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Culture, Gender and Identity: Images and Realities in Igbo Community, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines the images and reality of gender identity differences in Igbo community as social processes of self-esteem, class structure, status consciousness and self-categorization in the community. The changing images of gender and identity in Igbo patriarchal community dates back to the outset of colonial infiltration of the indigenous culture with the introduction of women taxation, western religion and education and office employment in the area. Like in many other Nigerian cultures, gender image and identity started to change in meaning and values consequent to colonialism. Thus preference for the male-child over the female-child started to take prominence immediately after western-education was introduced in the area in the 1900s Britain expedition. The reality is the change in gender equality that existed and its implication in cultural values, norms and beliefs of the people in terms of religion, education, marriage, occupation, inheritance rights and leadership. Moreover, an unprecedented class distinction and social status consciousness began to negotiate the terms of social recognition and interaction on the bases of the new ways of life at the expense of those who did not have western influence through religion, education and travelling to foreign countries like Britain, United States of America and Canada. They were subjected to inferiority complex persecution in the community, thus creating gender inequality. Through textual analysis of data and interviews with community leaders, elders, and youths, this study established insights on gender image and identity construction and deconstruction within the contexts of colonial influence on gender image and social identity, arguing that the stimulus to stigmatize gender-female image-identity as inferior subordinate to male among Igbo people comes from colonial cultural influence of self-categorization. Thus, there is need to depersonalize colonial influence in our cultural life so as to reanimate indigenous values and respects for womanhood.

Keywords: Culture, Gender, Image, Identity, Inequality, Colonization, Community, Igbo, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to examine realities of gender image and identity in Igbo community from the traditional perspectives to modern times with emphasis on the factors responsible for the gender inequality both in image and identity among the Mbaise-patriarchal community. This is because at the centre of the much debated gender inequality is the image and identity of the womanhood in the society with emphasis on rights, duties, inheritance rights, limited access to economic resources and decision making in her first and second family. These are social processes that emerged as a result of colonization of the people with changes in their cultural values as new culture values were introduced through foreign influences. For instance, in the traditional Mbaise-patriarchal community there were no accounts of gender inequality amongst members of the clans beginning from the family to kindred and community. People were treated with equal rights except that seniority in age was observed with respect. Perhaps this might have been viewed by foreign colonial anthropologists as inequality in gender image and identity as the reality in the area with little knowledge of the culture. Given the assumption that gender inequality in African societies is culturally constructed is a cultural fallacy. Western and modern African feminists like, Oakley, (1974), Edwards and Ribbens,(1998), Mohanty (2003), Imam,(2015), believe that the African woman predicaments in terms of social image and identity status...
are basically cultural. For Imam, “most of our problems here are about culture” This negative assumption poses a challenge to understanding the reality of gender image and identity in the pre-colonial Mbaise community as there were structured balance between patriarch and matriarch.

For instance, the signification of praise names husbands give to their wives in recognition of their capability to produce and reproduce, protect and defense their children and even husband in men’s world shows that the Igbo culture recognizes the importance of womanhood in a man’s life.

Cultural names such as Obidia, literally meaning the heart of her husband, Odoziaku, the stronghold of wealth, Ezenwanyi, queen, Nnedia, mother of her husband, Agu diya, her husband’s lion, were ranked in ascending order. These entire praise names symbolize social identity and image of gender and manifest through matrimonial reality have been negated by the ongoing debate surrounding cultural factors responsible for gender inequality. This is because culture refers to the people’s intellectual, spiritual and moral endowment expressed through relationships in which all these praise names are philosophically structured to give out the inner feelings of the men about womanhood.

**Literature Review**

**Igbo cultural sociology in perspective**

There has not been a consensus of opinion on the origin of the Igbo but there are, however, attempts to get to the root of Igbo origin by some scholars like Talbot (1926:19-22), Uchendu (1965:40), Strong (1864 – 1893) so as to trace the source of its culture. For instance, Talbot (1926) speaks of the migrations sets in motion in Egypt in 1870 B.C. by such events as the Nubian wars of Amenemtha I or the conquest of Egypt somewhat later by the ‘Hyksos’ which led some Egyptians to migrate to certain Igbo territorial area. According to Talbot (1926), these various migration movements – groups arrived at different times only to occupy contiguous geographical units which today include all of the Igbo speaking peoples in the south-eastern Nigeria; Abia; Anambra; Ebony; Enugu; Imo States; while in the south-south; Ikweere and Etche in Rivers State, and Ika-Igbo in Delta State. Thus Igbo cultural-groupings constitute one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Five sub-ethnic groups can be identified amongst the Igbo ethnic-nationally. These are Northern Igbo; Southern Igbo; Western Igbo; and Cross River Igbo (Afigbo 2001:31). Besides, the entire Igbo cultural groups are purely for agricultural activities, blacksmith, mat and pottery making. According to National Population Census (2006) Igbo population is unevenly distributed as a result of their locations in other parts of Nigeria in particular and the rest of the world in general. They speak a common language which makes it possible to a large extent to share a common cultural system. Thus this cultural system also forms their social identity irrespective of the fact that there exist diverse sub cultures and dialects.

**Precolonial gender images and realities in Mbaise community**

Going by the reality of gender images and identity that existed in the pre-colonial Igbo culture, there is no doubt that whatever images and identities we have today are cultural aberrations. The good olden days of the deification of motherhood as a goddess liken to mother-earth (Ala) in traditional Igbo culture is gone with colonialism: deification of motherhood as a pride of humanity held in such a dignified honour and respect in the community as a source of life is modernized. Underlying this culturally held image was a belief that the motherhood could embody collective power both economic and political wills more efficiently than the fatherhood that favoured self-centred interests, especially in a patrimonial structured society such as Igbo even with exception of Ohatia matrilineal structured community. The matrimonial praise names which husbands gave their wives in recognition of their wives’ capability to produce economic livelihoods, care for children, care for the husband; both spiritual and physical, in all situations, and society also accord the women such dignified honour and respect, as they (women) were called and greeted in recognition of what they (women) are or have achieved for others to recognize in the family, village and society are measures of equality. For instance, when a man is recognized in the community, his is also assigned with praise names as an image and identity by which everyone knows him.

As Oha (2003:2) argues that the act of praising is performed as a means of encouraging positive behaviour in people “within the Igbo cultural context, praising as an ideal positive reinforcement act, is justified with the wise saying that: e to o dike na nke o mere, o mechie ozo: literally means that if a great person is praised for his or her achievement, he or she would achieve more”. What is symbolic in the statement is the fact that women in the traditional Igbo community were empowered through praise names that reinforce their image and identity positively in the society. The socio-cultural reality is that there were no such inequality For instance, women matrimonial praise names that were socio-culturally constructed like Obidia, meaning the heart of the husband; Odoziaku; meaning the one that keeps wealth well; Nnediya; meaning the mother of her husband; Nwanyi nweulo; meaning the head of the house, Ugodiya; meaning the eagle of her husband, were connected between economic and political powers of a woman in her matrimonial home, extended-family, village and community. Praise names adopted by Igbo
men for their wives in pre-colonial period, show that there were gender equality in both economic and social status, although traditional Igbo society was structured on democratic principles which explicitly gendered social empowerment processes between men and women in terms of enduring and unique relationship, yet patriarchy existed as a natural form of government in terms of security and defense of the community’s commonwealth. As Meek (1950:130) aptly put it: “That the elders of the community were like a body of mediators and referees rather than of prosecutors and judges, and the community was a republic in the true sense of that term, a corporation in which government was the concern of all (1950:130)”. In other words, it presupposes that there were no gender inequality since men were mediators and not prosecutors and judges. Similarly Green (1947:58) in his study of Igbo village affairs observed that “going together” is the hallmark of traditional Igbo democracy which attaches importance to individual rights to life, property and social status and equality. Of course, the gender image and identity in traditional Igbo community did not conflate to the present space of inequalities the modern feminists are projecting; constructing an identity or image of a woman always in crisis; unhappy, hated, dehumanized and rejected by the kind of her male-offspring. But in traditional Igbo culture the words gender image were none existence until the middle part of colonization in 1928 when the colonial government introduced women taxation in Igbo land, which inevitably led to Aba women riot. The implication is that there were no inequalities between men and women in Igbo community social life until the emergence of colonization. Just as Oyewummi (2002:2,8) argues, the traditional Yoruba family can be described as a non-gendered family. It is non-gendered because kinship roles and categories are not gender-differentiated. Significantly then, power centre within the family is diffused and is not gender specific. Gender image in Igbo land in particular and Africa in general is a colonial agenda designed to create disaffection and mistrust between wife and husband; between brother and sister, in an attempt to exploit their inheritance, rights to natural resources in their environment. Of course, the only way the colonial government could exploit the people with less force, was to institutionalize gender image and identity inequalities in the family, community and society in terms of non-existed economic and political differences between wife and husband, brother and sister in the traditional setting.

According to Mrs. Ezenwanyi Nwachukwu 98 years (king of women) a matriarch of Umusike-Village Lorji Mbase, Imo State, and a retired school headmistress, questioned what gender image means. For her, her mother never knew what gender image means. For her, her mother never knew what gender image means in her days and she was brought up in that way. She claims that her mother and father lived a one to one life and every other family within her kindred and far into the community, as much as she can remember, “we lived one to one love and happy life”. Asked why she bears kind of women as her real name, she claimed that her father gave her the name in appreciation of her mother’s quality of character as women’s leader in the community. This remark is corroborated by Pa Elder Anyanwu Udo, 101 years, the patriarch of Umudim Eziala in Aniomama, Delta State, perceptive observation; the very fact that a man paid dowry on a woman as his wife indicates that he loves her, he adores her, and he cherishes her and respect her. He supported his claim by saying the Igbo proverb; *Nma nwanyi wu di,* (personal communication, June 2014) meaning that, the beauty of a woman is her husband. This expresses the fact that a woman is not complete without a man, in addition, woman on account of being the gateway to this world, *Nne bu uwa ndu* meaning that mothers are the micro-world, had a terrifying aura in traditional Igbo culture. Just as Achebe (1958: 8 -9) observes, “The againwayi umuofia, literally means the mythical powerful old woman of war, was reverend and feared by all because of her alleged power over life and death in the community ”She would never fight a fight of blame as active principle…” however, Igbo tradition also recorded some women who accompanied their men to communal wars, specifically over land or boundary disputes. In addition, women were not initiated into *Osu* castes except when one is born into the family of *Osu*. Two observations are necessary here. First the colonial anthropologists in Igbo land (all males) have either ignored the traditional gender image identity consequent to their roles played as mother of all (male and female) which did not require publicity. Second, the women having given support to men during such communal wars, suggests that gender differences in pre-colonial Igbo land were completely absent until colonization period in the area. For instance, *Ogu Uumu nwanyi* (women fight) Aba women riot of 1929 which took place simultaneously in every community in Igbo land against colonial rule, is a clear evidence of the turning phase of gender-image in Igbo land.

**Colonial images and realities in Mbase community**

Early in the development of gender image and identity inequalities is the connection between colonial influences on the indigenous values and its implications in the community social life or the people’s behaviour. However, some Igbo gender scholars like Ezekwesili (1993) argues that gender image is an Anglo-Saxon construct which is perceived within the perceivable observation framework of European and American value. On the contrary, she claims “I am a traditional African woman who believes that men and women have distinct sex roles. Both were created by God to complement each other. I firmly believed that a man no matter his status is the head of every family. For love, peace and harmony to prevail in every home, the woman
no matter her status must acknowledge her natural duties and obligations in the family, community and society.” In other words, the above factual claim is just an attitudinal disposition of virtually every woman in pre-colonial Igbo society without a sense of gender inequality. Besides, the marriage institution was based on gerontocracy of age whereby the husband is older than his wife but nowadays some men marry even their mother’s age mate which is the European and American styles. This modern practice in marriage between older women and younger men has some implication for the gender image inequality in Igbo land. For instance, social alienation of age maturity set for marriage for men and women in our society today, breeds gender image inequality like self-antagonism, contemplation of divorce and so on. In addition, is the importation of ‘same sex marriage,’ ‘lesbianism’ and ‘homosexuality’ which are foreign to Igbo culture norms and customary behaviour. All these anti-socio-cultural behaviours are attempts being made to introduce gender equality in Africa without recourse to African morality. However, the point needs to be made here is that colonization did not take cognizance of the existing traditional gender image structures in Igbo land in terms of women roles in economic, leadership qualities within the contexts of directing the children and managing the home-front on the one hand and on the other hand, in times of misuse and war in the community, women have been found to be active in bringing about order and peace which earned them the traditional matrimonial praise names they received from their husbands and accepted by the family and community in recognition of their capabilities. To that end, it means that gender image in traditional Igbo society is culturally attached to individualistic mental power to produce and reproduce and organizational prowess in the family and community which women were duly recognized. Somewhat, it seems that these culturally endowed and recognized gender image have been eroded by colonization basically as a result of misconception and misplacement of values or as deliberate attempts to discredit African cultural values in favour of European values or as deliberate attempts to discredit African cultural values in favour of European values and practice in Africa. Thus the problems of gender image and identity between men and women, husbands and wives, in our present day families, villages and communities had negated traditional values and morality. As Rai (1996) observes feminist debates about the nature of gender citizenship are often Anglo-Euro-centric and tend to ignore constructions of citizenship in developing nation-state. (as quoted in Agenda, 1 Mar 01, 19/4/01:55). In other words, theories of gendered image and identity inequality in Africa today are western epistemological constructs especially those based on inequality of rights to access to economic power and social status being propagated or introduced to educated Africans by Western feminists on gender images. The Euro-America gender theorists believe that African societies are men’s world with women slaves; just as some African scholars like Olutayo (2000:68), Udegbe (1998:7), believed that African women are imprisoned indoors into traditionally restricted areas such as agriculture and domestic work. The above statement represents the obvious reaction in modern times. There two basic reasons for this. First, it shows the level of colonial influence on African scholars who ignore their cultural heritage in terms of defication of motherhood as a gender image identity. This is because Olutayo (ibid) and Udegbe (ibid) accounts do not represent the true picture of gender images in traditional African societies. For instance, in Yoruba traditional culture mother is seen as gold Iya ni wura, second there is a lack of critical research into traditional gender images among African scholars who restrict and conceptualize African gender image identity in line with their Euro-American feminist scholars. This approach invariably create gender image crisis between home cultured women and western-cultured woman in our society. The Igbo idea of gender image should best be understood in terms of traditional cultural values placed on womanhood rather than Europe and American constructed images that pose a challenge to our cultural values and collective solidarity that did not differentiate between sexes but assign roles and duties according to capability.

According to Ekeh (1985:151) Igbo traditional life was characterized by collective solidarity of people who shared common customs and beliefs, linked by blood or marriage ties and above, an identical worldview of what a woman’s status as a sweet mother ought to be in the family and society. But this collective solidarity which was non-gender based has been destroyed through colonial factors such as Christianity and Western education introduced in the area. As Obiechina (1975) correctly noted that Christianity initially militated against the collective solidarity of the people, for the early Christian converts neither appealed to clan solidarity no responded to its appeal. In addition, to the destruction of collective solidarity through Christianity there arose a new ideology in marriage institution through European colonial models, court and church marriage rituals that challenged traditional marriage institution. This was the beginning of a new phase in gender image in marriage and divorce cases in courts in Igbo land in particular and Nigeria in general. (as quoted in Ekeh, ibid).

Theoretical overview

the gender image and identity in terms of dichotomy or subordination and inequalities within the context of economic, political, social status and empowerment both in the family and society, from the Euro-American gender-feminists constructed perspectives rather than from African trado-cultural gender image and identity that places a woman on a high esteemed value as a deified mothers (See Madubuike and Solomon, 2005, “The Deification of Motherhood in Igbo Society” in S. Afonja, 2005, ed. Beyond Our Imaginations: African Women’s Realities). However, in considering the esteemed value African trado-culture places on women, Oyewumi observed that: In many traditional African societies certain measure of self-determination add value, and practiced as a matter of course and as a way of life for all adults, male and female. This very tradition of Africa self-determination-personal, cultural, and political has been truncated by a series of successive global historical processes most notably the Atlantic slave trade and European colonization (2003:1-2). Similarly, Awe (1977) argues, that the problem of gender image and identity has to be examined within many contexts of ethno-cultural values placed on women and with an awareness of cultural differences so as to have better understanding of gender image and identity in the societies.

For Taiwo (2003) it is these cultural values differences and specificities that gender-feminists willfully block out of its theoretical mindset. Taiwo asserted that: To confront these differences is to unearth the ugly fact that women never experience their oppression in the same ways; the wife of a wealthy peasant, for instance, may not be “a typical rural African woman” and the possibility of accumulation may vary from place to place and from class to class (2003:53). The implications are first, gender image and identity in African societies are not necessarily confined to the Euro-American perspectives or otherwise situated in like manners of oppression and subjugation; second, that African women are not culturally discredited, discriminated and or marginalised as perceived by Western feminists and their African Euro-American oriented feminists but encompasses the economic capability to produce the basic household needs; food, care for its members including male-members, and reproductive programme for continuity of the society; giving birth to children and socializing them into societal norms for a better society. For instance, Ogunbiye and Leslie (1985) argues that: It is through the institution of marriage that women who become properties in their husbands’ lineages, lose all personal rights and self-identity. Women loss is men’s gain, as the institutions of marriage and motherhood further invest men’s existing powerful positions in the kinship system and interpersonal relationships with wider political and economic meaning (as quoted in Bakare Yusuf 2003:2 of 15).

In other words, it is the women that situate men’s existing powerful positions in the family and society as a result of their exceptional capability to reproduce and care for the ones they reproduced or otherwise the likes of what they are capable to reproduce as members of the society. Issuing from the above strands of arguments, we can examine our past cultural gender image and identity and its realities in economic and decision-making in the family and society and find out where the present gender image crisis emerged from, what we can change and how we can reconstruct the image identity. According to Fayorsey (2003:1) we can make a change by examining our culture and the processes in our development rather than importing and coping with the gender images and identity in Euro-American feminists’ perspectives which Oyewumi (2002) dismisses as Euro-American centered experiences. I adopt Oyewumi (2002), Awe (1996), and Fayorsey (2003) positive propositions which attributed the rise of gender image and identity inequalities in Africa to colonial influences. However, I have weaved African gender image and identity perspectives and submerged these ideas under socio-cultural and psychological patterning of differences between male and female in African context, specifically in Igbo view of gender image and identity in spite of their patrilineal and matrilineal groups orientations as the case may be in some communities through lineage structures centered on traditions and customs.

Unlike the Marxist theory of class struggle over access to economic and political power in the society which identifies three classes in the struggles: the external ruling class – colonial power; the internal ruling class – elite; the subordinate class – the masses, the gender image and identity that occurred in Igbo communities is at variance with Marxist theory. This is because there are variants in African cultural lines that require cultural tools of analysis. The inevitability of such cultural tools in the analysis of gender image and identity in Africa is expressed by the realities of the traditions and customs. According to Afonja (2006) other things being equal, the possibility of cultural tools emerging as our theoretical consideration is much more lively in the analysis of gender image an identity realities in the pre-colonial African societies.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The data which supplied the empirical evidence for the study were generated from ethnographic study of the Igbo communities identified as the study location. Interviews, Focus Group Discussion, and observation techniques, formed the primary source, while newspapers, journals and books on gender image and identity inequalities in Igbo community from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs complemented the primary sources.
Limitation of the study

Some limitations were observed in the data collection, specifically in the interview approach due to the sensitivity of the present politicized gender image and identity realities in the homes and public places between men and women, husbands and wives in the society. The most difficult areas were the illiterate and half educated women who see the educated women in their communities as ‘mentors’ who are teaching them how to claim their ‘natural rights’ among men even in the home, for instance, when to say yes for sexual intercourse with their husbands. The question on who leads the home and provides the family needs was not clearly addressed because of the conflicting issue of claims of shared family responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the number of respondents who linked gender image and identity inequality to colonial impact or influence through western education, life in urban cities and visits to Europe and America was quite reasonable and the opinion was limited to the traditional home based women and men respondents.

However, the respondents identified what they regarded as the root causes of gender image depersonalization in the community which had far reaching effects on the social relationships, table 1.

There is no doubt that depersonalization of gender image and identity consciousness in Igbo community emerged at the epochs of Christianity and European colonialism in the area. These epochal periods had introduced divergent perceptions on cultural bond-affinity relationships which existed between male and female on their socio-cultural values, specifically as a new class order, birth rights and social status consciousness of who you are in the family and community.

Thus the implications are the root causes of gender inequality and its outcome in terms of undesired socio-cultural value change in the area. However, there is a misrepresentation of gender image and identity by looking at Euro-American feminists’ perceptual observation of African situation.

This is because they believe that African women are culturally imprisoned by their men. For instance Ogboro (2005:270) argues, that “the pre-colonial political economy of the hinterland of Igbo revealed that title taking was one of the yardsticks for measuring social, economic and political attainment an achievement. Because of this, in some Igbo communities such as Nnobi, both men and women aspired to acquire titles on equal basis. In Nnobi the female title Ekwe, was associated with the goddess Idemili; Similarly in Mbaise communities, Imo State, Bende communities, Abia State, Ika-Igbo communities, Delta State, Ikwerre communities, Rivers State, the title of Ezenwanyi (king of women) was socially accorded to women who displayed exceptional charisma, economic prowess both in farming and economic activities and also in character such as honesty and faithfulness to their family and community.

The implications of these are, first, it is necessary to look beyond the present crisis of gender image in Igbo land as culturally constructed rather than externally influenced. Second, pre-colonial Igbo women were socially and culturally recognized and equally respected by all members of the society.

FINDINGS

To capture the realities of gender image and identity in post-colonial Igbo community studied, the study used ethnographic approaches to gather qualitative data from selected respondents of Igbo culture. Varying definitions have been given for the reason for the inequality in the gender image and identity perceived amongst Igbo communities with regard to age differences between respondents between the ages of 25 years and 45 years who see the inequality as that of culture made that does not want to change its norms and beliefs in line with modernity. While respondents between the ages of 50 years and above believe that colonial influences through western education and Christianity are the roots of or created inequalities in gender image and identity in the area. These definitions should alert us to the gender ideological image functions implicitly introduced through Christianity and colonialism to Igbo people rather than cultural values. It also points to the ongoing struggle and debates on gender images specifically on women social status: identities in economic, education and politics. In attempting to define the crisis of gender image in Igbo culture, the respondents between the ages of 50 years and 100 years argue that the crisis of gender image must be seen as colonial mentality that had destroyed the Igbo-cultural fabric of collective solidarity both in marriage institution and social relationships. For Madam Joy Nwokoma age 78 of Omuma in Rivers State, “it is a world turned upside down, in our days we only knew of our mother and father Nne na nna who live as one in one and achieve together.” (Personal communication, June 2014).

Similarly Madam Ugo Ogbonna, 98 years, the matriarch of Ogbonna family Uzokoli, Abia State, quiered what gender image and identity inequality means?

To her “it is like dividing the family into two and once this is done the centre can no longer hold; gender image is un-African and un-Igbo to me, the reason why we fought the Aba women riot in 1929 was because they the white men (colonial masters) wanted to introduce tax here the way it is in their country and we said no to them”.(personal communication, June 2014) While one may also question the rationale behind the imposition of taxes on housewives who had no pay jobs in the society. As Obiechina (1975) observes, by extension, colonial government was evil and exploitative which too easily implicated the crisis of gender image and identity in African societies. Pa Samuel Okoh, 98 years a retired civil servant at the University College Hospital Ibadan,
Table 1. An Integrated root causes of gender-image-depersonalization

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<tr>
<th>Root causes</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Expected effects and changes in social relationships</th>
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<tr>
<td>Western-education</td>
<td>Disregard for cultural symbols and practices. Lack of respect and fear of gods and</td>
<td>Wife and husband dichotomy in relationship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian-religion</td>
<td>sacred things: distortion of cultural values and identity</td>
<td>Competition in social status; educational attainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Globalization / neo-colonization</td>
<td>Conflicting cultural values</td>
<td>economy empowerment unlimited rights of inheritance,</td>
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<td>networks</td>
<td>changes in attitude to life and behavioral patterns:</td>
<td>marriage free of social stigmatization, legalisation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Overbearing of foreign influence on individual and national attitudes.</td>
<td>of abortion of pregnancy; social recognition of</td>
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<td>Class, birth and social</td>
<td>Divergent</td>
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<td>status consciousness</td>
<td>perceptions of cultural bond-affinity relationships.</td>
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<td>Inferiority complex persecution drive; unmarried ladies. Known as Senior girls; singular</td>
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<td>stimulus to social stigmatization and criminality.</td>
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Source: Personal Fieldwork Madubuike 2014

native of Agbo, Delta State, argues that “the so-called
gender image-identity is a ploy played by the Whiteman
so as to establish that our people are backward in
everything including their marital relationship” (personal
communication, June 2014). He regrets that “this ugly
trend did not end with colonialism rather our sons and
daughters are the ones championing gender image-
identity inequality in their homes and workplaces, this is
unlike African and it is unfortunate for our culture
development.

Obviously, the realities of gender image and identity
inequalities within the Igbo families, villages and
communities have been transformed by historical
processes of Christianity and colonialism. The concept
of gender images continues to be applied to negative
attribute of woman and man relationship in the context of
man marginalizing, ill-treating and imprison the woman,
despite the fact that pre-colonial Igbo land were non-
gendered.

According to Ekeh (1985:153) “Igbo metaphysics
has maintained the concept of human beings dependent
on God rather than proclaim man as the rational
absolute”. However, the dislocation of such reality by
colonialism is the beginning of the perceived inequalities
in the image and identity in Igbo communities in modern
times.

As Nzewi 1997 observes, “modern African has
recklessly abandoned its human essence and cultural
values while gobbling up the modern publicity-hoisted
glamorous allures of western thoughts and lifestyle.
Africa cannot afford to continue thinking and acting as
the west thinks and acts or wants it to think and act”. Be
that as it may, the inequality of gender images and
identity meaning can only be resolved through
depersonalization of colonial mentality inherent in our
way of life and restoration of our traditional cultural
values that provided collective solidarity and gender

equality based on conscience collectivity in our families,
villages and communities, as practiced in the pre-
colonial Igbo culture. Thus, this would rather provide the
people a moral life and better society than the awful
changing life style amongst our youths. These changes
are expressed in Igbo culture and language with little or
no signification to young modern Igbo person as the
study reveals within the age bracket of 25 yrs and 45yrs.
Ironically those found within the ages above are victims
of globalization network culture rather than traditional
culture, as a result of their lack of adequate
understanding of their traditional culture, as a result of
their lack of adequate understanding of their traditional
values as regards gender image-identity. The study
suggests that the policy framework should be
reintroduction and reorientation of traditional cultural
values so as to empower the Igbo women in modern
times as it were in pre-colonial time through with some
degree of modifications as a result of globalization
network relationships.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the way the study had tried to
examine the gender image and identity in pre-colonial
times and the issue of inequalities that emerged at the
turn of Christianity and European colonialism in Igbo
land would present some problems to the western
feminists and gender scholars who believed that the
problems of gender image and identity in Igbo
community in particular and Africa in general was as a
result of cultural restrictions propagated by men.
Moreover, the perceived dominance of political and
economic organizations in the modern times by men
which is traceable to colonial structure of administration
is an issue in the gender images and identity inequality.
debate. However, the merit of the study is that it may generate a further study on the realities of gender image and identity equalities as were observed in the pre-colonial times and the inequalities in the contemporary times so as to propagate a new phase of cultural values for development and stability in the society.

The reason is that colonial mentality has destroyed the Igbo values in all spheres of life; be it gender equality in the economic, political, social recognition and the traditional title holding and so on; the ultimate goal or aspiration of an average modern Igbo woman or lady person goes beyond the traditional values. The reason is that she always wants to live and behave like an English woman, therefore creating inequalities in gender image and identity in the community.

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