

EDUCATION AND GENDERED ROLES IN POST- ADJUSTMENT IGBO SOCIETY

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Abstract

The impact of Igbo lost the 1967-70 Biafra-Nigeria war was of collective punishment of the Igbo through the policy of marginalization and exclusion. This strategy of disempowerment imposed a heavy price on the Igbo attitude to education. The frustrations of the educated Igbo males to find accommodation in the formal sector of Nigerian economy pushed them into the informal sector for survival and social mobility. For Igbo men, investment in education was seen as a waste leaving it for female folks. But post-adjustment neo-liberalization of the Nigerian economy and the consequent retreat of the state altered the dynamics that created a level playing field for job competition, thus creating room for the empowerment of Igbo women by the virtue of their educational attainment. The paper examines these changing dynamics of gender roles of Igbo society arising from these changes in the structure of Nigerian economy. It employed a multiple method of data collection including documented materials and surveys which was analyzed using descriptive analysis to arrive at the finding that changes in gendered access to education among the Igbo society has altered the traditional Igbo gendered role.

Keywords: Education, Gendered Roles, Structural Adjustment, Igbo Society, Nigeria.

1 INTRODUCTION

The predicament of the post-war Igbo society is reflecting a social dissonance in gender roles reversal stemming from effects of losing the war. The Igbo had fought a secessionist war from 1967-70 of which they were defeated with their dream of an independent 'Biafran state' turning into an illusion. A well known aftermath of the rebellion was the policy of marginalization that earmarked the Igbo as target for exclusion from the formal sector of the Nigerian economy as strategy of disempowerment. The implication of these was denial of economic infrastructure in the Igbo area and particular difficulty for educated Igbo males to find accommodation in the formal sector of the Nigerian economy. As a result, most Igbo males saw the informal sector as an avenue and only way for survival creating the impression that investment in education amounted to a waste. This informal sector of the economy which Igbo males has found solace in thrives in centre of commerce most of which are located outside of Igbo land. The migration of Igbo males in drove in pursuit of informal economic activity has created a vacuum in the cultural sphere and the role of women therein and secondly the attitude of Igbo men to education since the end of the war affected enrollment to overwhelming advantage of the female gender whose probability of experiencing discrimination due to ethnic origin is lower compared to the male gender. The implication is the empowerment of women by the virtue of their educational attainment and labour mobility, bringing about increasing roles in the socio-political environment and the traditional family setting, thus threatening the patriarchal Igbo society. Using qualitative data sourced from focus group discussion and documented materials, the paper examines these changing dynamics and situates the analysis on the assumption that gender roles are constructed, and is crystallized in the psyche of the people by the process of socialization which creates a problem of adjustment occasioned by social dynamics.

2 THE CONCEPT OF GENDER

Gender is a social phenomenon that defines the roles played by the male and female within each individual society (Oyekanmi 2004). Each individual sex has specific roles to perform as well as a socially determined ways of awarding merit to these roles. It is from this backdrop that Mason (1984) noted that gender the concept of gender is concerned with the status of women in comparison with men. However in most Nigerian societies including the Igbo society, the practice over the years tends to place the male child above the female counterpart (Oyekanmi 2004).

Though Igbo society is not entirely homogenous, as there are diversity in terms of culture, dialect and etiquette across the Igbo nation, most Igbo societies are patriarchic the male child are considered superior. The patriarchal attitude underpins the subordination of women which manifest in social, political and economic aspects given men in the Igbo societies' dominance over women. Cain et al (1979). This is so because patriarchy represents a set of social relations with a material base that enables men to dominate women (Cain 1979 et al). in fact patriarchy connotes the distribution of power and resources in the family in a manner that men maintains power and control of resources so that women are made to be powerless and dependent(Oyekanmi 2004). This state of affairs breeds some sort of inequality in the relationship between the men and the women revolving around three basic dimensions including inequality in prestige, inequality in power and inequality in access to or control of resources (Rothschild 1980).

In the traditional Igbo society, it is difficult to discern any strict separation between the reproductive and productive roles of men and women but rather these roles were seen as an integral part of life experiences that starts from cradle even to adulthood (Oyekanmi 2004). For the typical Nigerian woman, Williams (1990) considers three roles to be very important, namely; the procreative roles, the domiciliary roles and the indirect political influence. Acknowledging that there is no controversy on the first two roles, William applied illustrations to underscore the third role. Furthermore she stresses that the third role are brought to fore in situations were women were brought in to resolve civil conflict as exemplified with Madam Tinubu of Lagos and Emotan of Benin. Dwelling further on the roles of women in traditional Nigerian society, Osinulu (1990) posits that the Nigerian women is seen as an appendage to her husband or father, family, village or ethnic group and that in rural setting marriage was between tow families rather than man and woman implying that the marriage goes beyond death of the man as the woman is made to remain in the husband family. He further posits that the Nigerian women through childbearing contribute to the manpower requirement for farming (Osinulu 1990). Beside this the women also acts as economic partners by engaging in distribution and marketing of farm produce. But in the urban setting Osinulu argue that the Nigerian woman is versatile that may affect some of the traditional role of child rearing but this need is getting filled up through activities of women association establishing daycare centers.

Another aspect of modernity that has impacted significantly on gendered roles of the traditional Nigerian society is formal education. Though the advent of formal education into the Nigerian society through colonial penetration saw men having greater access and consequently assured their dominance of the social ladder, the passage of time and event such as the civil war in Nigeria and its aftermaths particularly for the Igbo seem to have altering the established order.

3 ROLE OF TRADITIONAL IGBO WOMEN

Discourse on the role of women in Igbo traditional society by many scholars who have examined the economic role of Igbo women have established that such revolves around agriculture, manufacturing and trading (Basden 1966, Uchedu 1965, Ezumah 1988). In agriculture for instance, Igbo women fill a substantial role in decision making and execution in the production process and the associated food processing activities (Ikpeze 2000). While it is said that men in traditional Igbo society perform the role of clearing and preparing the land for cultivation, planting of crops like yam and harvesting oil palm produce, whereas women plant other crops like maize, cassava, cocoyam, beans, tomatoes, vegetables, pumpkins and okra. Apart from this, women also engage in pre-harvest weeding. Women in traditional Igbo society also perform activities such as cotton-spinning and weaving, mat-making, basket weaving, pottery and soap making all of which are in the manufacturing sector (Ikpeze 2000). In the area of trading, women dominate the market place in traditional Igbo society where they sell agricultural products as well as handicraft and other manufactured goods but the men engage in long distance trading.

Using the socio-economic structure of Igbo society, Gallagher (1981) attempted to explain the superiority of men over women. According to him, the crop of the men 'yam' is regarded as the king as has to be planted before the numerous crops of the women (Gallagher 1981). More so long distance trading considered being more lucrative is in the domain of men, and the patrilineage system predominant in most Igbo society that confers on men the control of land combines to confer superiority of men over the women (Ikpeze 2000). But though men clearly have advantage in traditional Igbo society, scholars like Achebe (1988) have argued that women in Igbo society are not necessarily oppressed given the role they play in the socio-economic structure. According to him their strategic economic role has given them some degree of integrity which has contributed significantly in less the institutional barriers to access of political power. In fact according to Allen (1972), in Igbo

society status that manifest in wealth, generosity and oratory is achieved and not ascribed to both men and women.

The traditional Igbo society has not been static as event such as colonialism and advent of modernity have to some degree broken-down the gender division of labour (Okorji 1985, Ezumah 1990, Ezumah 1997). For instance women now clear land and engage in planting yam which is a male crop, more so male urban migration has ensured women dominance in food production. Ezumah however argue that this dominance turns into a disadvantage because women lack access to farm technologies, credit, land and wage that culminate in low yield at farm level leading to food insecurity and poverty on their part (Ezumah 1997).

4 POST-WAR IGBO MARGINALIZATION

Ikpeze (2000) has made well articulated effort at analyzing the issues pertaining to post-war marginalization of the Igbo. According to him, the marginalization of post-war Igbo nation reflected in political power distribution and control of the allocation of material and other resources at the centre. This include; economic strangulation, politico bureaucratic emasculation and military neutralization and ostracism all of which were tailored at furthering the objective of keeping the Igbo very weak in the context of power equation relative to the other major groups in the country.

Some of the issues that readily come to mind include twenty pounds ceiling placed on bank lodgments for every Igbo after the war no matter how much they had in banks. Analysts have interpreted this policy as a calculated attempt to neutralize the savings and capacity of Igbo to rehabilitate and re-integrate into the Nigerian economy (Amadiume 2000, Duruji 2010). Another calculated action to keep the Igbo down from rising from the economic devastation of the war was the sudden withdrawal of federal troops from the east, a ploy that was aimed at denying the Igbo economy stimulus for recovery. Duruji (2010) argues that the continued stay of the troops in Igboland has potentials of empowering Igbo people as suppliers to the troops but were denied the opportunity by the withdrawal. Again the timing of the indigenization policy by the Federal Military government, shortly after the war when Igbo people were financially constrained to participate in the exercise, left room for from other ethnic groups to have to buy up the shares without Igbo participation, thus incapacitating the Igbo economically relative to other ethnic groups. Beside these, the marginalization of the Igbo also manifest in the area of infrastructural development which is deficient in the Igbo area relative to other parts of the country resulting in the mass migration of the Igbo people to other parts of the country for economic survival (Duruji 2010). This is so because of the discrimination against the Igbo in the citing of federal industries and the attendant benefit of linkages that come from such location of industries. This is equally connected to the deliberate neglect of ecological problems of soil erosion that is rampant in Igboland leading to loss in agricultural lands and settlements. The ecological devastation becomes obvious in relative terms when compared with the massive attention given by the Federal government to desertification in the north and beach erosion in the western parts of Nigeria (Ikpeze 2000:98). Beside these policies that economically disempowered the Igbo, other instruments were also used to effectively exclude them from economic and political power at the centre (Duruji 2010). Such include the tokenistic appointment to strategically insignificant positions, marginal presence of individuals of Igbo extraction in the administrative and headship of ministerial and extra-ministerial departments and parastatals particularly during the long duration of military rule in Nigeria. Another issue is the distortions of the federal structure to the disadvantage of the Igbo who have the least number of states and local governments compared with the other major tribes and the indifferent response of the federal authorities and even governments of other states to uphold the constitutionally inviolable natural residency and citizenship rights of original Igbo owners as far as issue of abandoned property was concerned (Ikpeze 2000).

The marginalization of the Igbo also manifested in the policy to ensure under representation of the Igbo in the military given the role Nigerian military officers of Igbo extraction played in the Biafran Armed Forces. Consequently, re-absorption of the Igbo into the military after the war was negligible, and the rates of upward mobility of the few that were re-absorbed were very slow, thus completing virtual exclusion of Igbo from highest sensitive military facilities of such important installation as mechanized division or armouries. These were mainly the issues that the Igbo were complaining about since the end of the civil war, all through the years of military dictatorship down to the return to democratic dispensation in 1999 (Duruji 2010).

5 STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY

The global recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s has a significant impact on the Nigerian economy as the country witnessed declining revenues from oil which is the major foreign exchange earner for the country for instance, the earning for 1985 which stood at N10.915 million plummeted to N8,107 million in 1986 (Jega 2000). This declining revenue compounded the ability of the country to keep its debt obligations and the increasing interest rate and penalties on inability to service catapulted the debt from the initial \$3 billion to about \$20 billion as at 1986(Jega 2000). Beside these was the progressive decline in purchasing power of the income of Nigerians due to hyper inflation and general decline in the production of goods and services (Olukoshi 1993, Oluyemi-Kusa 1994).

It was against this backdrop that the military government of Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) inspite of opposition from the Nigerian public who rejected the idea in the various conferences and symposia to that regard (Duruji 2013). SAP was a stabilization policy that was aimed at strengthening market forces, restoring price stability and balance of payment equilibrium. These policies were of course inspired by neo-liberal economic reforms of the Breton Wood institutions that preached the 'gospel' of rolling back the state in most Third World countries where this programme was implemented (Jega 2000). The objective of the programme was to increase efficiency and productivity in the economy by reducing wastage and promoting entrepreneurship in those countries that implement the programme (Olukoshi 1993). The feature of SAP comprises of cuts in government spending particularly expenditure on services that are crucial to the poor, the vulnerable and the aged in areas such education, health, housing, water supply among others. It also involves removal of import controls and removal of low prices even in essential goods and allowing the free market to determine prices. Devaluation of currencies was meant to reduce imports and increase exports. It also included tight fist control of money supply and credit to burn away inflation (Ihonbere 2000). Raise of interest rate to encourage savings, as well as privatization of government enterprises to encourage profitable management of these enterprises.

These measures, it was believed would solve the fiscal and trade imbalances and improves the capacity of government to service their debt obligations. The 'fat' of government spending and intervention in the economy would be cut away leaving the 'muscles' of a re-invigorated private sector to push development forward. Government development projects and social service initiatives would be suspended until adjustment was carried out (Ihonbere 2000).

According to Jega (2000) the Babangida regime vehemently pursued the implementation of the SAP but the outcome was profoundly devastating for the Nigerian political economy. The result was that the programme was unable to curb the wastage in the management of the economy and manufacturing sector experienced a complete comatose. The Nigerian state systematically disengaged from providing social services culminating in unbearable increases in the cost of education, medical and health services (Jega 2000). The policy of devaluation which was meant to reduce the mad rush for imported goods by making them expensive as well as boost export earning through the cheapening of produce in the country ended up worsening the purchasing power of the workers and peasants, thereby heightening the cost of living and driving many Nigerians into the poverty line (Jega 1993, Adejumbi 1995). It is worthy of note that the impact of SAP exposed the Nigerian state as reckless, insensitive, irresponsible and unable to meet the basic obligations to its citizenry (Jega 2000).

The policy of devaluation of currency adversely affected country which an import-dependent nation such that imported spare parts, fuel and other inputs to industries became more expensive, therefore raising the cost of doing business in Nigeria. Because these spare parts cannot be replaced locally the consequence for most of the industries was closure (Ihonbere). It must also be noted that the quota allotted to Nigerian products does not necessarily gain outside market even when they are cheaper. The policy of devaluation instead of achieving its intendment rather led to inflation, capital flight and bad allocation of scarce resources. The policy further made capital to start new businesses harder to come by, resulting in stagnation. It also caused many businesses to run into bankruptcy and the consequent decline in the economy that worsened unemployment (Jega 1993)

The policy of privatization created its own damage to the economy for instance; there was shortage of indigenous businessmen to take over government enterprises. The few indigenous buyers of the government enterprises were those who have looted government fund. The companies which they could buy fell in the hands of foreign big business (Ihonbere). The emphasis on profitability by the new owners rather than on providing service saw a low turn of enterprises that have strategic importance and most significantly was the fact that unemployment was heightened due to massive retrenchment of workers from those enterprises (Jeag 1993).

The external trade liberalization which SAP encouraged led to dumping of cheap products such as clothes, shoes, creams, used cars among many others. The implication of this for the economy was that it undermined the local industries producing such items. The consequences of that were that it led to stillbirth of many infant industries in the country. Furthermore taking advantaged of the policy, developed countries reduced the prices of their agricultural goods such as rice, wheat and milk etc to get rid of them at any price. This of course undermined the capacity of Nigerians to produce its own food requirement.

It is at this stage that the process of state decomposition started with chaotic management of the economy, institutional decay and the inability of the state to provide basic socio-economic and security needs of Nigerians (Jega 2000). This was exacerbated by the unresponsive and unaccountable position of the government which was led by the military and for the people to survive the harsh economic condition, a culture of alienation from the state began to take the centre stage and large number of Nigerians began to learn to survive outside of the state (Jega 1993).

6 POST ADJUSTMENT GENDERED ROLES IN IGBO LAND

Gender roles are the social definition of women and men. It refers to a set of qualities and behaviors expected from a female or male by society, it is learned and can be affected by factors such as education or socio-economic status. These vary among different societies and cultures, classes, ages and different periods in history.

The genderisation of division of labour across many societies has given the men edge over the women in the socio-political structure of many societies and cultures including those of the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria (Mbiliyi 1994). This is reinforced by the image of womanhood which undergoes series of changes particularly for the Igbo society from girlhood or maidenhood to wifhood and motherhood. And it is this images that influence and determines the responsibilities and roles that are ascribed to females and what they participate in (Ezumah 2003)

As such, in the traditional Igbo society right from birth, girls are perceived in the light of their roles as prospective wives and mothers, and hence from infancy, the socialization of girls is tailored towards equipping them with qualities that will enable them fulfill their expected future roles as wives and mothers. Though feminist scholars typically lament that it is the lot of women everywhere to be placed in an inferior status relative to men (Brunsdon 1978:23), the case of the Igbo women looking at the issue from the perspective of the socio-economic structure of the society seem different. Though the economic roles compared to those of men are less prestigious and lucrative in the sense that man's crop yam precedes other crop and the long-distance trade is a pre-eminent form of commerce, making men to exercise greater command over economic resources. This coupled with the patrilineage system of Igbo land which gives men the control of the land, to making men's status superior. But as Achebe (1988) noted, the role of women in economic activity contributes to their maintaining a considerable economic integrity. This gives credence to the position that whenever women have been able to maintain economic autonomy, their status has remained unimpaired as they are able to organize and keep their right intact (Leacock 1978).

But we have been able to establish that colonial intrusion into Igbo society opened up new statuses for male and female gender. Such institutions as the church, the school, urbanization and modern politics did not significantly change the socio-economic equilibrium of the traditional Igbo setting (Uchendu 1965). It was rather the civil war and its aftermath that significantly did (Ikpeze 2000)..The first shift in this gendered roles occurred during the civil war, when most able bodied men were engaged in some aspect or the other of the war effort, forcing women to engage in the traditional men's work of clearing the land and planting the yam. The post war oil boom that encouraged rural – urban migration consolidated this.

The oil boom of the 1970's it has been argued has great social effects, one of which was the greater urbanization that saw flight of men from agriculture into city life and urban wage employment. However for the Igbo men this movement was into self-employment in the informal sector as a response to the post-Biafran war marginalization of the Igbo deliberately targeted at excluding them from the main stream of the Nigerian economy.

Igbo men responded to the post-war economic marginalization by moving quickly into the informal sector as their was a dire urgent need for economic rehabilitation. In the face of economic asphyxiation and the deliberate official attitude to close entry into the formal sector, the informal sector

appeared to be the easiest and perhaps the only feasible port of re-entry into the Nigerian economy at the end of the shooting war (Ikpeze 2000).

The impact of these is that the economic marginalization of the Igbo which denied them access into the formal wage employment created a disincentive to investment in education especially for the men folk. The point being that many Igbo men who invested time and money to acquire education found it extremely difficult to secure a job in an economy that was dominantly state owned and state control. Whereas Igbo men who went into the informal sector of trading, improved their economic status within the same period compared to their counterpart who invested time and money into improving themselves educationally. This scenario for majority of Igbo men proved that investment in education is an illusion and waste of time and resources since the prevailing socio-political situation seem bleak for economic mobility. This consequently necessitated mass drove of Igbo men into informal sector of self employment. It also and influenced the pervasive attitude that investment in education is a waste for the men. These opened the window for Igbo girls to have a lee way in educational pursuit and since they faced less social pressure than the men the temptation for shorter economic break via involvement in commerce was not as intense.

This attitude of Igbo men to educational pursuit created a social problem because more women are getting empowered by the virtue of the fact that they were the gender that embraced education. At a point in the 1990s it became a social challenge that male enrolment in schools were dropping significantly in Igbo states of which the governments in those areas. The implication of these reflected in the reversal of the situation whereby for many families, only the Female were empowered educationally with the skills to undertake formal positions in the bureaucracy or corporate enterprises. But the men who moved into the informal sectors in drove were still in charge owing to their better financial empowerment compared to the female gender who were not under intense social pressure of providing for the family in the light of the socio-political climate in the country that clearly disadvantaged the Igbo ethnic group in the competition for jobs in the formal sector of the economy.

However, another major change arising from the post civil war development was the liberalization of the Nigerian economy following the adoption of International Financial Institution's recommended policy of adjustment and stabilization (Ihonvbere 2000). These policies which has continued for many decades, has turned most enterprises into the hands of private profit oriented individuals implying the less visibility of the officially championed exclusion of the Igbo in those enterprises as was the case after the civil war. In other words, the opening up of avenues and opportunities for the educated people with skills has become in order for the day for a private profit oriented enterprise. Instead of the nepotism that characterizes employment in Nigeria, the emphasis in post-adjustment Nigeria has created a level playing ground for skillful persons to be employed irrespective of their ethnic background. As such post-adjustment economy of Nigeria, threw up opportunities for the Female gender in the Igbo society to compete for better paying employments unlike their male counterparts disadvantaged by the difference in educational attainment. The implication of these development reflected in the fact that more Igbo women has become empowered economically and in some cases better than their male counterparts who most times are their husbands

This of course is causing a breakdown in gender role as the domination of the men in Igbo society is getting diminished as these better income earning educated women are asserting their right in the family, social and political spheres more that any other ethnic group in Nigeria. This trend has created social tension as most Igbo men who still believe in the traditional role of the women as one that has to be under them are putting up a resistance to the changes and finding it difficult to adjust to the reality.

7 CONCLUSION

Gendered role has defined the place of the male in female gender in many societies, including the Igbo society. But these roles are not static but dynamic in the sense that changes occur due to factors in space and time. For the Igbo society just like many other societies around the world, the female gender is at the receiving end of these socially define roles even though the Igbo women are better off when compared with other societies, but the female is seen as below her male counterpart which was how it was defined by traditional setting in Igbo society. But progressively event such as colonialism and modernity has eroded these traditionally defined roles in Igbo society but the one event that is upsetting the traditional order is the post-civil war fate of the Igbo in Nigerian state and the post-adjustment economy which has together combined to bring the female gender in the Igbo society at

par with the male in terms of economic empowerment and responsibility with the accompanying social dissonance that is yet to be fully accepted.

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