



REIMAGING AKWA-CROSS WOMEN OF NIGERIA IN THE CONTEXT OF EGALITARIAN COMMUNICATION

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Cite this article:

Ojorgu, L. O., Akodu, P. K., Etim, V. E., Aganbi, E. V., Ntamu, A. A., Lucas, B. D. (2024), Reimagining Akwa-Cross Women of Nigeria in the Context of Egalitarian Communication. British Journal of Mass Communication and Media Research 4(3), 22-36. DOI: 10.52589/BJMCMR-QTNSUUDN

Manuscript History

Received: 19 Jul 2024

Accepted: 16 Sep 2024

Published: 26 Sep 2024

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ABSTRACT: *The study examines one area in which an African woman of Akwa-Cross of South-South Nigeria has been made to believe her opinion does not count: The idea that a woman has no religion and its impact on her and society. The research used questionnaires to generate data from 100 men and 100 women within Calabar, Cross River State Capital, and Uyo, Akwa Ibom State Capital. Both cities have common social demographics. Additionally, personal interviews were conducted to generate data from 10 men and 10 women who live in rural areas of the two states. The study adopts egalitarianism, cultivation and hegemony theories. Research findings revealed that about 70% of married women have had their faith decided by their spouses – even against their will. As a way forward, the study recommends that our media narratives concerning the importance of men and women in society should be rooted in egalitarian communication, which highlights the equality of men and women in matters of opinion and decision-making.*

KEYWORDS: Egalitarian, Afro-woman, Akwa-Cross, and cultural hegemony.



INTRODUCTION

Behavioural and cultural studies have shown that African women, almost on average, have been brainwashed by society into thinking that any struggle against those social structures and constructs which constitute an affront to the dignity of womanhood, is tantamount to waging war against what is divine, and thus would be almost as futile as a search for a needle in a haystack! However, extant gender studies on women's subjugation and struggle for emancipation from men's domination indicate that, in modern times, the majority of women, especially the elite class, have woken to the challenge of confronting these gender-based structures, with attendant mixed reactions, though (Freeman, 1995). Arguably, this consciousness and crusade for women's liberation found full expression in the 1979 UN General Assembly that dedicated a pride of place to the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violation of the rights of women in society (CEDAN, 1981). The convention defines discrimination against women in the following terms:

Any distinction, extinction or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of women's rights irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

The phrase "any other field" is presumed to have accommodated religion and religious-related matters, not itemised overtly of course. Article 16 of the convention states that men and women of full age, without any limitation by religion have the right to marry and are entitled to equal rights in marriage entered with free and full consent (CEDAN, 1981). Driven by the consciousness of gender imbroglio, there have arisen women's religious movements, two of which have corroborated the position of the convention: the Islamic Feminism Movement and Christian Feminism. Like Islam feminists who make reference to the Holy Qu'ran from which they seek inspiration for justice for women in the totality of their existence (Margot, 2009), Christian feminists draw strength from the teachings of the Holy Bible on the fundamental equality of all humans, be it man or woman (Katheleen, 1999).

Empirical findings have shown that attaining the UN General Assembly goal of total emancipation of women is arguably, a near impossibility, especially in Africa. The reason is that most women themselves tend to be comfortable with their present status due to the influence of cultural hegemony and they see men's authority as having divine origin against which nothing humanly possible can be done! One of the areas in which women's right is violated and about which most women themselves are complacent is the area of a woman's religion and belief. The question of who determines a woman's religious beliefs is one that must not be treated with a kid's glove as it is posing many problems already in a patriarchal structured society such as ours, especially in the Christian marriage settings, as a pilot study (2020) has shown.

Who determines a married woman's religion and belief: man/husband or woman/wife? The African woman of Akwa-Cross of South-South Nigerian situation mirrors one of the worst-case scenarios, a situation that is generally worsened by lopsided media gender narratives (Mbilingi and Omari, 1976). The after-effect of this state of affairs is that the African woman of Akwa-Cross of South-South Nigeria is not able to give her all in the overall development of society to which she belongs. The aim of this study is to re-establish her importance through positive media-based image projection, and, thereby sting her into the consciousness of her



worth and asserting this worth as a matter of right and obligation in all spheres of human endeavour for the integral development of the community in which she finds herself. This is egalitarianism, and far from radical feminism. (Groothuis, 2016).

Objectives of Study

The aims and objectives of this research include the following:

1. To evaluate the role of men in determining women's faith in marriage among the people of Akwa-Cross of South-south, Nigeria
2. To determine women's representation in religious/cultural practices in Akwa-Cross of South-south, Nigeria
3. To determine the role of the media in reinforcing gender-based stereotypes in Akwa-Cross of South-south, Nigeria

Significance and Unique Contribution

This study has the capacity to tone down the flourishing of cultural hegemony and patriarchal authority in Akwa-Cross society. It has the capacity to direct attention to the misrepresentation of women in the media. It has the capacity to reform the consciousness of women and the self to ensure they have pride in themselves and to de-market and re-image cultural structures that pose barriers to an enhanced image.

Conceptual Analysis

The following key concepts are going to be explained: egalitarian communication, mental liberation, Afro-woman, Akwa-Cross, Cultures and cultural hegemony.

By egalitarian communication, we mean all media-related activities and programmes that emphasise equality of importance between men and women in content and scope.

By mental liberation, we mean having the women folk free from a particular way of reasoning and having them think outside the box.

By Afro-woman we mean an African woman, of which the Akwa-Cross (i.e., Akwa Ibom and, or Cross River State) woman is a prototype. She is born and bred within the cultural situations, practices and norms associated with the roles of men and women in these communities. The word Akwa-Cross is used as a compound noun to mean Akwa Ibom State and Cross River State, both of which are situated within southeastern Nigeria but geopolitically, are classified under south-south Nigeria. These two states have a lot in common: language, culture and several other socio-demographic variables they were once together in Cross River State until in 1987, following a military decree No. 24, Akwa Ibom State was carved out of Cross River as a separate state with full autonomy.

By cultural hegemony we mean the process of (gaining) ascendancy by a particular group over yet another group in the society from the perspective of cultural practices. Hegemony generally squares with the Marxist theory of social stratification according to which society is divided into two major camps: the poor and the rich; dominating and the dominated. But there is more to the concept. At the heart of hegemony lies the affirmation and consent of the dominated



class about the very reason for which it is dominated by the dominating class. Antonio Gramsci (1935) is quoted by Hall (1977) as saying that “one class exercises hegemony to the extent that the dominating class has an interest which the subaltern class recognises as being in some degree in their interest too”. Hall (1977) corroborates this fact in the following words: “hegemony is in operation when the dominant class not only dominates but actually organises so as to command and win the consent of the subordinated classes to their continuing sway”.

When the foregoing is the case, the dominated class comfortably accepts its position of being dominated. This is the situation with most African women and cultural practices, especially in Akwa-Cross of South-South Nigeria. What follows is a review of some studies on the myth of African patriarchy, the negation of women’s rights and the misrepresentation of African women in the media.

REVIEW OF SOME STUDIES

African and Myth of Patriarchy

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines patriarchy as a social system in which men hold all the power. Thus, patriarchy connotes lordship, authority, power, control, etc., by men over women. The patriarchal ideology (i.e. the women being under the headship of men) is very much rooted in the subconscious mind of the African woman such that she will ultimately see herself as being created for the man, and thus, entirely at his service rather than at and for God’s. The indices of this ideology and belief are often expressed in the following words: *Nna-anyi*, which connotes the phrase “my lord”, amongst the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria. Otherwise, *Etinyin* or *Obong-mmi* and *Atite, Inah* in Efik and Agwagune languages respectively in south-south Nigeria! All of these are not without cosmogonic and historical antecedents, woven into the tapestry of creation myths.

Myths, as many people tend to assume, are not just about ideas or stories that people believe, which are not necessarily true. There is more to the concept. Myth is a story of a people about where they originate from and how; where they are at the moment and where they are heading to. Douglas Kellner (1979) gives a classic definition of myth which has provided in part, one of the contexts within which this study is situated. According to him, “myths are simply stories that explain, instruct and justify practices and institutions; they are lived and shape thought and action”. If myths are stories that explain and justify practices and institutions as well as shape human thoughts and actions, then it is not difficult to see why the practice of patriarchy is justified by society, and ironically, comfortably accepted and applauded by perhaps most African women, especially of low educational status.

The biblical cosmogonic myth of Adam and Eve, for instance, is the story of the first woman created from the body of the first man as his “helpmate”, thereby painting a picture of the former as being somewhat superior to the latter. In the Greek creation myth, Pandora, the beautiful woman is presented as being sent by the Greek god, Zeus, to punish men for their wrongdoings. This, she did by opening the box in which all the troubles, pains and evil of the world had been stored. This is analogous to the story of the first fall in the Garden of Eden caused by Eve, the woman, which, ushered evil, pain, etc., in the world. But at the centre of this particular creation myth lies the fact that both Eve and Pandora owe their creation and



origin to the male gods – yet another nuance of patriarchy. As Judy Tobler (2000) puts it: “Both Eve and Pandora were created by male gods and for the male humans”.

All of these, and many similar creation myths, provide the ideological foundations and conceptual frameworks for subsequent Greek thinkers and Christian theologians, and the present socio-cultural African mentality on the subject of patriarchy. Like Greek anthropology in which Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle feature prominently in presenting women respectively, as inferior beings, African anthropology, towing this line, sees the woman as being subservient to man. It begins from the cradle and develops through the socialisation process, as Okure (2001) observes. For instance, boys eat at the table with their fathers, and girls in the kitchen with their mothers after doing all the jobs of preparing, cooking and serving the food. They also wash up the dishes, and the woman carries the harvest and loads back home. Once arrive, the man and his sons relax while the mother and daughters take to the kitchen to do the “woman’s work” (Okure, 2001).

Under such a socio-cultural matrix, it is not difficult to see that the boy and girl grow up believing in female inherent inferiority. This socialisation process consequently paves the way for the assignment of roles between men and women in terms of who does what. This assignment of roles is done, not so much on the basis of biological variation (i.e. based on their sexes) but on the basis of gender distinction brought about by the structure of society. Thus, in Africa, weeding grass, cooking food, fetching wood and water and general domestic chores are classified as “woman’s work” (Okure, 2001), so much so that a man found doing them presents a picture of anomaly. For instance, there will be nothing wrong with a man carrying his baby on his back (a practice that hitherto held sway among women in most primitive African communities) if the need to do so arises.

But within the African context, especially, it will take a man great courage to do this since this would portray him as a weakling and make him an object of ridicule not only before men but especially the entire women folk who would unflinchingly see such action as entirely abnormal and perhaps even abominable. For instance, empirical studies have shown that men who tend to be loyal and loving to their wives are often given such labels as ‘woman wrapper’ to suggest that they are as inferior as women, if not worse. Ironically, these gender-based tags are more often than not, appropriated by women themselves. This, as indicated earlier, is the handiwork of myth and hegemony. Or again, in some African communities, custom and tradition prescribe that it is wrong for a woman to eat the gizzard of a bird, or break kola nuts at public functions since all of these are masculine activities belonging exclusively to the man; it is a myth and hegemony that are at work.

Instances of African patriarchal society can go on, almost *ad infinitum*. Nevertheless, a little insight into the Pauline injunction on women’s compulsory silence in the church and women’s subjection to their husbands will further elucidate the cultural and religious myth of patriarchy.

The Pauline Injunction: Wives be subject to your husband

The Pauline theology on the subjection of women to their husbands is a well-known one to which adherents of patriarchy often make reference. In his letter to the Christian community at Ephesus, Paul of Tarsus, and subsequently St. Paul, writes, inter alia: “Wives be subject to your husbands as to the Lord, for husband is the head of the wife” (Eph. 5: 22-23). According to St. Paul, “As in all the churches of God’s people, the women should keep quiet...They are not



allowed to speak...It is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in the church” (1Cor. 14: 33-35). What is the meaning of all of these? To answer this question, it will be proper to situate Paul’s teachings in their proper historical and cultural contexts. To start with, it is important to indicate that the aforementioned biblical passages about the place of women in the church and family setting have been given different interpretations by different scholars.

While some are of the view that Paul was suggestive of male chauvinism, others aver that he was not. (Udoette, 2000). In the Old Testament and especially in Judaism, women were more of a chattel than human persons. Enslavement, oppression, and total submission to men were their lot. As Jeremiahs (1969) observes, in their fathers' house, daughters came behind the sons. Their education was limited to learning domestic arts, especially needlework and weaving. Again, the Jews regarded women as being the cause of evil and death in the world and in many places they were forced to carry corpses of the dead for burials. Women were counted as the greatest misfits or accidents of nature (Udoette, 2000). In the synagogues, women were neither allowed to stay together with men nor allowed to pray together with them.

Even in the Hellenistic world, the lot of women was not better than what was obtainable in other oriental cultures. In ancient Athens – a city close to Corinth where Paul worked – women, for example, were not allowed to appear in public meetings and gatherings. Otherwise, they were put in a separate chamber away from men and guarded by dogs (Udoette, 2000). This is but a partial portrait of the religious and cultural environment in which Paul lived and by which his letters and writings were influenced.

The Misrepresentation of African Women in the Media

Generally, discourse on the presentation of women in the media has long been in the front burner of gender studies. When it comes to the issue of the presentation of women in the media, the narrative is fraught with indices of misrepresentation in the context of stereotypes that portray them generally as the weaker sex “condemned” to play second fiddle to men, subservient to them and as their beck and call. These negative images associated with women, as have been argued in some sections of society, are not the fundamental problems themselves, but the entire media structure (Downing and Mohammadi, 2012). This is blamed on the myth of the legitimacy of patriarchal domination. Even if the images were changed, the media would continue to belong to commercial enterprises that use media for profit.

Others argue that the media would continue to be in the hands of men who use it to tell stories that suit their purposes (Downing and Mohammadi, 2012). In the African context, the story is not different. Some studies have shown, for example, that instances of biases and negative representation of female candidates have declined significantly in the media due to more professional reporting and sensitivity about gender biases (Kahn, 1996; Smith, 1997). Nevertheless, instances of the traditionally “masculine” world of politics are observable, as the place of women in the Fourth Estate is still limited (Cotter, 2011). This is why such research on the subject of gender representation contained, especially in the works of Mbilinyi and Omari (1976), has devoted a pride of place to the gendered images of women in different kinds of mass media like textbooks, radio programmes, advertisements, newspaper reporting, film narratives, etc.



Further studies, based on the hegemonic theories of Antonio Gramsci and Louise Althusser have shown that media texts act as the locus of construction, contestation and struggle over larger cultural understandings of issues such as gender-based violence, and how media portray gender biases and stereotypes in Africa (Audrey and Gadzekpo, 2011). Like much of the research on the representation of gender in the African media, GMMP research findings have also consistently shown that African news suffers from various afflictions including the fact that women are underrepresented and misinterpreted in news media coverage and the fact that news is gender-based and reinforcing of gender stereotype (Audrey and Gadzekpo, 2011). Furthermore, internet news continues the same trend and in some respects, can be considered even more culpable than traditional news media in the manner in which women are represented (Gadzekpo, 2010).

When it comes to African film narratives, the story seems to be worse. For instance, Haynes (2010) indicates that much of the literature on African videos tends to be in the form of books. Empirical research agenda has shown that research on African cinema is often built around concepts emanating from post-colonial gender or cultural studies. Accordingly, this suggests that scholarship is being generated on the gendered dimensions of film. For instance, some of the authors who wrote on African films such as Abdalla Uba Adamu and Brain Larkin, construct Hausa videos as sites of “parallel modernities” where generational roles are contested and norms of Islam and Hausa culture are debated (Haynes, 2010). Other film studies have made the connection between the influence of religion and gendered images resulting from it.

In her research on Pentecostal film culture in Ghana, for instance, Meyer (2003), observes that in an effort to appeal to their female audiences, many of whom actively practice a Pentecostal brand of Christianity, Ghanaian film-makers,

Usually try to make films which suit the taste of women who appear to regard film as a sort of civilizing device which will teach their boyfriend or husband the virtue of fidelity and other aspects of the partnership.

The enterprising Nigerian film industry, especially, has provided fertile ground for research on gender representational practices, some of which have similar influences of religion in the construction of gender in films. Dominica Dipio’s (2009) analysis of the Nollywood videos with Catholic themes argues that, positioned as they are as a major work of critical commentary on Nigerian culture, these films are a reflection of societal attitudes towards gender. Nigerian films, according to Dipio (2009), “create super protagonists and reinforce the popular hero stereotype” which tend to also reinforce the ideologies of power and build an acceptance of the structures of dominance in Nigerian society. Gadzekpo (2010), acknowledges Dipio (2009) by identifying the stereotypical images Nigerian films convey of women to include seductive threats to the virtue of men; witches with power; weak and treacherous beings.

Consistent with other Nollywood critiques, she (Dipio) observes that rarely are women depicted as educated professionals capable of confronting social problems in Nigerian society. On the occasions when they are portrayed as professionals, Dipio (2009) notes, they are often shown as incapable of managing the domestic sphere. Clearly, Nigerian films serve to perpetuate the private-public dichotomy between men and women (Gadzekpo, 2011), in terms of who is capable of what like the Nigerian home videos, and like other media of communication, especially new media. The same scenario plays out in all of these, the ripple effects of which have been extended to Akwa-Cross women of South-South Nigeria. These



effects are mirrored in one big question of who determines a woman's religion and faith vis-à-vis the Pauline injunction "wives be subjects to your husband in everything" (Eph. 5:22-23).

The Akwa-Cross of South-South Nigerian Experience

Akwa Ibom and Cross River state women are generally loving, law-abiding, well-mannered and very industrious species of women. This is understandable given the role that two notable white women missionaries played in the formation and foundation of the girl child at a time when little or no relevance was attached to the girl child. These were: Mary Slessor from the Church of Scotland, by whose intervention, the killing of twins was stopped, and Mary Charles Walker of the Roman Catholic Mission who spearheaded the grooming of young girls into either responsible wives or consecrated religious women. Today, quite a handful of women in these areas are beginning to have a voice in society due to their level of education. However, much is still left to be desired, considering the fact that the majority of women in these areas are still suffering from marginalisation, especially in the areas of politics, religion, etc.

Like women from other states of the federation, Akwa-Cross women have also had their fair share of stereotypical and lopsided presentation of their image in the media in a variety of ways. In the area of politics, for instance, studies (2021) on Akwa Ibom state politics and Nigeria in general, agree that there is marginalisation and brutalisation of women in Nigerian society, especially in Akwa Ibom state, the consequence of which has stimulated academic interest in gender-based issues (Eduproject.com.NG, 2021). It is sad to note that despite many female organisations that have been established for the sole purpose of fighting for women's rights, it is impossible for women to acquire up to five per cent (5%) positions in policy-making institutions in Akwa Ibom state (Eduproject.com.NG, 2021).

Again, in their study on women and political office holding in Cross River state of Nigeria, a study of cultural barriers indicates that Cross River state women are considered unfit for holding political offices and offices in other related areas because to do so would be "inappropriate" (Ikeji, Utulu, and Adeyemi, 2012). The consequence is the observable few number of women in politics generally.

METHODOLOGY

The research used a questionnaire to generate data from one hundred married men and one hundred married women within the metropolis of Calabar, Cross River State Capital, and Uyo, Akwa Ibom State Capital in South-South Nigeria. Both cities have common social demographics and historical realities, having had years of relationship together as a political unit before the split. The selection was done through stratified sampling, and then simple random sampling to obtain the male/female characteristics the research emphasised and to select respondents respectively. The research recruited administrators from Catholic communities in the two cities to administer the questionnaires. Additionally, personal interviews were conducted to generate data from ten married men and ten married women who live in rural areas of the two states to complement data from the questionnaire.



The choice of married men and women is obvious as it aligns with the interest and goal of the research. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select interview respondents.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and analyses data from the field using percentage and frequency tables.

Who decides a woman's faith and religion: the man or the woman?

Table 1: What the men say

Responses from Men	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Man	80	80
Woman	5	5
Both	15	15
Total	100	100

Table 2: What the women say

Responses from Women	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Man	85	85
Woman	5	5
Both	10	10
Total	100	100

Table 1 above shows the responses from male respondents as to whose responsibility it is to determine or decide a woman's religion/faith in marriage. Out of a total respondents of 100, 80 men (80%) say the duty of deciding a woman's faith/religion rests squarely on a man's shoulder. A negligible 5% say it is a woman's duty to decide her faith and religion while 15% say both men and women must decide matters of faith and religion.

Table 2 was used to contrast table 1. Here, a total of 100 women gave their responses differently as to who should decide the religion and faith of a woman in marriage. Out of this, 85% ironically say the man has to decide a woman's religion/faith while 5% say it is the woman that decides her religion and faith. Ten per cent of women, nevertheless, say the responsibility lies on the shoulders of both men and women. The implication of the overwhelming support of women in favour of men deciding women's religion and faith was further corroborated during an interview in the course of this study as we shall see later.



The Impact of Cultural Hegemony on Women

To determine the impact of cultural hegemony on women couched in the aphorism: “A woman has no religion”, the following question was asked as demonstrated in the table below:

Table (3): How are women influenced by the saying: “A woman has no religion?”

Responses from Women	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Makes women complacent and unassertive	70	70
Makes women emotionally down	30	30
Total	100	100

Table 3 above shows that 70% of women respondents hold that such cultural belief as “a woman has no religion” leaves women complacent and unassertive in the face of clear injustice and in the event of defending and fighting for their rights in matters of religion and faith while almost a negligible 30% say having no say in matters of faith and religion leaves them emotionally down.

The Role of the Media in Reinforcing (Cultural) Gender-based Stereotypes

To determine whether or not the media have a role to play in the reinforcement of gender-based cultural and religious stereotypes, traditional marriage rites between actress Regina Daniels and Prince Ned Nwoko, which were replete with scenes of gender stereotypes in the social media used as a case study to gather data from respondents.

Table (4): Regina Daniel’s traditional marriage rites to Ned Nwoko as 5th wife: in whose favour?

RESPONDENTS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Regina’s	60	30
Ned Nwoko	120	60
Both	20	10
Total	200	100

In Table 4, 30% of total respondents say the heavy traditional marriage rituals to which Regina Daniel was subjected by the husband’s culture favour Regina more, as it grants her the



legitimacy of a wife with all rights and privileges. However, 60% of respondents say it favours Ned Nwoko more because the ritual exempted him from the obligation of fidelity to Regina, which Regina cannot violate without incurring severe penalties. 10% of respondents say the ritual favours both of them. But what is left to be indicated in the very strong social media voice is that Regina owes her husband the obligation of fidelity as wife, and silence about Nwoko's obligation of fidelity as husband. Of course, culture and religion in this instance, allow Nwoko to marry as many wives as he chooses to. The table below was used to contrast Table 4.

Polyandry and Rights of an African Woman

Table 5: On a Nigerian woman marrying more than one husband

Female respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Proper	12	12
Improper	88	88
Total	100	100

In Table 5 above, 88% of respondents say a woman marrying more than one husband is improper while 12% say it is proper. In Table 4, social media were awash with scenes of traditional rites of marriage between Regina and Ned Nwoko. In those rites, the media projected Regina as owing Ned the obligation of fidelity and not vice versa. According to Delta culture, the woman possesses little or no rights in marriage. As media have profiled women thus negatively, they can also be used to project women positively.

The Role of the Media in Enhancing Women's Images

To determine the role of the media in enhancing women's images, the movie "Lion Heart" was used as a case study to generate data from respondents on the important, effective and productive roles women can play in society.

Table 6: How would you describe Adaeze in "Lion Heart?"

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Smart, intelligent and brave	172	86
A lone wolf and self-opinionated	8	4
Unknown	20	10
Total	200	100



In Table 6, respondents show how they would describe the character of Adaeze in the movie, “Lion Heart”, 86% say she is smart, intelligent and brave. Four per cent see Adaeze as a lone wolf and self-opinionated person, and 10% say they know nothing about the subject matter. It is obvious that the latter have no idea about the movie let alone watch it.

DISCUSSION

The areas around which the discussion of this study revolves are those presented and analysed in the preceding tables, which of course align with the objectives that guide this study: the question of who decides a woman’s religion: the man or the woman?; how women are influenced by the saying “a woman has no religion”; the role of media in reinforcing cultural gender-based stereotypes; polyandry and rights of African women and the role of the media in enhancing women’s images. The logic that defines tables 1, and 2 aligns them with objective one. The logic of Table 3 aligns with the second objective. The logic of tables 4, 5 and 6 aligns them with the third objective. The result from the analysis of who decides a woman’s faith or religion reveals that the majority of men hold the view that it is the duty of man to decide where the woman (wife and children) should worship.

This squares with the popular saying that a woman, once married, has no Church or belief of her own. This patriarchal mentality is obviously rooted in most religions and cultures of the world, such a belief that seems to have influenced the thoughts of men lopsidedly or parochially in history. Even women by their thought and expression of values in social space promote patriarchy vicariously and believe it is divinely motivated. The worst-case scenario is illiterate and half-baked literate women. For instance, P1, an interviewee, sees the choice of a woman’s place of worship in marriage as falling squarely on the shoulder of the man (husband) because according to her: “It is there in the Bible that man is the head of woman. So, she must listen to whatever her husband tells her. If the husband tells her to go to Church with him, she must obey because the Bible has said so”.

This way of knowing is supported by the authority of scriptures and culture. This is in tandem with what studies have shown that most Christians believe that Christianity has set a mould for women to adhere to, and the mould is one that limits a woman’s freedom in the Church. According to the Christian Bible, wives are expected to be submissive in many ways to their husbands, Church, community and God. Islam obviously tows the same line. In his work “Women in the Islamic World: Past and Present”, Esposito (2018) submits that: “before Islam became so widespread, people in the Middle East lived in households in which women were seen as the property of their husbands and were only meant to perform household tasks, ultimately dehumanizing them”. The only marginal exception perhaps is with Hinduism wherein women are portrayed as equal, otherwise even greater than men. For instance, Kali Ma (i.e. Dark Mother) is the Hindu goddess of creation, preservation and destruction who wielded enormous power (Wikipedia, 2018).

Throughout history Hindu women have held public religious positions as practitioners and conductors of Verdict Rituals (Liljestrom, and Paasonen, 2010). Contrary to the position of P1, another interviewee, P2 avers that “although we live in a society in which culturally, it is believed that it is the duty of man to decide where woman worships, however, mutual consent



from both parties should be a parameter for deciding the place of worship for both, as both men and women have inalienable rights and freedom of choice, and that includes choice of where to worship". P2's stance finds parallelism in P3, as she says, "If we consider obedience and tradition, then man takes the day. Otherwise, everyone – whether man or woman – has a right to choose religion and place of worship"

Men's position, as Table 1 in our analysis has shown, is somewhat mixed. Although men of the elitist class consider both parties as having the right and freedom to choose their religion and place of worship, the not-so-educated men think otherwise. For instance, P4 holds a strong position in support of equality of man and woman in matters of religion and choice of place of worship. As he puts it: "In my own opinion and firm standpoint, it is wrong to impose religious beliefs on another person outside the self. One's own relationship with God is really and realistically spiritual...The husband (man) does not have the moral obligation to impose how and where to worship on his wife".

P4's position resonates with that of P5, P6, P7 and P8 who aver that although in our male-dominated clime, the husband decides, however, it should be freely decided by both spouses because each one has the right and freedom of worship. However, P9 thinks differently. According to him "There is no way my wife can decide for herself. It is either she comes with me to where I worship or she parks and goes to her father's house". P9's position mirrors the position of about 80% of men in this study, who hold that the responsibility of deciding the place of worship for women is the man's. It is obvious from the analysis of this study that the level of education acquired by human beings determines the level of reasoning.

This study also reveals that the majority of those who support men choosing a place of worship for women are those with little or poor educational background. Again, perhaps very interestingly and ironically, the study reveals that women themselves tend to be more comfortable with men choosing their places of worship as according to them, this is backed up by culture and sacred scriptures.

The Role of the Media in Reinforcing Gender-based Stereotypes

Following from submission of those interviewed and of respondents, apart from culture and religion as sources of gender discrimination and stereotypes, the media have been identified not only as a source but also as agents and reinforcers of extant gender-based cultural and religious stereotypes. For instance, this study established social media as an agent and reinforcer of gender-based stereotypes – in culture and religion – using the traditional marriage rites between actress Regina Daniels and Prince Ned Nwoko as a case study. Study findings show that media played a major role in the reinforcement of gender-based stereotypes.

For instance, while Regina Daniel was subjected to heavy traditional rituals by her husband's culture, including the obligation of fidelity to him, the husband appeared to have been exempted from such obligations as culture and religion that he professes to allow him to marry as many wives as he wants. Even some contents of the mainstream media like television and newspapers, etc., carry such negative profiling. Women are sometimes portrayed as sex and disposable objects, posing sometimes, half nude in advertisements. According to Rasul (2020), women models are used as items for the promotion of certain products. The popular Delta soap advertisement on television uses the female image suggesting that beauty belongs exclusively to female folk while the Malboro advert carries the image of a man suggesting that whenever



it comes to physical strength, only the man can have it in full. The argument is that if the media can reinforce gender-based stereotypes, then it can also become an agent to enhance women's images.

CONCLUSION

Egalitarian communication is far from being linear; it is participatory. It suggests equality of rights and duties, in the distribution of burdens and privileges arising from these rights which are inalienable to every human: be it male or female. The African woman – especially of Akwa-Cross extraction, has the right to choose where and how to worship, a violation of which amounts to strangulation of her rights. The media has the role of revolutionising the hitherto held traditions and customs, which debase the dignity of women, by changing the negative or lopsided narratives and stereotypical roles of women to positive ones through its contents and presentations. This way, the women themselves, will begin to gain the consciousness of their worth and inalienable rights and dignity, get liberated from the clutches of cultural hegemony, and present themselves as relevant collaborators with men in the building and development of society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a way forward, the paper makes the following recommendation:

1. The National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should factor into its regulatory activities, the content analysis, censorship, regulation and possibly, the prevention of any video work that presents women in a bad light while discouraging narratives with excessive male hegemonic and chauvinistic connotations.
2. Religious leaders – who are often males themselves – should as a matter of sincerity, harp on the fundamental equality of men and women in the eyes of God and teach their male congregants, to, as a matter of conscience, allow their spouses to make a choice of where they desire to worship in as much as the choice does not infringe on men's rights.
3. Educated and enlightened women or daughters of these two states should come together, close ranks and form one body with the aim of raising the consciousness of their rights and privileges. They should emphasise the need to assert these rights in order to contribute to the growth of society.
4. The government, especially at the state level, should design school curricula to accommodate gender studies at the elementary level. This way, citizens will grow up, inculcating in their subconscious mind the fact that women are as important as men.



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