

## Full Length Research

# Women And Chieftaincy Titles A Gender Issue And Cacophony: Breaking Boundaries In The Study Of Musicology In Igbo Custom And Tradition

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**In the Nigerian context, and especially in the traditional Igbo setting, women have never featured prominently in the enterprise of politics and power play. Women have but few rights in any circumstances, and are not allowed to take chieftaincy titles because they have their own positions as the tradition permit. In the enclave of women, before taking such a title they are made to pay a fixed amount of money and a number of yams and cook a sumptuous meal for the title holders. This article will explore this sexist attitude and, using some feminist hermeneutic keys, will try to analyse the phenomenon of power politics. This is because recently there is an upsurge of the chieftaincy titles taken by women which contradicts all depictions of the traditional Igbo reality and where some traditional instruments are.**

**Keywords:** Domination, Female Power, Gender, Politics, Patriarchy, Sexuality.

## INTRODUCTION

### Origin of Chieftaincy Title

It was Eri who is regarded as the father of the Igbo in diaspora that is believed to have introduced a centralized democracy in Igbo land characterised by secular or theocratic Kinship, more differentiated and hierarchically arranged titled systems and age grades. A problem that needed solution was first brought to Eri who presented it to his cabinet called *Odoloma* Eri (Idigo, 2000). According to Fidelis Idigo (2001:115) again "every family was represented in the council of elders whose only qualification was to be 75 years old and above. In this way, every family was given the opportunity to give their voice on issues of government that determined the fate of members of the family". Michael Marcuzzi (2010:157) asserts that "its mythical connection to an ancient patriarch establishes the cult as the arch through which devotees approach the reproduction of the gerontocracy and the fecundity of the

collective of male ancestors". As a point of emphasis, in Igbo cosmology before any man enters this stage of life especially in communities that holds on tenaciously to tradition like the Aguleri, there are certain rituals that would be performed in order to initiate such a person into that cult. Nwando Achebe (2011:91) affirms that it is this egalitarian gerontocracy that bestowed leadership on a group of elders.

But today, we are beginning to observe that this patriarchal system instituted by Eri is being eroded by certain changes in the tradition among the Igbo by conferment of women chieftaincy titles that are not allowed by the custom of the land which is tied up to patriarchy. Arguably, even after conferment of such chieftaincy titles, they (women) are not allowed to shake their titled men folks with that designated hand shake which the Igbos calls *ina ito* because the tradition and

ustom of the Igbo race does not accept that. It is tantamount to disrespect for any woman to shake the chiefs in that form. Gloria Chuku (2009:82) asserts that “hierarchical relationships in Igbo society were determined by age, experience, ability, marital status, and rites of initiation”. A political system of the Igbo is male-dominated and that of Kingship, but somehow flexible enough to accommodate and to accord women political positions in order to uphold and bolster matriarchy. Presumably, Ahebi Ugbabe was the first and only female to become King in the history of Igbo land, although her community Enugu-Ezike in the present Enugu State, Nigeria resisted that move then. But under the symbolic shadow of her political and black-magical powers she was able to rule her people during the colonial era (Achebe, 2011). According to Angulu Onwuejeogwu (1981:77-78)

*Women have their own titles, although fewer in number. As an elderly wife in her husband's lineage, she can be a leader in the married women group called iyiom. The headship of the iyiom group is determined firstly by the order in which women are married into the lineage and then by the order of taking the various titles culminating in the life nne mmanwu. The nne mmanwu is equivalent the title ima mmanwu that male children take at the age of nine. Elderly married women of exemplary character and achievement are allowed to take this title in which the secret of the ritual mask is revealed to them. It is the greatest honour a lineage can give to a woman and so involves much feasting. It gives the woman some of the privileges of a male citizen of the lineage.*

Basden (1966:88) asserts that “women have but few rights in any circumstances, and can only hold such property as their lords' permit”. Idigo (1990:67) affirms that in a community like Aguleri such women before taking such a title they are made to pay a fixed sum amount of money and a number of yams and cooks a sumptuous meal for the title holders. An equivalent of *Iyiom* is the prestigious *Odu* women society in Onitsha custom and tradition (Bosah, 1973 cited in Hahn-Waanders, 1990:88). The political typology or structure of the chieftaincy titles or “*Ozoship*” in Igbo land according to Onwuejeogwu (1979) considers men only have attained certain age.

### **New Age and Gender Issues**

Today, “the expansion of the chieftaincy institution, in terms of influence and quality of office-holders, and its increasing visibility are irritating facts compared to the prognoses of social theory” (Harneit-Sievers, 1998:57). It is on this position that Wale Oyemakinde (1977:63-64) posits that “some care was taken to define terms for the purpose and to avoid

ambiguities. The word chief was used to describe a person whose chieftaincy title is associated with a native community and includes a minor chief and a recognized chief. By implication, honorific titles were excluded in favour of traditional titles”. This syndrome has gained immense popularity because of the representative qualities of its symbolic ways by which titles are just given any how especially to women in Igbo societies. According to Ebere Nwaubani (1994:348-347) “this upsurge of the chieftaincy contradicted all depictions of the traditional Igbo reality... those who feel that they have arrived in society are rushing, at huge expense, to have the Kings confer chiefly titles on them”. Van Allen (1993:459) argues that “in traditional Igbo society, women did not have a political role equal to that of men. But they did have a role – or more accurately, a series of roles – despite the patrilineal organization of Igbo society. Their possibilities of participating in traditional politics must be examined in terms of both structures and values”. Due to this quest for unnecessary recognition Igbo women has joined the band wagon of their men counter-parts seeking for traditional titles to equate themselves with men. It is in full acknowledgment of this that against the run of cultural and traditional play, that certain women are admitted into the hallowed chambers of the cabinet as members. In fact, some of these Igbo kings somehow show a kind of frightening blend of courage and clairvoyance when they decide to admit a woman into the royal cabinet, the first in living memory which negates the tradition of the land. In this regard, the Igbo ancestors must have the king hints about the spark somebody like Chief Mrs. Ebelechukwu Obiano carries (Eze, 2018). Never in the history of Aguleri tradition and as the head Igbo race through the mediation of sacred ordination has a woman been conferred with a chieftaincy title until recently.

This new transformation or innovation in Igbo culture is a way to bastardize and annihilate the time honoured tradition and custom of the people which is totally heinous and unacceptable because womenfolk has their traditional position through its sacred ordination. Nonetheless, Oyemakinde (1977:64) argues that “such dignitaries of the local population might gain some recognition, but not to the extent of that they would assume the status and position of the master”. John Orij (2007:262) laments that this new development could be “the end of sacred authority and genesis of amorality and disorder in Igbo mini states”. Basically, looking at the whole scenario, one would deduce that there is a kind of power shift, relation or tussle that has gender underpinning not minding the fact that chieftaincy titles are a sacred stool solely meant for men who are primarily the guardians and custodians of the sacred canopy (Orij, 1989).

However, the sacredness of the chieftaincy titles as a sacred canopy among the Igbo communities offers an amazing field for the exploration of gender inequality and power becomes evident because “modesty, submissiveness and fear of authority” (Valji et al, 2003:72) would be attributed to the cause of this gender inequality and restrictions in many aspects which also includes their sex as a currency for female power. Insofar as culture represents routine behaviour that carries norms and values of a society, they are often not easily changed (Steady, 2005:326). Okeke (2000:50) consistently argues that the tendency to regard gender discrimination inherent in cultural practices as being acceptable because it is the tradition. She goes on to illustrate how patriarchal continuities, even when they contain contradictions between statutory and customary law and the weaknesses in statutory law can lead to the strengthening of traditional justifications that still privilege men in relation to property rights, inheritance laws. This can result in relations of power which keep in place an inequitable social structure that privileges the dominant gender (Okeke, 2000:57). Mahmood (2005:2) argues that it is under the pretence of tradition that women are enchained, no wonder then that Al-Bukhari (1928) cited in Mernissi (1991:49) asserts that “those who entrust their affairs to women will never know prosperity”. Leppert (1987:64) argues that “this attitude reached its climax in the early nineteenth century in the establishment of rigid distinctions between both peoples at all levels of interaction”.

It is on this notion that Fleischacker (1994:21) thinks that tradition refers to “the practices and standards of conduct that we accept unquestioningly when presented to us by our society”. He argues that “traditions are first and foremost the sum total of what is not argued in the transmission of knowledge and practice from parents to their children” (Fleischacker, 1994:70). It is on this position that Okafor and Emeka (1998:62) asserts that “culture and conventions are generally localized within culture groups but certain traits could be universal to the main groups. Because of this, even small communities have firm control of these customs and conventions and can therefore exercise social control of its members. The individual is subject to the community – bows to its laws and conventions and yields to all manners of sanctions”. On the contrary, Brenkman (1987:3) argues that “it expresses a restless consciousness, one that senses in every work of culture the fact and the effects of social domination”. He stresses that “this restlessness, this critical attitude toward what is sometimes experienced as the realm of freedom and the very place of human meanings and values, also includes the hope of liberating the human capacity for thought and expression—a capacity that is promised or realized in still distorted and threatened

ways in those forms of activity we call culture, art, and literature, philosophy and science” (Brenkman, 1987:3). Again, insofar as gender is analogous to difference but contains within it notions of inequality and is often viewed as a metaphor representing relations of power, nonetheless, analysis of power is often restricted to male/female power relations only, ignoring power relations based on race, class, ethnicity, age, nationality and so forth (Steady, 2005:319). According to Ruth Bloch, “the view that gender relations are cultural has been a standard cliché of the anti-biological argument. The very term gender as distinguished from sex has derived its widespread appeal from its supposedly cultural definition. As a cultural rather than purely physical fact, gender is meant to refer not merely to the male and the female but to the contingent and variable symbols that define masculinity and femininity within a particular social group” (1996:73-74). Sadiq (1996:58) view this concept of gender as a form of socio-cultural distinction in the individual’s physical outlook. Marin Whyte (1978:163) affirms that “these features give men more outlets and resources to use in dominating women, and more ideological support for the controls they place on their wives and daughters”.

According to John Brenkman (1987:ix) “a major premise drawn from post historic hermeneutics is needed to keep the interpretation of ideology and utopia from slipping back into the original dichotomy. A text’s meaning is not fixed once and for all, because it is determined by the situation of the time and changes with each distinct configuration of production and reception contexts”. Brenkman (1987:34) again argues that “historicism maintains that its object domain is unaffected by the interests of modern interpreters themselves; that the techniques of the historical-philological method are capable of dissolving such modern prejudices and recovering the real, original meaning of ancient texts; and that the concept of the classical can be employed as a value-neutral category of periodization and stylistic description”. It is on this position that Dollimore (1995:520) argues that “there are two analytic perspectives which address first, this paradoxical centrality of homosexuality in our culture, second the phenomenon of homophobia, and third the construction of masculinity [the three things being closely related]. The one is a radical psychoanalysis, the other a materialist account of deviance”. However, Tapper (1991:104) asserts that inequality of status does not preclude able women from wielding considerable power within the household. Koskoff (1989:13) also observes that across culture women sometimes “conive” with this notions of male superiority. This concept of gender has been a serious discourse for sometime which made Aluede (2005:58) to assert that such roles structure our choices and guide our behaviour in an

acceptable manner within the community we operate. However, gender issue is a condition of being either male or female and in this wise, Nfah-Abbenyi (2005:260) argues that men and patriarchal ideologies control women's reproductive and sexual capacities, and that as a result, women are trapped by their reproductive anatomy and by a dogma of compulsory heterosexuality. In fact, in Nigeria, a typical Igbo man, in an Igbo society attaches much significance to this concept of gender inequality and this apparently is very noticeable in situations where a woman does not have a male child for the husband, she of course knows that her position is being threatened (Nwokocho, 2007:230). Metuh (1987:188) asserts that "a woman who cannot or has not given birth is a social misfit and if she has never conceived she is openly ridiculed and told that she is not a woman". Augustine Nwoye (2007:390) argues that "an African marriage experiences a sense of disorder and distress where the above process of positive evolution in a marriage fails to place". It is also noticeable in the same community where men and women play different roles in the areas of musical practices especially as it concerns instrument like the *Ikolo* (Ibekwe, 2013:137). According to Doubleday (2006:119) leaving of life in communities like the Aguleri, "where a pronounced ideology of gender separation has been defined and imposed by male authority. This affects musical life/practices in several ways: [1] virtually all musical activity is segregated according to gender. [2] Men dominate religious, classical and radio music, leaving only folk music to be shared with women, and [3] Men have inhibited women from playing almost all musical instruments". Strictly speaking, this religious structure of the Igbo in the context of Aguleri tradition, culture and hegemony as regards the sacredness of *Ikolo* drum is apparently "chauvinistic" (Balogun, 2010:28); "a symbol of women's oppression" (Mahmood, 2005:195) which portrays "women as timeless victims of a ferocious patriarchal order" (Zezeza, 2005:213). This is why Rattansi (1997:485) argues that "the feminization of the colonized male also of course occurred in the context of the masculinism of imperialism and the dominance of the male in the metropolitan order of things. It is therefore appropriate to turn to another recent contribution to post-colonialism literature in which many of these issues are particularly well highlighted". It is on this position however that Van Allen (1972:169) asserts that "women, therefore, came second to men in power and influence". Brenkman (1987:231) argues that this notion of dominance is a "socially organized forms of exploitation, coercion, and non-reciprocity which structure the uses that one individual or group makes of another for the satisfaction of its own need".

### Chieftaincy Titles as a Sacred Position

More so, the chieftaincy titles "represents more of a process than a product, based on this, it carries its own rules of etiquette" (De Jong, 2010:199). It is on this position that Ventakesh (2006:9) affirms that "there are always rules to be obeyed, codes to be followed, and likely consequence of actions". Pals (2009:109) argues that such sacred positions when conferred "substantively therefore designates the thing whose essential characteristic is sacredness". It is on this ground that Idowu (1973:58) argues that "the sacred informs and gives meaning to the common, and the common is for the sacred a means of self-expression". Derion and Mauze (2010:6) posits that words like "sacred/secret/sensitive" would be used to describe to such indigenous sacred stools because it "commands respect and therefore require special care or the observation of prohibitions; in all events". In a simple phrase, Derion and Mauze (2010:6) again argues that such sacred stool "propose to use the all-encompassing expression culturally sensitive object, which is less reminiscent of religion and emphasizes the native peoples' values and sensitivities effectively at the heart of the matter". It is on this position that Brown (1975:43) argues that "anything or any place could become sacred". Auboyer (2014:1) asserts that throughout the history of religions and cultures, objects used in cults, rituals, and sacred ceremonies have always been of both utilitarian and symbolic. He argues that in such ceremonies, ritualistic have been utilized as a means for establishing or maintaining communication between the sacred – transcendent, or supernatural, realm and the profane – the realm of time, space, and cause and effect (Auboyer, 2014:1). Wosien (1992:10) argues that due to the theology and asceticism which add their share to the repression of spontaneous movement; eventually the stool becomes a taboo and is regarded as dangerous, underground or evil manifestation. The sacredness conferred on such positions by the Igbo community is partly positive and partly negative among the initiates, neo-phytes and "especially women and minors" (Nabofa, 1994:18). Nabofa (1980:394) again affirms that "there are several places that women are forbidden to enter in view of the widespread fear of the contagious blood in them". Durham (2001:2) argues that "on the one hand, it had to be kept separate from the profane; it should not be touched or looked at by profane persons; when not in use, it is hidden in special location, itself made sacred by association". Adedeji (2013:1) affirms that "it is a blend of the sacred and secular". Doubleday (2006:124) posits that attributions of sacred symbolism may express androcentric ideas.

During and Dayera (1993:561) writing from the context of Persian tradition and culture, asserts that women symbolizes “the image of both the heavens and the assemble circle of mystics”. Clavir (1996:100) argues that for the Igbo race, any “potent” position occupied by women like Ahebi Ugbabe “commands respect and can give rise to prohibitions as to who may view, touch or use it”, because it is meant for the titled men (Achebe, 1958:41). It is through this method that the initiates who are also the custodians of the tradition and customs of the community “pursue practices and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status” (Mahmood, 2005:4-5), and confers “male religious authority” (Mahmood, 2001:217). Isichei (1983:289) attributes it to “*abhorrence of menstrual blood; a kind of role selection in which men are perpetual performers of an art, women are perpetual spectators; while many observers have seen it as a way of subordinating women*”.

### **Patriarchy, Musicology and Gender Issues among Indigenous Women**

Illustratively, Lo-Bamijoko (1987:23) asserts that “in Afikpo area, women are still not allowed to see or listen to these instruments while they talk”. Ayisi (1972:91) asserts that “these rules have religious implications and people who overlook them feel a sense of guilt and seek ritual restoration”. Lo-Bamijoko (1987:23) argues that “the functions for which those instruments are used take place at night, in order that women may hear the instruments playing but not see either of them or the players” and this according to Weisenfeld (2013:134) makes women “invisible”. It is on this position that Zeleza (2005:207) affirms that “women remain largely invisible or misrepresented in mainstream, or rather malestream, African history. They are either not present at all, or they are depicted as naturally inferior and subordinate, as eternal victims of male oppression”. Young (2003:100-102) under the notion of feminism and ecology ironically laments that as timber is exploited for military and industrial purposes without thought of the longer effects of deforestation and desertification, so also in this way men has been ideologically colonized trying to take control of nature just as patriarchy tries to control women.

D’Azevedo (1994:345) writing from the context of *Poro* a secret society in Sierra Leone affirms that “the position of women remains subordinated to that of men, and *Sande* may be viewed as an instrument of male control of women in which the high-ranking leaders of *Sande* engage in an ancient conspiracy with their dominant male lineage-mates to sustain the principles of patrimony”. Temple (1922:182-183) writing from the

context of *Dodo* secret society of Kagoma traditions affirms that the “initiates were told that the whole society was really a conspiracy to keep their women folk in subjection”. Zeleza (2005:208) asserts that “in viewing them as unchanging, as guardians of some ageless tradition, women are reduced to trans-historical creatures outside the dynamics of historical development”. Metuh (1999:129) argues that “this has overtones of male chauvinism and is often used by men to remind women who appear to be very forward of their subordinate place in society”. Shepherd (1987:155) affirms that “male hegemony is essentially a visual hegemony”. He argues further that “the male desire to control women therefore parallels their desire to control the world, which implies that women themselves must be controlled and manipulated” (Shepherd, 1987:154). It is on this position that Richard Ohmann (1995:305) argues that the “powerful groups in a society have ideological advantage over the poor, weak, or unorganized”. According to Daniel Pals:

*The sacred thing is par excellence that which the profane should not touch, and cannot touch with impunity. To be sure, this interdiction cannot go so far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible; for if the profane could in no way enter into relations with the sacred, this latter could be good for nothing. But, in addition to the fact that this establishment of relations is always a delicate operation in itself, demanding great precautions and a more or less complicated initiations, it is quite impossible, unless the profane is to loss its specific characteristics and become sacred after a fashion and to a certain degree itself. The two classes cannot even approach each other and keep their own nature at the same time* (2009:104).

Lutkehaus (1998:245) writing in the context of Papua New Guinea argues that such taboos also protect the so called “sacred flutes” like the *Ikolo* drum played only by initiated men. Derion and Mauze (2010:5) asserts that “through such prohibitions and signs of respect, these peoples are seeking to redefine and obtain recognition for their cultural values in their specificity, in the hope that the dominant society will henceforth take them into account, and that their political and social situation will thus improve”. On the other hand, such sacred instrument is believed “to have powers, it could cure illnesses, confer strength in battle, and assure the continuing fertility of the people” (Durham, 2001:2). Nonetheless, Pals (2009:109) explains that profane persons, that is to say, “women and young men that are not yet initiated into the religious life are not allowed to touch or dance the music, they are only allowed to look at it from a distance and even this is only on rare occasions” because they are “reached for an immediate experience for the listeners” (Ogbu, 2010:123).

This is why Nabofa (1980:394) argues that “women priests and votaries keep away from their temples and shrines when they are under menstruation and other such conditions; and generally all women are required to undergo a ritual of purification at the end of their menstrual period and also some days or months after child birth”. Frazar (1922:190a) asserts that “in general, we may say that the prohibition of women and the effects supposed to follow an infraction of rule, are exactly the same whether the persons to whom the things belong are sacred or what we might call unclean or polluted”. Olupona (1991:6) argues that almost all cultures throughout the world have elaborate beliefs and practices about menstruation; and African practices no doubt are part of this larger tradition. He affirms that in all African cultures, menstruation is associated with women’s secret power – often expressed also in witchcraft as anti-thetical to men’s secret power: one of the ways in which women exert force and power mystically in the universe and on men (Olupona, 1991:6).

However, the initiates are “those who tread the path of wisdom and find peace” (His Pupil, 1932:1). Akintola (1992:25) argues that the initiates “are men whose souls have become awakened into spiritual consciousness; and in this state of consciousness, their body, mind, spirit and soul are synchronized, each one and all, with the other”. In fact, it is the sacredness of the *Ikolo* among its initiates that makes women not to dance the music, in this wise “the sacred dance becomes a *locus* in which this power game is played out” (Nkosinathi, 2010:157). Derion and Mauze (2010:8) argues that “the sacred covers much more than the magical-religious domain strictly speaking; it takes in potentially everything that is understood to be part of local history and culture”. Stokes (1997:22) idiomatically asserts that sacred sound like the *Ikolo* thus provides the means by which men learn to be gentlemen and women to be gentlewomen, and it conveys its fundamental values in such domains as manliness, femininity, modesty, distinction, and pleasure (Rice, 2007:29). Sugarman (1989:193) posits that this “gender concepts and musical practice can thus be seen to exist in a dialectical relationship to each, each functioning as a mutually determining aspect”. Ortner (1995:507) argues that when “both men and women can and must be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence, only then will women be seen as aligned with culture, in culture’s ongoing dialectics with nature”. Buttressing this further, Norales (2011:76-77) asserts that:

*People within a culture do not necessarily act in the same manner in every environment. Whether one is in church, school, or office, the location of one’s interaction provides guidelines for behavior. Either consciously or unconsciously, a person is aware of the prevailing rules,*

*many of which are based on one’s culture. In Belize, men and women worship together in church. In Saudi Arabia, men and women do not worship together.*

### **Chieftaincy Titles a gender Issue**

According to Sarkissian, gender combines a principle of social organization and a set of ideas which, while appearing to be natural, based on common sense and biological difference, is in fact culturally constructed and variable (1992:337). Okafor (1998:173) posits that “age-sex limitations on the use of musical instruments are found in many areas”. A survey of some of the most widely used history textbooks clearly demonstrates these biases (Zezeza, 2005:208), and Igbo traditional society attaches much importance to this gender issue, when men and women operate in separate musical practices albeit, the same culture (Ibekwe, 2013:137), and “historically, culture made women invisible” (Court, 2008:421). Conkey (1993:42) admits that “first, we found that women – if they are present at all in reconstructions of prehistory – are usually depicted in a narrow range of passive, home-oriented tasks; they are often exchanged as wives, the objects of art and image making, and symbols of fertility and sexuality. In contrast prehistoric men are shown as very public, far ranging [adventurous], productive, active and responsible for most of the significant changes in human evolution, especially technological innovations”. MacGaffey (2000:236) argues that what matters about gender is not maleness or femaleness as such but the ambivalent interdependence of the two, always at least latently competitive. Ibekwe (2013:138) explains that “there are many factors that determine or contribute to gender role playing. These, encompasses natural factor, cultural factor, religious factor, and social value system/social factor”.

### **A Musicology Study of Women and Gender Issue**

Based on the study of musicology as concept where women and gender issues are concerned, Abeles and Porter (1978:65) argues that sex-based stereotyping of instruments can “limit the range of musical experiences available to male and female musicians in several ways, including participation in instrumental ensembles and selection of vocations in instrumental music”. Abeles (2009:128) comments that “a socio-cultural model for gender associations suggests that sex-based stereotypes, such as those of musical instruments, are a consequence of socialization”. This is why Doubleday (2006:125) admits that “male professionals sometimes asserts their ascendancy by

downgrading women instruments”, and “satirically accuse women for not knowing anything about music theory” (Doubleday, 2006:120). Gilmore (1993:163) argues that “these gender ideals, or guiding images, differ from culture to culture”. Murphy (2012:78) observes that in religion like that of the Igbo, “the menstrual blood from women can disturb the physical and spiritual compounds that enable sacred drum” like that of the *Ikolo* “to speak and endanger the woman in contact with them”, because *Ikolo* sacred drum is a “spirit drum” (Nzewi et al, 2001:95). Buckley (1993:134) writing in the context of the Indian law argues that “a menstruating woman is highly polluting and will contaminate the family house and food supply if she comes into contact with either. Thus, in the old days, a special shelter for menstrual seclusion was built near the main house, and special food for a family’s menstruating women was separately collected, stored, and prepared for consumption in this shelter”. Buckley (1991:45) again affirms that “traditionally, when a girl menstruates for the first time she undertakes a ten-day period of seclusion and ritual activity, an amplified version of the routine she’ll follow during each of her periods until menopause”.

Ogundipe (2007:29) asserts that “as the woman is sacred in endogenous thought, her body is also sacred. Similarly her body as the house of life, parts of her body such as her hair and nail clippings, women’s discharges such as her milk, menses, tears, sweat, and even saliva are considered sacred”. According to Nabofa (1996:11) “our experience among our own people, eye-witness accounts from Africans and the study of African thought forms and religious practices have revealed some beliefs and symbolic cultic practices associated with saliva”. He affirms that its uses for positive and negative ends have been noticed and it is an element into which multivocal symbolologies have been encoded, with varied meanings decoded from it (Nabofa, 1996:11). Ogundipe (2007:29) argues that “they can and are used as blessings, curses, and potions for power – social, material and supernatural”. She argues that women’s menstruation is considered sacred and powerful, and that it is believed to have the power to interrupt, interfere with and cause to happen (Ogundipe, 2007:29), “thereby asserting their womanhood” (Kopytoff, 2005:135). Nabofa (1996:35) argues that there are checks and balances in its use, especially for some seemingly negative purposes such as cursing, magic and sorcery and coercion, but man’s conscience is always his judge at this situation as could be seen in few cursing rituals. Ogundipe (2007:29) posits that women’s uterus as well as their vagina is also considered sacred. Olupona (1991:6) argues that “it could not be that the biological nature of women is sinful, but rather that blood, which is a symbol of life, has some

potency, which can itself destroy. It may be that people like to put this potential threat/power at bay, to control, so to say, that which is highly charged with the sacred”. Leppert (1992:109) writing in the context of playing the family piano in England argues that “in this instance, the virginal, anthropomorphized as woman, is made by the violence imposed upon her. Music is posited as harmony, but harmony is produced by a beating. Aestheticized as music, women’s very being is articulated as a product of a deferential masochism in response to sadistic revenge...Yet even in the privacy of the playing, such instruments’ discursive boundaries must be pre-established”.

No wonder women are kept from playing sacred drums like the *Ikolo* in order to protect them, not the drum and it is believed that the spirit that inhabits the drum, desirous of blood, may cause women to bleed to death (Velez, 2000:156). Women are afraid of it, and if one should see the activities forbidden to women she would no longer conceive (MacGaffey, 2000:238). Nabofa (1980:394) asserts that “this is one of the major reasons why women, especially those who are still of child-bearing age are often precluded from taking key positions in many religious activities”. Roberts (1997:23) argues that women from the beginning, has been seen as objects whose decisions about reproduction should be subject to social regulation rather than to their own will. Levy-Bruhl affirms that “menstrual blood and miscarriage sometimes attract danger” (Douglas, 1966:96). Nabofa (1980:394) posits that “such blood is believed in many places in Africa to be capable of rendering whatever and wherever it touches unwholesome ritually, and that is why traditional believers are suspicious of women when it comes to religious activities”. According to Metuh (1985:89) holy things/objects like the *Ikolo* “is surrounded by a set of prohibitions. Ordinary people may on the advice of a priest or diviner adopt and practice certain prohibitions and thus achieve a limited level of holiness. It would appear therefore, that prohibitions create or preserve the status of holiness [*nso*], while the breach of prohibition [*nso*], result in pollution or unholiness. *Nso* are therefore sacred prohibitions”. Nabofa (1980:395) argues that “generally, any form of blood from the woman’s reproductive organ is considered to be unclean and a taboo which makes for ritual defilements”. He affirms that being an embodiment of different symbols – in terms of its different applications and uses – we have seen its symbology in African beliefs as multivocal in nature (Nabofa, 1996:35). However, from the Islamic perspective, according to Doubleday (2006:115) “despite its message of equality, the Holy Qur’an was open to misogynistic interpretation. One verse states: Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made one of them to excel the other. The Qur’an also states that women

are unclean when menstruating and thus unfit to perform ritual practices". Equally, from the Christian perspective according to Obeng (2000:386) "the Catholic Church, on the other hand, disqualifies all women from exercising priestly and thus sacramental duties due to its sacredness", and these "decisions are mediated by the ability to ensure that their current relationships are not jeopardized", and it also serve "as a sign of strength" among the men (Venkatesh, 2006:104 and 105), which is "the security of the group boundary" (White, 1995:46). The idea is that somehow being a male confer something extra or perhaps the role of men additionally makes most men think that they should be in the leadership of all women at all times (Ogundipe, 2007:43). However, from the Aguleri traditional paradigm, the *Ikolo* performance in this dimension is solely men's affair except in few instances where one or two women of matured age who has attained their menopause age especially the Queen mother is allowed to play it for the king, "while precautions to prevent the audience from touching the performers reinforce the separation of the two realms" (Drewal, 1977:44). In his study of gender and performance in Swahili, Ntarangwi (2003:105) clearly demonstrates the discrepancy between what is stated as ideal and what actually happens in practice: "that lived experiences and practices form the crux of a culture, and not the expressed ideals that are constantly negotiated through practice, is now a truism in the social sciences. Thus, it is by looking at Swahili life as practiced rather than as stated I have been able to understand the social contradictions and contingencies reflected in Swahili musical expression".

On this ground, Rice (2007:25) argues that "constructed identities become an issue in situations of change or where the weak and the powerful are fighting over issues of identity". Buttressing this further, Obeng (2000:386) affirms that only postmenopausal women are permitted to perform religious ritual acts in their own right in the indigenous society. In this situation, because the Queen mother has been admitted into the group [cult] of the *Ikolo*, "the concern may likely be less serious or non violent" (Ibekwe, 2013:142) and in that case, the Queen mother is invariably regarded as [*Nne Manwu*] mother of spirit manifest (Ibekwe, 2013:141) and in this form she design, shape and size motifs symbolic of their matrilineage (Antiri, 1974:32). Steady (2005:319) argues that such "changes in the lifecycle can alter women's status so that post-menopausal women can assume political functions and serve as elders and advisers on the same basis as men". Ibekwe (2013:141-142) explains that "spirit manifest [*manwu*] in Igbo tradition is an embodiment of ancestral spirit in the physical realm and for that, it is only the men who are qualified to communicate with such supernatural beings". No

wonder, Matory (1993:60) argues that "most importantly, men act in all communal rituals as affectively potent embodiments of their subjects, social and political unity". It is only in such special situation that the Queen mother is permitted/allowed to undergo certain ritualistic tests, after which she can begin to use "the homiletic language in a transformative manner so that the believer would begin to speak" (Ogbu, 2010:125) in what Nabofa (1994:59) describes as "classical and weird languages that are anchored on priestcraft", where "the foray into the men's repertoire is viewed as evidence of an unusual degree of intelligence and talent" (Sugerman, 1989:208). Malinowski (1954:74) posits that the use of such languages or words "invokes, state, or commands the desired aim". The idea is that the Queen mother has possessed the "moral quality of wisdom, knowledge, emotion, compassion...symbolically, not granted by man, but as a person with the innate quality of of a woman who moves in a man's sphere of action; a person without formal political authority in a court of male power" (Gilbert, 1993:9f). Attar (1966:40) writing from the Muslim context, clearly affirms that in that situation, "when a woman becomes a man in the path of God, she is a man and one cannot any more call her a woman".

From these observations, it has been shown that chieftaincy titles cannot be conferred by 'anyhow, anybody' without the approval of the King, the cabinet members and the consent of the gods and ancestors in Igbo cosmology and this positional transformation affirms a decoration and demonstration of power which is described as "shifting configurations of power" (Gilbert, 1994:118), while Jacobson (2000:12) refers to it as "crossing the sacred bridge", after "grappling and wrestling individually with God" (McAdams, 1988:35), which actually accords high regard and respect for such a woman like Ahebi in Igbo community because she is looked upon as not being an ordinary woman but man. Ezeanya (1994:7) argues that on this occasion of attaining a new social or religious status of this nature, it invariably implies a remarkable change in her life. This is because "she is subjected to a number of conventions and taboos during this period" (Ardener, 1989:79) through this kind of "inner transformation" (Schipper, 1993:171). Mernissi (1991:117) writing from the Islamic context asserts that "one of women's roles in pre-Islamic Arabia was to spur men on during war to fight to the end, to not flinch, to brave death on the battlefield". She argues that "this role obviously has nothing to do with the image of the nurturing women who bandages wounds and comforts the dying" (Mernissi, 1991:117). This situation is remarkable because in many other regions—parts of Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa for instance, sacred drumming is traditionally performed by men, not women (Doubleday, 2006:109). It is on this



position that Ortner (1995:492) argues that “the secondary status of women in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact. Yet within that universal fact, the specific cultural conceptions and symbolizations vary enormously from culture to culture, and over different periods in the history of particular cultural traditions”. Hoffman-Ladd, (1992:83) asserts that this “implies the degradation of the female sex as a whole and suggests that true spirituality is normally found only among men, it also indicates that the sex of the body is not a barrier to the inspiration and grace of God”.

Insofar as it is not proper in Igbo tradition for women to overstep their boundaries or do the obvious in matters or roles strictly meant for males, nonetheless, all these put a check and balance on the type of music being performed by any categorised group, male or female (Ibekwe, 2013:143). According to Ekwueme (2005:23) gender functions have been so arranged and segregated that men arrogated superior functions to themselves and inferior functions to women. Rosaldo (1974:19) argues that “what is perhaps most striking and surprising is the fact that male, as opposed to female, activities are always recognized as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men”.

This is the reason why Doubleday (2008:4) equates women as commodities like musical instruments “which lend them to contestation. Through the agency of monopolies and taboos, one group may claim possession over an instrument to the exclusion of another. Gender is one of the most important parameters in human power relations, influencing most aspects of life, and power play between humans over musical instruments is often enacted along gender lines”. Doubleday (2008:3) again asserts that “musical instruments are significant cultural artifacts invested with a range of meanings and powers. Through their presence and through the sounds they produce, they have a special ability to transform consciousness. To possess or play a musical instrument is to wield power”. Sugarman (1989:193) affirms that “this responsibility was ascribed to men primarily because they were perceived as being physically stronger by nature than women. He argues that men were also regarded as having greater social savvy because of their activities within the public sphere, and their esteem within the community increased as they gained in experience (Sugarman, 1989:194). On the contestation of male strength hypothesis, Brettell and Sargent (1993:2) asserts that “men are physically stronger than women and this gives them superiority. They are larger, and they have stronger muscles and less fat, a pelvis better adapted for sprinting, larger hearts and lungs, and so forth”. They explain that “one position holds that women are left-brain dominant, giving them superior

verbal skill, while men are right-brain dominant, giving them superior visual spatial skills” (Brettell and Sargent, 1993:2). Lincoln (1989:73) argues that “dominance is thus the imposition of an unwanted and exploitative fusion on groups that are converted into subordinate segments of the new social aggregate”. Matory (1993:61) admits that women cannot be trusted due to the fact that they can divulge the secret information and may betray the town on important matters because of the secrecy involved. Shepherd (1987:153) argues that “women are necessary as the source of life, as well as potentially dangerous in their power to withdraw it”. No wonder the proverb of the Gikuyu of Kenya says: “women, like the weather, are unpredictable”, and “women have no secure gourds, but only leaking, upside down ones” – you can’t trust women with secrets” (Mbiti, 1991:66-67). Insofar as ritual, cultic and esoteric affairs usually involved in the sacredness of the *Ikolo* have male dominance and women are highly restricted from intruding or interfering in such situations, therefore, it would be seen that both cultural conceived notions and biological sex differentiation are at play in gender definition, which in turn influence musical performance typology (Ibekwe, 2013:138).

From my own analysis, it has been observed that traditionally Aguleri women are not allowed to participate in the ritual dance of the *Ikolo* but in another way I can interpret that to mean a kind of male dominance which Rattansi (1997:494) argues that the resultant reactionary consequences of this is what he describes as “the romantic culturalist chauvinism”, or “dominant club” of men (Smith, 1992:151). In this wise, “the above observations suggest that notion of human sexuality, and the consequent freezing and projection of women as sexual objects, which constitute little more than a cultural construct representing male dominance in the world” (Shepherd, 1987:155). Buttressing this further, Shepherd again argues that:

*The conceptualization of people as objects decontextualized from social relations implies the possibility for uncontested, unilateral control. The objectification of women thus becomes a crucial step in the mystification of social relatedness. If women symbolize the source of life, the social interactions that are the source of our being as people, and if sexual relatedness provides a biological code for these same processes, then women tend to become equated with sex. In order to be successful in a male-dominated society, they must package themselves [or be packaged, as in advertising images] as objects amenable to control by men. Male-defined culture is projected back onto nature; women as objects are in turn equated with a natural or material world thus susceptible to unilateral control by men. Control by cultural reproduction compensates for a lack of centrality in biological*

*reproduction, and nowhere is this control more effectively exercised than on the mapping and notational procedures – among which music figures prominently – which both facilitate and constrain processes of cultural reproduction. It is no accident that the vast majority of noetic and scribal elites have been male, for by this means men preserve themselves paradoxically as independent and in control of the very social relations which produce them. (1987:154).*

Ibekwe (2013:142) explains that there are significant areas where men have advantages over women in sacred music which includes ritual music, wrestling music, hunting music, war music, and initiation music and so on. Van Allen (1993:459) argues that “in traditional Igbo society, women did not have a political role equal to that of men. But they did have a role – or more accurately, a series of roles – despite the patrilineal organization of Igbo society. Their possibilities of participating in traditional politics must be examined in terms of both structures and values”. It is on this position that Monts (1989:220) asserts that musicianship in *Ikolo* musical practices like other professions is divided along gender line. He explains that “on a general level, women’s musical roles were bound up inextricably with the fundamental practices of birth, initiation, marriage and other labor-related activities” (Monts, 1989:220). Gender-based asymmetry is equally shown in what Ortner and Whitehead (1981:13) describes as “*prestige structure*”, in which “*male as opposed to female activities are always recognized as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and values to the roles and activities of men*” (Rosaldo, 1974:19).

This method goes a long way, also combined with the value assigned to men’s activities is a corresponding tendency to devalue women’s activities (Sarkissian, 1992:343), in other that women would be “silenced, defeated, and furious” (Mernissi, 1991:2). Collier and Rosaldo (1981:311) argues that gender conceptions in any society like the Igbo are understood as functioning aspects of a cultural system through which actors manipulates, interpret, legitimize and reproduce the patterns of cooperation and conflict that order their social world. Mead (1949:125) regrettably comments that “in every known society, the male’s need for achievement can be recognized. Men may cook, or weave, or dress dolls or hunt humming birds, but if such activities are appropriate occupations of men, then the whole society, men, and women alike, votes them as important. When the same occupations are performed by women, they are regarded as less important”. It is in this wise that Makwenda (1990:97) affirms that “*performance is produced within people’s personal lives, their social organization, politics and social control, gender and religion*”.

### Significance of Chieftaincy Title in Igbo Land

Nonetheless, due to the syndrome of what I can describe as ‘*Igbo Enwe Eze*’—Igbo does not have a King or leader which Okafor (1998:116) argues that “the saying is a political philosophy derived from the prototype political ideology characterized by egalitarian and republican features and its political system is complex and dynamic which is based on the segmentary lineage system where every man is a god in his house; every village an autonomous community”. Harneit-Sievers (1998:60) argues that this “theory is welcome in current popular and political debates about chieftaincy, as it seems to be able to prove the character of contemporary Igbo traditional rulers titles”. Isichei (2004:286) asserts that “historians and ethnographers have always applied the word king to a wide range of dignitaries located at different points along a range from priest like ritual figures to powerful rulers”. According to Isichei (2004:286) again “there is a proverb to that effect that the Igbo have no kings [*Eze*]. In some polities, including Asaba in the late nineteenth century, *eze* was a title multiplied deliberately, and held by many men as a safeguard against oppressive rule but it is now dying because of its ritual restrictions”. Buttressing this assertion, the symbolic interpretation of this proverb is that no one person rules any Igbo community and this made Francis Arinze to affirms that:

*The Ibos are unique among the other peoples of Nigeria in the decentralization of political authority in Ibo land in the past. While the Yorubas had their mighty Obas and Fulanis their powerful Emirs, the Ibos’ greatest political organization was often the town, village-group, or commune. Only Onitsha and some Western Igbo towns had the Obi or Kings, but the influence of these rulers was limited practically to their own towns (1970:7).*

It has been observed that conferment of chieftaincy titles usually come up during annual *Ofala* or *Ovala* festival—the first fruit festival in Igbo land. Buttressing this further, Idigo (2002:23) argues that in most cases, it is the only royal festival or ceremony of traditional monarchs and until recently, the *Ovala* festival is only celebrated in very few communities in the Igbo nation known to be ruled by kings and monarchs from time immemorial. Nnamah (2002:8) affirms that “among such communities are Aguleri, Onitsha, Asaba and very few others”. *Ovala* festival has been described as “the most Igbo of Igbo events” Ojukwu, (1998:47), which has ever since been held “annually at the beginning of each year” (Idigo, 1990:34). Buttressing this further, as a “great tradition” (McDougall, 1995:336), and as what Choi (2012:1) refers to as a convocation of the “cream of the society”, Thalia (2012:1) posits that “the *Ovala* festival is, however, the most prestigious amongst all as

it is a Royal festival celebrated on the first *Eke* market day of the year. It attracts dignitaries, from all works of life. Neighbouring village heads also come to pay homage to the *Igwe Aguleri* to this day". Such time-honoured and ubiquitous sacred festival connect the Igbos who are otherwise "religiously and geographically dispersed", and it act as an "audible ritual expression of a collective past" (Friedmann, 2009:7). Buttressing this further, Young (2003:114) argues that such time –honoured ritual is "focused on those at the margins of society, those whose cultural identity has been dislocated or left uncertain by the forces of global capitalism – refugees, migrants who have moved from countryside to impoverished edges of the city, migrants who struggle in the first world for a better life while working at the lowest levels of those societies". Nnamah (2002:8) asserts that "*Ovala* festival signifies a period of reunion for all the components – quarters/villages of Aguleri and it is a period of re-ordering for New Year.". According to Xrydz-Eyutchaë:

*It was Professor Anta Diop of Senegal who observed that ethnic groups often do not realize the extent to which they share kinship with the language, culture, tradition and historical socio-political structures, evolved by communities they have come to view as rivals. Indeed ethnic groups tend to see themselves as self- enclosed communities (1986:18).*

This is the reason why Aniakor (1978:42) asserts that "*Ijele* masquerade is seen only on very special occasions such as yam festivals or in the case of the Northern West Igbo in Aguleri area, the *Ofala* festival of *Eze Idigo*, a use pattern that dates back to the nineteenth century". He argues that "more recently, the mask has come out during the *Uzoiyi* festival of *Umoji* and it is possible that in the past, *Ijele* appearance was associated with some major celebrations of *Eze Nri*" (Aniakor, 1978:42). Aniakor (1978:42) again explains that it is in *Ovala* festival that "the mask performs to *Igba Eze* music, the music of Kings, named for its association with major events in those Northern Igbo areas that have a tradition of Kingship". No wonder then that Dike (1987:75) affirms that the King's "*persona* has been built up by his association with certain objects and his controls of certain festivals and masquerades". Festivals like the *Ovala* celebration has become what Alexander (2010:154) refers to as "cultural magnets", "which make the people to travel from far and wide to relate with their kith and kin at home and from other places" (Idigo, 2002:24), and the rest of the events marks what Nnamah (2002:8) refers to as "*Azu Ovala*" – the closing ceremonies. Idigo (2002:24) argues that this provides the rare opportunity or limelight to witness such events as: the inaugural outing ceremony of nascent age grades being integrated into the community's trade-social structure, official outing ceremony of new dance

groups and troupes, cultural entertainment, masquerade displays and conferment of honorary chieftaincy titles to individuals.

Buttressing this further, Flora Kaplan (2004:190) posits that in Aguleri kingdom unlike in some Igbo towns today where chiefs invent and award titles anyhow, only the king with the advice of cabinet chiefs has that power. She argues that the proliferation of titles that is common among the newly rich, seeking instant recognition and statue in Nigeria is absent in community like the Aguleri kingdom, where such recognition must be earned over time. The king rewards humble as well as wealthy men with titles based on performance and merit (Kaplan, 2004:190), and such titles are given to "deserving individuals in order to cement social relationships" (Perani and Wolff, 1999:83). In that wise, Kaplan (2004:190) argues that such a title is not expected to be bought but "must be earned because titles conferred by the king are for the lifetime of an individual and cannot be taken away, even by the king himself". Horton (1963:111) asserts that "in addition to all this, the ideals of the institution forbids its members to bring into it the struggles for status and influence which rage in the village outside; so as an arbitrating group, it has all the formal trappings of impartiality. And where the successful resolution of many disputes lies in persuading people that can climb down from extreme positions without loss of face, such an appearance of impartiality may be crucial – whatever the reality behind it". Brown (2004:169) argues that once initiated into brotherhood "a person acquires long life connection to a family-like network of temples", and "should someone later prove disloyal or disgrace himself, he may be declared an enemy of the king and banished from the court, while the title he was given is his unto death" (Kaplan, 2004:190).

## CONCLUSION

This kind of uncontrollable conferment of chieftaincy titles to women could somehow lead to bastardization and cannibalization of Igbo sacred institution if not appropriately check mated now by the real lovers of Igbo culture especially the real custodians of the sacred canopies and the members of town unions. It has been observed from research that some of these Igbo traditional rulers that engage in this kind of 'cultural suicide' are individuals who have no royal blood in their lineage but equally people of questionable characters who because of their wealth have high-jacked the sacred stool. I therefore propose that such traditional rulers in some of these Igbo communities where their traditional institution has been truncated culturally should emulate communities like Asaba and Onitsha who still observe the sacred ordination of kingship as an institution of

antiquity in Igbo land, because through centuries, history has shown that they have not been influenced by events and developments because these communities still maintain her cultural ecology. Also, in the aspect of musicology, women are still relegated to the background where patriarchy still holds them under the carpet all under the notion of tradition and culture.

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