Gender Victimization: A Study of Widowhood Practices Among Ogu People of Lagos

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Abstract
Badagry is the first community to receive the Christian religion in Nigeria. For this, every good reason exists to suppose that its coming into early contact with the missionaries should have caused the Ogu people to acquire a healthier understanding of fair play in the context of widowhood practices. Regrettably, they seem to respond more slowly to change in their attitudes to widows. Thus, despite the overwhelming presence of Christian relics in the ancient town of Badagry, traditional customs such as wife inheritance and widowhood rites have continued to appear significantly associated with violence against which women are not well-protected. “Gender Victimization: A Study of Widowhood Practices” among Ogu People of Lagos is the focus of this study. Quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted for the study. Thus, five in-depth interviews and three focus group discussion instruments were used to collect primary data, which were used to complement quantitative data. Although quantitative data were subjected to univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses, qualitative data were cleaned, reorganized into themes and analyzed. The study found that much as the Ogu people of Lagos acknowledge the position of the scriptures on society’s non-criminal relation with widows, they still believe that their culture comfortably drives the greater proportion of their widow-friendly interactions. This study suggests that the adoption of cultural best practices in handling women and their peculiar issues will tone down violence in customary widowhood practices and enable women who lost their husbands in circumstances beyond their controls access community-based support.

Keywords
Ogu, widowhood practices, community-based support, missionaries

Introduction

The need for a change in African customs militating against widows must be seen in the context of the principle that equality means equality of opportunities, of rights and responsibilities for humanity, for the good of the society as a whole (Oke, 2001, p. 56)

To stimulate this desired change, the challenges of widows in Lagos, Nigeria, and elsewhere in Africa require a systematic study. Rather than seeing African culture being instrumental in the woes that disable women, especially widows, it provides afflicted African women with significant soothing resources for recovery from the violence inherent in motherhood and the excruciating pains of widowhood. Recognizing that widows cannot be meaningfully empowered to live full productive lives in the absence of reliable data, African widows, irrespective of their ethnic locations will need to be reconnected to policy attention by research.

Okeke-Ihejirika (2004) and Opara (2000) acknowledged that marriage and motherhood are priority issues in the aspiration of a traditional African female. Although marriage redesigns the demographic profile of a woman to access motherhood resources, unexpected or even foreseen deaths of husbands causes widowhood to traumatize motherhood with agonizing experiences, which are not peculiar to African women as wives. If research findings are not made to link the realities of African culture with their women who are in the throes of widowhood agony, these women may remain among the most vulnerable and destitute women in the world. Granted that mistaken belief about the positive impact of indigenous tradition on African women is pervasive, justified true belief that could be gleaned from research will emerge to invade the hypocritical foundations of these blatant misconceptions and oust them. For this reason, research into the nexus between widowhood and African culture is the intervention that has been missing and now seriously required.

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In the absence of the foregoing and other associated reasons, in patriarchal traditional Africa, women will continue to be valued only in relation to men (Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 1992) and may remain eternally vulnerable to being presumed guilty of their husbands’ death until proven innocent by undergoing various rigorous and demoralizing aspects of mourning (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1997). Thus, in the context of widowhood, marriage may continue to be an adventure fraught with danger and rewarded with little pleasure (Ogunyemi, 1996) especially for women, if research is not enabled to explain the critical connection of culture, women, and widowhood.

Nothing that could be scientifically proven keeps widowhood travails within the confines of African continent. In 1900, for instance, evidences exist establishing that Western widows struggled hard to survive although facing overwhelming odds that did not reduce until 1908 when an Old Age Pensions Act gave them small pensions (Lambert, n.d.). Before the advent of White missionaries in Africa, widowhood had already developed a firm root in their system. Therefore, the consequences of the decline in the level of support following the demise of husbands could be disastrous (Nystedt, 2002; van Poppel & Joung, 2001), not only for African women but also for women anywhere in the world.

It is a paradox that rather than applying the spiritual option prescribed by the colonialists as an antidote for the pressures of widowhood on African women, they opted for what Dribe, Lundh, and Nystedt (2006) identified as five alternative strategies opened to widows in preindustrial rural context of Western Europe. Among these was that children were responsible for taking care of their parents in old age (Lundh & Olsson, 2002). Besides the children, the responsibility to take care of the old and weak fell on the community in which they were registered (Lundh, 2004; Montgomery, 1951). The colonialists met these practices already guiding African conduct. They regrettably could not define them as legitimate traditional mechanisms probably because they did not conduct with their cure-all panaceas for African widowhood impasse.

It is probably in recognition of the deception inherent in the colonial spiritual antidote for African widowhood dilemma that “we cannot use the scripture to legitimize the non-inclusion of femaleness in the norm of humanness” (Oduyoye, 1995, p. 181) because there is a myth in Christian circles that the church brought liberation to the African woman, especially in the absence of concrete or continuing examples (Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 1992). It is only in this context that the request of Oduyoye and Kanyoro’s (1992) for the actual difference made by Christianity for African women other than its attempt to foist the image of a European middle-class housewife on an Africa, which had no middle class that earned salaries or lived on investments becomes remarkably enlightening. Therefore, it is by reconstructing the pseudo character that has been maliciously imposed on the wholesomeness of African culture that indigenous scholars can escape from the academic web in which they have been viciously enmeshed as aptly captured by Adesanmi (2011). Therefore, African scholars cannot continue to romanticize with the distorted image of Africa from Western imagination and remain eternal students of Eurocentricism.

 Granted that widows constitute a significant proportion of female population in both developed and developing societies of the world, widowhood is markedly a challenge of elderly women in the West. In Africa, more victims of widowhood exist among young women and child mothers due probably to war, ignorance, disease, or poverty. Although much of research on widows has to a large extent been dealing with widows’ living conditions and strategies after losing the spouse (Bloom, 1991; Gunnlaugsson & Gardarsdottir, 1996; Johansen, 2004; Kertzer & Laslett, 1995; Moring, 2002; Wall, 2002), comprehensive research into the dimensions of widowhood practices that expose African widows to diverse criminal acts remains intensely inadequate. It is against this background that this article committed itself to filling a gap in knowledge by providing answers, using the experiences of the Ogu people of Nigeria, to the following questions: (a) What are the different widowhood practices among the Ogu women in Lagos, Nigeria? (b) To what extent do these widowhood practices criminally affect widows? and (c) How best can women trapped in widowhood regain the control of their lives?

Source of Data and Method
The study was carried out among the Ogu people in Lagos, Nigeria. The Ogu people are the Egun-speaking people of Badagry in the south-west of Nigeria. Although their presence too is noticed in some parts of Ogun state, majority of Ogu people domicile in Lagos. Apart from their dialect that does not go any close to any dialect of the Yoruba language, the Ogu people subscribe to most of the cultural orientations of the mainstream Yoruba people. Although the Yoruba people believe that they migrated from Ile Ife, the Ogu people are united about their historical linkage with the Republic of Benin. The Ogu women are ideal for this study because Badagry is historically the first geographical part of Nigeria to receive Western influence through education and religion. For these significant reasons, the root of widowhood practices is expected to have long been weighed down by the influence of aggressive evangelism and education, if these mechanisms were practically effective as they had been advertised before experience.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data gathering. For quantitative data, the questionnaire method was used and for qualitative, in-depth interview and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used for the collection of complementary data. To make the sample size representative of the whole population in the study area, random sampling technique was used. Badagry town has seven quarters
out of which three—Posukoh, Boekoh, and Ahovikoh quarters were randomly selected. However, being the most thickly populated area of Badagry area, seven quarters (Ajara Iluda, Ajara Tako, Ajara Vetho, Ajara Topa, Ajara Tande, Agelasho, and Ajara Aganmaden) were randomly selected from Ajara part of Badagry. From the 10 quarters that were randomly selected for this study, 22 respondents were randomly selected from each to give a total sample size of 220. Copies of a questionnaire were administered on each of the 220 respondents.

**Data Collection**

This study is based on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches. In addition to empirical data collected through in-depth interviews, FGDs, and survey in Badagry, available secondary materials were reviewed for related information. Two hundred twenty Ogu men and women were randomly selected from Badagry in Lagos State to participate in the study. Three graduating students of Sociology Department of the Lagos State University, comprising two ladies and a man were engaged as assistants who conducted the in-depth interviews, FGDs, and administered copies of the questionnaire with the researcher. These assistants were rigorously trained on the techniques of interviewing people in ways that will prevent respondents from holding any vital information back, taking due cognizance of ethical expectations. Pre-interview practice sessions were held to avail the research assistants the competence to administer questionnaire, handle tape recorders, and transcribe their contents. These orientation exercises took 5 days. In all, out of 220 copies of a questionnaire that were administered, 210 were retrieved, correctly completed, and analyzed for the study.

For qualitative data, five in-depth interviews were conducted to elicit complementary qualitative information about the challenges which widows faced in Badagry, Lagos state. Participants were selected across varying socio-economic backgrounds within the study sites. The survey covers the extent of the influence of widowhood practices on the life chances of women who lost their husbands in circumstances beyond their control in Lagos state. Consent forms were administered to all the participants before the interview. The researcher safely keeps tapes, consent forms, and notes taken during the in-depth interview.

**Data Analysis**

**Quantitative Data**

Returned questionnaires were subjected to thorough editing. Prior pre-coding of the questionnaire facilitated entry and analysis. Quantitative data collected from this survey were subjected to analysis. This involves an examination of the distribution of the respondents according to particular characteristics. This decision is informed by the assumption that responses of individuals in society to social stimuli are, to a large extent, determined by their personal characteristics as well as those of the environment in which they live their daily lives and experience the criminal widowhood practices.

**Qualitative Data**

The data from in-depth interviews were transcribed and translated verbatim. Analysis involved developing a system of indexing the data into sets of categories or codes that provided structure to the data based on the research objectives and the topic included in the question guide. A qualitative ZY-index software package for ethnographic data was used for textual data analysis. Some striking expressions were used as ethnographic summaries to make the report richer and more robust. Data from qualitative survey have been extensively used in this article to validate quantitative analysis where and when desirable.

**Results**

**Socio-Demographic Variables**

Data on Table 1 show that 65.7% of the respondents are male Ogu people whereas 34.3% are female Ogu respondents. Of these, 7.2% of the respondents were aged 20 and below; 19.6% of the respondents were within the age brackets of 21 to 15, 26 to 30 (26.3%), 31 to 35 (44.5%), and 36 years and above (2.4%). In terms of the marital status of the respondents, 69.7% were single, married (21.2%), divorced (3.0%), and separated (6.1%). (That the highest proportion of unmarried Ogu people are respondents in this study has significant implications for the sustenance or otherwise of widowhood practices being studied). Concerning educational qualification, 27.8% of the respondents hold the Higher National Diploma, National Certificate in Education (27.3%), First Degree (15.6%), Ordinary National Diploma (14.6%), West African School Certificate (9.8%), and University Second Degree (4.9%). These imply that the population studied is not educationally backward. Respondents are engaged in diverse occupations as 42.9% were students, civil servants (39.5%), other occupations (12.7%), and traders (4.9%). More 60.0% of respondents are Christians, traditional believers (25.0%), and Muslims (15.0%). In spite of Badagry being the first point of contact with the missionary, that a quarter of the study sample still stick with traditional belief shows that, widowhood practices in their reformed version, will come alive sooner or later, as society recognizes that civilization is the advanced stage of cultural development.

**Ogu Women, Cultural Identity, and Widowhood Practices**

Table 1 reveals that the Ogu people do not wholly accept that they are Yoruba people. Just as 83.3% of the respondents averred that they are Ogu people, only12.4% acknowledged
that they are Yoruba people. One significant point that could be inferred from this is that there may be a tinge of cultural conflict between the majority who assert their ethnic independence and the minority which identifies with mainstream Yoruba culture. The Yoruba people believe in fairness. Traditionally, widowhood practices were intended to enable the widow re-establish her love for her deceased husband as well as show commitment to his surviving family members. It was from this background that the sentiments which drive wife inheritance developed. If a greater proportion of the Ogu people assert that they are not Yoruba people, then the need to harmonize the people’s perception with acceptable normative pattern of the African people is urgent. In everyday interaction of human beings, offenders and victims emerge. Some offences may not be deliberate, therefore, in the light of a new knowledge of the norm, misconceptions may be challenged and a truly African widowhood framework may evolve for use throughout the continent to regulate African interaction with African widows.

Respondent A observed,

Though some violent widowhood practices once existed among the Ogu people, with widespread consciousness and enhanced power of negotiation by women, the impact of the practices on the lives of widows has remarkably diminished. They are being accorded their human status even as a handful of older Ogu people still remain insistent that the old ethos, especially gender relations must subsist. (December, 2012)

Consensus of FGDs

Information from FGDs reveals that components of culture such as tradition and religion play very significant roles in gender interaction among the people. Thus, decisions on widowhood rites and wife inheritance are primarily driven by benefiting brothers-in-law who rely on community elders for sustenance. Some aspects of widowhood practices we met on ground as children were truly violent. Today, the awareness is high that the woman whose husband has died remains an Ogu citizen whose misfortune we must all collectively manage or share, even if vicariously. This is the positive way our community has continued to propagate the dictum embraced and appreciated by all Africans that we are our brothers’ keepers (October, 2012).

Respondent B,

I cannot lie. I am a born again Christian. Regardless of whatever anybody may want to make everybody else believe, widowhood practices exist. They are not always demonic as they are being portrayed. Though widespread information has it that some families still secretly force widows to become wives of the brothers of their late husbands, this never happened to me. Rather than hostility, what my children and I have enjoyed from my husband’s family has been the extension of the love my husband showed to us while alive. This is not to say my experience is a good representative sample of what Ogu widows encounter in widowhood; I am saying that widowhood practices depend on families and their belief systems. In my particular circumstance, the relations of my late husband have been exceedingly helpful to me and my children. Apart from the physical exit of my husband which unleashed lots of emotional trauma on me, I feel very seriously that members of his family have provided adequately for the needs of my family. (December, 2012)

Attitudes Toward the Prevalence of Widowhood Practices

This section examines attitudes and prevalence of widowhood practices among the Ogu people of Lagos. To
determine the extent of the danger inherent in these practices and attitudes toward widows and widowhood, a number of questions were put to respondents. First, they were asked the common name that women who have lost their husbands are known by in their cultural environment, 65.7% male respondents said it is “oshosi.” Whereas 34.3% female respondents know them as “oshosi,” 7.0% female respondents know them as “opo” the name which the mainstream Yoruba people generally call widows. “Oshosi” is not a derogatory label. Widows did not see anything stigmatizing in being called “oshosi” because they see it as a mere dialectic translation.

Second, respondents were asked to mention the rituals which a woman who loses her husband’s experience, before his eventual burial, among the Ogu people of Lagos, 95.6% of male respondents said the woman scrapes her hair and stays indoors for 40 days, 4.4% male respondents said the woman scrapes her hair and stays indoors for 3 months; 93.0% female respondents said the woman scrapes her hair and stays indoors for 40 days, 7.0% female respondents said the woman scrapes her hair and stays indoors for 3 months. There is a basic agreement among the Ogu people that hair scrapping for widows is symbolic, even if discrepancy exists in the number of days they remain indoors. This and discussions in the FGDs revealed that widows are mandatorily made to observe some days of mourning in the house. This period might appear unduly long and injurious to widows’ socio-economic present and future, the profound intimacy that the couples had established before the exit of the husband requires a period of sober reflection for the woman to know which of the man’s precious cultural preferences, pet projects, and commitments to children and significant others she has to discard, continue to nurture and sustain.

In-depth interviews conducted with Ogu widows at the different sites revealed that the clandestine ways in which some family members of some widows’ husbands present all of these rites often initially make the widows develop a perception of hostility. Mourning is spiritual. It is a kind of cultural fasting. Although the consensus among respondents reflects the conclusion that a widow should be allowed to exercise the freedom to decide for how long she wants to mourn her husband, they detested the way power relations between men and women have come to be constructed. The way it is made it appear likely that in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa; almost every woman who loses her husband, at some point in her life, has the expectation of experiencing one form of cultural violence or the other. This cannot represent the objective truth about the operation of the African culture because it has a human face to women, particularly widows. At some levels, the substance of culture is domesticated on the basis of clans and families. Respondents are united in their submissions about the potential fears of women who are yet living with their husbands and nurse the unhealthy expectation of becoming cultural victims of widowhood on the demise of their husbands. It is in this context that the perception of women about widowhood practices needs to be reconstructed for clear comprehension, to rescue prospective widows from the web of cultural panic in which they are enmeshed.

Respondent C observes,

It is not sure if all Ogu people are willingly in support of the modern demand to discontinue widowhood practices. What appears objectionable in the practices is the dimension of violence imported into them by some disgruntled individuals. Though, everybody gives the impression that all is well with the clarion call for the discontinuance of widowhood practices in public, in reality, how are we sure that all these calls are sincere? If they are, then who are the criminals who committed the crimes that allegedly characterize widowhood practices? Are they ghosts? Of course, they are my Ogu compatriots! I will only challenge public policy to make a specific pronouncement on the need to criminalize any form of hostility against widows under the cloak of widowhood practices in society and prosecute whoever victimized widows under whatever guise. (January, 2013)

Another in-depth interview respondent (D) lamented,

How can harmless practices be labeled and made to seem obnoxious cultural practices all because they are strange to the labelers? Long after the death of some men, their children get married in the presence of the members of both couples’ extended families. There is really nothing perilous about widowhood practices in Africa. These practices are in the interest of the deceased family. Widowhood practices further reinforce the relationship that was consummated between the two families of the couples during marriage, on the demise of either of the spouses. (February, 2013)

**Perspectives That Propagate Abysmal Widowhood Practices**

To the question whether wife inheritance is an established cultural issue among the Ogu people, 2.6% of male respondents and 8.9% of female respondents said yes, whereas 97.4% of male respondents and 91.1% female respondents said no. On whether wife inheritance has reproductive health risk, 7.7% male respondents and 7.7% female respondents said yes, whereas 92.3% male respondents and 92.3% female respondents said no. This tacitly implies that Ogu people subscribe to wife inheritance. In spite of the people’s consciousness of the existence and widespread nature of AIDs pandemic in contemporary societies, the respondents’ responses gave expression to the lopsided conviction that wife inheritance, whether it is acceptable to non-Africans or not, is a phase of their tradition that has refused to be blown away by the seeming powerful wind of globalization. On whether women who lost their husbands still concede to widow inheritance, 7.4% male respondents and 14.3% female respondents said yes and 92.6% male respondents and 85.7% female respondents said no. The percentage that said no appeared intimidating. However, this might be the perception of individual widows for whom no one, from among their deceased husbands’ retinue of brothers, has readily signified interest to inherit.
Respondents were also asked whether wife inheritance is a gender-respecting culture, 3.9% of male respondents and 8.3% of female respondents said no, whereas 96.1% of male respondents and 91.7% of female respondents said yes. From the foregoing judgment, it is clear that widowhood practices among the Ogu people may not easily give in to the wishes of the detractors of African culture. If in spite of all the claims of hostility, majority of male and female respondents adjudged wife inheritance as a gender-respecting culture, then there is something in widowhood practices that lopsidedly endears the Ogu and African women elsewhere to their tradition.

Apart from wife inheritance, the study also investigated issues relating to how the properties of the deceased are devised. First, respondents were asked whether Badagry men commonly write their wills, 12.5% male respondents said yes and 87.5% male respondents said men do not write their wills. Similarly, 29.6% female respondents said yes, whereas 70.4% female respondents said their men do not write wills. To what extent do the families of the deceased comply with the wishes of the deceased who did not die intestate (without a will), 100% of the respondents said the family does not interfere with sharing of the properties of the deceased. The reluctance of the men to write wills proves that will writing is not cultural. The thought driving this reluctance might be that the family may not be able to remain together after their demise, if they write wills. But African men have lots of respect for the cultural wisdom of their families. They often credit their people with lots of cultural intelligence to sustain their families long after they had gone, even if they did not write wills.

Respondents were also asked what usually happens if a Badagry man dies intestate, 2.2% of male respondents said they shared the property accordingly and cooperate with one another; 19.9% of male respondents said the head or members of the family will inherit his property; 19.1% of male respondents said that family decides on what to do with the property and 58.8% of male respondents said the children take charge of their father’s properties. With the bulk of the respondents insisting that children of the deceased take charge of their fathers’ property at death, widowhood is undoubtedly a recognized cultural practice among the people. Long after an Ogu man died, his dependants sustain themselves with his estate.

However, 7.0% of female respondents said they share the property accordingly and cooperate with one another; the head or members of the family will inherit his property (28.2%); family decides on what to do with the property (28.2%); and the children take charge of their father’s properties (36.6%). Respondents were also asked the extent to which widowhood rites limit the liberty of widows in Badagry, 100% of the respondents said that widows’ liberty is limited until the burial rites are completed. The current state of the activity of widowhood practices is imprecise as 100% of male respondents unanimously agreed that such a practice does not have any firmly fixed roots in the cultural environment of the Ogu people of Badagry—and 100% of female respondents confirmed too that such a practice only has historic relevance. One point that becomes clearer from the foregoing is that widowhood practices that portend violence are widely not admired by the Ogu people.

**Widowhood Practices and Survival of Victims**

Experience has shown that gender power relations is skewed against women even long after her marriage has been nullified by the death of her husband. To verify the extent to which this assumption holds water, respondents were asked whether the widow has any right on the death of her husband, all the respondents said the widow has rights. Then the question of the kind of rights she has was put and respondents classified it into diverse subheads. While 8.1% of male respondents and 7.0% of female respondents identified right to life, 22.8% of male respondents and 14.1% of female respondents said the right of the widow to train her children with the properties left behind by her husband, 3.7% of male respondents and 15.5% of female respondents said right to remain in and be respected by the people of her husband, 65.4% of male respondents and 63.4% of female respondents said right to remarry or choose to be whatever she wants to be. If this high percentage of the respondents admitted that Ogu widows enjoyed the right to remarry, the hostility that was putatively associated with widowhood practices are essentially conjectural and therefore misleading.

As if to give a current empirical validation to Gbenga’s (1997) observation that widowhood is an issue that affects more women than men, another female in-depth interview respondent D remarked,

Widowhood practices are borne out of patriarchal ego. When a man dies, there is a widow who must not only internalize a sense of loss but also externalize the pains for others to see. However, it is regrettable that when a woman dies, the tragedy also creates a widower who simply sits down for a couple of days to entertain visitors who come to commiserate with him over the death of his wife. Shortly afterward, he takes a wife without anyone raising any righteous anger against such an act. Our culture should be an amplifier of justice and not an author of unfair criminal discrimination. (January, 2013)

**FGD** agreed that,

Criminal exploitation of widows through widowhood practices happened to some of our mothers when our fathers died. We were oblivious of the psychological impact of those hostile widowhood practices on the well-being of our mothers. In most families, widowhood is not painful beyond the loss of the husband for the widow. Brothers and sisters of the deceased plan how the children of the deceased will not smear the family name with misconduct arising from lack of or inadequate care. Some widowhood practices could be oddly managed such that it reeks of criminal content, depending on the pedigree of the actors and actresses. These criminal widowhood practices have died. We shall do nothing to activate the monster. (November, 2012)
Socio-Economic Implication Aspect of Widowhood Practices

Studies concerning the social roles of widows in African societies have predominantly highlighted their marginality and insecurity in terms of property ownership and economic livelihoods (Ewelukwa, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2003; John-Smith, 2002; Strick-land, 2004). To find out if this is still re-enacted up to the present day, the aspect of widows’ lives which wife inheritance affects most was probed into, 7.5% of male respondents and 14.3% of female respondents said it is widows’ economy; 77.4% of male respondents and 64.3% of female respondents said it is their emotions; and 15.1% of male respondents and 21.4% of female respondents said others that were not specified. If an election is decided to determine whether wife inheritance should continue, 56.4% of respondents said they would vote for its total removal, 10.3% of respondents would vote for its retention whereas 33.3% would vote for its amendment. From the above, it can be inferred that widowhood practices are not the controversial problem but the violence associated with them in some situations. If majority of the respondents acknowledged that the most impact of widowhood practices was felt by widows on the emotional front, then widowhood practices are not as satanic as they are being painted.

In-depth interview respondent E said,

Don’t mind our people. When the breadwinner of a family dies, all sorts of promises come from members of the husband’s family. Most of these promises, though reassuring, are insincere and therefore empty. As soon as the deceased is buried, the widow is usually arranged for inheritance. In the event of a refusal by the widow, in some families she is evicted and her children left to suffer. It is in the light of these realities that any lover of humanity should support the idea that the violence that underlie widowhood practices was felt by widows on the emotional front, then widowhood practices are not as satanic.

After a thorough deliberation of the relationship that exists between widows and the members of the families of widows’ husbands by an FGD, it was agreed as follows: In the light of the ongoing economic hardship, it would be nothing but self-deceit for some men who have not fed their families well enough to contemplate shouldering additional responsibility created by the deaths of their brothers. We should not disturb ourselves, women who lose their husbands should be allowed to remain unmolested to cater for their children or go and remarry, if they so choose.

Conclusion

If in spite of Badagry being the first point of contact of Christianity with Nigerians, Ogu people still could not develop a liberal tolerance of widowhood and a more humane handling of issues affecting widows’ interest, then widowhood challenge is a problem that transcends religion. From the data made available by this study, the problem does not lie per se on African values. An exploration of the social situation in Western societies and widowhood in the time immediately preceding and following the advent of colonial missionaries in the African continent, among Europeans, widowhood was already a challenge. The experiences of Western widows were not comparatively better than those faced by their African counterparts.

It was on the misleading perception of the effectiveness of religious beliefs to overcome the travails of widowhood that most ignorant African believers predicated their expectation that if Christianity entered Nigeria through Badagry, and religion was erroneously perceived as a one-size-fits-all cure for widowhood, then it is logical to expect the Ogu people to have jettisoned their traditional handling of widows. To make the pains and grief emanating from widowhood practices in contemporary African societies a lot more bearable for victims so that they could access the joys of motherhood, comprehensive processes of recovery that are essentially indigenous to Africa should identify customs that are inimical to widows’ interest such as those that commodify women, regard widows as part of their deceased husbands’ inheritable property, upgrade and activate them for more gainful use.

In actual sense, wife inheritance and widowhood practices may no longer be fashionable. Originally, they had society- and women-friendly philosophical foundations. Although the study found that widowhood practices that relegate widows to the background in Badagry appear to be disappearing, widowhood practices as normative resources appear to have come to stay. This is especially so because when respondents’ claim is examined against the background of the expectation of the proportion of respondents who suggested the retention or review of widowhood practices, it was discovered that there is something lopsidedly cultural about widowhood practices which the earlier position does not seem to corroborate.

Recommendations

Flowing from the study, the following recommendations are suggested to reduce the incidence and intensity of widowhood practices among the Ogu people of Lagos, Nigeria, and other African widows elsewhere:

1. Governments should strengthen the policy framework for the elimination of violence against widows through making of laws providing for gender equality regarding inheritance matters.
2. Education should be used to enliven the fine points of African tradition and identify the harmful components for removal. This will make Africans develop a personality that is truly traditionally unique, great, and undisputedly original. By this, family life education taught to children in schools may genuinely connect with the realities of the African people.
3. Men should use traditional methods to devise their properties in ways that would prevent the disruption of fragile network of customary relationships after their death. This does not have to take the European outlook.

4. Government should criminalize any attempt, under whatever guise, by someone or a group of people to force another to experience any unduly devastating widowhood practices.

5. African widows should take advantage of contemporary support networks to activate their human potentials and access community-based support resources for self-development.

There is need for further research in this area because people do things rightly or wrongly for specific reasons. Therefore, studies should unearth the unexplored dimensions of widowhood practices in other communities of Africa so that an assemblage of cultural widowhood experiences could be put into a seamless whole to advance the elegance of African culture for the guidance of human conduct among the Ogu of Nigeria especially and Africans, in general.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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