are often no more remembered. When an individual has a legitimate background or not is no more a contention of the society. Everyone is free to choose what seem good for one provided it does not disturb the other person. Most of the inhibition of tradition is seen as mere superstition.

The issue of the cost of dowry has also prevented

Igbo men and women from marrying early. To avoid this, some co-habit, some are, "living in lovers," ;if in the process, a child becomes the result so be it. Even the Christians are found in such situation. To the Christians, such union is only blessed by the pastor but the couples will not be allowed to wear white gown (in a white wedding). It may be frowned at for a Christian girl to have a child before wedlock but now she can go to the altar pregnant. It depends on the Christian denomination. The doctrine decides what to accept. Things are changing rapidly. Culture is also changing. The reality is that the dynamics of civilization gives the society the opportunity to chose conditions that favour its kind and discard those detrimental to humanity be it religious or secular.

In the Igbo society, the Osu was once anathema in any community to be associated with let alone get married to. Although the remnants are still prevalent in most Igbo societies, individual group, still object to its association whether by Christians or not; some groups are beginning to accept the situation especially where it is beyond the control of the social change in the society. Somewhere in Anambra state, an Osu can be married to a freeborn provided she or he is from outside that particular Igbo town. The people believe that it has crossed the rivers, which they assume, have nullified the power that can cause harm to any of the groups.

### Single Parenthood

Although we may still believe that a woman's honour is not complete without a husband, marriage is no more for better or for worse. Some groups may still hold that a woman or man must stay married once marital oaths have been sworn. This is no more real or true to the Igbo woman. She is often free to disassociate whether her reason is cogent or not. The society can talk about her situation but may not stop her from exercising her right especially where she is economically viable.

**Women Empowerment:** this has encouraged single parenthood. Some young ladies confess that they want to be single parents even when they have not married.

Single parenthood on the side of the woman is now rampart in the Igbo society and most families welcome it, especially where there is no male child. In the traditional Igbo setting, it was not a misnomer especially where it was preferred. For a male representative in a family, most parents usually make it mandatory that the first daughter gets a child at home before getting married. She may be free to be married outside the home, later. This example has given so many women the impetus to decide whether to be single or stay married. The situation presently, has made it inevitable that single parenthood is no more a disadvantage or a misnomer but a conditional situation that demands profound attention by the society due to poverty, violence against the female gender or widowhood. The place of a woman without a man is

no more thought of as an insecure situation, a burden or stress on a woman. The security of the man is no more the ultimate as some feel that it enslaves women.

Nevertheless Migration has made the world a common place today. The Igbo marry Chinese, American, Liberian, Jamaican or any race. Likewise the whole world are intermarrying and bringing various cultures together. This often makes it difficult to identify an individual in a complex society. A typical example can be cited with the Jamaican society. Migration has made Igbo people in the western world of Europe and America diversified in their pursuit for greener pasture and wealth to the extent that most Igbo females, although married in Nigeria still believe that love must go on in the absence of their husbands. Also the men believe the same. Some believe that they can go very far to earn a living. Therefore, it is not unusual to see a married man in Igbo getting married to an American or European in other to get a green card (dual citizenship). You now have two or more families for a man living in different locations. Most Igbo men find it difficult to keep their foreign wives in Nigeria. Majority are staying back unlike before. There is also an example of the brain drain going on in African countries by the west. In as much as it is intimidating some cultures, it is at the same time bringing the world together, changing lives and creating wealth for countries that operate them. Visa lottery from the Western world is an example of such economic and political strategy. At least, it checks the number of immigrants inhabiting a society. It also monitors their activities. Transfer of technology becomes easy and dominant cultures melt the hard core culture traits that may be detrimental to the wellbeing of the society.

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### DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is still prevalent on the basis of culture, language and religions. The role of women in this context is piteous. Some women suffer in marriages where their husbands are foreigners or vice versa. For example the deprival or acceptance of working permit, visa processing. In politics, the question of "where is she from?" is a prevalent question when positions of authority are being assessed. The children are involved. Most often, for an Igbo man, his marriage is not complete until he marries from his town or village, although he may have married someone outside his native home. However, intermarriages have brought globalization to our door step such that the society is often persuaded to accept the obvious. Westernization which stands as a more dominant group seems to have its way in the luxury of culture in Igbo land.

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### GENERAL CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

Salsa, samba or Caribbean dance among the women group is popular in modern cultural groups in Africa. The

women-dancing group do not only depend on the ancient tradition, they mix features from other cultures that can enhance their present costume that are entirely different from the traditional types. Most of the recent materials used in their performances are usually synthetic. They add color and movements that could be traced to other distant cultures.

The Igbo woman naturally, dances like others found elsewhere. For an Igbo girl to eat outside or to be seen in a hotel was a misnomer. Migration has brought these present Igbo girls to a place where they really recognize such restrictions as off point; they may not see anything wrong in eating in a restaurant or cafe.

She is often kept till puberty when she is thought how to be a woman who is usually successful when married to a man. She is taught how to sit, to talk, to relate with strangers and to relate with the male counterpart. Presently, unlike in the past where there was no form of courtship, the young woman is taught how to court. Part of modern culture which the group may not see as unreasonable are issues like a girl indulging in alcohol or being arrogant; such character is regarded as improper. She engages in politics and vies for superior positions in the society. Traditionally, she is called "Oliaku" or Obiageli" meaning one who enjoys the wealth of the husband. While the man is the "provider," she is the "Controller". This gives her a pride of place. This is why she is anxious about discarding those practices that affects her. There members were the group who enforces such cultural traits that regulate or impinge on the health and wealth and steady growth of the Igbo woman. Men are now "Oliaku" or 'Obiageli" because the women can now marry them.

The issue of Osu as we have mentioned earlier poses no serious trait in modern times to an Igbo female. She is free to make her choice whether there are consequences or not. She can live anywhere. Many ethnic groups, travel to wherever she was, become single parent, acquire education or become a businesswoman. What she knows is that she must maintain her status quo in the society as a wife, spinster or Woman.

Women are now becoming aware of laws that deal with maltreatment against them. They are becoming aware of trafficking in females and other related offences. So they can defend themselves through the law. But intermittently, they support using their might to achieve what they want.

Some widowhood rites such as slaving, widows with broken homes, constitute criminal assault if the widow is forced to undergo them under both the criminal and penal codes like any other assault (Against violence Against women, 1999).

Folarin Coker stated that, "one thing that strikes me time and again when reading the history of Nigeria is how little is said about the great women of our land, the role played by Nigerian women not only in building the nation but also in saving it."

Typically, in every Igbo family there are educated person and perhaps one or two people living abroad. Some may be akin to business although they are educated while some may depend on an educational career to be successful. In one-way or the other, there is a way where the family relieved its financial crunches. The females are prided on getting a wealthy or well to do husband or a husband that can be supported. No matter how a man is reared, he is encouraged to keep a happy family in all situations.

Many Igbo women now go to school while the men are in business. This may bring about a future of women leaders where they rule men who are less educated but rich; where women will then be deciding the fate of their culture or state.

The modern Igbo woman is influenced by a lot of foreign ideas. She spends her time looking at possible maneuvers in her life style, just to be different despite her cultural demands. Some still adhere strictly to certain cultural norms like observing some rites or functions whether her new faith permits or not. The "new yam festival," is an example; it is usually at August period. For some Christians who do not want to be counted as partakers of the traditional rite, they use the period as a mere holiday. During this period also masquerades are apparent. For many the period is more of a subject of ideology than of aesthetics. Some women are found becoming custodians of some masquerade performance. In the traditional setting it was abomination for a woman to be initiated into the cult except on some spiritual grounds and of age (well above menopause) or her creative skill, which is useful when masquerades are created.

It was taboos for Igbo woman to carve wood but today she has gone beyond the carving of wood to casting of metals like in the making of jewelry.

It is often difficult to distinguish between a literate Igbo woman and a non-literate Igbo woman especially when they are both living in affluence. The more readily identifiable is the low economically balanced woman who does some petty trading or some other menial jobs. Whatever is the case, she must measure up to her mate in the society or she would be counted as lazy or unfit to be called a woman.

The metro-political Igbo woman may not have the fire to cook. She buys her food and her wards food from outside. She may no more be the usual housewife. Often the modern Igbo woman contributes to the family and may no more be cowed as a rural woman. She is entirely free to choose her life style but this does not mean she would be wayward. Whether she has a job or not, she is no more subject to her husband as the culture demands but seen as a companion that has the right to call off the relationship at any time. But this is just what it seems. The man is however cautious with the modern Igbo woman who you cannot just intimidate except on the grounds of

culture whose ugly side is fast disappearing.

Women are brick layers unlike in the tradition where it was meant to be a man's job. She is seen carrying cement tub on her head or using the shovel to scoop sand.

The question of female power is now distinct in Igboland. She is a taxi driver, motorcycle rider. In this context power can be seen as transforming rather than dominating. We see power as individual who is being able to control his or her life; to help relate or associate with others, genderless. Nwakaeze-Ogugua ( ) puts it thus:

Herein, are embedded the principles of freedom; idea or creative responsibility, self-control, self-discipline and mastery.

That a woman is fertile or not or had only females make no more meaning as it would have years ago. The understanding of the male compeer helps to prune such transformations brought by the power of the female gender. Until this influence is recognized and augmented, a lot may be lost. It is what a woman gives the society that we take. He has the power to determine her contribution. Today women are more educated than the male in Igboland. If this should continue, a time will come when such positions of economy, political and religious power in governance would be taken over by the women folk with very few men to contend with. She can concentrate in many things at a time. While breastfeeding, she is thinking of the soup in the fire, her exams or classes, her children and even her husband's comfort.

## ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS, INTERACTION AND INTEGRATION

The Igbo woman is more outgoing than many other women found in other tribes in Nigeria. Majority live abroad. They pride their existence in visiting other societies to embrace alien cultural forms (njepu). This does not mean that they have forgotten their culture. Often they come home to choose husbands. Recently, this is no more the case. They can marry anywhere provided there is love and economic comfort. There innate consideration is usually economic comfort. They are friendly and like making friends or speaking other languages. They believe that wealth comes mainly for outside than from within. They however appreciate a wayfarer. "Ala bu otu," meaning all lands are the same. A modern Igbo girl would always be proud to say, "my fiancé," is in Greece or America, to say the least. Their choice is usually fantastic but may not recoil when the available becomes desirable because they believe in the progressive future and value love of family more than wealth. Whichever comes first

is accepted. Her joy is the family. This is where the Igbo woman differ from any other group of womanhood. . .

Discrimination of any sort can be seen as a male thing. It seems to be higher in men than women. For example, if a girl wants to marry in Igboland, the question time is usually more on the female; to ascertain whether she is still a virgin, whether she is of a noble birth, an Osu or Ohu; whether she is of good character and other qualities. These days the girls are denying such question time and would wish the marriage to go on without such questions. They have seen other cultures and feel that most of the things are unnecessary in marriage relationships and generally the Igbo society is adjusting. They prefer the couples to live happily than asking such questions.

At the beginning of the 60's, dowry debt was usually so exorbitant. This has kept a lot of young men from getting married or many other choices; many could not survive the cost in a biting economy.

Also dowry can be returned to the man if the man decided to divorce the wife. Women are more free these days to make their choice than before.

Regardless of all the influences of globalization, the Igbo woman holds tenaciously to the positive provisions of her culture more than the men. A man may not bother much about certain traditional values but a woman might get emotional about i.

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