

Postmodernist Attacks on Ethnography

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Abstract

Postmodernist scholars proclaim the death of classic ethnography on which aspects of ethnoarchaeology stands. In its place, they propose a deconstruction of cultural narratives to make meaning fluid or even futile. Such a proposition originated in reaction to the theology of sacred texts and got extended to most writings and finally to culture as a system of meaning. In the present paper, I draw from the examples of gender relations among the Igbo to argue that such a proposition is unhelpful in the study of culture. It is important to understand a group's management of knowledge and organisation of their common memory if we are to understand the worldview that they hold in common. I will also argue that postmodernist scholarship is a mere power-peddling game; a colonisation of knowledge production, by another name. Gender relations among the Igbo of Nigeria have attracted the attention of professional ethnographers following British colonisation of Nigeria. With particular reference to gender relations, the impression is given that all groups in the developing countries, including the Igbo, hold women in subjection but ethnography has shown this to be counterfactual. The first colonial Governor-General of Nigeria, Lord Lugard, in a foreword to a world-class ethnography on Igbo gender relations found the power that women wielded in traditional Igbo society remarkable. This paper combines synchronic ethnographic data, current official records, and recent history to argue that most disadvantages Igbo women now suffer are the results of post-contact acculturation. I suggest that classic ethnography is particularly imperative in specialisations such as archaeology and tourism studies where the culture-bearer's views are crucial in an attempt to understand artefacts in time and space and the indigenous knowledge that explains them.

Introduction

The Igbo have one of the richest crops of ethnographies among Africans, some of which date to 17th century. Interestingly one of the earliest of these is written by someone of Igbo origin, a manumitted slave named Olaudah Equiano who published his autobiography in England in 1789 (Equiano, 1988). In his lifetime the book was considered so important as a narrative on the African society by a native African that it reached its 13th edition. In contemporary times Equiano's narrative continues to be re-issued in different languages in Africa and elsewhere. From Equiano's days down till ours, so much has been published on the Igbo by both amateur and professional

ethnographers, native and foreign. Nearly all of these contain important sections on gender relations. Four of these, happily each by a career anthropologist and each a woman, are devoted to the study of women in the Igbo traditional society (Leith-Ross, 1939/1965; Green, 1947/1964; Amadiume 1987-a, 1987-b; Agbasiere, 2001). This makes getting the background information on the subject of our present discourse easy.

I also have included ethnographic data of my own. In the main I have included a discourse analysis of language as it is spoken at present. Language has the rare quality of containing fossilized aspects of culture that produced it. In today's language we can see the past culture, just as we see in it the current social relations and processes of such a society.

Terms

Patripotency is used in this discourse in the sense of organization of social institutions in a manner that privileges the position of the male, or in other words that subordinates or otherwise puts the womenfolk at a disadvantage; what the more familiar postmodernist discourse give the debatable name, patriarchy. Patripotency is the one that captures completely the sense in which some writers engage the real or putative problem of disproportionate allocation of power between the genders in a human group. Patrifocality in contradistinction to matrifocality (Barnard and Spencer, 1998: 612) may be used but this seems to refer only to the centrality of the gender under reference. The gender may be important in this way but lack actual power to control the institution. The segment, **potency**, brings in the dimension of power, where the control of the institution lies. Molapo (2008) reporting a pro-male inequitable sharing of social power among the Basotho prefers the term, patriarchy. Again patriarchy does not seem to reflect fully the phenomenon that is the subject of this discourse. In the discussion of social relations, patriarchy seems to emphasize the governmental aspects. Patripotency is used in this discourse to refer to all instances of exercise of power in whatever social domain by the male gender. Its converse will be matripotency. Each also implies unfair denial of the rival gender of adequate measure of control in the domain under reference.

It is alleged recently by some writers, usually those that are outside anthropology, that the Igbo society in Nigeria is one of those that suffer from patripotency. Examples of such writers are Onyeizuigbo (2003) and Elobuiké (nd). But it has also been demonstrated that writings that allege gender inequity among the Igbo are of two types. The first are writings that are based on quantitative surveys and powered by trendy postmodernist practices, usually of questionable methodology (Ezeh, 2003: 94, 95). This is typified in Onyeizuigbo (2003) where after having sampled 500 undergraduate Igbo speakers of English employing Standard English grammar, she concluded that the Igbo society was sexist. What was surveyed was not Igbo grammar. It was English grammar, and it is elementary sociolinguistics that a language reflects the society of its provenance. In this

case what is to blame is the English society; not the Igbo society, which has its entirely different strategy. I demonstrate below that all the points she holds against the Igbo second-language (L2) speakers of English in her survey are unknown in Igbo language.

Elobuiké (nd) represents the second category that consists in polemics that are usually based on the sentiments of their author or on second-hand sources of comparable motivation. As will become clear from the following, neither category is anchored on first-hand data of ethnographic or historical rigour.

Gender Relations in Traditional Igbo Society

Equiano (2007: 30) recounts in a publication that was first made in 1789 that activities into which contemporary Western societies have just begun admitting women were already open to Igbo women of his days. He states with regard to participation in war, "Our women are warriors, and march boldly out to fight along with the men."

It must be added that he recounted that more stricture are laid on the women than men on matters of marital infidelity. But then the social relations of the Igbo society of his days have to be taken into account. Majority of the Igbo communities were and are still patrilineal and patrilocal, although a handful of these in the southern-most eastern districts are either matrilineal or double-unilineal. Professional monographs have also been published on both categories. The latter are represented in the works of Nsugbe (1974), Ottenberg (1968), and McCall (2000). Altogether the Igbo number about 45 million and live in a territory some 40, 922 square kilometres located between 5° and 7° North and longitudes 6° and 8° East in Nigeria's south-eastern districts (Onu, 2005: 170).

As a rule patrilineal societies tend to be stringent in their control of wives' sexual relations. Some would argue that it is the logic that produced the regulations of sex in societies influenced by Judeo-Christian faiths. Where extramarital sex is permitted, such might be within members of the man's lineage. Maquet (1954: 185) once described this sort of cultural logic among Bahutu. Comparable sex taboos are encountered among the Igbo patrilineal communities. It contrasts with the classic case reported by Malinowski among the matrilineal Trobrianders. There the woman will not sleep with her husband's agnates (Malinowski, 1939: 385). But note that the Trobrianders are matrilineal. Again, in a different sense it also contrasts with the situation among the matriarchal Na of south-eastern China described by Hua (1997) where due to an agamous kinship the women choose her sexual partners on each occasion or the case described among the Lele by Douglas (1963) where the woman may become a culturally approved sexual partner to several men in a special kind of polyandry before such adolescent males eventually go their separate ways in distinct permanent marriages of their own. In traditional societies, kinship systems are important in the determination of rules on sexual conduct.

Amadiume (1987-a) suspects that the entire Igbo were once matriarchal at the level of power relations. Looked at from such perspectives, matriliney that are found among some of the Igbo communities will be interpreted as survivals of the greater matripotency of the olden days. While avoiding such far-reaching speculation both Leith-Ross and the former Governor-General of Nigeria, Lord Fredrick Lugard, who wrote the foreword to her monograph wondered at the enormousness of power wielded by the Igbo woman in the traditional social life. Lugard (1965: 6), noted, "She [i.e. the Igbo woman] claims full equality with the opposite sex, and would seem indeed to be the dominant partner." Leith-Ross (1965: 277) herself wrote, "In Ibo-land [*sic*] ... the equality of the sexes is so marked." The Anglican missionary, George Basden, despite his hostility to the Igbo culture in other respects reported in a narrative that was written in 1917 before Christianity and Westernization took roots, On one occasion I had the opportunity of watching a crowd of women making preparations for a meeting. The peculiar feature about it was the fact that they were dressed up as men; they wore men's hats and, in some cases, coats; the breasts were bound down close to the body by crossover straps and each member flourished a cutlass in her hand, and in every way they imitated men (Basden, 1966: 94).

Leith-Ross, Lugard and Basden all mentioned the existence of an all-women powerful council that was central to the organization of the society. Leith-Ross (1939/1965: 109, 110), the anthropologist among them, already noticed incipient acculturation, due to introduction of Christianity and colonial administration, that would vitiate the position of women. "It is natural ...," she wrote, "that the day of the Women Council is over ... It is true that if this form of feminine activity is doomed to disappear, another one is being created under the name of meetings of ... church members."

It is important to note these early accounts of the Igbo autochthonous systems and their displacement by the imposed allochthonous rivals because they have implications for the rest of this discourse. I will show that that all forms of discrimination, real or apparent, in present Igbo society are traceable to Christianity and botched Westernization through post-traditional education and supraethnic state impositions.

Evidence of gender equity among pre-contact Igbo is found as well in their language, also called Igbo. I borrow from examples I used in an earlier work (Ezeh, 2003). In the language the terms referring to human beings in a generic sense are gender-neutral, from time immemorial. The terms are: *madu*, and *onye*. *Madu* may be translated as human being. But it lacks the generic sense **man** in English, **l'homme** in French, **άνθρωπος**, in Greek, or **homo**, in Latin. It simply denotes human without reference to gender. The same is the case with *onye*, which means a person.

Of course, Igbo language does have the terms for **man** and **woman** when these are being spoken of distinctively. The term for man is *nwoke*. The term for woman is *nwanyị*. When the referent is merely a member of the *Homo*

sapiens species without bothering about gender, then the term in Igbo is *madu* (Ezeh, 2003: 99).

Igbo pronouns are also gender neutral. In this vowel-harmony-directed language, the third person singular nominative pronouns are *o*, or *o*, depending on the phonological feature of the vowel in the verb. The pronoun will apply whether the agent is male, female, or even neuter. This is the same for the objective third person singular pronoun, which is *ya*. The only difference here is that because of the special phonological nature of the low back vowel, /a/, in this language it is constant in all environments, i.e. it is not affected by the vowel harmony rule.

I have used the third person singular pronoun to illustrate this point because that is where some European languages are having problems with grammatical gender. Igbo language never had this in any aspect of its grammar. Igbo has as far as grammatical evidence goes, always been gender equitable.

We can use examples of possible utterances from English, French and Igbo.

- 22 **Jack** spoke about ethnography.
He spoke about ethnography.
Jill spoke about ethnography.
She spoke about ethnography.

- 23 **Jack** a parlé d'ethnographie.
Il a parlé d'ethnographie.
Jill a parlé d'ethnographie.
Elle a parlé d'ethnographie.

- 3. **Jack** kwuru maka etinografi.
O kwuru maka etinografi.
Jill kwuru maka etinografi.
O kwuru maka etinografi.

Feminists elsewhere in the world are just waking up to the sort of grammatical gender equity that the Igbo have always known. In the examples just cited, I didn't need to change pronouns in the third set of utterances to indicate a change in the sex or gender of the speakers that are being reported. I changed that for the first set, namely English. I did the same for the second set, namely French. The third set is Igbo. Yet, despite this manifest gender-equitability in the language, some writers merely echoing refrains from international postmodernist/globalisation-driven campaigns claim that Igbo speakers demonstrate sexist tendencies. When empirical features of Igbo are put side by side the claims made in Onyeizuigbo (2003) their incongruity becomes palpable. Worse, claims like Onyeizuigbo's are the nearest that writers in this category come to any evidence whatsoever; otherwise they just proceed on the assumption that if the social structure of

some human groups contain gender discrimination, then the social structure of all human groups *ipso facto* contain gender discrimination.

Harris (1971: 138) has shown that a language can be evidential of the gender power relations of its speakers. He used the case of English speakers, which he rates as unsatisfactory. I suspect that the Igbo can provide him with an example of the positive converse of the valid sociolinguistic point that he was making. Igbo language is gender equitable in all its features.

Kottak (2008: 237) quotes Amadiume (1987-b), an Igbo woman and an anthropologist, has reported that in this society, women may even marry other women. The title of Amadiume's work on this is so revealing: *Male daughters, female husbands*. Among the Igbo, virtually every status is attained through one's efforts. Biological status of sex is secondary. Social construct is crucial. A man can be socially re-created a woman; and a woman, man. McCall (2000) after a long-drawn-out participant observation among the Ohafia Igbo devotes a chapter of his monograph reporting this phenomenon in the shape of a case study of one of such matriarchs, Nne Uko. It is not only that she is married to another woman; she is, in fact, a polygynist. For all practical purposes no man enjoys a higher social privilege than her in all social domains of her Ohafia community. The choice is up to a woman in Nne Uko's position. Depending on the context she can express herself as a woman or as a man, and either is socially taken seriously.

Western-style Education

Western-style education was introduced to the Igbo by Christian missionaries. The obvious reason that one could guess is that the catechumens needed literacy to be able to follow the scriptural faith. But historians and early ethnographers say that the design was more fundamental than that (Leith-Ross 1939/1965: 396 – 397; Afigbo 1986: 18 – 19; Isichei 1995: 270 – 272). Converts were hard to find at a time when the indigenes were adamant in their traditional belief systems and brooked no ambivalence on tradition. The church then used education as bait. Parents were asked to bring their children to school to be taught reading and writing, which missionaries had confirmed that the Igbo marvelled at and envied. But once in school, the pupils must also be involved in church matters. The logic was [and it seems a logic that has now worked out well for the Christians] that in due course the generation that had the mission education would replace their parents as elders and the autochthonous ways of life would die out.

After a historical survey of the matter, Isichei (1995: 270) has concluded, "South eastern Nigeria is a particularly striking example of the way in which Christianity spread through the hunger for education." For our present purpose, the religion is also to blame for most of the problems of acculturation, including inequity in gender relations, for which the host culture is, for lack of relevant data, regularly traduced. Viewed objectively, Christians should not have destroyed the autochthonous systems that are not

demonstrably inimical to the newly introduced plural society. Mutual accommodation of the two systems would have produced a symbiosis that has been found to be extremely mutually beneficial in places where informed decisions have led to such accommodation. Kottak (2008: 32) has used the case of the ethnic Samoans in the United States to illustrate this.

There is something that can be learnt here from the strategy that applied linguists call contrastive analysis. It is futile to try to destroy an old knowledge system so that a new one might be learnt. If a later system is needed, it might help to see if it can be reconciled with the existing one, or at least to accurately understand such pre-existing one so that areas of conflict between it and a later one might be resolved. In the case of post-contact gender relations among the Igbo, Christian missionaries worked against such objective understanding of the traditional ways of the host society. In some cases they did not hide their prejudice and hostility to it. Leith-Ross (1939/1965: 110) has reached a similar conclusion at the incipient stage of the ill-advised acculturation, without of course using the contrastive-study analogy. The preference of sentiment over science that led to the ignorance of such an objective strategy had meant that hardly any policy on gender issues has worked among the post-contact Igbo up until now.

Originally more boys than girls were enrolled in Western-style schools. But so also were more people on the fringes of the old system than those in its mainstream. A man sent his slaves to school and kept his free-born to learn the traditional ways. The truth is: the natives were suspicious of nearly everything of European provenance initially. In some cases, the fledgling colonial administration had to fight to be able to bring in the new system. Isichei (1976: 199 – 139) devotes a chapter of her authoritative book on the history of this people to accounts of such resistance by the Igbo and its ruthless bloody British suppression at usually high casualty figures on the part of the host community.

Comparable suspicion greeted the colonial officer's imposition of chieftaincy as a supervisory institution of sorts for the grossly understaffed foreign bureaucracy. The largely acephalous Igbo did not have autochthonous chieftains and so when the colonial administrator requested for candidates for such strange office the natives as a rule gave them dispensable members of their communities. Of course such candidates returned to lord it over their former masters. Not being the type to be easily subdued, the Igbo resisted the imposition through a mass insurrection. Interestingly for our present purpose, the uprising that lasted from 1929 to 1930 was exclusively women's affair. Historians now call the event "Aba women riots" or "Women's war," after the community where it began before spreading to all the nooks and crannies of the Igbo country (Comhaire, 1981: 43; Isichei, 1976: 151 - 155).

The relevance of this example in this context is that the initial reluctance in sending girls to school was not an act of discrimination at all. It was protective. This kind of protection was also extended to free-born boys, vis-à-

vis their slave counterparts, and respectable nobles vis-à-vis their ill-reputed counterparts in the extraneously introduced chieftaincy institution. When the value of Western-style education became evident, the Igbo readily encouraged their girls to become part of it. If there is any gender imbalance in school enrolment among the Igbo at the moment, that imbalance is skewed against the boy-child, not as in some places, against the girl-child.

Women and Education among the Igbo: Current Situation

By 1980s the decline in the enrolment of Igbo boys in secondary schools in favour of girls had become very noticeable. Dr Lawrence Ocho, the Provost of the College of Education, Ehamufu, a tertiary-level teacher's training establishment, was the first to raise the alarm, warning public policy-makers, of the need to take steps to encourage the boys (Ocho, 1987). During the 1987 convocation of the college, he released statistics that outlined the situation as it affected what are now three of the Igbo states: Anambra, Enugu, and greater part of Ebonyi.

Table 1: Enrolment by sex into secondary schools in old Anambra State (present Anambra, Ebonyi, and Enugu States) in the first half of 1980s decade

Academic session	Student enrolment				
	Boys	%	Girls	%	Total
1980 / 1981	75815	50.2	75350	49.8	151165
1982 / 1983	76235	42.9	101349	57.1	177584
1983 / 1984	74789	40.4	110527	59.6	185316
1984 / 1985	68766	38.8	108338	61.2	177104
1985 / 1986	66777	38.4	107161	61.6	173938

Source: Ocho (1987)

As the trend continued, nearly a decade afterwards one of Igbo foremost academics, the surgeon and medical teacher, Professor Frank Akpuaka, gave a public talk at Owerri, another of the Igbo towns, and echoed Ocho's concerns. Akpuaka (1995) warned, "This new gender imbalance in school enrolment is bound to create future distortions in society. Soon we may have a large crop of loud, rich young men with very shallow values." The trend, however, has continued in most Igbo communities. But there is something to be learnt from this for our present purpose. Whereas more Igbo girls than boys now go to secondary schools, elsewhere getting girls to go to school still remains a huge problem. A survey in three states in northern Nigeria close to the same time found that only 7% of secondary school students in Jigawa were girls. In Sokoto it was 22%; and in Kebbi, 28% (Anon, 1994: 13).

These statistics are from the same nation state but one that has such diversification of culture with peoples that have come to the contemporary plural society and the globalizing world through different historical paths. However, it is usually for this sort of ethnic mosaics that international bodies

usually prescribe uniform transformational strategies, often anticipating the same results because they are looking at the nation states, and not at the groups that constitute them.

At present in University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in the Igbo-speaking area, female undergraduates are greater in number than male undergraduates in most disciplines.

Female undergraduates are nevertheless still fewer in some of the professional disciplines and some of the sciences.

Nigerian universities have catchment areas, that is, the part of the country where they should admit the larger number of their students from. University of Nigeria, Nsukka's catchment area is mainly the Igbo-speaking states but there are also three states that are non-Igbo-speaking in the list. Besides its catchment area, a university must also take some students from other parts of the country and internationally. This explanation is necessary to be able to appreciate the data in **Tables 2, 3, and 4**. I was unable to get the breakdown of the admission in terms of ethnic origins of the students, but by the specifications just outlined, the Igbo should be in the majority.

An earlier study by Professor Jean Comhaire, the Belgian who used to be the Head of Department of Sociology & Anthropology that I now work for in University of Nigeria, seems to strengthen this assumption. At a time when Nigeria had only four universities in 1971, Igbo female students in all the four accounted for 93% of the entire female undergraduate population. Only 378 female undergraduates were in Nigerian universities at the time, but out of those, 353 were Igbo (Comhaire, 1981: 95).

Table 2: Student enrolment by sex in the Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 4 academic sessions, between 1996 and 2001

Academic session	Student enrolment				
	Male	%	Female	%	Total
1996 / 1997	634	39.7	959	60.2	1593
1997/1998	600	35.5	1088	64.4	1688
1999 / 2000	656	34.4	1250	65.5	1906
2000 / 2001	640	31.8	1370	68.1	2010

Source: Author-adapted, from the *Academic Planning Unit Bulletin*, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2003

Clearly not only is the percentage of enrolment of female students over that of male students in the Faculty of Arts consistently higher for the four sessions, the number of female matriculants for each subsequent year continues to rise and that of their male counterparts continues to fall. In the University of Nigeria, the departments in the Faculty of Arts are: Archaeology & Tourism, English & Literary Studies, Fine & Applied Arts,

Foreign Languages & Literatures, History & International Studies, Linguistics, Igbo & Nigerian Languages, Mass Communication, Music, and Theatre and Film Studies.

Please note that because the source of these data omitted the 1998/1999 session for the Faculty of Arts records although they were included for the other two Faculties, I ignored these for the latter, for a fair comparison. For these other Faculties, I only included the sessions for which data are also available for Faculty of Arts.

Table 3: Student enrolment by sex in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 4 academic sessions, between 1996 and 2001

Academic session	Student enrolment				
	Male	%	Female	%	Total
1996 / 1997	732	43.7	941	56.2	1673
1997 / 1998	699	38.9	1094	61.0	1793
1999 / 2000	1198	44.8	1471	55.1	2669
2000 / 2001	903	39.2	1396	60.7	2299

Source: Author-adapted, from the *Academic Planning Unit Bulletin*, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2003

Evidently more females than males were admitted. In addition, the number of female matriculants increased and those of their male counterparts decreased against each preceding session, excepting the 1999 / 2000 session.

Table 4: Student enrolment by sex in the Faculty of Engineering, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 4 academic sessions, between 1996 and 2001

Academic session	Student enrolment				
	Male	%	Female	%	Total
1996 / 1997	1127	92.1	96	7.8	1223
1997 / 1998	1266	93.7	85	6.2	1351
1999 / 2000	1715	91.1	167	8.8	1882
2000 / 2001	1816	90.9	180	9.0	1996

Source: Author-adapted, from the *Academic Planning Unit Bulletin*, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2003

More male matriculants than female are recorded for this Faculty but two points should be noted. First, ordinarily women even in industrialized societies find the physical demands in the fields that are involved in this Faculty unattractive. In this school, the Departments in this Faculty at the period under reference were: Agricultural & Bioresources Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electronic Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Mechanical

Engineering. Second, excepting the 1997/1998 session, the number of female matriculants into these fields was nevertheless on the increase.

Although the data for those were not available, nevertheless the Academic Planning Unit, the authors of the records, indicated in general outline that fewer female applicants applied for courses demanding mathematical or technical skills but also noted that the situation was improving (UNN, 2003: 2, 3).

Discussion and Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing that the situation in gender relations among the Igbo of Nigeria is different from the internationally fashionable stereotypical portrayal of African societies as being patripotent in all their social domains. This is true whether the matter is viewed, historically or from the standpoint of evidence-driven ethnography of the Igbo contemporary society. One clear point emerges, in all those instances where there is apparent or real disadvantage against the Igbo womenfolk, such a disadvantage is the result of relatively recent allochthonous importations into the Igbo social relations by Christianization and Westernization. Both are precursors of what is now called globalisation to which postmodernism provides a theoretical engine.

At its incipient stage, European writers predicted the present distortion of the indigenous systems and some of them warned of the problems that such could bring. Interestingly, the first colonial Governor-General of Nigeria, Lord Lugard, had referred to natives who favour such cultural distortions as "Europeanized Africans" (Leith-Ross, 1939/1965:5). The only snag is that, in functional terms, an entire human group might not convert *en bloc* into a rival culture. Cultural borrowings are possible and do occur. It is an important source of social change. A human group can borrow from other cultures and blend the cultural traits so borrowed.

In a situation of culture contact, bearers of the rival cultures who need the traits of the other culture can acquire them easily or with difficulty depending on how the new traits compare with equivalent traits in their own culture. Teachers of L2 learners of language are already familiar with this phenomenon as it relates to applied linguistics. All those interested in culture change might borrow a leaf from the experience. Each being a symbolic system, and also being intertwined with each other, language and culture as systems of communication share characteristics (Spencer, 1996; Ezech, 2012). Learners with the background of a language without number are likely to find learning the feature of number difficult in a language like English with number. Learners with the background of a language without tone are likely to find it difficult to learn the feature of tone in a language such as Igbo with tone. By extension untrained observers from a patripotent society are likely to read this trait into whatever society they look at whether that element is present or not. On the part of the observer, culture shock is the price to be paid in a situation of such misinterpretation of culture; compare this to

grammatical flaws in a situation of L2 learning. More problematically, the observer if he/she has real or imagined authority over the host society may even go on to universalize the cultural traits of his/her own society. But the tragedy is that any policy that is based on such a wrong assumption is guaranteed to fail, or the investment on it may just be a mere waste of fund. Imagine for a moment someone investing resources in the groundless belief that he/she is campaigning for the number of Igbo girls to catch up with that of Igbo boys in school enrolment.

Igbo women's impressive performance in the domain of Western-style education in a context where many other groups in Africa are having problem achieving gender balance in this sphere has reiterated the old point that inter-culture innovations are possible and also drawn out attention to the oft neglected one that cultural traits are necessarily society-specific. The implications are broadly two:

1. it is a costly error to assume that culture is like a garment which can just be chosen or changed at will,
2. in a changing world, any effort to encourage a change in a people's way of life should request and use the assistance of the relevant sciences of society, and not rely on mere sentiments.

The issue in this essay is not whether change is desirable or not. The issue is if there is something that requires modification in one culture, does the fact that such a thing exists in a particular society confirm its existence in all societies? The case of assumed androcentric gender relations among the Igbo shows how faulty and wasteful such an assumption can be. At the levels of the individual, it is the equivalent of a doctor treating everyone in a community for enteric fever simply because some cases of this have been confirmed in the group. Should the doctor nevertheless not investigate each subsequent case presented to him/her? Other patients may really be afflicted with some other ailments, dysentery or malaria, for example. And how tragic and wasteful such a strategy could be!

The present sterile generalization of gender-relations situations in Africa is the price for neglect of ethnography. Ethnographies carried out by trained anthropologists among human groups have been shown to be the only science that can enable humans understand human societies. Unfortunately it has suffered a lot of neglect in Africa in recent times. Today, people from all sorts of disciplines, that are relevant in their own ways but which do not equip them to understand the intricacies of culture, carry on as if they could bluff through anthropology without adequate training in it. We can go back to the Igbo case to see how unhelpful this can be. All ethnographies on the Igbo that are written by anthropologists - male or female; indigenous or foreign - at different times report gender equity in that society. The only claims of androcentrism or patripotency are found in the works of writers from other disciplines.

The usefulness of ethnography to archaeology and tourism studies as far as these touch on human cultures are self-evident. For readers in Nigeria, the

resolution of aspects of the famous Igbo-Ukwu finds through the intervention ethnography is well-known. The Igbo-Ukwu artefacts were of such exquisite quality that many sceptics doubted that they were made in that locality. To complicate the matter further, some of the materials were no longer being produced. But clues were found in contemporary culture of the Igbo. The sculptures among the artefacts bore the multiple facial horizontal aristocratic scars that are known as *ichi*. *Ichi* is borne only by the Igbo and evidence that they had done so for a very long time could be found in the narrative of the 18th century manumitted slave in England, Olaudah Equiano (1988: 2). Archaeologists analysing the finds therefore concluded that those artefacts that date back to 9th century AD must have been by ancient Igbo people. If the postmodernist had been around and listened to, an erroneous conclusion would have been stamped as an immutable fact.

Postmodernism, poststructuralism, and globalisation are the trinity of the current efforts to discourage authentic, community-relevant scholarship of non-Western provenance. They are a powerful combination for vitiation of rival points of view. Our common humanity will be the worse off for it if such epistemic incongruousness is taken serious. Note that although they deny meaning, they nevertheless expect that they can somehow rule as the only custodians of cognitive process, short of saying so in so many words. Their attitude is the conceptual equivalent of a village college bully telling an underdog who has a rival point, "Nonsense!", in the hope that his victim cower for him to have his way.

Postmodernist attacks on classic ethnography proceed on the false premise that, as Fortum (1986: xi) states, "Culture is produced in the ways it is textualised for circulation [by writers]" (emphasis added). But nothing is farther from the facts about how trained ethnographers really work. One of the features that make ethnography distinctive is because the narrative is presented from the standpoint of the culture-bearer. It has been so from the days of its inventor, Lewis Morgan, and has continued to undergo improvement. Repackaging of ethnographic data away from the culture-bearers' narratives may only be possible with the extreme abstracization that grand theories that are removed from field-sourced data, such as postmodernism and its related paradigms represent. As early as the turn of the century, I have been drawing attention to the dangers of relying on postmodernism in attempts to explain society as a lived experience (Ezeh, 2010; first published 2000). It is encouraging to observe that so many voices reach similar conclusions in diverse disciplines and places in the world. Alvesson (2002: 100) has quoted an earlier writer who said with regard to postmodernism, "I can think of no better prescription for the stunting of a field of intellectual inquiry." Ritzer and Stepnisky (2014: 221) note that globalisation, postmodernism's kindred product, has played into the hands of Marxism which postmodernism sought to discredit. "There are many who believe that globalisation has served to open the entire world, perhaps for the first time, to unbridled capitalism and the excesses that Marxists believe

inevitably accompany it." A reviewer of the book, *Evil*, by the American essayist and thinker, Lance Morrow (2003), quotes him as seeing postmodernism as a "dangerous fantasy".

When one reads a book with the title of Mike Featherstone's, *Ondoing culture*, one wonders (Featherstone, 1995). Given what is known about culture, can you really undo it? To undo culture is to descend to anarchy or revert to the pre-human levels. A culture is the sum of all that a human group bring into their existence to enable them survive a social aggregate. Anything that is not natural is cultural. While things in nature are constant and similar, things in culture vary from group to group, and they have to because cultural strategies are reactions to the ecological and other existential challenges of specific groups. The truth of what is happening, vis-à-vis globalisation, is simply that there are efforts to impose a culture of the cultural hegemonists on the rest of the world; something that is not new at all in human history. It has happened all the way from the days of international slave trade, up to the proselytisation of Islam and Christianity, up to the European colonisation, and now the unipolar world of Euro-American globalisation. But the present efforts are perhaps the most disingenuous of them all. To understand culture and therefore explain it in ways that make archaeological sense or explain it to those outside such a culture, such as those in the tourism industry do, ethnography will always remain the number-one tool.

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