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The Evolution of Gender Relations in Igbo Nation and the Discourse of Cultural Imperialism

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Abstract

This paper conducts a comparative case study of how gender discourse in Igbo society has evolved from pre-colonial, colonial to post-colonial periods, more so, how this evolution contributes to the debate on cultural imperialism. It claims that an historical understanding of gender relations in Igbo society could provides an understanding of national cultural imperialism from a political perspective. With the assumptions of cultural imperialism, it reviews how the effect of colonialism contributes to the evolution of gender discourse in Igbo society. According to some earlier researches, gender equality in Igbo society has been on a constant slide from what was obtainable in the pre-colonial era. This trend as it is analyzed, collaborates the assumptions of national cultural imperialism; thereby disentangling the congested concept of cultural imperialism.

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Introduction

In recent times, there have been several efforts to address the inequality between men and women in Nigeria. Unfortunately, many of these efforts have not produced required results. These failures have been connected to the government's inability to consider the distinctiveness in ethno-cultural affiliations within Nigeria (Nwanesi; 6). Consequently, the cultural evolution in Igbo nation, which comprises states in the south-eastern Nigeria, has been chosen in this paper as a peculiar ethno-cultural "torch-light" in understanding gender discourse in Nigeria. As a nation, the Igbos are considered culturally homogenous. Therefore, an historical understanding of evolution of gender discourse from south-east perspective would foster an understanding of gender relations in Nigeria.

Consequently, the term cultural imperialism becomes vital in evaluating the developments in gender relations in Igbo society. The term was coined to explain the purported imposition of western culture on others (supposedly inferior cultures), especially in relation to American media cultural products (Hamm and Smandych; 31). Over the past century, there has been a constant debate about what constitute and does not constitute cultural imperialism. While one school of thought sees American media as agent of cultural imperialism (Tomlinson; 68), the said school of thought has been criticized by another school of thought which argues that it is problematic to refer to the cultural effect from American media as cultural imperialism.

It is widely accepted that the definition of cultural imperialism is very opaque. However, there are two major contexts in which the term can be explored. The political: historic account of Eurocentric political dominance which culminated into colonialism (Dunch; 317). This political perspective is what is otherwise, known as national cultural imperialism. Another perspective through which cultural imperialism can be approached is the economical: the capitalist oriented system of consumer culture (Ibid). However, this paper would only

approach this study based on national cultural imperialism perspective. It is only through this political approach to cultural imperialism that the evolution of gender relations in Igbo society can be understood. Consequently, this paper will review some selected writings on national cultural imperialism from the “pluralist scholars”, and some criticisms leveled against them. The pluralist scholars are writers who criticize the very act of cultural imperialism. The review is geared towards an understanding of how the dialectics on “national cultural imperialism” came about and why different views are held.

Furthermore, I incorporate in the perspective pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial gender relations in Igbo nation. Hence, this viewpoint provides a critical investigation on the perception of gender roles in south-eastern Nigeria (Igbo nation) from pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial periods. It has been argued that contemporary women in Igbo land and in Nigeria at large are far less involved in the political and economic running of the Nigerian society than they were in pre-colonial period. Consequently, this paper argues and claims that gender inequality in Nigeria is an effect of national cultural imperialism; during and after colonialism.

1. National Cultural Imperialism: Political Perspective

To understand the concept of national cultural imperialism, one needs to distinguish the difference between a “nation” and a “nation-state”. A nation can be defined as a group of people with one language, definite boundary with homogenous cultural identity. On the other hand, a nation-state can be defined as the amalgamation of nations into one sovereign political unit. In this sense, “national culture” should be understood as not always synonymous with nation-state culture. National culture gives homogenous cultural identity to a collection of people within a specific geographical area. Nation-state culture may in certain cases be seen as synonymous to national culture, but in most cases it transcends the later to imply an amalgamation of national cultures (Barker; 31-33). Hence, the pre-colonial Igbo nation lost its nationhood during the amalgamation into the nation-state called Nigeria. One may not regard the current Igbo people as having a national culture as it has long been erased and merged into the Nigerian polity. Therefore, this loss of Igbo national culture is in this respect, termed national cultural imperialism. The key issue here is the use of political power and the resultant effects on the local national culture. (Dunch; 302)

1.1 Pluralists of National Culture

National cultural imperialism and colonialism are often depicted as synonymous by pluralist scholars. Nevertheless, the first signifies overt political control by the western powers over many third world nations in a bid to civilize them, while cultural imperialism is often associated with the cultural effects which came along with colonialism. Hence, the pluralist of national culture would claim that some indigenous cultures in the colonized countries are being replaced by western cultural products through political dominance.

Dunch following Edward Said, contends that these cultural changes are brought about by euro-cultural chauvinists with the concept of superior 'self' and inferior 'other' and who consider the cultural practices of the first better than the latter (Dunch; 303). Said's work on *Orientalism* has been credited for bringing recognition to third world cultural products as credible as their western counterpart (Ibid). As a result, third world cultural practices are now seen as unique and valuable as against the condescending and dismissive representations often depicted by some other oriental writers (Ibid).

In her essay titled "Five Faces of Oppression", Iris Marion Young describes cultural imperialist action as irrational as it uses stereotypes to subjugate a collection of people to a particular indivisible identity (Young;192). She claims that cultural imperialism in this sense becomes a way through which a set of people or race is subdued into a collective identity which often are seen by the dominant class/group as deviant (Ibid). Though her view on cultural imperialism boils down to general view on oppression as a social concept, it can be understood from a cultural perspective too. The gender development in Igbo society would in the latter part of this essay discuss how cultural imperialism uses stereotypes to identify a group of people. The connecting line here is the perception of the dominant class about the "other" which often paves way for the manifestation of cultural superiority. The culmination is that the downtrodden group see themselves as they are defined by the dominant group. Hence, whatever they are told is right becomes right. According to Young, W.E.B. DuBois would term this "double consciousness": the constant mirror of oneself through another that sees nothing but impurity and the constant attempt by the culturally dominated to reconcile one's view of one's self with the image the dominant class makes of one (Ibid). Young would further assert that culturally dominated group often recognizes among themselves; their

shared agony. They often develop a sense of common view of social life which is necessary for their survival (Ibid).

In her essay on “The Faces of Cultural Imperialism”, Annabelle Sreberny Mohammadi shows in a comprehensive account, how narrow the term cultural imperialism is, especially as it is often used in relation to media cultural imperialism. According to her, cultural imperialism had thrived most conspicuously under colonialism as a cultural carrier and “was in itself; a multi-faceted cultural process which laid the ground for the ready acceptance and adoption of mediated cultural products which came much, much later” (Mohammadi; 51). Hence, taking the changes in gender discourse witnessed during colonial era in Igbo society as an example, one would see that cultural imperialism had been in practice before the advent of its conceptual study. She further regards colonialism as one of the cultural carriers that have left the third world culturally tainted and has probably meted out irrevocable cultural consequences (Ibid). However, in her review of Raymond Williams, she purports in conformity with Hobsbawn that it is not only through aggression that cultural imperialism thrived. According to her, it also functioned through establishment of western life patterns, language, values, belief and political institutions. She further asserts in conformity with Laitin that even as colonialism has come and gone, these institutionalized patterns of life are still in place (Ibid). The imperial forms of colonialism still thrive to the detriment of the third-world local cultures. In this regard, gender inequality in Igbo society that had thrived during colonial era is still being perpetrated in contemporary Nigerian society.

Another intriguing assumption is that of divide and rule principle in cultural imperialism.

James Petras argues that in relation to the third world countries, western cultural imperialism is geared towards methodical process of cultural infiltration of the ruling class in the

colonized countries (Petras; 2070). This class (usually the power brokers) in these colonies tends to dance to the tune of the imperialists in a bid to hold on tenaciously to power, at the expense of their socio-economic sustainability. He opines that after colonialism, imperialism thrived best in the third world countries through the intermediary and undergird roles played by the upper-class “who imitate the style of their patrons. These collaborators are servile to the west and arrogant to their people, prototypical authoritarians personalities...Backed by banks and multinational” (Ibid). Hence, all efforts that might have been put in place to redress the issue of gender inequality in contemporary Nigeria have often been thwarted by some corrupt, masculine chauvinists. Often, these chauvinists act in collaboration with outside influence. Hence, Petras maintains that cultural imperialism can only thrive in post-colonial period if there is disarray in the collective notion about traditional ways of life. The reverse would be the case within a society where there is unity of purpose in class, gender, race and ethnic relations (Ibid; 2073).

In line with the reviewed exponents of cultural imperialism, some basic assumptions will be outlined. It is upon these assumptions that this paper would base its argument; there by applying the gender developments in Igbo society to address and authenticate its line of claim.

- a. Cultural imperialism is embedded in overt political control by the western powers over a group of uncivilized nations, in a bid to civilize them.
- b. Cultural imperialism uses stereotypes to subjugate a collection of people to a particular indivisible identity.
- c. Cultural changes are brought about by euro-cultural chauvinists promoting ideas of superior “self” and inferior “other” and which considers the cultural practices of the first better than the latter.

- d. Cultural imperialism is maintained through the establishment of western life patterns: language, values, belief and political institutions. Cultural imperialism continues to be even when colonialism has come and gone by methodical process of cultural infiltration of the ruling class in the colonized countries.

1.2 Critique of Pluralists

The critique of the pluralists of national culture is not fundamentally canvassing for the sustainability of national cultural imperialism; rather, it is mostly a critique of its methodology, scope and ambiguity surrounding the concept. Ryan Dunch tries to single out the very problem with identifying national cultural imperialism within a nation-state. He argues that before a claim can be made against cultural imperialism, there has to be an identifiable culture with obvious implications showing that a foreign culture has subjugated the former's existence and that the said culture would have thrived without the effect of the foreign culture (Dunch; 305). Earlier on, he would argue that one problem associated with cultural imperialism is its inability to separate the epochal understanding of cultural imperialism as obtained during the colonial era and the more recent cultural imperialism often seen as American media-driven imperialism (Ibid). In this sense, this paper argues that gender equality in pre-colonial Igbo society had been a homogenous practice among the Igbos. However, with the advent of colonialism, the balance of power between male and female changed to the detriment of women. The creation of Nigeria as a nation-state does not deny the ethno-cultural affiliations of the component nations within Nigeria; in which case, Igbo happen to be one of the member nations. Perhaps the entanglement of both phases of cultural imperialism has been inherent in cultural studies and has undermined the emergence of a coherent theory. However, it is a debatable issue to categorically refer to both phases as

distinct given that the remnants and lingering impact of colonial/national cultural imperialism still thrive during this post-colonial period which inadvertently has been more conspicuously perpetrated via media.

Nevertheless, Ryan Dunch would go further to process what is perhaps, one of the finest critiques of cultural imperialism. His argument here is centered on the definitional scope of the concept. He argues that since the underlying argument of cultural imperialism from various perspectives is that a foreign culture has compulsively triggered change on the local culture, it implies that all knowledge is acquired coercively. He would then question the limit of such assumed dominance as he asks: “since we all inhabit culture and accept in some measure the cultural products that come with them, have we all been colonized?” (Dunch; 307). He does seem to suggest that colonialism encompasses the fundamental meaning of cultural imperialism. His deductive argument here is no doubt very quintessential; however, it could have been elaborately directed to the exponents of media cultural imperialism. Which ever be the case, this has only reinstated the need to categorize the study of cultural imperialism and the need to widen “the scope of methods and approaches involved in the study of cultural imperialism beyond critical political economy, because the phenomenon of cultural imperialism is far too important and far-reaching for its analysis to be limited to any single....sub discipline” (Kraidy; 28).

Perhaps the most interesting criticism of pluralist scholars has been championed by Ernest Geller as contained in Dunch. According to the latter, Geller’s argument particularly against Edward Said, questions the validity of post-colonial cultural studies since according to Geller, it is impossible to authentically ascertain the historical conditions inherent in the colonized territories during the pre-colonial epoch. Accordingly, his accusation reads: Edward Said

“simply makes himself a present of a stance from which he can pass moral judgment and tell us how things really stand, without facing the difficulty of validating it” (Dunch; 306). His critique of Said could be substantial, but there are still some traditional societies in Africa, Asia, and Australia where pre-colonial cultural practices still exist. In Igbo nation for instance, there are still communities where gender relations inherent in pre-colonial Igbo society still exist, more so, as it concerns the culture of gender relations, from where we can ascertain the historical conditions in pre-colonial Igbo society. It is probably mere ignorance or denial of fact for one to dismiss the existence of pre-colonial cultural practices among the colonized; upon which Geller allegedly dismisses the post-colonial studies as invalid and unsubstantiated.

According to Peter Golding and Phil Harris, Cees Hamelink would first posit that there has always been an intermingling of culture over time. However, he critiques pluralists of national culture by maintaining that the cultural changes in colonized countries, often associated with colonialism do not depict the cultural practices inherent in the colonizing countries since “the distance between the exclusively western culture and the indigenous culture is kept as wide as possible”(Golding and Harris 1997; 49). In other words, he rejects the idea that gender inequality (which has been confirmed by some scholars in the latter part of this paper as practices in Britain) introduced in Igbo society are fundamental pattern of gender discourse in Britain in the 19th century. It sounds somewhat a controversial assumption and critique. Nevertheless, it would have been intriguing to see how he would reconcile the fact that some of the practices as they were introduced in the colonies by the colonial agents were not initially cultural practices obtained in those colonized nations. Hence, the introduction of gender inequality in Igbo society during colonial era altered the pre-colonial Igbo gender relations.

Having got a grip of how the dialectics of cultural imperialism is played out from the political perspective, the onus now lies on the development of gender discourse in Igbo nation to throw more light in clarifying these boiling assumptions. Consequently, the next chapter will present some of the indicators identifiable with gender roles and representations from pre-colonial to post-colonial periods.

2. Diachronic Gender Developments in Igbo Society

In this chapter, the paper will present some earlier research on gender issues and development in south-eastern Nigeria. This may prove to be enlightening with regards to the misconception in some western colonial study about gender roles in Nigeria, particularly Igbo nation (Adu; 17). It will unveil how gender issues have been constructed and construed. More so, it would contribute to the epistemology of cultural imperialism from the national perspective. Nevertheless, an historical overview of south-eastern Nigeria might be necessary in order to comprehend the advent of colonialism vis a vis south-eastern Nigerian cultural shift.

2.1 Igbo Nation and Colonialism: An Historical Perspective

The current political society called Nigeria came into existence in 1914 through the amalgamation of the south and the north by Lord Fredrick Lugard, the then Governor-general representing the office of the Queen of England (Nwabueze; 20-23). Hence, while the north would perhaps be considered culturally homogenous, the south was made up of two major nations: Igbo (south-east) and Yoruba (south-west).

The basis for marking these groups out was due to their respective homogeneous cultural identity. The Igbo nation thus had one Language and one cultural affiliation. However, unlike the north and south-west and due to its decentralized political system,¹ the British colonial rulers found it difficult to pass on rules and regulations and to garner the support of the masses in these colonies (Nwabueze; 20-23). Consequently, they introduced the system of ‘indirect rule’ by using warrant chiefs who were accountable to the British. This system worked effectively in the North and south-west. However, it was ill-fated in the south-east due to pre-colonial Igbo nation’s decentralized political organization, (Adu; 47-48) which

¹. Political leadership was through the assembly of elders and traditional monarchs

culminated into the first African women's revolution of 1929 (Nwabueze; 20-23). The essence of the riot was to protest the shift in political organization in Igbo society especially against women. The riot was to "make apparent to the government, the danger which, at the level of development existing at the time, was inherent in the system which disregarded and tended to break up the traditional political organization of the eastern communities" (Ibid; 23). The riot did not make the colonial rulers reconsider what sort of political organization would be suitable for Igbo nation; however, it has remained a constant reference in recent history: the essence of women in pre-colonial Igbo society, which presuppose gender equality.

2.2 Gendering Education

The general trend in Igbo pre-colonial educational system was aimed at classification of perceived gender-suitable occupations. According to Benedicta Ozoemenem Egbo, although the pre-colonial educational system was more or less vocational, it was not designed for gender exclusionary purpose. Instead, it was designed to inculcate into women the necessary social skills to run the affairs of their family and to be able to cater for themselves and the men; the techniques for more physically related occupation. Accordingly, "everybody received appropriate education", (Egbo 1997; 41). Hence, men and women were free to choose whatever occupation they like, regardless of whether the occupation was male or female-related.

In the same vein, according to Karibu Nwanesi, the pre-colonial period saw the use of formal and informal systems of education in the areas of commerce, defense, religion, social studies, medicine and politics. While men were trained mostly in areas such as defense and politics, the women were mostly trained in social studies, medicine and religion (Nwanesi; 35).

With the introduction of British educational system, education in the colonial era excluded women from the mainstream occupational skills. According to Nwanesi, while men were allowed to study religion and other professional disciplines, women were relegated to the study of home keeping and how to be maids. Hence, Steady would maintain that the colonial educational system was “tailored along sexism and gender roles, with the notion of men as the ‘bread-winners’ and women as ‘the homemakers’” (Ibid; 38). Interestingly, in Mohammadi’s essay above, Gann and Duignan had already maintained with paradoxical benevolence that though the colonization of Africa was act of imperialism, it provided Africans with much needed British educational system, medical system and so on; the same educational system that brought gender discriminatory policies (Mohammadi; 51), thereby altering the gender ‘unrestricted’ educational system inherent in pre-colonial Igbo nation.

According to Nwanesi, Gilman argues that division of labour during the colonial era allocated work for men and home-keeping for women. To confirm the latter’s assertion, Nwanesi argues that the colonial educational system was gender discriminatory (Nwanesi; 38). Skill acquisition was exclusively meant for the men. It was against this back-drop, that the then British Governor General asserted that the essence of women’s education was to equip them only for the house-wife and mother role which presumably were the only roles women could play (Egbo; 43). Consequently, the pre-colonial industries usually coordinated by women were rendered non-functional (Nwanesi; 38). The home-keeping role restricted women from participating in economically vibrant skills which were pivotal in piloting the economic enterprises of pre-colonial period. According to Egbo:

Although colonial education was essentially limited to the liberal arts, its emphasis on the training of boys systematically reduced the role of women within the society.... women found themselves even more devalued. Western capitalist economic ideology...

values that were incompatible with traditional African culture - became national goals. (Egbo 1997; 44)

Similarly, the post-colonial era, especially the period after Nigerian independence (1960), would not see a different turn in educational gender balance. It was only very recently that the government started ensuring some equitable yet unrealistic educational policies for men and women. According to Egbo, particular consideration for women in educational policies was first witnessed about two decades ago. That notwithstanding; women's involvement in education in post-colonial period remains relatively poor. Though statistics cannot not show how many women drop out of school within the same period, scholars believe that there is a huge number of women who dropped out after the time of Nigerian independence (Ibid; 50).

In ascertaining the factors responsible for this female decline in education, studies have shown that apart from post-colonial government policies, social-cultural policies in gender education during the colonial administration might have necessitated a recurrent gender bias in post-colonial socialization of women. More so, international economic influence has also been implicated as one of the causal factors (Ibid; 24 and 50-61).

2.3 Gendering the Economy

The pre-colonial economic activities in Igbo nation was characterized by women-driven economic wheel. According to Nwanesi following F.K Ekechi, these women traded in various kinds of agricultural products, ranging from palm product, yam, Cocoa-yam and so on. Some Nigerian economists have noted that prior to the advent of colonialism; Igbo men regarded Merchandise as women's occupation. Sequel to this, the money accruing from these enterprises gave Igbo women the power to be independent and to provide them with material needs (Nwanesi 2006; 33).

The advent of colonialism made the economic status of women insignificant. According to Nwanesi, in a study of Ngwa people (an Igbo tribe), S.M. Martins maintains that colonialism induced poverty on Igbo women by transferring economic power first to the colonizers and more recently to the African men. The British colonizers were said to have considered what was obtainable in Britain while changing the economic power of women to men. Nwanesi following Cornwall maintains that with regards to economic gender roles in Europe in 19th century, men were regarded as intellectually superior to women. Hence, they were regarded as breadwinners, who should be authoritative and self asserting. On the other hand, women were regarded as the weaker sex and less intelligent. The British colonizers took their own gender roles as a model which should be incorporated within their colonies (Ibid; 51). According to Nwanesi, this economic power-shift paved way for foreign corporations: Lever brother, John Holt INC and then United African companies and so on (Ibid: 37, Adu; 50), all of which were under the control of men. These changes have been labeled sexist by some scholars. As a result, many families started witnessing poverty. According to Nwanesi, Steady maintains that these changes not only removed women from the mainstream of economic activities, but also “women were denied access to medium and large-scale loans which were vital in operating the bulk purchase level of the colonial economy” (Nwanesi; 37).

Similarly, the economic situation in post-colonial regime was ‘nothing to write home about’. According to Nwanesi, the period could be categorized into two phases: civilian and military regimes, and both regimes having little or no changes in economic gender roles and considerations. The first civilian regime (1962-1968) did not initiate any policy to balance or address the economic inequality prevalent in Nigeria; neither did the second civilian regime

(1979-1983). This has led to the emergence of several women's association with a view to redirecting the role of women vis a vis men in economic relations (Ibid; 43-45).

More so, since Nigerian independence in 1960, the military has ruled Nigeria for about thirty years. According to Nwanesi, during the first military regime, employment rate rose significantly. However, "most women were employed in dead-end jobs, cheaply paid and career progressions were lacking" (Ibid; 41-42). Similarly, the later introduction of structural adjustment programme (SAP), which was meant to assuage growing level of poverty by increasing macro-level productivity, turned out to fuel reduction of workers. Unfortunately, most of the affected workers were women who were even less in proportion to men (Ibid).

2.4 Gender and political participation

According to Adu, Judith Van Allen maintains that pre-colonial Igbo society was a "system of diffuse authority, fluid and informal leadership; shared rights of enforcement, and more or less stable balance of male and female power" (Adu; 42). She writes that though men and women were regarded as equal, there was an inherent tendency to see women as complementary to men. However, due to their enterprising nature and existence of gender equality, women had equal influence on communal decision. They also had women forums through which they influenced communal decisions. Just as the political authority of the assembly of elderly men was recognized, so was the political authority of their female counterparts (Adu; 43). In a situation where a man was found wanting, probably by beating his wife or maltreating her in any way, the women forum would impose a curfew on him and have him reported to the general assembly who would determine the adequate reparation or punishment. According to Adu, in such a situation sometimes, the women could hold "sitting

on a man” kind of protest, in that the women could go to the offender’s house from morning till dawn, singing ridiculous songs and “calling his manhood into question” (Ibid; 45-46).

Van Alle further maintains that the general assembly which allows the participation of every Adult member of the society was highly democratic. According to her, every adult, both male and female was allowed to air her or his opinion and it would be taken, as far as it was reasonable and resonates with a majority of the assembly. She supports her claim by quoting an Igbo adage which says: “a case forbids no one” (Ibid; 43). However, the problem with this sort of democracy is that decisions are hard to reach. Nevertheless, they were able to reach decisions based on a simple majority.

Dissimilarly, the emergence of British colonial rule juxtaposed the usual political gender balance prevalent during the pre-colonial epoch. According to Adu, with the introduction of indirect rule, the power of the general assembly was now transferred to the warrant chiefs. No woman was among these warrant chiefs until after the Aba women’s riot in 1929; women were not allowed to protest as they used to, neither were their interests considered as before. Women were literally left out in the political organization during this period and were banned from having women’s forums and associations (Ibid: 46-49 and 53; Egbo; 54).

Similarly, the autocratic system of governance through these warrant chiefs was just unconventional and incompatible with the Igbo Society. According to Adu, women felt left out in the administration of the society. The commission of inquiry set up to ascertain the cause of the women’s 1929 riot met a stiff complaint-laden women group with hysterical outburst: “We don’t want chiefs...instead of coming home to consult women, they generally agree with the District Officer straight away” (Adu 2008; 48).

More so, the post-colonial government in Nigeria was more or less sexist. According to Nwanesi, the gender political discrepancy associated with colonial era was further orchestrated in post-colonial administration to exclude women. The situation was as unpalatable in civilian regimes as it was in military regimes. Till date, the percentage of women in political administration is still very insignificant. This has led to the formation of some women's pressure groups and committees whose aim is to uplift women's involvement in Nigerian administration. However, these associations would not have a smooth sail as patriarch-minded people who have come to believe in domestication of women would not relent in juxtaposing their effort (Nwanesi; 43-50).

To conclude this chapter, the presentations above have shown apparent epochal cultural shift in Igbo gender roles and representations. More indicators could have been considered had the scope of this paper permitted. Nevertheless, what is contained here should be sufficient enough to decipher national cultural imperialism (within gender relations in Igbo society) in the next chapter, based on the assumptions presented in the theoretical framework.

3. Locating Cultural Imperialism in Igbo Gender Relations

In this chapter, this paper will test the assumptions of cultural imperialism with the findings in the chapter above. These assumptions have been outlined in the theoretical framework. It would also be taking into consideration, some of the criticisms leveled against these assumptions.

3.1 Cultural Imperialism as Overt Political Control

The question of political control remarkably was the core feature of colonialism. The queen of England was regarded as the head of state in those colonies that make up contemporary Nigeria. Though she was not a resident head of state, she governed through some selected governor-generals. These governor-generals in turn, had regional overseers and local warrant chiefs who accounted to them. As a result, women were left out in the political structure of the colonial Igbo society. Though this political system did not excel in Igbo society, it has remained the political system in Nigeria (where ‘selection’ of political leaders has painted negatively, the good image of democracy).

According to the research materials above, the British brought with them their educational system, medical practices, Christianity and political arrangements. These new practices replaced the existing local counterparts. It is beyond the scope of this paper to ascertain whether the new practices are more fruitful than the local practices. However, what is clear is that these local practices have been replaced by British colonizers which confirm the above assumption of cultural imperialism.

3.2 Cultural Imperialism Uses Stereotypes to Subjugate a Collection of People to a Particular Indivisible Identity.

The amalgamation of the North and South-East and South-west was perhaps the paramount and the apex effect of colonialism in Nigeria. Culturally, the three ethnic groups are distinctively different from one another. While political power in the pre-colonial north was solely reserved for men, it was shared between men and women in the south, especially south east. Religiously, the North was (and is still) predominantly Moslems; south-west was divided between traditional practitioners and Moslems (now Christianity and Islam and traditional religion); while south-east was predominantly traditional practitioners (now predominantly Christians). Even during the British occupation, the North remained Moslems while south-east turned Christians with South-west divided between Christianity and Islam.

However, the British apparently did not take into consideration these obvious differences as they merged all together in the name of Nigeria. Though this paper does not intend to investigate the pros and cons of such amalgamation, it epitomizes the extent of cultural shift for the component ethnicities in Nigeria. More so, the fact that these three distinct societies were amalgamated has brought some cultural shift to the Igbo society, prominent of which is the change in political gender equality inherent in pre-colonial Igbo society.

Another way of understanding the assumption of cultural imperialism through stereotype is by the introduction of indirect rule. The British assumed that since the system of indirect rule worked in the North and south-west, it should also work in the south-east. However, the pre-colonial political system in Igbo Nation functioned best as a decentralized system. More so, there was an inclusive system of democracy where everyone was allowed her or his opinion. The system changed as the warrant chiefs were imposed on the Igbos. As a result, the Igbos

were not adequately integrated into the colonial political system especially women.

Consequently, in collaboration with the assumption above, it is perhaps safe to say that the British perceived the nations comprising Nigeria as a set of people without differences. More so, the post-colonial political system in Nigeria has done little or nothing to address these issues.

3.3 Superior 'Self' and Inferior 'Other'

One of the assumptions of cultural imperialism is that Cultural changes are brought about by euro-cultural chauvinists with the concept of superior 'self' and inferior 'other' which considers the cultural practices of the first better than the latter. Apparently, the colonizers saw the discriminatory and exclusionary gender practices in Britain as better than what was obtainable in pre-colonial gender equity in Igbo nation. According to Nwanesi, it is clear where the notion of masculinity that defined colonialism came from. Nwanesi's review of some scholars purports that in Britain; women were political, economically and educationally perceived as inferior to men. At some point, women were not even allowed to vote. All these were as a result of perceived men's superiority to women. (Nwanesi; 38)

Unfortunately, this perception was transferred to the Igbo society during colonialism.

Economically, women were at the top of affairs during the same epoch. Educationally, both gender had equal opportunity to excel in the 'suitable' discipline. The reverse became the case with the advent of colonial rule. As a result, Igbo women were politically and economically excluded. Education for women in colonial era was only meant for servitude.

Interestingly, these findings perhaps, may have responded to Cees Hamelink among the critics of cultural imperialism above. He argues that the cultural shift witnessed from agents of

cultural imperialism do not reflect the culture from the agent's country. Apparently, he is of the opinion that cultural impact of colonialism does not mirror the situation in Britain.

3.4 Establishment of Western Culture by Infiltrating The Ruling Class

Cultural imperialism is maintained through the establishment of western life patterns:

language, values, belief and political institutions even when colonialism has come and gone by methodical process of cultural infiltration of the ruling class in the colonized countries.

The continuation of cultural imperialism legacies in the absence of its agents determines how successful it has been. From the findings in the research materials above, the cultural baggage that came with colonialism is still thriving in Igbo society and Nigeria at large. Women are less represented in Nigeria's political structure. In terms of education, they are still lagging behind when compared to the men. The governments have not been able to put some sustainable policies which would address these issues. Economically, women absorb the far reaching effect of poverty inherent in the society. Reductions in workforce often affect women more than men. All these are results of transferred perception of gender inequality from the colonial political system to the post-colonial government regimes in Nigeria. More so, actions taken by some to redress this societal ailment through the establishment of women's associations and committees have often met stumbling blocks from masculine chauvinists. Though there are significant government policies and institutions; for instance, the ministry of women affairs; much still need be done in terms of awareness, legislation and empowerment of women, to bridge the gap that is clandestinely ever widening between men and women in the larger Nigerian society.

Conclusion

This paper has unveiled how gender discourse in Igbo society has occurred from pre-colonial, colonial to post-colonial periods. According to the findings in the case study, gender relations have undergone some changes over the stated periods. Though this study corroborates, the assumptions of cultural imperialism from the 'national' perspective, it has also unveiled the need for its conceptual stratification. By evaluating some developments in Igbo gender relations from the pre-colonial, colonial to post-colonial periods; it draws a line within post-colonial cultural studies on cultural imperialism; against a unilateral approach often embedded in media cultural imperialism. By so do, it throws the reconciliatory rope to bridge the divide within the dialectics of cultural imperialism

Hence, this paper claims it is evident that in pre-colonial Igbo society, men and women enjoyed relative gender equality in political organization and education. Interestingly, women had an edge over men economically. Or better put, they enjoyed relative economic control in pre-colonial era since trade was significantly dominated by women.

However, this gender balance was significantly altered with the advent of colonialism.

Politically, Igbo women were left out in the societal political structure under the guise that women were inferior to men. The same goes in the educational sector. The men were meant to study occupational disciplines, while the women were reduced to servitude studies. To further compound the women's woes, they were deprived of their leadership position economically.

Similarly, but in a larger Nigerian society, the gender discriminatory trend that defined colonial rule has so far done little or nothing to put a redress on this phenomenon. Women are still politically, economically and educationally marginalized. However, unlike in colonial era, the marginalization is no longer an overt practice; rather, it is assumed to be fueled

surreptitiously by some outside influence in collaboration with some malevolent local syndicates. Some of these chauvinists have been accused of liaison with some foreign influence with selfish interest and aggrandizement at the expense of a well functional Nigerian society. Similarly, the British colonizers have been accused by some Nigerian scholars for the loose motive of amalgamation which the critics claim never took into consideration the socio-cultural differences in the component polities (Afigbo; 13).

This study therefore rings the bell of urgency in addressing this ailment in Nigerian society. It becomes imperative that gender equality in Nigeria can be actualized through a reversal to the situation obtainable during the pre-colonial era in Igbo nation and perhaps, with some modern undertone as a redress for the lost years in developments within gender equality. It is therefore safe to say that national cultural imperialism (as a theoretical paradigm) can be applied to study cultural phenomena in post-colonial studies.

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