Burden of Tradition on Women in Pre-Colonial Rivers State: The Etche Experience

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Abstract

This paper examined Burden of tradition on women in pre-colonial Rivers State: The Etche experience. The issue of burden of tradition on women in Etche cut across all facts of human lives and has spanned through the pre-colonial eras of Etche history but no comprehensive work has been done in the area. So many of the scholarly works done in Etche centered on the origin, economic activities and political organizations. However, this study gave an in-depth analysis of the burden of tradition on women in pre-colonial Etche which cut across several aspects such as traditional beliefs, cultural, economic and political issues. As regards methodology, the primary and secondary sources were employed to generate required data mainly from oral interview, books, journals, and articles among others and since knowledge cut across disciplines, the work also made use of interdisciplinary approach to further enrich the available historical data. To ensure validity of data, all the sources were cross examined before conclusions were made and the historical and narrative approach to data analysis was employed to assess the issues based on burden of tradition on women. The study revealed that in Etche the burden of tradition cut across several aspects such as traditional beliefs, cultural, economic and political issues and there are certain activities women do not engage in as it is believed to be activities for men. The study established that such traditions and belief systems impacted negatively on women during the precolonial era and limited women's economic, socio-cultural and political opportunities. The study further revealed that the burden of tradition on Etche women was encouraged by low level of Education, the economic power of women, women seen as weaker sex, religion and culture among other factors. Following the above submissions, the researchers recommended a holistic study of burdens of tradition on women in schools, increase the representation of women in decision making positions, and adopt practices that promotes women power

and equality in education in Etche in particular and Rivers State and Nigeria in general.

Keywords: Burden of tradition, Pre-colonial, Etche, Traditional cultural practices.

Introduction

Tradition is a belief or behaviours passed down within a group of society with symbolic meaning or within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past. Common examples include holidays or impractical but socially meaningful clothes, but the idea has also been applied to social norms such as greetings. Traditions can persist or evolve for thousands of years.

This study is on burden of tradition on women in pre-colonial Rivers State: The Etche Experience. A tradition is a belief or behavior (folk custom) passed won within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past. Burden of tradition on women arises mainly due to the differences in socially constructed roles in genders. The lacuna created between men and women is generally regarded to political, social, economic or any other problem that is perceived to exist as a result of such differences. It is opt to note that burden of tradition on women has been surprisingly diverse and spread. In every conceivable way, men and women are unequal in endless circumstances like in jobs. There are various causes of burden of tradition on women first, is bad mentality; women are discriminated to the extent that they are described as being suited for jobs like nurturing, housekeeping and service provision.

While men believe that they are suited for high profile jobs and decision making and authority. It is generally believed that women cannot rule big organisations, surprisingly most women have the same mentality that they cannot occupy most top positions. Second is the education level of women. It is no news that lack of proper education can cause the burden of tradition on women. This is because nobody can go far without adequate education level in the world of today as the world is fast turning to a global village. Many families do not pay proper attention to girl child; they see them not better as compared to men. Therefore they end up not getting proper education. Third, research on burden of tradition on women has shown that religion is one of the many reasons for gender imbalance. A number of things in some of the religions is a great cause of increased pains in the world than peace. Even though religion plays a very important role in every human, there still exist some weaknesses in some religions which act as edges to the women. Lastly, women lack enough empowerment in some parts of the world. Understanding the importance of empowerment will motivate women and curb the issue of gender

imbalance. Burden of tradition on women will lead to violation of rights, sexual abuse and violence. These problems and many more shall be addressed in this study.

However, due to the sensitive issues raised above, this work is set to bring to limelight the Burden of tradition on women in Etche during the pre-colonial era and how women are still marginalized up till date. The study will therefore make vital suggestions that will help to cover the lacuna that existed between the men and women in Etche land in the aspect of economic, socio-cultural and political activities.

Literature Review

Much work has not really been done on Etche history. However, in recent times few works has been done on Etche land. The origin and socio-economic development of Umuechem village by Benedicta Onyemaechi Nwala (Mrs) (1978) discusses the social and economic development of Umuechem one of the villages in the present Etche land. This survey failed to analyse objectively the problem of burden of tradition on women in the area (Umuechem) in particular and Etche in general. It also did not mention the period that was under study. But this work is there aimed at analyisng the role played by Etche women in the pre-colonial and post-colonial period.

"History of origin and people of Ulakwo (1977) is a work essentially on the origin and people of Ulakwor". This work talks about how the people of Ulakwor came to be, it also examines the marriages, and customs of Ulakwor. It then discusses how Christianity was influenced. Although the work briefly survey the economic life of the Ulakwor people thereby assisting in writing the history of Etche, it failed to demonstrate the part played by Etche people when it came to gender imbalance and also Etche women in this regard. It is this lapse that this present work seeks to address.

Nwodim, E. (1985) "Christianity in Etche land: Analysis of its development and influence" It is a work on the way Etche land was greatly influenced by Christianity. The work discusses in detail the history of the development of Etche and the influence Christianity had on Etche land in the sense that the coming of Christianity caused interference on the way people worshipped and honoured the gods in their possession. It is not worthy at this point to state that African's, Etche as a case study were not pagans they had the gods they worshipped and obeyed and these gods worked for them in terms of bountiful harvest, good health, fishing out guilty offenders etc. As confessed earlier the work discussed Christianity and not burden of tradition on women or how women were classified or seen in the society, whether they were given political positions or allowed to speak in a social gathering in Etche land. This present work will therefore seek to fill that gap.

A literature review of the concept of women by Faseke (2008), The Nigerian Women, her economic and socio-political status in time perspective, described a woman as an adult female person. It presupposes that the female group has certain attributes which makes her distinct and for which she is well known. The book also discussed the political escapades of women and their social activities in the pre-colonial era. In the colonial era despite the uprising of women in 1929, mention was also made on the active involvement of Nigerian women in the nationalist struggle. Among the women activists mentioned were Wuraola Esan, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo and Sawaba who played prominent role in forcing the British to reverse some obnoxious policies in fact the colonial period was known for the indoctrination of Nigerians in Western values. The activities of women in the post independent or colonial Nigeria in both the civilian and military regimes were explained, but surprisingly, the book did not relate to the issue of women in Etche community, and the book did not also talk about the area of development and underdevelopment in the communities the women came from in general or Etche community in particular. From the review, it is glaring that no comprehensive work has been done on the burden of tradition on women in Etche. Most of what has been done focused on Etche history and other aspects of their society. The socio-political and economic burden on women which has impacted negatively on Etche has not been studied. It is against this background that this study intends to fill the gap.

Methodology

A single source alone cannot provide the needed materials for this study hence the need for the researcher to adopt the multi-source approach in writing this work. This approach became necessary because of the relationship or tie-up between historical sources especially on the strength and weaknesses of each source which allowed the researcher to employ the strength of one source to balance the lapses arising from the weaknesses or strength of the other.

According to Alagoa (2012) "African oral tradition and oral history still have a value of African societies in the modern world. African historians have the primary responsibility to map out their systematic recording, documentation, preservation and use in the service of the owners of the traditions and of the modern nation state". The study has also resorted to colonial documents such as annual reports, handbooks among others. We adopted the use of written materials. The numerous materials on gender, gender inequality as reviewed in our literature review will help to correct the beliefs on burden of tradition on women in Etche land and also make our oral sources to be more reliable.

Although written sources on the subject matter especially as it has to do with burden of tradition on women in Etche is few, the dearth of written materials will not limit the

researcher to the use of only oral sources. Written sources in this context include but not limited to newspaper reports, official government documents, books, diaries, letters, minutes of meetings, journals, amongst others. This research work will bring to limelight the issues of burden of tradition on women in pre-colonial Etche. The work will be discussed in time perspective to give a historical meaning to it.

Statement of Problem

Across the globe, the economy and how it is operated is very important to the development of that society. Same is applicable to Etche land which is not different from other communities in terms of economic, political and socio-cultural except on some issues of gender discrimination which is now a burden on the women. It is on this note that an attempt will be made to examine the part women in pre-colonial Etche played in the economic development of their society. The economic system and its history will be studied under three major headings – Agriculture, trade and manufacture. These activities played an important role in determining the character, quality of culture, religion and cosmetology. But they did not all receive equal attention from Etche and consequently did not all attain same level of development.

It is often said that behind every successful man there is a woman. To this end, Etche women have participated actively in the economic life of their society and supported the men in diverse capacity, but their contributions to some extent have not been well presented by the male dominated society. According to Little (1975) it is tempting and fairly accurate to describe the role of women as complementary rather than sub-ordinate to that of men even though the women as a rule are under the control of men.

Geographical Location and People of Etche

Etche ethnic nationality is located presently in the North East part of Rivers State. It is bounded by Abia State in the East and in the West and South by Ikwerre and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas and North-East by Oyigbo Local Government Area, Rivers State. Etche is a Local Government Area (LGA) named after a man called Echie the ancestor of the people. Etche people of Southern Nigeria have two local government areas namely Etche Local Government Area and Omuma Local Government Area. Villages and towns that comprises of Etche are: Akwu/Obuor, Chokocho, Egwi, Afara, Mba, Okehi, Ulakwor, Umuakonu, Umubelu, Umuechem, Egbeke, Igbodo the ancestral home of Etche, Igbodo comprises of Umuohiaukwu, Umusharam, Umuoga, Okonocho, Umuine, Umudi, Umunkwa, Umuochie, Amaku, Obibi, Ezelaka, Umuisi. In 1999 the population of the Etche people was put at about 600,000.

Etche occupies one area of about one hundred square kilometers with a large population. Etche land has many petty markets in each clan which the biggest is located at Igbofo the ancestral home which is transversed by the Ngor – Okpalla – Igwuruta Federal road. It is opt to mention at this point that Etche is an in land society. The availability of fertile land has encouraged agricultural practices. Etche is as well blessed with navigable creeks on Egbeke, Omuma, Ebeir, Mba clan. This natural endowment explains why the local people engage in fishing. Agricultural produce such as plantain, yam, cocoyam, maize, palm oil and kernel served as principal articles of trade. They also traded on locally manufactured goods such as pot, chair, hand fan, tripod stands etc.

Etche as earlier noted is found on a plain article land with healthy composure. The land is fertile, richly endowed with mineral resources such as crude oil. The humus soil encouraged the cultivation of staple foods such as yams, coco yams, cassava and maize. Etche is divided into four zones by three main rivers namely; Imo, Ogochie and Otamiri. The presence of these rivers supported water transportation as well as external trade. We can now see how the location of Etche land has to a large extent influence the life of the people. The main economic activities of Etche people are farming, distilling of local gin (Nkwu) from raffia palm, fishing, hunting, extracting red palm oil, trading, trapping and also animal husbandry.

Burden of tradition on women in Etche

In every community, the economy and how it is operated is very important to the development of that community, be it country or town. According to the English Dictionary the word economy can be defined as the system of production and distribution and consumption.. However, Etche land is not different from other communities since means of production seems to be same across the world. There are however areas of discrepancies between Etche economic, political and socio-cultural practices and belief system. It is on this note that an attempt will be made to examine the part women in pre-colonial Etche played in the economic, political and socio-cultural development and the aspects of the tradition and customs that have become a burden to thereby militating against their corporate existence and survival as women.

It is often said that behind every successful man there is a woman. To this end, Etche women have participated actively in the economic life of their society and supported the men in diverse capacity, but their contributions to some extent have not been well presented by the male dominated society. According to Little (1975) it is tempting and fairly accurate to describe the role of women as complementary rather than sub-ordinate to that of men even though the women as a rule are under the control of men.

Burden of Tradition on Etche Economy

Land Use Laws and Agriculture

According to Onwuzurike (1994) the Etche women occupied and formed the backbone of rural agriculture. In the traditional society a strict division of labour was followed on the execution of agricultural operations. It was the duty of the Etche men to clear the bush, burn and get it ready for cultivation. If yams were to be planted, it was the duty of men to till the ground while the women planted the yam seedlings, the women also see to the weeding until the yam is harvested. After the planting of the seedlings it is the duty of women to plant the inter-crops such as vegetables, maize, okro, melon, sugarcane etc. The planting of cassava, cocoyam (Ede) and three leaf yam was exclusively the responsibility of women although the men clears the land for them in preparation for planting.

The three leaf yam is also planted through the seedlings. It undergoes same process of planting the yams right from planting period to harvest. What the men did was to regulate the farm and the yam staking exercise. Farming was majorly the duties of an Etche woman as such, after the morning chores, the Etche woman goes straight to the farm, and any produce gotten from the farm was transported to the market. The Etche woman usually does 70% of the work in the farm. The harvesting of the yam seeds are exclusively duty of the male folks while the women and children ensured its convergence home.

According to Davidson (1996) of all their material skills, tropical farming was probably the most impressive among the Etche people in the pre-colonial economy. The Etche women will grow enough food for their family needs, but other professionals like the blacksmith will make enough hoes or spears to be sure that he could get what he and his family needed in exchange: but they are seldom exchange for money. They were taken to the market and the blacksmith would exchange his items or commodities for what he and his family needs. In the pre-colonial times there was hardly anything like stealing in Etche land because of the grievous consequences from the gods, so goods would be put up for sale and the owner would be in the farm, only to come and see money for some purchased goods or goods used for exchange. It is also important at this point to state that coastal Etche women took to fishing more than farming. For example the people of Obibi, Odufor, Mba and Egbeke engaged more in fishing than farming.

From the foregoing, it is glaring that women and men were partners in progress in the agricultural sector of pre-colonial Etche which manifested in the rapid development of their society. However, the denial of farm lands to unmarried women and young girls who served as the work force of the society stood as a barrier to women empowerment. Denial of access to farm land by their male counterparts became a burden to the women and adversely affected the production capacity. It is pertinent to state that in Etche, if a woman

is not married, she will not be assigned a farm land irrespective of her age during farming season which is not same with the male folk. Such land use law is not only counterproductive but also deprive the women their right to live and survive in an agrarian society like Etche.

Trading

In many respects trading is subsidiary to agriculture. Nevertheless, trading was an important economic activity in pre-colonial Etche land. According to Onwuzurike (1994) there were two major types of trading, the internal or inter-village trade and external or long distance trade. The inter-village trade involved exchange of local produce especially farm produce while long distance trade involved exchange of local produce food items not produced in the community and Etche women participated in both trade. Local markets were mainly dominated by women and the main articles of trade were local produce such as yams, cassava, fish, vegetables, and some locally manufactured goods. These locally manufactured goods were hoes, pots, salt, baskets, ropes and mats etc. The women also played crucial role in the distribution of essential goods which determined the survival of the people.

The barter trade was most important at the Eketa Igbodo market where the food items were involved and exchanged for cloth, beads, shoes among others. In such exchange, farm produce such as yam, cassava, plantain, maize etc. were exchanged in turn. Alagoa (1970) has uncovered evidence which suggests that the trade between the Etche people and their Igbo neighbours was already firmly established before the dawn of the era of European traders. In the area of trade, women were the major participants and in most cases exposed to the dangers of long distance trades just to promote the economic wellbeing of the family and please her husband. It is expedient to state unequivocally that as the women return from the market, accounts are presented to the husbands which in most cases the greedy ones don't even consider the welfare of the struggling wife.

Etche Tradition and Political Burden on Women

During the pre-colonial period, Etche women contributed significantly in political aspect. The women through their clubs and meetings regulated the conduct of their members and acts such as stealing, gossips, fighting among others were discouraged. Through these clubs, harmony was promoted. For instance, "Ogakoro Ndem" Etche which was formed during the pre-colonial era was headed by a woman, popularly known as Ada Etche. Through this "Ogbakoro Nedem" Etche, village heads were selected who improved the sanitary condition of market square where the various clubs head carryout their dancing festivals. Through the above mentioned associations, rules and regulations were made concerning the behaviours of children, expectations of motherhood and dignity of married

life. Very many of these women served as advisers to their husbands during critical moments or crisis. Though the women supported the effective running of the community administration by ensuring that the meeting venues of the male folks were kept clean, provision of food during meetings among others, they were not fully granted opportunities to participate in political affairs.

In the pre-colonial society (Etche), women were dynamic and participated in social, political and religious systems to improve their lives. They were aware of their worth in society, fearlessly maintained her identity and asserted power over her rightful sectors. In the pre-colonial Etche, there is a name given to the wife of a chief called "Obete". It is the title of a chief's wife and does not mean they are chiefs. It is not a title name in Etche or a name of a title holder; it's just the wife of a chief. Inspite of the numerous roles of women and their contributions in Etche, there is no woman that was called an Eziji which is a title for men. The women did not get involved in politics, they can only help to sweep the arena and arrange the place, but they have no business with the politics in Etche. This is because the Etche people belief so much on the idea of Bio-rammer. To them, the hormone that produces women are weak and as such they are seen as second class figures or citizens (Offor, 2019). Thus the public private dichotomy in traditional definition of politics is used to exclude women from public political sphere and politics as they are seen as mothers and wives (Offor, 2019).

Etche Tradition and Cultural Burden on Women

Every Etche family must have their daughters married, compared to some cultures in Rivers state such as Ogoni where the first daughters in most cases during the precolonial era are not allowed to get married and any child gotten from her, is entitled to the family inheritance. In Etche every daughter is supposed to get married and the women in Etche land do not have any inheritance of land whatsoever. If the parents have just an only daughter, she does not have or inherit any land except it is a land gotten by purchase even at that, the witness must be a man. The only property the Etche woman has is an "Ite Ola" (clay pot). It is given only to the first daughter and she inherits it after the death of her father.

In the case of Burial in Etche culture, the married women are expected to be buried in their father's compound because it is believed that in Etche a daughter is not sold during marriage but given out. So their bodies return to their father's house after death. From the early 20th century, because of the coming of education, Christianity, modernization among others, there was a demand that the women be buried in their husband's compound but this decision or order was not carried out by everybody. Even if the women are buried in their husband's house, a big cow would be given to the father of the lady. Unlike the men,

they do not have to think of where to be buried or giving a cow, everything is done in Etche. If a man dies, shooting of a cock tied to a pole would be carried out at the burial but this is not done for the women (Offor, 2019).

The issue of inheritance, affects the economy of the women, because they have no lands for cultivation and therefore are streamlined to one source of income. The men have more economic powers because of the vast lands acquired which makes them have another means of income however making him more economically buoyant compared to the women. Lack of economic power makes and also affect the political participation of the women that is why till date there has not been any "elected" woman in the council or local government. The women can be referred to or given names under their husband's titles like Iye Ezeji (wife of king of yam) among others.

In the social aspect of culture, the Etche women contribute significantly to the social entertainment. The women were important force to be reckoned with in dance clubs. During the pre-colonial era, there were no televisions, or cinemas houses to entertain people and as such, the various women clubs performed so greatly in entertaining people. In Etche, we have the "Arungu" dance club, Igba dance club and Owu Nba dance club to mention a few. During these performances, the women singers and dancers were presented with gifts in cash and in most cases, some girls are betrothed to their prospective suitors. These dance clubs helped to create good will and promote intra group relations between villages in Etche land. At times, some of these dance clubs honored invitations to neighbouring communities to entertain and teach dance steps during festivals and wrestling which also promoted intergroup relations between Etche and her neighbours. It is interesting to state that while the men engage in the wrestling, the best wrestler or winner is given gifts or a wife as a reward.

Before the advent of western or Orthodox medicine, the people of Etche depended on traditional medicine and its practitioners for their medical needs. In this regard, Etche women played a vital role as traditional midwives. We can therefore appreciate the important services these traditional midwives have rendered to Etche land. Some of the traditional midwives who rendered such useful services to Etche include; Nwuhia Nworgu and Ada Nwaje

The women also contributed to health care system in Etche by providing traditional medicines tapped from herbs and roots. These traditional medicine or drugs were used for the treatment of ailments such as cough, convulsion, fever, stomach aches etc. These herbs such as sheer butter, Elu (the preparation from palm kernel) discovered during the pre-

colonial era by the women are still useful to date. Men also engage in this traditional medicine preparation and administrations (Nworgu, 2019).

In Etche culture, during the pre-colonial era it was believed that a woman does not need to be educated because the life of a woman ends in the kitchen. In the pre-colonial Etche, the aspect of traditional education was very rampant; this kind of education is referred to as informal education where the young ones of a given community are brought up to be useful citizens of that community. This involves sending the child on errands telling stories, teaching skills, respect and obedience for elders, the history of the family, town and Etche land at large. The aim was to develop the child morally and intellectually so as to make him a useful citizen to the town. It has to be noted at this point that traditional education still forms an important aspect of education of the child. In traditional education, Etche women play an important role, the traditional education of a child starts from the home by the mothers. The child especially the daughters were taught how to cook different types of foods, household chores such as washing of plates, and fetching of water while the boys engage in splitting of firewood that would be used for cooking the meals. The girls were taught usefulness of the farm and the mothers introduce the girls to farming technologies of the town. Another contribution of women to traditional education of the child was through useful story telling on life experiences and these stories were motherhood and the women exploited such opportunities to create friendly relations with their daughters. The children were as well taught moral values of respect, obedience, honesty and truthfulness. The women, through that contributed in the upbringing of useful citizens in Etche land. The men on the other hand do not have time for the traditional education. They believe that it's the duty of the women to train up their children they only get involved when financial aspect comes up. In Etche land, the men believe that the simple jobs are duties of women while the tasking ones are meant for them (Victoria, 2019).

In summary, the issue of burden of tradition on women in the pre-colonial Etche land was very predominant. As the men were seen as superior to the women. An average Etche husband could prefer to have more of male children than female because to them raising a woman is a waste of time because she is going to get married and bear her husband's name. But the men would remain, take care of the lands and tend to the various family issues. In an Etche community (Name withheld for security reasons) a woman who could not bear any child for her husband, married another woman for herself and allows any man of her choice to get her pregnant so that the contracted woman can have children for the family. These children would not bear the contract man's name but would bear the name of the woman. It is important to note here that those children would not have any share in the property of the contracted man but they would have an inheritance in their mother's house. The contracted wife would act as a wife to the said woman.

According to Amandem (2019) during the pre-colonial era, the question of male or female child was a sensitive one as male children were preferred, because it was believed that once a man has sons, he would not be challenged in the farm, meetings and also no one would be able to take his properties and he would be seen as a very strong man. Whereas any man that has just daughter would be struggling in every aspect of his life. People would purposely take things that belong to him because he has no back up. And the man would be seen as a weak man. During farming season he would go and hire labour to clear his farm because the work would be too tedious for the girls to handle. Because it is believed that girl child would be engaged in cooking, household chores, farming, planting, keep the livestock which can be used for economic, religious (rituals, burials etc.) and domestic purpose.

Emmanuel (2019) opined that there are activities that are meant for men and there are some meant for women. A man does not do a woman job and also a woman cannot do a man's job. Like climbing trees, wrestling, hunting, cleaning bush, carrying the masquerade among others. During the pre-colonial era, women were seen as temporal properties although the typical Etche father does not sell his daughter when giving her hand out in marriage, rather he gives her hand in marriage and that is why when Etche daughter dies, even in marriage, she is buried in her father's house.

In the aspect of chieftaincy, the traditional stool in all the communities in Etche, no single woman is entitled to any because women cannot handle the traditional symbol called "Ofo" and cannot pour libation and as such cannot take decision for the community. The women were not allowed to be members of "Amala" (village assembly) but can only appear on invitation. Most of the things that happened on the issue that affected women in the pre-colonial era still happen in the post-colonial era.

During the pre-colonial era, the issue of burden of tradition on women was also seen in the aspect of tracing the origin of a child. The origin of any child born in Etche is traced from the fathers side and not mother. They practice the patrilineal descent not matrilineal. This is because women are not seen as bonafied members of the family. This also takes us to what is called residence, which is known as patri-local. Patri-local simply means that one leaves in the father's side not the mothers' side. Etche people believe so much in patri-local and not matri-local which is a burden of tradition on women in Etche society. This does not mean that an Etche child cannot go and visit his or her mother's village or community (Offor, 2019).

Factors that promoted burden of tradition on women in Etche during the pre-colonial era

Low Economic Power of Women

In Etche communities, women have contested in several activities but the economic power is not available, even if they have the economic power, they would not be able to handle the forces that be. By virtue of population of Nigeria in general and Etche in particular the potential female labour force is 50% but the actual value is 31%. The proportion of woman in the formal sector is very minimal. Women are mainly involved in petty trading, selling wares in the market or street hawking. In pre-colonial Etche, a woman has no economic power as all her wealth and power is believed to be her husband's own.

The Nature of traditional Politics

Over the years, there has been a remarkable increase in women's participation in politics in Etche society considering these standards as to number of women who vote and are voted for, yet there is inherently a pronounced level of under representation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts (Nkechi, 1996). From the precolonial era to date, women have always experienced political marginalization and domination which promotes gender inequality and invariably a burden on the part of women. Denying women traditional political powers is as good as disempowering them. Since women were not given equal political powers during the pre-colonial era, it impact negatively on their political rights as they were relegated to the bottom rung of society and could only make inputs in decision making process either through their husbands or male family members.

The women are seen as weaker sex

During the pre-colonial era, women were seen as the weaker sex and as such their opinions were not respected or accepted in the socio-economic and political affairs of the community. They were instead relegated to the background and reduced to the issues that have to do with home making. The women cannot be compared to the men as they are not given equal rights and responsibilities. While the men climb trees to bring palm wine the women tend to the farms and cultivate food stuffs which they in turn take to the market for sale. In the village of "Eketa" in Etche 90% of the population are women just 10% are men. The men see themselves as the stronger sex and so have nothing to do with buying and selling, instead they engage in hunting, tapping of palm wine (Ekwu Elu), and setting traps among others. Since women were not given equal economic opportunity, it impacted negatively on the production capacity of their communities especially during farming seasons.

Religion and Culture

Generally, religion is used as an instrument in defense of a class society and patriarchy. It discriminates against women especially in the pre-colonial Etche where they worship their gods. Women are not allowed to pour libation or perform rituals in festivals or coronations. At times, when the masquerades come out, women are adviced to stay indoors. The Etche culture forbids a woman from being a native doctor, they can be herbalist (native medicine practice) but not native doctor as it is believed that the duty of communing with the gods is solely for the male sex (Uku, 2019).

Land use Laws

The land use laws in Etche that empowers men against women is a major factor that hindered effective women participation in economic and socio-cultural activities. In Etche, women do not have right to ownership of land. During farming season, the married women benefit from portions of land allocated to their husbands or male children. The unmarried ones do not have such opportunities and as such denied farm land. In most cases, the wealthy women buy farm lands for agricultural purposes. Whereas their male counterparts enjoy free access to land, the women live at the mercy of the men which impact negatively on the production capacity of the society since women do more of the cultivations (Offor, 2019).

Conclusion

This study covers burden of tradition on women in pre-colonial Etche. The issue of burden of tradition on women is as old as history itself and cannot be over emphasized. Burden of tradition on women has been an issue that affects every individual as a reason of sex. During the early years of the country Nigeria, women were not given the same entitlement and privileges as the men which gave rise to gender imbalance and questions. The women were discriminated to the point they believed and were groomed in accordance to the fact that they were just suited for jobs like nurturing, that's the reason some women still see being a house wife as an occupation. While men on the other hand believed that they are suited for high profile jobs and decision making and authority and is evident even till date. For example if a man has a manager as a woman he would sometimes prove reluctant to take instructions because he is used to dishing out instructions and vise-visa. In other to achieve the essence of the study, the history of Etche was examined with special reference to the land and people, their economic, political and socio-cultural developments. Etche history that was seen as not relevant in the past was brought to line light in this study.

The Etche culture did not see women as relevant to societal development especially in ownership of lands as they were prohibited. This informed the reason a woman could get herself a (wife) so that she will bear her male children that would inherit lands from her

husband's family. Etche culture is not against polygamy, this culture was promoted because the average Etche man is a farmer and as such needs more hands on the farm. Furthermore, the desire to have plenty male children also promoted polygyny in Etche. The men used the children gotten from their numerous wives as labour on the farm. The implication of the above on contemporary Etche society is recycled poverty which is very alarming in some families and the number of children giving birth by the other wives increases the poverty level of the family. This has ripple effect on Etche society as the number of criminal cases increases per day. The issue of land ownership is a blessing and a curse. On one hand, it improves economic activities while on the other hand if the woman does not have a male child that would inherit the lands, such will be taken away from her at the demise of her husband by relatives and extended family members. The study established that denial of women access to land in Etche has impacted negatively on the production capacity of the society. However, since married women get portions of farm lands from their husband's, it has on the other hand promoted marriage contracts in Etche as virtually every young lady devotes their time towards having a husband that will protect their interest.

The study revealed that the economic potentials of Etche people gave rise to group interactions. The male gender had little role to play in terms of economy. They believed to get involved with the difficult aspects and leave the rest for the women. For instance, it is the duty of the men to clear and prepare the lands for cultivation. Then the women take over till the produce gets to the finished or final stage (market). As Etche people increased in population, there was the need to relate with other groups in other to achieve economic, social, and political goals, since no group can exist in isolation. Such interactions promoted intergroup marriages, trade, socio-cultural activities as well as political ties which became a mixed blessing on the overall existence of women in Etche. The pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras of Etche history showed that even though women tried to be improve themselves and gain economic, political and social status, there were constrains as Etche land is patrichial in nature.

The study has also established that the major factors that caused burden of tradition on women in Etche are: poor level of education, the poor economic power of women compared to their male counterparts, the nature of traditional Etche political structures that prohibits women from leadership, weaker sex status of women, religion, culture and Bio-socio factors.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion and findings of this study, the researchers put forward the following recommendations:

1. The research and study on burden of tradition on women in Etche in particular and Nigeria as a whole should be studied at all levels of education and the study of gender itself should be holistic. There should be an in- depth study of gender imbalance/disparity in all field of study across states irrespective of the size of the audience involved.

2. Furthermore, the socio-economic potentials of both the male and female sex in Etche should be harnessed for high productivity. For instance, Etche community is agrarian in nature and produces foods like plantain, garri (cassava flakes) fufu, (fermented cassava) among others. Equal opportunities and access to land will increase the production capacity.

3. All the various communities in Etche should make deliberate efforts in ensuring they eliminate gender inequality and live peacefully. This can be achieved through putting measures in place such as equal rights to economic, political and socio-cultural activities such as access to lands and land ownerships by both male and female members of the society.

4. The issue of the poor level of education of the female child in Etche should be looked into. It is not enough to send only the males to school while the women stay at home and keeps the homes. The world has gone above the saying that a woman's life ends in the kitchen. These days woman are doing explicitly academically and are coming up very well with the task at home. If the girl child has as much education as the male child the effect of inferiority complex among her pears internationally and nationally will be eliminated. As education they say is the key to societal development.

5. Design appropriate responses to gaps and market failures, including policies to reduce barriers to women entrepreneurship administrative burdens on firms and excessive regulatory restrictions; policies to support firm growth, internationalism and innovation, including professional advice on legal and fiscal matters.

6. Changing the system not the woman should be directed to the people's attitudes, cultural norms and legislation.

7. Encourage, and promote respectful relationships, including the understanding of vulnerabilities of difference in people not minding the gender.

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