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**Dr. Rita A Ngwoke**  
Ph.D. Senior Lecturer,  
College of Law, Igbinedion  
University Okada, Edo State,  
Nigeria

## The place of women in the Okada region

**Rita A Ngwoke**

### Abstract

This work is designed to investigate the ethnographic background of the place of women in the Okada Region. The work shall begin with introducing the people of Okada district in the present-day Ovia North East Local Government Area, as bini people who trace their origins to the ancient Benin Kingdom in history. The work examines women in the region, particularly that they are often subjected to practices that degrade and diminish their humanity at each stage and prevalent traditional practices in some areas, like marriages, divorce, property ownership, intestate succession. The work uses the empirical research methodology, and a self-report questionnaire based on oral evidence is designed to be used in this study which is adopted from about 15 communities such as Okada, Utesse, Egbetta, Uhen, Ogbesse and the other communities that comprised Okada Region within the old Iyekovia district of Benin Kingdom. This work concludes by recommending the way forward for a woman in the realm of a male-dominated world which does not seem very conscious of the subjugation and outright degradation which women go through in the name of native customs despite the encomiums men pour on their beauty and allure.

**Keywords:** women, ownership, region, intestate succession, divorce and property

### Introduction

The inestimable role of woman in the very creation of humanity and its sustenance economically, work-wise socially, health-wise, politics wise, intellectual- wise, peace-wise, -morally and spiritually, not to mention all, can never be estimated in total. The same is the mother, the sister, the guardian, the worker, the counsellor, the peacemaker and the spiritual guide, a woman has generally been the focus of man's natural sexual allure, and nearly all men would do next to anything to have the woman they desire in their arms. It is, however, tragic to note that the same woman is treated in most cultures- even the pious religious- like the banana peel that was discarded carelessly after its content fruit had been used. Her relevance beyond the bed and kitchen has been a challenge to even the world's so-called civilized societies and nations. For all their touted civilization, the British took a long time to allow women to The writer examines the plight of women who have only been subjugated by men and states it loud and clear that given a chance, women can do wonders all around, as already demonstrated amply in all fields of human endeavour so far in the world. In Nigeria, the subjection of girls and women to harmful traditional practices is legendary, and the okada region is no exception vote; the Muslims and even some Christian churches regard women as too 'dirty' to lead prayers before God. This general phenomenon was handed down from one generation to the next with improvements here and there in the ethos of humanity. These cruel, discriminatory, and sometimes dangerous and cruel practices span the female life cycle, from childhood through adolescence to marriage, matrimonial relationship, widowhood, property ownership, intestate successions and old age. The woman is often subjected to practices that degrade and diminish her humanity at each stage. The starting point is the prevalent traditional practices in some areas in the Okada region, like marriage, divorce, property ownership and intestate succession. This can be traced to the 'patrilineal' system of many communities within this region.

The girl child is regarded as a bad investment because she will marry outside the family. The writer will focus on the Okada region women in the Benin kingdom of Nigeria to amplify the often suppressed wails of the distraught woman from the very depths of her heart to seek her release from the dungeon into which the chauvinistic male society has cast her. This work examines the place of women in the Okada region in order to fashion out the way forward for

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Dr. Rita A Ngwoke**  
Ph.D. Senior Lecturer,  
College of Law, Igbinedion  
University Okada, Edo State,  
Nigeria

a woman in the realm of a male-dominated world which does not seem very conscious of the subjugation and outright degradation which women go through in the name of native customs despite the encomiums men pour on their beauty and allure. Ten ladies put together in all ramifications. That is what the true Okada lady is. However, how does her traditional society perceive this rare pearl? With a paucity of apt diction, the writer attempt to describe the place of women in the Okada region.

### **Okada as a name**

Okada is generally known to refer to the system whereby commuters are borne commercially on motorbikes to their destinations. Generally, it is common in West Africa, especially Togo, Benin, Cameroon, and Nigeria. It needs to be made distinctively clear here; however, the name Okada does not refer to this commercial practice. In our context, Okada is a region in the Edo State of Nigeria. Therefore, the work is not referred to Okada as a business, but as a place; for this work, the Okada region shall refer to the following communities; Ogbese, Egbeta, Utese, Iguomo, Okada, Okha, Usen, Udo, Iguobazuwa, Ugbogui, Evbonogbon Utese, Egbetta, Uhen, Ogbesse and Aghanokpe.

### **The Situation**

She is all around but not recognized enough. She is everywhere life is, but taken for granted. The economy thrives on her hard work, but she is deemed dependent and treated subserviently. She is the very fountain of life but deemed rubbish to the very people she sired. That is the woman in general, and that is the woman in the Okada region. While the writer bemoans the woman's plight in general, I must be generous enough to admit that her situation has not been precisely static in all situations. As referred to earlier, the British would at first not countenance the idea of women voting, but the case is no more so. Women vote massively in Britain today, and as she writes, Britain is led by only women –both as Queen and Prime Minister. Pakistan never allowed a woman to lead their prayers of all Muslim countries. In Africa, where the subjugation of women is endemic, women have risen to heights in government, and one needs not go far to pinpoint the present female President of Liberia instead after the country had been shattered by war and one would have expected as a physically strong leader to have been chosen after such a war, to place the country on rationale course. Instead, a woman was chosen! Women now own property in many cultures, not to mention the lawyers, doctors, army officers, police officers, astronomers, great scientists and pastors who have emerged from the fold of women. All this have not been without women's activism and persistent thrusts at their captors. How slowly, there has been a marked improvement in many nations and societies, which one must applaud. From this background, the writer ventures into this work, which places the Okada region woman's traditional plight also in the limelight.

### **Landscape, economy and opportunities**

The Okada region harbours thick trees that line the road and only little signs of the thicker ones in the forest that threaten to thicken if one <sup>[1]</sup> ventures deeper into it. The trees were foreboding in even daylight as some looked like huge giants that had life in them. Tropical Africa boasts of thick forests, but the forests of Edo are simply numbing in their neat

appearance. One cannot help feeling eerily that these trees are either spirits in themselves or have spirits living in them. The virgin forests, which may take centuries for any generation to develop, seem to stretch interminably, promising generations of Okada to come lots of lands to do whatever they want. They also represent the good reasons for the animism of some Edos, including some Okada region women. One would not want to travel along these stretches of the road all alone on even a starry night. The writer could understand the spiritual respect and worship our ancestors offered these forests and, to some extent, why women were not encouraged to go deep into them without men. They seemed to represent huge unseen eyes that had been there since creation and should be acknowledged even if not worshipped the green forests and served as a spiritual rebuke to whoever claimed hunger in the state. The Edo region is the nation's food basket, and the reason is clear. Here is land galore and as fertile as biblical Leah's womb <sup>[2]</sup>. Anything dropped on it is sure to blossom a millionfold. The hot climate is only typical of Africa, and the humid air they breathed would have caused no stir among our ancestors to such extent that they covered their noses occasionally with a handkerchief. The area is more of a savannah by nature. Oil palm seems to grow in the land even when not planted by anyone, sometimes causing litigation among some indigenes against this grassland however is the sharp contrast from plateaus on the higher grounds the vegetation is diverse, ranging from the savannahs to the thick forests. Though rubber plantations seemed to have deforested most of the virgin lands, here is a land virtually telling people something like, "kill a million, a million more would sprout". The rich forest has come back stubbornly, and the evergreen vegetation seems to have defied the trampling of humanity into its reserves. Even some of the communities that have rivers running by them are rich in mangrove and swamp vegetation, all promising more grounds for agriculture, which is the mainstay of the people, just as it is in most African habitations <sup>[3]</sup>. The main crops, including oil palm (and its derivative products cashew, rubber, cocoa, yam, cassava, maize and plantain, sugar cane, groundnuts, tomatoes, thrive commercially. Fruits like oranges, pineapples, coconuts, avocados, green vegetables and lots more grow well there. Animal husbandry, which took care of sheep, cows, rabbits, goats, also flourished <sup>[4]</sup>. The humid and sub-humid nature of the south, which are good for all sorts of crops and the aquaculture of the south, makes the Okada region a depthless, rich pit of unexplored treasures. The Okada region can boast of agro-based resources, and this could be of much interest to foreign investors, thereby engendering more employment, hence betterment to the lives of the people. There are a few, but considering the vast capacities of the region, how many enterprises are there? One can mention some privately-owned enterprises as the Bendel Cement Company, Edo Pharmaceuticals, Bendel Brewery, Okomu Oil Palm Company, the Bendel Feed and Flour Mills, the Nigerian Bottling Company, and perhaps a few more. As the writer had observed earlier, the region needs investors for industrial activities like petrochemicals, fertilizers, cement, ceramics, sugar and fruit juice processing. They can as well venture into rubber processing. As one can see, enough is not being done, and a vigorous investor-chasing drive will have to be undertaken to develop the region and its people. There are still other industrial mineral resources, quartzite, marble, clay, limestone, chalk,

gypsum, gold, petroleum, kaolin and lignite, which serious investors can explore. All these should be exposed to them deliberately to develop the region and its women. Of course, Benin City has many industries, but they are still not enough as more still needs to be done. Timber processing can be increased, with, of course, its concomitant tree replanting for reforestation, more textile mills are needed, a lot more can- processing industries could be sited in the region to feed the whole world with this staple meal which women use to feed billions on earth, especially almost all Africans. Animal feeds too could be produced more and animal farming could become a pervasive business in the region, all to better the lifestyle of the people. Okada region women engage in this a lot. What of the limestone deposits is yawning for more exploration? For energy to bolster the industries, the gas pipelines that run so close can do. A little more attention, and the women of the Okada region would not need to step out anywhere except for curiosity. Since the climate alternates between the wet and dry seasons, seasonal crops could thrive with good planning and more modern farming techniques to ease the laborious processes of traditional farming, which weakens the women and compels them to engage mainly in subsistence farming, could be handy.

### **Brief history of Okada region**

Traditionally, Okada Town or Community belongs to the Iyekovia District of Benin Kingdom. However, before September 1991, this community was not associated with the communities in the old Iyekuselu District, which comprised the present-day Ekiadolor and Ekewan Area. Today Ekiadolor and some parts of the Ekewan area are part of Ovia North East Local Government Area, which has Okada Community or Town as its headquarter. Indeed, the present people of the Okada region were a distinct subgroup in the defunct Ovia Local Government Area made up of the old Iyekovia and Iyekuselu Districts in the ancient Benin Kingdom <sup>[5]</sup>. The old Ovia Local Government Area occupied the entire Western Section of the Benin Kingdom; it shared a common boundary with Ondo State, but its Southern ends had a common boundary with the presence of 'riverine' areas of the old Warn Local Government Area. <sup>[6]</sup> The entire area of the Okada region consists principally part of the Iyekovia and Iyekuselu Districts. The Okada region falls exclusively within the Ovia North East Local Government area. The entire landmass known as Ovia North East Local Government with its headquarters at Okada Town was originally a part of the defunct Ovia Local Government Area bifurcated into two local government areas. On September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1991, General Ibrahim Babangida- led military administration. The entire area is vast, covering a landmass measuring approximately 2,354.24.sq.km<sup>2</sup> <sup>[7]</sup>. The entire Ovia North East Local Government Area (ONELGA) lies in the Rain Forest belt in the country bounded by Ondo State in the West Owan West Local Government Area in the North, Egor Local Government Area in the East and Ovia South-West Local Government Area in the South. According to Mrs Lucy Omagbon, who had told me much, the average population of the Local Government Area is sparsely dense - about 122 107 people who are scattered in 492 towns and villages of the Local Government- Area The people are mainly Bins with a relative mix-up of some other tribes like the Yorubas, Ijaws, Urhobos, Isokos, Igbos, Itshekiri and Effiks. Indeed,

interaction with the local people within this region reveals this fact. In this research, one of the researchers attended the inter-house sports activities of Okha Primary School, and during the various performances, it was revealed that the Ibos and the Effik were as many as the Benin speaking tribes.

### **Her place in agriculture**

It is only to note here that woman in Agriculture is still not recognized enough, and more attention needs to be paid to her in this wise; with the constant migration of men to the cities, agriculture which is the mainstay of the Okada region, the woman is left mainly to the females, but the idea of farming is still perceived as the domain of men. Hence, women hardly receive corporate funding to boost their farming life. Extension officers hardly come to advise women on new techniques and methods. Also, as Mrs Oseizua <sup>[8]</sup> Later helped the writer understand that many lingering customs and traditions still hinder the woman's agricultural potential. For instance, women do not own land due to gender discrimination from long ago in some communities. The Okada woman is no exception. Farming on a large scale is therefore not accessible. Also, there is still the presumption that women are made for the kitchen and food, so men concentrate on cash crops while women are limited to cultivating only food crops. Therefore, even though she excels here, she has great potential in the cash crop areas and needs to be encouraged <sup>[9]</sup>. The Okada region woman needs more loans to get more giant farms, and she can do it because she is already in it. Ownership is, however, denied to women still in many of Okada's communities. Naturally, this limits the extent to which she would want to stretch her wings. Animal husbandry and poultry are both deemed the preserves of men, but when women take over, management tends to be better, said Mrs Osas <sup>[10]</sup>, a lady into commercial farming. She has been blessed to have her husband's consent to own the land she farms and keeps the animals and birds. However, notably, she is only expanding.

### **On her role as a mother**

In her role as a Mother, she is the forbearer or the genesis of humanity; like all other women in the world, the Okada region woman starts her role in society with the very birth of human being after bearing her in her tummy for nine difficult months. She now nurtures the born baby with all patience to survive against all the odds that threaten its very existence. These odds include witches and those who use bad medicine <sup>[11]</sup>. She must protect her child from the worst spiritually, so the Okada woman is very spiritual, depending on her faith. Those who are Christians are Christians, and those who are traditional worshippers are all out for it. Those who are Muslims also hold on tenaciously to their faith. Spiritually, therefore, the Okada region woman is a bulwark of strength in the home. She offers prayers to God or gods to protect her husband and children, and these prayers certainly receive answers, all believe.

### **In her role as a counsellor**

Okada region woman is known as well for her discipline that is why adultery is reduced in most of the community. She does not watch her children grow like a wild bush in the desert; she is constantly interacting with them, sharing life's realities with them so that they may grow into responsible

citizens. When it becomes necessary, she calls on their father to discipline them. The men who are not as close to their children benefit from their wives' counselling role; hence, it affects the desired discipline. They recognize the woman's role as a mother when she gives birth and honours her accordingly. The Okada woman is the fulcrum of existence and life. This is the first place to begin when one wants to assess the place of the Okada woman. She is the fountain of life to the Okadas, and that role can never be played by anyone else as it pertains everywhere. She is the one who takes the risk of struggling between life and death to deliver.

#### **Her role as a peacemaker**

The world knows how women help to prevent war. It is so with the Okada woman too. She is generally very peace-loving and suave in her persuasion. That angry husband only needs to respond when she calls him at dawn. That wrathful son only needs to see his mother approach; that boisterous girl must not be beheld by her mum. The discipline she exudes with her quiet dignity is one role the Okada woman has played and still plays. We were only corrected here and there with laughter where we did not respond as tradition required it. It was indeed a hilarious welcome home.

#### **Her role as traditional healer**

As we rose to leave in the cause of the interview <sup>[12]</sup> an old lady said we should wait for just a second. She walked to me and looked deep into my eyes. I felt a bit nervous as those deep ancient eyes bore holes into mine. Then she said: My daughter, see the fever in your eyes. You may not listen to the old lady, but I will advise that you take much warm water and stop taking cool water. Every day before you sleep, boil the water down. Boiling will keep the germs away. Then, when you wake up at dawn, drink a lot of the boiled water. Try it every day. You will hardly fall ill for me, my dear daughter, if only you would obey me <sup>[13]</sup>.

The writer was not in the best of health but would have loved seeing a medical doctor in the Igbinedion University Teaching Hospital instead. However, as the writer politely thanked her, some women advised me to follow her advice. She was a traditional healer who had a considerable reputation. Many a time, she delivered babies, and no problem ever erupted. Many of the townsfolk flocked to her to remedy all sorts of maladies, and she was sure to help out. She had inherited her knowledge from her mum, they added and encouraged me to just listen to her and follow her instructions if we could. The writer was to discover later that many such women exist in the communities, i.e. Okada region, who carry on the traditional knowledge of old into the modern world, thus playing the role of doctors effectively. Some of them are as follows: traditional healers in the Okada region, Mrs Igbinoba, mama Oghenevo, Mrs Enabulele, Miss Esther Obiri, Mama Dada, Mrs Margaret, and odedede Mrs Obateru Remi, Mrs Patricia Nohumwan, Mrs Oloju, Mrs Omekaro, Mrs Oronsaye, Otasowe Omoiguel.

#### **As breadwinner**

The Okada region woman is simply redoubtable. The economy of the family and home rests more on her shoulders, and she manages it with thrifty deftness even when the man spends the little they have on the other woman because she is the latest. She maintains her

husband's farm as well as hers. She does not eat the bread of idleness. Whether the man has money or not, she makes sure the home is fed. Industrial and Modern level, the Okada woman is just as robust, if not more. She is now a teacher, a banker, a businesswoman, a politician. She is also a lawyer, medical doctor and pastor. The Okada region woman is a traveller who dares across the seas with all dangers and hustles abroad to better her life and others, especially her family. Today too many family houses in the Okada region owe their existence to an Okada lady who braved the odds and went outside for money.

To some extent, this trend has helped to make the traditional issue of women not having their property a matter of less meaning to sound reasoning. After all the hassle for it? Should she not own it? The woman's place in the Okada region is more vibrant than one may think. She trades in everything tradable just to bring food onto the family table. She cooks and sells to bring money home. Intra Nigeria alone may hardly go anywhere and fail to meet an Okada lady. They are everywhere, engaged in all promising endeavours, all to keep body and soul together as well as help someone go to school, travel or set up a business <sup>[14]</sup>.

#### **On her role as a sister**

Having a big sister in the city is more advantageous than having a big brother. This is the expression of many young people that we spoke to. The sisters, they told me, help them more than the brothers. They are more resourceful, more understanding and more sympathetic. Many young men were able to travel overseas more through their sisters than their brothers. Some add or presume a connotation of immorality to the Okada lady's success everywhere. However, the fact simply is the Okada sister is an easy influence on those whom she needs to help her because she is naturally hardworking and self-sacrificing, generous, sensitive to humanity and approachable <sup>[15]</sup>.

#### **Her role in business**

While most traditional Okada women are into farming in the main, many are still in all sorts of business enterprises, ranging from petty trading to industries. The writer's interviews with them elicited that money is always the challenge. Availability of capital, Miss Susan <sup>[16]</sup> told us that is the main bottleneck that affects them adversely. Micro financial help is available, but some of the conditions given are sometimes harsh on the women who are only engaged in small and even big businesses. The microservice loan providers expect them to be more intellectual in their business approach. They made me understand that much as they knew it was good for their business, the demands of some of the microfinance providers implore them to do business proposals and projections, which are most times technically beyond them. To procure the services of the experts still needs the same money which they need. Many a time too, when the services of the experts are sought and gotten, the projections are not realistic as they present what they feel would convince the service providers professionally, not what the actual situation on the ground is. Even they do not understand what is on the paper; they present it eventually. So there is misleading going on between them and the microfinance providers who, in turn, give the loans on terms that apply realistically to them. They accept the loans on any conditions since they need them, and there is no quick way around the prevalent problem that

is pushing them. Then comes the inevitable need to pay back, they are under stress due to the wrong projections in the first place; worse, as, some confessed, sometimes these loans end up in even funeral observation needs, school fees, paying off a pressing debt or even just feeding the home. They sometimes take these loans out of the stressful need to face these urgent challenges, so they only go for them in the guise of using them for business. Their husbands sometimes drive them to take these loans for projects that sometimes fail. Therefore, the welcome presence of the microfinance providers sometimes becomes the albatross around their necks as they struggle to pay or face sanctions that do not exclude police arrest. "Wednesdays are days I dread," Miss Susan <sup>[17]</sup>. told me, "The ones I deal with customarily come around on this day to take some of the money according to the agreement between us. I sometimes have to go to a private lender to get other loans to pay off. Of course, not all use the money from the service providers wrongly, said Miss Florence from Okada:

I had a definite plan to buy more wares in my provision store, and I did precisely that. I would not let anything else take the attention of that money. I knew it was dangerous going for loans to pay funeral bills or school fees, but the intention was to use it for business <sup>[18]</sup>.

The result is that she has expanded her tabletop provisions business- selling a business into a big store that now serves her community well. Even so, payment back is not so easy, she confesses. "I heard to be hard on myself to pay back. It is not easy as the profits only trickle in, and other needs also compete for the same money's attention. It is not easy, but we stick to our principles of not owing anybody, and it is working for me" The generality, however, soon find themselves dodging the micro-service lender or evolving excuses upon excuses till the lenders decide to take to the law or collapse. "We have sometimes contributed to the collapse of the microservice lenders", Odidia, a fishmonger, confessed piously. "After taking the loans, many of us found it hard to pay, so if the service providers are not able to take their money back, they collapse, and this ends up affecting their other clients who might have been saving with them, but it is not our fault, she ended in exonerating herself. Another way out of the financial noose is the associations they form, Diana Uguomo, another petty trader, told the writer. Mainly, these associations are formed to pool their resources and help each member stand financially. They do so by levies that they agree on or stipulated by the founders or earliest who join the association. These contributions are then given out to them as loans in turn. As the experience is, however, some of them cannot pay even their dues regularly, let alone qualify for these loans. When they take the loans here, too, it is still difficult to pay back because they may have used them up as usual in even day-to-day needs of the home, which is centrally the burden of the Okada region woman. It is generally a case of the drowning trying to save the drowning. They can hardly help each other enough. Others, therefore, engage in what is known as; "Esusu" which is from the Yoruba language, meaning pooling and sharing, It is in several forms, the writer was told, In one case, somebody or entity owns the business of taking an agreed amount from the client every day. Therefore, the agent goes around every day to take the

money while they are in their shops or other business locations; at the end of the month, the owner of the Esusu business typically takes a percentage which is most times a day's contribution. Then the contributor has money in relative bulk to do something meaningful or plough back into the business that produced the money. Another way is the communal style whereby they all contribute and take the loans in rounds. A group of about 40, for instance, may keep helping one another in this manner till the last person gets her share. Except for business infractions here and there, as mentioned, they use these monies to improve their businesses. The Okada region woman needs just a bit of attention economically. Less inhibition as a woman, and she can rule her world.

### **Things forbidden in okada region**

Mrs Endurance Osawe and Mr Nicholas Osawe <sup>[19]</sup>. They were both expressive about the native laws and customs that some of the illegal practices in the Okada region included ensuring that a bottle of oil is forbidden from being spilt, washing of plates and/clothes outside is forbidden. However, they added quickly that this position has changed since the inception of the university in the town. Traditional medicine practices, including charms, are forbidden, especially placing charms at junctions. In traditional diction, this system is known as Isobo; as it pertains to many societies, fighting is taboo, but in the Okada, fighting in the marketplace is taboo. One may engage in insults, but not outright fights, which can lead to banishing the person from the region. Then fighting a married woman is unpardonable to the Okadas. If found guilty, the offender would pay dearly for it. Unlike some communities of the world, dogs are forbidden, and like some others, house pigs are also not allowed in the Okada region. As pertains virtually everywhere on earth, suicide is a taboo in Okada. Adultery is not expected to exist, just as it is in most communities of the world. Fornication is not applauded in Okada, but at worst, it must not happen on bare ground without a mat or cloth. It is taboo among the Okadas. As well, they informed the writer, one may not have sex in the bush, not with even one's wife. It is deemed spiritual pollution of the land with grave consequences expected from the gods; bad medicine for fighting is also not tolerated in Okada. At this, the writer wondered. Wars had been part of the history of the Benin kingdom. They had fought even the British when they tried to colonize them. Were the warriors not using charms to fight as expected from the traditional fighter? Were the kings not supposed to be mighty in battle, even spiritually? If they had powers to fight, how could they have powers to fight to be taboo? One would have to find out. Needless to state, as it is so almost everywhere, poisoning is a capital crime in Okada. One dares not kill oneself or poison another. Life is sacrosanct and must be protected at any cost. Of course, just as it is worldwide, one should rather rap a lady, not rape her. It is a taboo and crime to have sex with a girl or woman without her consent. Marital rape, however, does not exist among the taboos. They made me understand that these rules are tailored towards good behaviour and a healthy community; while some were punishable directly, their violation is expected to invoke spiritual sanctions such as sleeping sickness and other ailments.

**Women that have achieved in the Okada region**



**BARR. OMOSEDE IGBINEDION**  
Member House of Representative



**BARR. (MRS.) LUCY OMAGBO**  
Chairman Ovia North East Local Government



**MRS. ENOHUMAN OLOJU**  
Bone Setter (Egbeta)



**MRS. COMFORT EDIAE**  
Traditional Healer (Egbeta)



**MRS. COMFORT EDIAE**  
Business Woman

## Marriage

Marriages differ slightly in terms of processes and expectations; marriage is generally conducted under the supervision of the men through the assistance of the women "the men are the government of the house/Home" <sup>[20]</sup>. The dowry is usually paid by the partners of the groom, not the man. However, each family in the Okada region has its way of conducting its marriage. The current bride price is N24:00 as tagged by the past Oba of Benin, who was in charge of everything in the Benin kingdom <sup>[21]</sup>. If the money is not complete, the suitors may convert the others into cowries and pay. The former Oba who just passed on tried to change the bride price to N200:00 (two hundred nairas), but this wish never saw the light of day <sup>[22]</sup>. We may, however, take a look at marriage in some of the communities. The writer was to learn later that in the Iguomo community, marriage is conducted according to the Benin native laws and customs. In ancient times, the father looked out for a girl for his son to marry. As pertains elsewhere in the world where marriage is given weighty regard, the father undertakes all the investigations and arrives with the findings. This means he checks the family's background to know much about the type of family they are marrying into, as to whether they are good or bad. In turn, the father of the bride pays homage to the groom's father and gets to know them the more. Finally, both families undertake the marriage blessing ceremony. In the days of yore, women were always seen off to the groom's house, but it is not so today <sup>[23]</sup>. In the Uhen community <sup>[24]</sup> the marriage pattern is structured on the general Benin traditions, which go as follows: The two families must be made known to each other through the process known as an introduction. This occurs in the family home of the bride-to-be. She is then and there invited and questioned about who the visitors are; when she identifies who they are satisfactory, the day ends on that note. After the introduction day, another day is given to the suitors to come and pay the dowry. After the dowry is paid, the woman still stays for about one week in her father's house; the reason for the one week stay after the dowry is for the father and mother to advise their daughter on proper behaviour and good values, when the weekends, some women in her family see her off to her husband's house. The man provides the women with the following items: one hen, drinks, kola nut and food. It is understood that in case of any issues arising in the marriage, these women would be called to settle the dispute.

On the issue of whether women had several husbands, the answer was yes and no with the explanation that if you marry a woman without paying dowry, then she is not yet your wife, so another man may take her. Also, in cases of death, a woman may remarry.

Unlike the Uhen, in the Olumoye community <sup>[25]</sup> marriage is conducted according to the customs of the person getting married. This translated that Benin's conduct according to Benin native's laws and customs, the Urhobo, according to Urhobo native laws and customs and the Yorubas according to their native laws and customs. However, we gathered that the Urhobo Marriage process is almost similar to Benin. In this case, after the introduction, they call for dowry payment that same day. After it is paid, the woman later joins the man in the evening, and some family members see her off. Peculiar in this case, the manslaughters a he-goat close to the woman's leg before she enters. Also, he must offer them "tummy fish" used in preparing a special delicacy called

"owo" and "starch". If he is an outsider, they will cook for him, but he is not entertained if he is an indigene. In the Ogbese, Okha and Ugbogui community, in the Olumoye tradition, every tribe conducts itself according to its customs. The Benin, Esan etc., do so according to their native law and customs.

Among the Egbetas and Utese's people, one sees a variation that does not pertain to the above-mentioned. There are two types of introductions; the first is seeing only the direct father and mother by the proposed suitor. Then the second introduction is general. Here, one is given the requirements to first meet with father and mother. Unlike the others, where the general introduction and payment of the dowry are made first, and the woman is seen off to her husband's house! This is where the variation is stark. Other communities like the Iguobazuwa <sup>[26]</sup> Moreover, the writer gathered Udo go according to general Benin native laws and customs.

## Divorce

It is a community- to community affair when it comes to divorce, but generally, it is not very common. Among the Uhen, Okha, Usen, and Uguobazuwa, it is not common, but it happens. Here, divorce is caused as a result of infidelity domestic violence. Also, it was gathered that women eloping are not uncommon, and the same leads to automatic divorce. Sometimes, the mangoes to the farm without quarrelling with his wife but only to return to the shocking realization that she had eloped. However, in the Olumoye community, divorce is less and occurs only in the few cases of adultery or spousal deaths. Obese and Udo communities are by far the strictest on divorce. It is hardly considered. Once the dowry has been paid, one cannot divorce easily. There must be a severe or proper reason for divorce. In cases of adultery or use of "bad medicine", however, the man may divorce his wife. The Egbert and Utese communities are akin to the Ogbese <sup>[27]</sup>. Except for adultery over which there is no negotiation for consideration, any other issue can be deliberated and settled by the families. Among the Iguobazuma, divorce is less broached except for a few isolated cases. Marriage is accorded the highest standard of stability and sanctity here. Among the Udos, divorce is not common, but in cases of childlessness, either on the man or women or even domestic violence, one may consider it. Here, one sees domestic violence plays a role in divorce as against the other communities were beating up one's wife is taken for granted, and the man only needs to be pleaded to take it easy on her.

## Property ownership

This used to be a challenging issue for women to own property in the traditional setup, but the good news is that the situation has evolved to an appreciable level. However, it differs from community to community <sup>[28]</sup>. In the Udo community, the answer to my question was, yes; women could own property through their efforts, but with the consent of their husbands in the community. Most married women are landladies. Among the Iguobazuma, too, the writer gathered that they too many with the consent of their husbands owned property. However, some husbands are known to refuse, and some wives go-ahead to procure such property secretly. It may spell grave consequences for her marriage; in the Egbeta, Utese, Okha and Usen communities <sup>[29]</sup>, it is no different. She may build her own house but only

with her husband's consent, without which there could be severe repercussions, including possible divorce. In Ogbese and Iguobazuwa, it is not so when one builds without the required consent of her husband; it may only be referred to the families to resolve when she is found out. The Olumoye woman may own property, some women own property bought by themselves. However, if the man tells the woman not to own property, the woman cannot though some still go-ahead to buy the property. Among the UHEN, women may own properties through hard work, and their husbands do not have problems. Here, it is permissible and so interesting that the woman, instead of maybe the owner of the house, not the man, and in cases of separation, the man has to leave the house for the woman. Among the Iguomon, too, women can own property. In ancient times it was not so, However, today, many married women own property with the consent of their husbands.

### **Intestate succession**

This is the method used to distribute property owned by a person who dies without a valid will. This method of succession is standard in most traditional communities in Nigeria, and the okada region is not different.

One may say the situation here is improving, albeit slowly; as usual, it differs from community to community. Among the Iguomon<sup>[30]</sup> A woman may inherit. The present oldest woman in mentioned community's father never had any male child. She inherited everything. The custom of inheriting the widow by his brothers is not practised in this community. It is forbidden. In the Uhen community, it is not precisely so. In a polygamous setting, the family shares the property equally among the children of the various wives. Intestate succession also includes inheriting the widow. She will continue bearing children either for the son, in cases of the father's death or for the brother in cases of the death of his brother unless the brother says he does not want the woman, in which case, a sacrifice is performed to free the woman. If the woman instead refuses the marriage, they will say that their ancestors forbid, but if the man refuses, there is no problem because a woman has no right; she would be forced to leave the house and property without anything. It happens more in wealthy families. Here, things are arranged: After the father's death: the first son must marry the woman. Sometimes if the first son is not married, he will be asked to start with the woman. Recently, a woman refused, and she was forced to marry the other son; in the end, the woman gave birth to the richest son. In the son's death, the widow marries one of the brothers; if they all refuse, she will continue to stay in the family house. If she were the one who refused to marry any of the brothers, then she would be sent away from the family house and not allowed to date another man. Their forefathers instituted this law because "there was and is no trust in women<sup>[31]</sup>." In Olumoye, the man's children inherit, not the woman, but if the woman had no male child, she could still inherit. In Ancient times, yes, presently, no, in monogamy, yes, it is the first son who has the whole property, but in a polygamous home, the property will be divided among the various wives and children. In this community, they have more landladies; all their husbands are late. In Ogbese<sup>[32]</sup> it is the first son or daughter who inherits. However, in the polygamous setting, the properties are shared among the children of the various wives. In cases where the woman is without male children, the property belongs to the female children. In Obese, if the

wife is still young, they can give her to the late husband's brother, but if the brothers refuse, the community will free the woman after conducting a sacrifice. If the woman said no, she would perform the sacrifice and be made to leave the community. In the Egbeta and Utese communities, the woman does not easily inherit her father. She may only get a parcel of land or farmland. The building belongs to the male child. However, if there is no male child, the female children will take everything. In the aspect of the chieftaincy title, it will go to the man's family; her power is in her husband's house. If issues are being decided in her father's house, she cannot be included, but in her husband's house, she can get an inheritance if the man is no longer in existence, but this development is owed to modernity. In this case, a sacrifice is performed to free the woman from the dead man so that she may continue her life and take care of the children. In Iguobazuwa, it is starkly different. If the woman is the only child of her parents, she takes over their property. In cases of male children, however, they inherit everything. Married women may, however, inherit after the death of their husbands. Whatever belongs to the children belong to them. Strictly, however, inheritance of the wife is not practised here. She does not get married to the dead husband's brothers. As pertains in the Iguomon community, it is not practised here. "If a woman does not have a child for the man, she cannot be yours and cannot inherit." In cases of all female children, they may inherit. In polygamous homes, it is shared among the wives. Among the Udo community<sup>[33]</sup> too, it is not allowed that the man owned the home. A childless woman is as good as she was not married in the first place. She cannot own property because, by the time she gets married to another man, the things will automatically go to him, so he would be claiming what he had not laboured for. Also in Udo Community;

- A married woman with female children can be considered because of the children, and whatever property is willed to the woman would be in the children's name, not the woman's. She manages on behalf of the children, and when the children are of age, the whole property goes to them.
- Concerning married women with male children, the male children take the lion's share and whatever is left is what the woman inherits. It is taboo in Udo culture and tradition for the brother to marry the widow just as it is with the Iguobazuwa and Iguomon.

### **Conclusion**

The Okada region woman is of non-negotiable importance in the region's development as she traverses every facet of the region in terms of life, economy and politics, even peace and can simply not be ignored. Her roles in the region are too innumerable to tabulate. Many decades after Beijing, one would have expected to see women placed on their deserved platform of respect and equality despite the constitutional provisions; unfortunately, however, this is still not the case in some communities within the region. In the Okada region of Nigeria, women are still treated shamelessly with shameful subservience. Women may still not inherit their parents; The Nigerian constitution and other relevant instruments have done much to institute better laws. However, the Nigerian is usually a traditional spirit, so most of these practices still exist, notwithstanding all the legal interventions.

The burden of this article is to stir the embers once more and make sure nobody presumes it is all well. By using interviews and literature existing on these issues, the writer has endeavoured to represent the situation as it still acknowledges the piddling progress made so far. I call them piddling because they are not sufficient. More legal enactments are needed but not only the laws' existence; we mock ourselves when we spend time, energy, and resources to enact laws only to leave them as invalids or like painted ships that do not move. The challenge this article is throwing is to all Nigerians who lay any claim to having some tinge of conscience. It is not enough to claim we are conscientious when the sufferings of others do not seem to impact us. We must rise and save the oppressed.

There is no better religion than loving one's neighbour. Women have played and still play critical roles in sustaining us all. Why then do we treat them as second class citizens? The writer is hungry for a change. In this article, we have tried to point out how urgently the rural folk need more education. Some live in another world and have not even heard of the legal changes. Since most rural women do not go to school, it is not easy helping them know what their new rights are, let alone insist on them. This article intends not to be just another academic paper. It is a clarion call which is just the beginning. The woman has been oppressed from eternity; it must not continue to eternity. I have borrowed literature depicting some of the successful people the Okada region has produced from all angles. It is heartwarming to see us make strides all over the world in all aspects. This means we can conquer the world if we all put our shoulders to the wheel. Free the woman, and the whole world will be free. Do not inhibit the woman, and she can take you to the moon. I hope that this article will remain a lasting torchbearer in the struggle to lend more respect to women, especially in the Okada region.

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