

EMBRACING DIVINE GENDER EQUALITY: PROMOTING FEMALE LEGACY THROUGH THE INHERITANCE OF FAMILY PROPERTIES IN IGBO LAND

AFUNUGO, KENECHI NNAEMEKA (PhD)
08037514378
nk.afunugo@unizik.edu.ng
NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION AND HUMAN RELATIONS
FACULTY OF ARTS

NGANWUCHU, GEOFFREY CHIAZO
08033103468
geoffery.nganwuchu@unn.edu.ng
RELIGION AND CULTURAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

Abstract

This study explores the notion that gender equality is divinely ordained by advocating for the promotion of female legacy through the equitable distribution and inheritance of family properties in Igbo community. The study employs both the primary and secondary means of data collection. It equally adopts the Intersectional Feminism Theory. All the gathered data were qualitatively delineated through hermeneutic and thematic content analysis approaches. Findings posit that in Igbo culture, the inheritance of family properties has traditionally been associated with maintaining lineage and preserving heritage. Whereas the Igbo people practice primogeniture inheritance system: The practice thus often favours male descendants, thereby perpetuating gender disparities. It fosters economic disempowerment of women along with rendering them vulnerable to exploitation. This study recommends advocating for customary legal reforms that dissuades gender imbalance; reinterpretation of religious texts to vividly portray divine gender equality; challenging of traditional norms that protracts female gender discrepancies while reinforcing traditional ideals that advances inclusivity, as approaches that will empower women, honour their contributions to family lineage as well as cultivate a more just and balanced society. Additionally, through the combination of cultural analysis, theological reflection and advocacy for progressive change, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality as a divine order and cultural preservation in Igbo society.

Keywords: Divine, Gender Equality, Embracing, Female Inheritance, Legacy, Promoting.

Introduction

The biblical creation story of the world and human kind in both Genesis Chapters one and two respectively, depicts creative process enshrined in divine equality. Adam and Eve were created to love one another and as well jointly engage in the task of populating the earth with humans via procreation. They were to equally serve as the overseers of God's created order. Divine gender equality was thus clearly exemplified in this since God never declared that neither man nor the woman should Lord it over the other. Adam on seeing Eve for the first time after creation in Genesis 2:23 declares according to the

rendering of Maxwell (2002) New King James Version “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man” (p. 6). Consequently, God ordained that man and woman are to be equals; although man is to serve as the official figure head to maintain structure and discipline. Adam evenly understood this absolutely.

Gender inequality as envisioned in the deprivation of the right to inherit family properties in most Igbo enclaves for females is perpetuated by male ego and cultural bias. The female folks in the Igbo communities keep lamenting over this clumsy form of marginalization since it undermines female legacy and thus affects them adversely. Goyal (2012) for instance, asserts that allowing woman to inherit family properties on par with men not only promotes gender equality but also enhances women’s economic empowerment, bargaining power, and access to resources. He highlights that legislative reform towards gender-equitable inheritance rights can have significant positive impacts on women’s access to physical and human capital, ultimately contributing to broader socioeconomic development and reducing gender disparities.

Bose et al (2017) in their study on promoting women’s right to communal land and communal forest tenure in Latin America, enumerate that simply granting joint tilting does not guarantee empowerment without accompanying support such as access to resources and markets. They underscore the need for nuanced understanding of local dynamics and challenges faced by women in small-scale farming and indigenous communities. They highlight that apart from granting women rights to land, ensuring access to resources essential for land use is equally important for transforming women’s status and well-being. This posits that granting women access to inherit family properties is a sure way of maintaining female legacy along with engaging in the socio-economic development of women.

Irrespective of the fact that the United Nations Human Rights (2014) establish that “Women’s Rights are Human Rights” and thus should be protected at all costs. Moreover, the United Nations General Assembly (1979) and United Nations (1995) initially enacted legislations for women’s empowerment including the strategies for its actualization under the international label: Women still face discrimination regarding the retention of family properties in most societies of the world including the Igbo Communities. Soluade et al (2022) reflect that gender discrimination is caused by cultural bias. They posit that gender discrimination in form of denying widows right to inheritance is still in existence among most rural dwellers in Nigeria, especially in Ipokia Local Government of Ogun State.

Azuakor (2017) laments that in reality, Igbo inheritance practices systematically discriminate against women, denying them land and real estate. They are perceived as temporary family members who must marry out. Thus they are often forced into dependency or even beggary if they remain unmarried. Along the same wavelength, Falade (cited by Sessou, 2023) declares that denying females rights to inheritance is unjust and inequitable.

Remarkably, Oshodi (2023) and Falade (cited by Sessou, 2023) outline several laws enacted to support women’s rights to inheritance in Nigeria which includes:

- The matrimonial Causes Act (1970).
- The Wills Act (Wills Act cap W8, LFN 2004).
- The Administration of Estate Law.
- The Child Rights Act (2003).
- The violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act) (2015).
- Customary Law Reforms.

- The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on Right to Equality before the Law along with prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender; Section 42((1)(a) and (2) (1999).

It is somewhat disheartening that in spite of these women's rights protective laws towards inheritance of family properties, a significant number of Igbo communities still deprive the female folks the rights to retention of family properties. Consequently, women continue to face discrimination regarding inheritance rights for family properties on account of cultural bias and male ego. This goes against the principle of divine gender equality; and equally calls for women in Igbo enclaves to rise up to the challenge, equipped with the enlightenment of divine provision and the Nigerian constitution; refusing to tolerate the deprivation of inheritance rights to family properties which rarely renders them significant cum mobile.

This study adopts the Intersectional Feminism Theory. Relevant literatures on the discourse were consulted, together with engaging in personal communications with reputable Igbo elders within Idemili North and South alongside Awka North and South Local Government Areas of Anambra State. The entireties of the consolidated intelligence were rationalized using hermeneutic and thematic content analysis approaches. This study equally focused on Divine gender equality from the Christians theological perspective as illustrated in the Bible.

Data-driven investigation

The incessant discrimination of women pertinent to the inheritance of family properties which seldom shapes or models them impactful and substantial in the milieu is visibly externalized in considerable number of Igbo communities. I. Ozodi, O. Anusieke, K. Ezendu and A. Udegbumam (personal communication, May 27th, 2024) intimate that female folks ranging from single women to widows experience this discriminatory act in most Igbo communities where it is obtainable. Some widows that gave birth to only female children coupled with those without children experience this act of victimization just because of their gender.

Azuakor (2017) acknowledges that the discrimination of women pertinent to inheritance of family properties is indeed a living reality in Igbo culture. He stresses in his words that, "they are not given land, not given real estate, considered as temporary children of a family who must be married out, and are made to become dependents even beggars should they end up not marrying" (p. 13). Ughegbe (2014) and Okafor (2020), establish that the lamentation of women over the discrimination they face regarding the inheritance of family properties made the supreme court of Nigeria to invalidate the Igbo customary law denying female descendants the right to inheritance of family properties. They narrate that on April 14, 2014, the Nigerian Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, confirmed decisions of two lower courts, which found unconstitutional an Igbo customary law of succession excluding female offsprings from eligibility to inherit the property of their fathers. The Supreme Court specifically held that the practice conflicted with section 42(1) (a) and (2) of the 1999 constitution. The reporters streamline that the case originated at the Lagos High Court: When Lazarus Ogbonna Ukeje, a member of the Igbo ethnic group, died interstate in Lagos in 1981, Gladys Ada Ukeje (his daughter) sued Lois Chituru Ukeje (the deceased's wife and the plaintiff's stepmother) and Enyinnaya Lazarus Ukeje (the deceased's son and the plaintiff's half-brother) before the Lagos High Court, seeking that she be included among the persons eligible to administer the deceased's estate. The High Court later sided with the plaintiff and voided the Igbo

customary law excluding female descendants from inheritance.

Dissatisfied with the High Court's ruling, Chituru and Lazarus appealed the decision to the court of Appeal: When the court of Appeal upheld the High Court's decision, Chituru and Lazarus availed themselves of their right to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court. It is however saddening that the Supreme Court's decision evokes mixed reactions from Igbo personalities, particularly traditional rulers who are the custodians of the tradition and culture, as well as church leaders as Okoli et al (2020) document. While some Igbo dignitaries and church leaders like the Bishop, Diocese on the Niger, Anglican Communion, Rt. Revd. Owen Nwokolo describes the Supreme Court's judgment as a welcome development on the grounds that female children are not second class citizens and thus should be accorded the same rights given to their male counterparts devoid of being marginalized. Some other Igbo dignitaries' and traditional leaders like the traditional ruler of Aji autonomous community in Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area of Enugu State, Igwe Simeon Osisi Itodo, declares that the Supreme Court's ruling cannot abolish the tradition and custom of the Igbo: Insisting that any attempt to implement such law in Igbo land would provoke chaos and skirmishes among various communities. The fact still remains that this tradition has no moral justification. It is worth noting that there are some other traditional leaders who insist that the Supreme Court's judgment must be obeyed by every community in Igbo land, like Igwe Christopher Nnamani of Likke Iheaka autonomous community in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area of Enugu State, Chief Augustine Uzochukwu from Ihiala Council Area of Anambra State and Igwe Patrick Okolo of Nkpunano Community, Nsukka, Enugu State. Okoli et al highlight that the substantial obstacle is on implementation of the Supreme Court's judgment since some Igbo monarchs still abhors the ruling simply because it voids the Igbo age-long law and custom.

Azubuine (2022) argues that women in Igbo cultural perspective are not marginalized when it comes to having a fair-share of their father's property. He maintains that women in Igbo culture are settled during the "*IDU UNO*" settlement. It equally takes place during the marriage rites of women. His argument however is not substantial to address the issue. He forgot that not all women get married. He equally fails to underscore that most family only give just kitchen utensils, beddings, home electrical appliances and related items to the women during the "*UDU UNO*" as I. Okeke, C. Onuegbu, S. Onuegbu, N. Osadebe and J. Okafor (Personal communication, May 28th, 2024) indicate. It is also rare to see an Igbo family give landed properties to their female members during the "*IDU UNO*" ceremony.

Nnamah et al (2021) express that women in Nigeria, particularly within the Igbo enclave, encounter oppression, subjugation and disempowerment in their daily interactions pertinent to inheritance of household properties among their kin. The authors emphasize that the challenge of Igbo women's efforts to inherit family properties mostly evince in two dimensions which includes, female struggles to own family properties through widowhood and female struggle to own property in their immediate family of origin. They bemoan that there are hardly any restrictive measures taken against the denial of women's inheritance rights in the contemporary Igbo enclave. The authors advocate that the existing laws which accord women certain rights to inherit property that belongs to their fathers and husbands where no wills exist, should be publicized, made more functional along with initiating options for societal re-orientation germane to women's right to inheritance of family properties in Igbo communities. Notwithstanding,

Chimakonam et al (2013) supplement that a major factor contributing to female deprivation, particularly in inheriting family properties in Igbo enclave, is the internalized gender consciousness, or the epistemology of womanhood. This internalized belief system has restricted Igbo women as much as societal norms. The authors conclude that changing this internal mindset is crucial for Igbo women to fully express their rights and beliefs. Aroh (2024) attests to Chimakonam's et al assertion by affirming that most female folks in selected locales of Enugu state maintain that they are oblivious of the fact that they ought to inherit properties from their late fathers. Thus, such women wallow in naivety and ignorance which equally is the root of their being marginalized.

Orjinma (2021) and Oluoha (2023) elucidate gory details of the negative impacts of female deprivation to family properties in Igbo land. They posit that even widows are still subjected to evil practices apart from depriving them access to their husband properties in some parts of Igbo land. The authors lament that female circumcision is still being practiced in some parts of Igbo land. All these contribute to the building of the feminine cognition also known as epistemology of womanhood as Chimakonam et al capture it. This chequered and pathetic consciousness of their own gender keeps restricting Igbo women from expressing themselves and employing concerted efforts towards fighting for their rights to inheritance of family properties.

Persistence of Denial of inheritance and family property rights to females in Igbo land

Pertinent to the insights from this study hitherto, the deprivation of inheritance of family rights to females in some Igbo enclave which further impinges on their capacity building persists because of the following reasons.

- **Patriarchal Traditions:** Igbo culture traditionally favours male heirs, perpetuating the belief that men are the rightful inheritors to family properties since women gets married to husbands who hail from other towns. Igbolekwu et al (2022) and Sadiq (2022) express that strong attachment to cultural practices and beliefs, impinging on female inheritance rights, are still held sacrosanct among the Igbo.
- **Customary Laws:** Customary laws and practices often prioritize male inheritance, excluding females from property rights based on traditional interpretations. Mordi (2014) and Urama (2019) underscore that customary laws on inheritance rights in Igbo community deny women the rights to family inheritance of properties.
- **Socioeconomic factors cum uneven Stereotypes:** Economic considerations together with chequered misconceptions and biases may also play a role, with the belief that male heirs are better equipped both mentally and otherwise to manage family assets and resources. Izzi et al (2020) intimate that localities in Nigeria like the Igbo people do not still acknowledge the constitution of Nigeria regarding the rights to inheritance of family properties by the female folks. They stress that laws alone cannot compel attitudinal change. The authors stress the need for governments to educate their populace via the tools and agents of socialization with a view towards changing negative societal norms, cultural practices and labels that impinge on female's rights to inheritance of family properties, particularly in Igbo land.
- **Social Expectations:** Societal norms in Igbo communities dictate that women

should prioritize their roles within the household rather than property ownership, reinforcing gender roles and inequalities.

- **Lack of legal protection:** Inadequate legal frameworks or enforcement mechanisms may fail to safeguard women's property rights leaving them vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion.
- **Cultural Beliefs:** Deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about gender roles and hierarchy contribute to the perpetuation of inheritance practices that disadvantage women. Relatively, Chukwuma Ali (2019) observes that gender roles in Igbo land that relegate women to the background as people only meant to be seen and not to be heard is simply complementary. Ukaegbu et al (2022) on their part declare that women were politically and culturally marginalized in both the traditional and contemporary Igbo society. Their roles are perceived to end in the kitchen and probably the farm lands.
- **Ignorance:** Most Igbo women are not even aware that the Nigerian constitution is in support of female's right to inheritance of family properties. Hence, it keeps them in bondage of not being proactive towards striving to break the shackles of such discrimination. Ojilere (2021) for instance, maintain that gaps in the judgment of the Supreme Court in favour of female inheritance of family properties in Igbo land may undermine its effectiveness. He laments that most women in Igbo land are oblivious of the judgment. The author equally elucidates that many rural people resist the change, adhering to traditional customs. Ojilere thus concludes that the judgment alone is insufficient for ensuring the full acceptance of women's property rights in Igboland. He however recommends legislative action, community sensitization, and involving traditional rules in legal cases to help bridge the gaps and expand women's property rights beyond the judgment frontiers of the Supreme Court. Asaolu (2023) on the other hand avers that since Gladys Ukeje fought for her right to inherit her father's property and won as already highlighted in this study, other Igbo women can equally follow suit.
- **African Male Ego:** The male folks in the Igbo enclave lord it over the females unnecessarily, owing to the fact that the Igbo operates a patriarchal cultural structure. Igbo women invariably retire in their shells in reluctance to break such unwholesome protocol. Ojukwu et al (2020) bewail that women actually subjugate themselves owing to this state of affairs to such extent that even the playwrights keep highlighting it for purposes of exposition and critical attention. They suggest that women's emancipation and equity in Igbo land can be achieved by dismantling oppressive cultural and patriarchal structures, leading to freedom from social and economic inequality. Yasin et al (2017) and Akhter (2019) delineate women subjugation in the family and society at large as a curse that stems from archaic cultural stance, stereotypes and male ego. Malaka (2014) and Pruitt (2022) assert that male ego is the main cause for much of the oppression that women face.

Challenges of Denying Family Inheritance and Property Rights to Women in Igbo Land, including the issue of shunning female legacy

The denial of family inheritance and property rights to females in Igbo land which

invariable debars them from positively contributing in their milieu apposite to the findings of this study leads to several problems including:

- **Economic Disempowerment:** It results in leaving women often times without financial resources or assets, thereby making them economically dependent on male relatives or spouses. This is why some Igbo women develop beggary stricken mentality. The male folks on the other hand keep complaining that women make demands from them unnecessarily. Muoghalu et al (2020) and Silas et al (2020) in this regard, declare that denial of inheritance to family property on Igbo women impoverishes them and equally constitutes a barrier to women attaining their full potentials which has serious implications for their health.
- **Limited autonomy:** Placed without property rights, women have limited control over their lives and decisions, including choices regarding education, healthcare, and career opportunities. They are disadvantaged in almost all spheres. Nwachukwu (2022) details that women face life of uncertainties, homelessness, undue male control and violation together with other serious negative impacts that family property inheritance deprivation exerts on Igbo women,
- **Vulnerability to exploitation:** Women in Igbo land may be more susceptible to exploitation and abuse without ownership of property, as they lack the means to support themselves independently. This also accounts for the incessant engagement of some female folks in the ignoble act of solicitation.
- **Reinforcement of gender inequality:** Denying family inheritance and property rights to women in Igbo enclaves perpetuates gender disparities and as well reinforces the societal notion of women being inferior to men. Nwakoby et al (2022) emphasize that this equally constitute social injustice, little appreciation of the women empowerment as well as heartening of gender inequality.
- **Inheritance disputes and family conflict:** The absence of clear family inheritance rights for females in Igbo societies can more often than not lead to disputes within families, creating tensions, and conflicts that can disrupt family harmony. Gabriel (2016) and Igomu (2022) acknowledge that there abounds several court cases and crisis relating to infringement on female family inheritance rights in most Igbo communities.
- **Hindrance to economic development:** Women wield unimaginable potentials. That is why any venture they engage in prospers. The women ministries both in the church and secular institutions for instance, always grow in geometrical progression. By excluding women from property ownership in Igbo communities, such enclaves miss out on their potential contributions to economic growth and development. Udechukwu (2015) and Onuoha et al (2016) elaborate that Igbo women are industrious and wield great potentials for contributing in community development which is a paramount aspect in the art of nation building. Their contributions to the church and society via their August meeting funds speak volumes in this regard.

Divine Gender Equality in the Creation of Human Kind

Bosterud (2021) uses the various leadership and pivotal roles that women wielded in the Bible as reference point to justify that the Bible hinges on divine gender equality. His study argues that the Bible contains numerous examples of strong female figures in leadership roles, both formal and informal, demonstrating that the Bible does not justify

gender inequality. Despite historical and cultural subordination, the author portrays that these Biblical women exerted significant influence and provided inspiration for postulation of modern gender equality, including in organizational and corporate leadership. Bosterud stresses that the Christian community historically utilized women's leadership talents, introducing a culture of gender sensitivity. These Biblical portrayals support the ongoing pursuit of divine gender equality across all societal levels and women's connection to these texts varies by context.

Eichler (2015) presents a methodically rigorous reading of the creation accounts in Genesis, highlighting two aspects that support divine gender equality. Firstly, it emphasizes that both men and women are created in the image of God, signifying their equal worth and status. Secondly, it challenges traditional interpretations of the second creation account to argue that the portrayal of the women as a helper (Hebrew "ezer") actually conveys her role as a powerful partner, equivalent to the man. Additionally, it suggests that the woman's creation from the man's side (Hebrew "tsela or tzelah") symbolizes their equality and mutual dependence. Overall, Eichler asserts that both creation narratives reflect a fundamentally egalitarian view of the sexes, affirming the principles of divine gender equality.

Deddo (2008) expatiates that even the Doctrine of the trinity sheds light on why God created us as human beings with gender; justifying divine gender equality. The author asserts that a scripturally grounded understanding of the trinity denies that the differentiation of divine persons is based on differing roles, functions, or attributes. It also rejects any notion of internal conflict or division among the divine wills. Instead, it affirms that the differences among the Trinitarian persons are solely due to their unique identities and eternal intra-Trinitarian relations, excluding subordinationism. The non-interchangeability of these persons and their relations is crucial, ruling out modalism and ensuring the preservation of personal differences within the Trinity. Deddo's perspective supports divine gender equality by emphasizing unity and equality without hierarchical distinctions. In a relative stance, Mwandayi (2022) elucidates that the implications of being created in the image of God "*The imago Dei*" or to be Godlike (Genesis 1:26) includes not only dominion over creation, care towards the created order, and the sanctity of human life abhorring suicide and murder; but above all, it connotes divine gender equality.

Lemmons (2002) in her argument, suggests that although the Roman Catholic Church, under John Paul II, does not ordain women, they still upholds the idea of divine gender equality. This is based on John Paul II's teachings in "*Mulieris Dignitatem*", where he asserts that men and women equally image God as stated in Genesis 1:27. According to Lemmons, Pope John Paul II further argues that while gender roles are different, they can still be equal in a complementary sense. John Paul II according to the author posits that the differences in gender roles reflect an analogous equality, rather than a univocal one. Hence, gender equality in the church is understood through the complementary and relational roles of men and women, mirroring the divine communion.

Rea (2016) points out that although it is standard within the Christian tradition to characterize God in predominantly masculine terms; as it is theologically mandatory to employ such pattern of characterization pertinent to traditionalism. He however, undercuts the main motivations for traditionalism by portraying that it is not more accurate to characterize God as masculine rather than feminine (or vice versa). The locus of his argument lie in the fact that it presupposes neither theological anti-realism nor a robust doctrine of divine transcendence, but instead rest heavy theoretical weight on the *imago Dei* doctrine and the method of perfect being theology. Notwithstanding, even if

this argument is not supported by theologians, since entities, localities, institutions and nationhood is largely addressed in feminine terms; his point is vivid, irrespective that God is addressed in masculine terms which may not be the best, we must never assume that to mean that men are superior beings. God ought to be perceived as a sexless being. God is too vast for mankind to bequeath human likelihood.

Pagne (2017) addressing patriarchy in the Bible emphasizes that the scripture is the authoritative guide: It teaches that patriarchy is as a result of sin and not God's ideal. He stresses that patriarchy is an abuse of power that diminishes the dignity and leadership of women. In as much as the Bible reflects a patriarchal culture in biblical settings, it does not endorse it as God's standard. Christ's redemptive work liberates all from patriarchy, promoting equal authority and mutual submission in relationships as perceived when he forgave the adulterous woman in John 8:3-11, together with the fact that women were among Jesus' close confidants. God's design includes marriage; celibate singleness, and mutual submission, with the unrestricted use of women's gifts being essential for the gospel. Followers of Christ should oppose patriarchal injustices and support equal leadership opportunities for women in all spheres. Patriarchy is a product of male ego targeted at subduing women. It is whimsical and capricious.

Ultimately, Burk (2024) in addressing the roles of men and women from theological perspectives encapsulates its egalitarianism and complementarianism. Burk reflects that both egalitarianism and complementarianism assert divine gender equality, emphasizing that men and women equally bear God's image and share equally in the blessings of salvation. According to him, egalitarianism upholds the authority of scripture while promoting gender equality in all roles, and argues that male hierarchy is as a result of the fall of man, and not God's original design, he cites Galatians 3:28 to support the view that redemption in Christ removes social hierarchies, thus advocating for equal leadership roles in all spheres for men and women. On the other hand, complementarianism as Burk expresses, emphasizes that men and women are equal in value and dignity as image-bearers, and asserts that men and women have different, complementary roles in the home and church, argues that male headship and female support are part of God's good design, not a result of sin, and also maintains that these differences do not diminish equality but reflect God's intentional design. Burks study posits that both perspectives agree on the fundamental equality of men and women before God but differ on how this equality manifests in roles and responsibilities. These roles make the human kind ordered, devoid of chaos and catastrophe as well as extremely beautiful.

The Intersectional Feminism Theory

Guy-Evans (2024) articulates that the intersectional feminism theory examines how different social structures like gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, ability, and age are interconnected and influence each other. It rejects the idea that all women experience oppression, subjugation and gender inequality in homogenous ways. Additionally, intersectional feminism acknowledges that women's oppression is rarely due to a single factor. It views gender inequality as the result of complex interactions among various social structures, unlike other feminist perspectives that inaccurately generalize women's oppression based on the experiences of western, middle-class white women.

Collins and Bilge (cited by Guy-Evans, 2024) convey that intersectionality examines how intersecting power relations affect social relations and individual experiences. They

For instance, a working-class woman may face oppression due to both her gender and social class. Additional layers of oppression may arise if she is also an ethnic minority, disabled, or homosexual, leading to unique experience of inequality. Guy-Evans indicates that the term “Intersectionality” was first used by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. Crenshaw, according to him, observed that there were multidimensional kinds of intersecting oppressions in the world, meaning that individuals had distinct challenges and predicaments because of these intersectional factors.

Soken-Huberty (2024) illuminates that intersectional feminism theory addresses how systems of oppression affect individuals differently based on race, class, ability, sexuality, and other factors. Unlike mainstream feminism, which may focus primarily on gender or sex, intersectional feminism views oppression as an interlocking system. UN Women (2020) supplement by saying that intersectional feminism theory focuses on the voices of those facing multiple, simultaneous forms of oppression to comprehend the extent of inequalities and their interrelationships in any context. They affirm that using an international lens involves acknowledging the historical contexts of issues. Long histories of violence and systematic discrimination have created profound inequalities, disadvantaging some from the start. These intersecting inequalities, such as poverty, caste systems, racism, and sexism, deny people rights and equal opportunities, with impacts spanning generations.

Altogether, Sharkey et al (2017) validate that “by adding the idea of intersectionality to feminism, the movement becomes truly inclusive, and allows women of all races, economic standings, religions, identities and orientations for their voices to be heard” (p. 1). This is more like it as it captures vividly the discrimination that Igbo women face over inheritance and retention of family properties. Intersectional feminism takes into consideration the multifaceted modes each woman in various localities of the world experience discrimination without neglecting any form of discrimination. It perceives every atom of gender inequality and discrimination as unwholesome, irrational and inhumane. Ultimately, while discrimination and gender inequality may affect individuals differently and uniquely; their shared aspiration for equality unites them all.

Utilizing Intersectional Feminism Theory to Promote Female Legacy and Inheritance in Igbo Land

Intersectional feminism theory can be applied to address the problem of female denial pertinent to inheritance of family properties including aspersion on female legacy in Igbo land by considering the overlapping and interrelated factors that contribute to this issue viz:

- **Recognizing multiple identities:** Intersectional feminism theory acknowledges that individuals experience multiple intersecting identities such as gender, ethnicity, class, and religion. In the case of Igbo women, their experiences of denial of inheritance are shaped not only by their gender but also by other factors such as their cultural background, socioeconomic status, and family dynamics. The entirety of these factors that instigates the denial of female inheritance in Igbo land subjugates them should be addressed holistically before a positive result can be actualized.
- **Understanding power dynamics:** This theory examines power dynamics within social structures and how they intersect to oppress certain groups. In Igbo society,

patriarchal norms and customs often privilege male heirs over female heirs, reinforcing gender inequalities in inheritance rights. By understanding these power dynamics and dismantling them through rational instructions, efforts can be made to challenge and transform the systems that perpetuate female inheritance denial.

- **Addressing cultural norms:** Intersectional feminism recognizes the importance of cultural context in shaping experiences of oppression and privilege. In Igbo culture, deeply rooted traditions and beliefs about gender roles may contribute to the marginalization of women in matters of inheritance. Advocates can work within communities to challenge and reshape cultural norms that perpetuate female inheritance denial while respecting the cultural heritage of the Igbo people.
- **Advocating for legal reforms:** This theory advocates for legal reforms that address the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by marginalized groups. In the case of Igbo women, legal reforms may be needed to ensure that inheritance laws are gender-neutral and protect the rights of all family members, regardless of gender. This may involve advocating for changes in customary laws and protections for women's inheritance rights.
- **Empowering women:** Intersectional feminism theory emphasizes the importance of empowering marginalized groups to advocate for their rights and interests. In Igbo land, efforts to address female inheritance denial should include initiatives aimed at empowering women economically, socially and politically. This could involve providing women with education and resources to assert their inheritance rights, as well as creating space for women to participate in decision-making processes within their families and communities.

Theological Approach to Foster Divine Gender Equality in Igbo land

Divine equality in gender can be theologically nurtured and cultivated in Igbo communities through the following strategies:

- **Reinterpretation of religious texts:** This study proposes the reinterpretation of religious texts (like the Bible) and their teachings to emphasize the inherent equality of all individuals, regardless of gender. Church clerics and workers in Igbo land should always highlight passages that promote justice, compassion, and respect for women's rights both in the churches and community summits cum rendezvous: Enlightening the populace that God ordained gender equality as against inequality.
- **Inclusive worship practices:** Inclusive worship practices that affirm the equal dignity and worth of men and women should always be promoted. Women should be encouraged to take up and participate in religious ceremonies, leadership roles, and decision-making processes within the churches and other religious institutions.
- **Educational initiatives:** Igbo community and church leaders should always deploy concerted efforts towards providing theological education and training programs which challenge traditional patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings. Church clerics and other religious leaders should be equipped with the knowledge and tools to advocate for gender equality and empower women within

their communities.

- **Community engagement:** Advocates for gender equality should always engage religious leaders and communities in dialogue and inflection on the principles of divine equality and their implications for gender relations. They should incessantly encourage open discussions about gender-based discrimination and strategies for promoting equality within the context of Igbo culture and religious beliefs.
- **Support for women's empowerment:** Church clerics and other religious leaders should capitalize on offering support and resources for women's empowerment initiatives, including education, economic development, and leadership training. They should empower women to take active roles in shaping religious practices and promoting gender equality within their communities.
- **Challenge harmful practices:** Gender equality activists within the Igbo enclaves should consistently speak out against harmful cultural and religious practices that perpetuate gender inequality, such as female genital mutilation, child marriage, and wickedness cum discrimination against widows. They should invariably advocate for the elimination of these practices through theological arguments grounded in principles of justice and compassion.
- **Collaboration with the government, religious leaders cum institutions:** Gender equality reformers in Igbo communities should collaborate with the government likewise religious institutions as well as their leaders to develop and implement gender-sensitive policies and practices that promote equality and social justice. They should equally encourage the government and religious leaders to use their influence to challenge gender stereotypes and promote positive attitudes towards women in Igbo society.

Conclusion

The advocacy for female inheritance of family properties in Igbo land represents a crucial step toward achieving divine gender equality and justice within the community. The traditional exclusion of women from inheriting family assets not only perpetuates gender-based discrimination but also undermines their significance along with the socio-economic stability of the society at large. Embracing a more inclusive inheritance practice acknowledges the invaluable contributions of women to both their families and the broader community: It also implies complete reverence for God, the absolute reality and creator of human kind.

Changing age-old customs that perpetuate gender inequality in Igbo land is achievable. It is conspicuous that by fostering an environment where women are recognized as equal beneficiaries of family wealth, Igbo land can set a progressive precedent that upholds human rights and promotes socio-economic development. Supporting female inheritance is not just a matter of fairness but a necessary stride towards a more balanced and prosperous society, where every individual, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to thrive and contribute meaningfully to the collective good apposite to Gods template and commission.

Recommendations

This study proffers the following recommendations focused at stimulating Igbo societies to work towards dismantling male ego and domination in order to promote a culture of mutual respect that ensures equal opportunities for all genders as God's creations:

1. Integration of gender equality and sensitivity training in educational curricula at all levels to foster respect and understanding from an early age. Mentorship programs should be established to aid in connecting women with experienced leaders who can provide guidance, support, and advocacy in order to break those with limited literacy pertinent to gender equality legislation, from the chains of gullibility and naivety: This will make it feasible to enforce strong anti-discrimination and anti-harass policies all over Igbo workplace, schools and communities in the near future, to protect women and promote equal opportunities.
2. Engaging men as allies in promoting gender equality; encouraging them to challenge stereotypes and support women in leadership and decision-making roles in the Igbo enclave. This should be extended to concerted efforts by both Igbo men and women towards promoting the sharing of household and care giving responsibilities to balance power dynamics and reduce the burden on women.
3. Advocating for media representation that challenges traditional gender roles and showcase diverse and empowered female characters. This should equally feature the highlighting and celebrating of male and female role models who advocate for gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles.
4. Investing in diverse researches across Igbo communities to understand the root causes of male dominance and its impact: Utilizing the gathered data as well to inform policies and programs aimed at achieving divine gender equality.
5. Creating workplace cultures that values diversity and inclusion, thereby providing training and support to prevent and address gender bias. This will equally facilitate encouraging individuals, especially men, to engage in self-reflection and self-awareness practices to recognize and address their own biases and behaviours.

References

- Akhter, T. (2019). *Women in Chains and Tears: Subjugation within family*. Emerald.
- Aroh, B. (2024, April 27). How Igbo Culture Deprives Women's Right to Inheritance. *SAHARA REPORTERS*. <https://saharareporters.com/2024/04.27>.
- Asaolu, F.S. (2023, May 4). Gladys Ukeje fought for Her Right to Inherit, Now All Igbo Women Can. *Document Women: Dev*. <https://documentwomen.com>.
- Azuakor, P.O (2017). The Women's Place in Family Inheritance in Igboland: A rational and legal critique. *Nnadiabube Journal of Social Sciences (NJSS)*, 1(2), 15-21.
- Azubuine, U.C. (2022, March 10). Should a woman get a share of her father's inheritance? The Igbo cultural perspective. *The News Chronicle*. <https://thenews.chronicle.com>.
- Bose, P. et al. (2017). Women's rights to land and communal forest tenure: A way forward for research and policy agenda in Latin America. *Women Studies International Forum*, 65, 53 - 59. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S02775395173042.ox>.
- Bosterud, C.E. (2021). Women in the Bible: What can they teach us about gender equality? *In die skriflig*, 55 (1), pretoria. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v55i1.2754>.
- Burk, D. (2024). The Roles of men and women. *The Gospel Coalition*. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay>.
- Chimakonam, J.O. et al. (2013). The Epistemology of Womanhood: Ignored Contentions

- among Igbo of Eastern Nigeria. *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK) New Series*, 5(2), 57-70. <https://ajol.info/index.php/tp/index>.
- Chukwuma-Ali, C.C. (2019). Igbo culture and gender roles of women: The question of marginalization. *Ulysses International Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Studies*, i(1), 45-55. www.ulyssesjournals.com.
- Deddo, G.W. (2008, October 30). The Trinity and Gender. *CBE INTERNATIONAL*. <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resoource/trinity-and-gender>.
- Eichler, R. (2015). Gender equality at creation. *The Torah.com*. <https://theorah.com/article/gender-equality-at-creation>.
- Gabriel, C. (2016, September 4). Property war in South-East: Never again will Igbo Women be denied of their inheritance. *Vanguard*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardng.com/2016/09/>.
- Goyal, A. (2012, May 14). Importance of Equal Inheritance Rights for Female Employment. *World Bank Blogs*. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/>.
- Guy-Evans, O. (2024, February 13). What is Intersectional Feminism? *Simply Psychology*. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/intersectional-feminism.html>.
- Igbolekwu, C.O. et al (2022). Awareness and Compliance with Court Judgement/Constitutional Provisions Legalizing Female Inheritance Rights Among the Igbo, Nigeria. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 7(1). DOI:10.1007/541134-022-00219-7.
- Igomu, T. (2022, October 29). Property inheritance: Widows endless battle against oppression, search for equity. *PUNCH*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/punchng.com>.
- Lemmons, R.M.H. (2002). Equality, Gender, and John Paul II. *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 5 (3) 111 - 130. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/20438/summary>.
- Malaka, G. (2014, July 16). You OK Sis, Black Men, and their fragile Egos. *MIND OF MALAKA: MOTHERHOOD MARRIAGE MADNESS*. <https://mindofmalaka.com/2014/07/16>.
- Maxwell, J.C. (2002). *The Maxwell Leadership Bible: New King James Version*. Thomas Nelson.
- Mordi, R. (2014). An Appraisal of Inheritance Rights of women in Nigeria. *Academia*. <https://www.academia.edu/7187814/>.
- Muoghalu, C.O. et al. (2020). Traditional Society in South-Eastern Nigeria: Implications for Women's Health. *Bangladesh Development Studies*, 43(1&2), 127-146. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27085877>
- Nnamah, I.O. et al. (2021). Gender inequality and female struggles for property ownership: An Examination of Pat Obi Nwagbo's when women go naked and Julie Okoh's our wife forever. *The Creative Artist: A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies*, 15(2), 46-72.
- Nwachukwu, C.M. (2022, November 21). Denied right to inheritance, women in South East daily face life of uncertainties. *Report Women*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/reportwomen.org/amp/>.
- Nwundayi, C. (2022). Implications of the *Imago Dei* (Gn. 1:26) on gender equality and agrarian land reform in Zimbabwe. *HTS: Theological Studies*, 78, (2). <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/7688/23763>.
- Ojilere, A. (2021). Expanding Women's Right to inherit Immovable Property in Igboland Beyond the Limits of Ukeje V. Ukeje. *IJOCLLEP*, 2(3), 30-36. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349732305>.

- Ojukwu, G.E. et al. (2020). Playwrights and the task of building strong female characters: Interrogating intra-gender subjugation in Nigeria plays. *The Creative Artist: A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies*, 14(2), 60-90.
- Okafor, T. (2020, September 8). Female inheritance: Supreme Court, Igbo Culture in head-on collision. *PUNCH*. <https://punchng.com>.
- Okoli, A. et al. (2020, August 26). Supreme Court's decision on female inheritance divides Igbo. *Vanguard*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2020/08>.
- Oluoha, N. (2023). Gender conflict in cultural practices in selected Igbo communities in Nigeria (Abiriba and Ohafia). Research gate. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371830466>.
- Onuoha, S.I. et al. (2016). Socio-economic characteristics and development roles of women involved in August Meetings in Nigeria. *International Journal of Management and Business Studies*, 6(6) 387-398. www.internationalscholarsjournals.org.
- Orjinmo, N. (2021, February 2). Nigeria inheritance: My brother took everything when my father died. *BBC NEWS*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55675987.amp>.
- Oshodi, M.I. (2023, November 7). The Inheritance rights of women in Nigeria. *IAWJ Rising Leader Archive*. https://www.iawj.org/content.aspx?page_/id=25078clud_id= 8822248item_id=4986.
- Payne, P.B. (2017). Biblical Gender Equality: A Summary. *CBE INTERNATIONAL*. <https://www.org/resource/biblical-gender-equality-summary>.
- Pruitt, D. (2022, October 16). Black voices: male egos are actively harming, even killing women. *The Indiana Daily Studies: IDS*. <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2022/10>.
- Rea, M. (2016). Gender as a divine attribute. *Religious studies*, 52 (1), 87-115. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26159844>.
- Sadiq, L. (2022, July 10). Inside Nigeria's Harmful Traditional Practices that Impede Women's Rights to Land Ownership. *Daily Trust*. <https://dailytrust.com>.
- Sessou, E. (2023, November 16). Denying Females rights to inheritance unjust, inequitable – property lawyer. *Vanguard*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguard.com/2023/11/>.
- Sharkey, G. et al. (2016, July 26). What is “Intersectional Feminism”? *DENISON*. <https://denison.edu/academics/women-gender-studies/feature/67969>.
- Silas, T.S. et al. (2020). Disinheritance and Women development in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria: A Theological-Ethical Study. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 3(5), 15-26.
- Soken-Huberty, E. (2024). What is Intersectional Feminism? *Human Rights Careers*. <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues>.
- Soluade, Z.O. et al. (2022). Gender Discrimination on Property and Widow Inheritance Rights Among Rural Dwellers of Ipokia Local Government of Ogun State. *Journal of Lexicography and Terminology*, 6(2), 69-79.
- Udechukwu, G. (2015). Women and economic development: Igbo women example. *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 7(2), 121-127.
- Ughegbe, L. (2014, April 15). Nigeria: Supreme Court invalidates Igbo Customary Law Denying Female Descendants the Right to inherit. *LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: THE GUARDIAN*. <https://www.oc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor-2014-05-06>.
- Ukaegbu, P. et al. (2022). Marginalization of women in Igbo tradition: Myth or Reality.

- Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy*, 13(2)271-283.
- United Nations. (1995, September 15). Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. *Fourth World Conference on Women*. <https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/>.
- United Nations General Assembly. (1979, December 18). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). *UN Treaty Series*, 1 2 4 9 (13). https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsq_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=en.
- UN WOMEN. (2020, July 1). Intersectional Feminism: What it means and why it matters right now. [Medium.com / @UN_Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/explainer](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/explainer).
- United Nations Human Rights. (2014). *Women's Rights are Human Rights*. United Nations.
- Urama, E.N. (2019). The Values and Usefulness of Same-sex Marriages Among the Females in Igbo Culture in the Continuity of Lineage or Posterity. *Sage open*, 9(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019850037>.
- Vasin, G. et al (2017). The curse of subjugation and Need of Empowerment for African Women in the Novel Paradise by Toni Morrison. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review (PLHR)* 1(1), 1-9.