

A Marxian Analysis on The Bond Between Capitalism and the Oppression of Nigerian Women Since Colonial Times

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Abstract

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there have been several attempts to diminish the significance of Marxism in academia. It is clear that, despite the large body of work on the dialectics of the subjugation and challenges of women today, only an inconsequential fraction of research examines the contribution of the capitalist mode of production towards this reality. This study examines the systematic oppression and exploitation of Nigerian women since the introduction of capitalism into the Nigerian context. The study contends that several sexist policies enacted by the British colonialist government facilitated the capitalist exploitation of the Nigerian masses and that the global exploitation of women is inseparable from capitalism.

Keywords: Marxism, capitalism, Nigerian women, private family, and colonialism.

African historiography, to decolonize itself, has disclosed the salient societal roles played by precolonial women. Several studies¹ have shown that women rose to prominence as leaders of their kingdoms, and in some cases as Queen-warriors and renowned traders. Women in these societies wielded so much power and influence that they were not subservient to men. The prominence attained by precolonial African women, however, began to wither following the emergence of proto-feudal relations. The peripheralization of the roles of women was consequently intensified by colonialism vis-à-vis the incursion of capitalist relations. Some Africanist scholars² have posited that precolonial African society had limited social stratification. These scholars³ have made bold claims that, in precolonial African societies, women were neither oppressed nor subjugated. Over time, this position has

been dismissed by other scholars⁴ who have postulated that social stratification indeed existed in precolonial African society.

Precolonial Africa existed under pre-feudal and proto-feudal eras. Because of the stillness of the forces of production, the former era persisted longer than the latter. Ultimately, the stillness in the forces of production was disrupted by the introduction of the Atlantic slave trade and European colonialism. Rodney contends that the birth of proto-feudal relations in Africa was occasioned with the rise of states. When Europe was abandoning feudalism and embracing capitalism, African societies were entering a phase comparable to feudalism.⁵ The birth of social classes in precolonial Africa was therefore a product of the inherent contradictions of feudalism. The advent of proto-feudal relations would inaugurate the first attack on the political and socio-economic rights and privileges of African women. In pre-feudal African society, the principle of sex complementarity⁶ was the social order, but the rise of proto-feudal relations created systems of class and gender-based oppression. Subsequently, colonial capitalist adventure institutionalized class and gender-based oppression. Thus, the combined contradictions of both feudalism and capitalism were responsible for the creation of both class and gender-based oppression in Africa.

One of the earliest social values of proto-feudal Africa was polygamy. The monopolization of lands by the ruling class in proto-feudal Africa led to paucity of labor. In response to this modification, the search for adequate labor compelled men to increase the population of their households by engaging in polygamy. This position is a departure from the unscientific, undialectical analyses of bourgeois scholars like Dobson – who had posited that polygamy became a norm in precolonial African societies because women outnumbered men.⁷

From the foregoing analyses, social consciousness thus is a product of material forces. The repression of the roles of African women, despite the pioneering effort of proto-feudal practices, was accomplished through capitalist social relations. Capitalism's reliance on exploited labor institutionalized the subjugation of women. Because the mode of production needed consistent exports of cash crops, men who grew them became prosperous. In contrast to this, the less profitable food crops grown by women weakened their social mobility in colonial Africa. As palm oil,

cocoa, and kolanut trade expanded, men grew in power at the expense of women. This indeed entrenched the political and socio-economic subordination of women. The attack on the status of women further revealed itself through the failure of the colonial government to prioritize female education. It is against this backdrop that, this study contends, because of the sexist nature of capitalism, women led several anti-colonial struggles in colonial Nigeria. The Dancing Women Movement of 1925, Aba Women Revolt of 1929, and Abeokuta Women Revolt of 1946, were anti-capitalist uprisings.

This paper argues that the oppression and exploitation of Nigerian women was a result of the contradictions of capitalism. This study explains the oppression of women within the context of challenges such as rape, sexual harassment, low-paying jobs, domestic violence, gender-based employment, exclusion from educational institutions, sexual division of labor, and domestic labor. This study argues that it was not colonialism that weakened the rights and privileges of Nigerian women but capitalism.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part will explore the nexus between Marxism and social oppression. The second part deals with the effects of capitalism in colonial Nigeria. The focus ultimately is to expose how capitalism in colonial Nigeria negatively impacted women. While many women resisted exploitation and subjugation, some women could not. The rapid growth of prostitution in colonial Lagos is one example of the gendered subjugation under capitalism this paper will explore.

Marxism and the Oppression of Women: A Conceptual Clarification

Departing from bourgeois perspectives, Marx and Engels note that the subjugation and exploitation of women is not deeply rooted in history. Marx did not write widely on the exploitation of women, but his hypotheses are vital. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels both warn that “the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.”⁸ Marxism is not just significant to our understanding of political economy, social classes, and social conflicts; it is also relevant in understanding gender-based oppression. Several

conservative feminist scholars⁹ have posited that Marxism is irrelevant to the discussion around the oppression of women. Some¹⁰ have even argued that the subjugation of women today is biological and not economic.

Capitalism as a mode of production is a product of the 18th-century Industrial Revolution in Europe.¹¹ Since the inception of capitalism, the system has been continuously thriving on exploitation. The oppressed class under capitalism, according to Marx, is the working class, otherwise known as the proletariat. Marx posited that under capitalism, the proletariat have nothing to contribute to social production but their labor. The bourgeois class under capitalism is the well-off class that owns and controls the means of production. The exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie in a capitalist society is thus inescapable. The exploitation that exists under capitalism, however, is not accidental. Marxism teaches that all forms of exploitation are products of the changes in the forces of production. The changes in the forces of production are indeed responsible for the creation of new social relations and, by extension, productive systems. To Engels, it was the change in the forces of production under primitive communalism that first interrupted the respect previously conferred upon women. In the same vein, Paul D'Amato contended that women's position in society "has been conditioned by the particular stage of development of the productive forces of that society, and, corresponding to that, the given social relations of the particular society."¹²

Engels further argued that the transformation of the forces of production under primitive communalism coincided with the first class opposition in history.¹³ Marx's position¹⁴ on the relationship between man and woman as an illumination of the shape of the existing relations between human beings in any society is an endorsement of Engels' submission on the coincidence of women's oppression and the rise of classes. The nature and character of the relationship that exists between men and women in any society can thus be used as a yardstick in exposing the model of social relations.

Because the oppression of women signals the first form of oppression in history, there is a misconception that the oppression of women had always existed. But Marxism has been able to dismiss this ahistorical conclusion. Engels has argued that ultimately the oppression and exploitation of the labor of women arose

historically.¹⁵ Engels went back in time to the period when production was carried out communally to prove that, for the most part, humans had once lived in a society wherein the relations between men and women were not oppressive and exploitative. One of the factors responsible for this non-oppressive relationship between men and women was that no sex held monopoly over social or material production. Whilst men formed an aspect of production, women were not left out. Chris Harman has similarly noted that women played prominent roles under material production in earliest human societies.¹⁶

Engels subsequently pointed out that the oppression of women can be traced back to the transformation of the agrarian society, when agricultural production became more complex. A section of Afro-Brazilian women in colonial Lagos, for instance, were reduced to mere petty-traders by the turn-of-the-century following the birth of “legitimate commerce.”¹⁷ However, the rise of family also further sealed the subordinate roles of women in favor of men, as men began to exercise extreme control over the means of production and by implication the household. Thus, the oppression and exploitation of women in any class society is not accidental.

Under capitalism, as the forces of production became much more complex and “developed,” the oppression of women became more prevalent. With the earliest emergence of capitalism in England in the late 18th century, the demand for labor was predicated on sexuality as men became the most sought-after. The roles capitalism fashioned out for English women during the earliest phase therefore were that meant for “housewives and mothers.” Under capitalism and patriarchy, the role of women increasingly became “bearing and rearing” the next generation of laborers to support capitalism. This is quite unfortunate, as expressed by Lindsey German: “No one walks down the aisle in a white dress thinking they are doing this for the benefit of capital or to reproduce the next generation of workers.”¹⁸ With this trend, the labor of women under capitalism became the cheapest commodity.

The subservient and servicing roles of women under this system were in fact validated religiously and culturally. Because the labor of women under capitalism hinges on the maintenance of the primary labor force, it is therefore not incorrect to argue that the system sustains itself through the unpaid labor of women. The unpaid labor of women exists in two places, both at

the household and factory levels. Lindsey German in her classic work¹⁹ has reiterated this position when she posited that the development of the family wage system, a product of capitalism in the mid-19th century, led to the most backward attack ever on the family, as it made women homemakers and absolute dependents on men for their own survival. German noted that the family wage system legitimized and popularized the sexist culture that men had more rights to go out and work than women.

Capitalism expressly led to the organized state of gender roles rooted in the ideals of extreme sexual division of labor. The male sex was delegated the position of a sole breadwinner and the female sex was relegated to the position of child-bearers and child-rearers. Hence, the capitalist social relations of reproduction, as agreed by Marxists, are not subjective; they are mediated by their relations to the conditions of production and reproduction. As such, under capitalism, the relationship between men and women is largely predicated on who controls social and material production. Although both men and women have rights to control and own the means of production, men dominate. Consequently, because of its sexist nature, capitalism is structured in such a way that a vast majority of women, in whatever society, are to be made socially inferior.

Beyond the fact that the capitalist social relations have placed women at the bottom economically, it has also caused a psychological disorder. In recent times, the surge of neoliberalism has institutionalized the objectification of women. The frequent portrayal of the images of women as sexual commodities are pointers to the social effects of capitalism. Whilst it is correct to point out that a chunk of women, regardless of race, are social victims of capitalism, the tragedy of African women under the system is incomparable. For instance, the Atlantic slavery trade did not end without an attack on the image of African women. Through racism, African women inherited a peculiar feeling of social exclusion and inferiority. Within the context of this inferiority complex, the general feeling of self-hatred among Nigerian women has indeed been one of the sources of the sustenance of capitalism in the country. Nigeria basically is one of the most fertile grounds for European-, Asian-, and Indian-owned capitalists merchandising bleaching cosmetics and human hair, otherwise known as weaves and wigs. This can be better interpreted as a situation wherein

foreign capitalists, in harmony with the indigenous capitalists, are making an abundant amount of wealth through the social exclusion and the inferiority condition of Nigerian women. So, whilst other women today had to deal with just social exclusion, a product of capitalism, African women in general had to suffer from the combined effects of social exclusion and an inferiority complex.

From the foregoing, it is therefore perceptible that for African working-class women, the need to get rid of capitalism is also dialectically related to the need to be liberated psychologically from any form of this inferiority complex. Nevertheless, this is neither an attempt to dismiss an international working-class solidarity nor an attempt to place the race struggle over the class struggle. But the point this intends to make is that the struggle against capitalism in itself demands a unity of purpose in thoughts, consciousness and psychology. This is pertinent because with an overwhelming number of perceptive women, the struggle against capitalism is reinforced. The above line of argument has been echoed by the conclusion of a number of Marxist-scholars²⁰ — that which is that women in their numbers must join the apparently male-dominated working-class masses in order to increase the fold of workers currently digging the grave of capitalism.

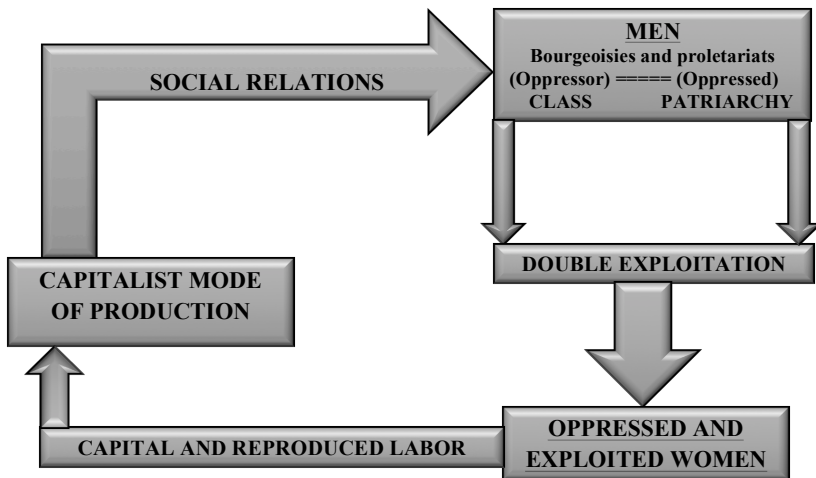


Fig.1. A pictorial depiction of the exploitative and oppressive social relations between men and women under a capitalist mode of production.²¹

Colonialism, Capitalism and Nigerian Women

One of the most decisive events in Africa outside the Atlantic slavery is the penetration of colonial forces during the last phase of the 19th century. Capitalism represents one of the most instructive of these forces. Basically, since the backbone of the Industrial Revolution was capitalism, it became essential for it to invade new markets. It is impossible for capitalism to survive without continuous accumulation of capital in foreign territories. In the 19th century, it therefore became the duty of European capitalists to transport capitalism to Africa in order to ensure their own continuous survival. This indeed explains why capitalism is inherently an expansionary system.²²

Added to the above underlying factor is that consequent to the spread of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, the need for a consistent source of supply of raw materials became inevitable, hence the scramble for colonies in Africa. Colonial Africa thus became the breadbasket of the global capitalist economy. This is why colonialism has to be viewed as a political force needed to strengthen the grip of Western capitalists on world economy. It becomes understandable why capitalism in Africa is domestic colonialism. However, colonialism did not transform Africa into the same capitalist societies existing in the metropolises. The system consciously failed to create an African capital-owning bourgeois class because of the nature upon which it was introduced. Importantly, the European capitalists indeed would have committed class suicide if they had created their counterparts in a territory where they were supposed to establish a strong monopoly over capital accumulation.

To prevent the existence of a competitive indigenous bourgeois class, European capitalist firms in colonial Nigeria adequately monopolized social and material productions. This was made possible because, without the exemption of any, all the economic policies initiated by the British in colonial Nigeria were specifically meant to concretize the dominance of these European capitalists at the expenses of the colonized. For instance, following the introduction of cash crops into the colonies, production relations were altered as the accumulation of surpluses became the basis for social production. This new process favored European capitalists because generally only few non-Europeans had in store

the necessary capital to create surpluses. More so, this alteration holistically is alien to the basic subsistence needs production was meant to cater to in pre-capitalist African societies. As beautifully put by Rodney, “when capitalism came into contact with the still largely communal African societies, it introduced money relations at the expense of kinship ties.”²³ This modification invariably affected relationships between classes and sexes.

Colonialism as a political mandate of capitalism thus manipulated the nature of social production. The control over productive forces by European capitalists meant that the indigenous people were to be at the mercy of the former. Whilst this new process intentionally favored fewer men in colonial Nigeria, it subjected the social production of women into a petty and anachronistic state. Some narratives²⁴ have argued that colonialism positively impacted the opportunities and social liberties of women. It has been suggested that the colonial authorities made it possible for colonized women to be able to divorce their husbands and access Western education. Ultimately, beyond the subject of divorce and the ahistorical claim of access to Western education, none amongst the apologists of colonialism had suggested the chances of economic liberation of women in colonial Africa. Truth be told, none of the structures, political or economic, erected by the British in colonial Nigeria was aimed at elevating the power and influence of women.

To demystify the acclaimed rights women had in colonial Africa through divorce, a study on the court system in colonial Iragbiji, a town in Southwestern Nigeria, had shown that this supposed privilege was fundamentally a concealed colonial project that facilitated the oppression and exploitation of women.²⁵ Some of these women, after securing the verdict of the court in their favor as several court petitions²⁶ have shown, were consistently arrested for their inability to pay toll rates for their goods and for road construction in the town.²⁷ Court petitions for the year 1947 showed that one Abike Famileke successfully divorced her husband,²⁸ but in 1952 her name appeared in a list of those charged by the authorities for inability to pay taxes.²⁹ The surge of divorce in colonial Nigeria undoubtedly totally destroyed the pre-feudal family ties, thereby negatively affecting the social mobility of women.

The social exclusion of women in the colonial economy was also apparent in the educational sector. Because the colonialists were absolutely clear about their strong preference for the male sex, they covertly and overtly expressed their strong desire not to prioritize the education of girls in colonial Nigeria. The disdain and contempt the colonial institution had for women, however, must be classified as a product of the existing social norms in Europe at this time. Women in 19th- and 20th-century Europe had no voting, political, or economic rights or privileges.³⁰ Indeed, many of these women had no equal occupational or educational opportunities. As such, colonialism was not just going to introduce alien political and economic systems but also new socio-cultural values into the colonies.

More so, in spite of the insignificant number of girls educated by the colonialists,³¹ the colonial educational system was not fashioned for any progressive purpose. Under the dominance of global capitalism, the educational system was meant to further lubricate the exploitation of the vast labor force and other resources of the colonized. It will be a massive contradiction to assert that a colonial education meant to keep the colonized people in a comatose state would be their object of liberation.³² The education of girls in colonial Nigerian schools primarily focused on subjects around housekeeping, home-nursing and office management.³³ The nature of colonial education thus in fact weakened the social mobility of women, as girls were not prepared to take up government jobs or occupy any public space. Denzer has argued that for the few women who were fortunate to be employed by the colonial government, their remuneration was less than that of their male counterparts.³⁴

So basically, colonialism, from all dimensions, was a negation of freedom for the colonized. The system therefore could not have emancipated any African group, or sex, for that matter. Rodney lent his voice to the above argument when he pointed out that what happened to African women under colonialism is that the “social, religious, constitutional and political privileges and rights disappeared, while the economic exploitation continued and was often intensified.”³⁵ The colonial economic interests brought about an abrupt end to the pre-capitalist sexual division of the labor system in African societies.

The excessive demand for raw materials in the metropolises shifted the focus of social and material production to men in colonial Nigeria. The cultivation of cocoa, kolanut, palm oil, cotton, etc., with the inception of colonialism soon became the general means of livelihood for the people. Although archival records have shown that, until the end of colonialism, Nigeria was still a major food-producing region, these food crops were primarily insignificant compared to cocoa, kolanut, palm oil, cotton, etc.³⁶ Farming activities in a place like colonial Iragbiji, dating from the 1920s, became dominated by men as a result of the intricacies of cash crops production.³⁷ For the male farmers, this translated into more power and influence in the town, and for the women, alienation. The extent of this dominance presents a wrong impression that women were not interested in farming activities hitherto. The economic exclusion of women was institutionalized to such an extent that incentives were provided by the colonial authorities at different points in time to male farmers. For instance, the District Officer in Osogbo at different occasions provided a number of incentives to cocoa farmers, who were mostly men. These advantages in turn widened the social mobility of a number of men. At several times, women in colonial Iragbiji who attempted to participate in cocoa production were unable to withstand the undue complexity that surrounded the cash crop, like the frequent hassle of self-transporting the produce for inspection at Ikirun grading station. Against this backdrop, men in colonial Nigeria became more involved in the colonial “money” economy — not just faster than women but also preponderantly. Through these discriminatory agricultural policies, the labor of women indeed became irrelevant and also inferior. In addition to the undermined economic status of women, the entirety of the colonial commercial and professional ventures, such as the civil service, railway, roads, mines, etc., were specifically all male-dominated.³⁸

The decline in the economic roles of women in their respective societies had a bandwagon effect on their political and social statuses in colonial Nigeria. Politically, women in colonial Nigeria had many of their institutions and chieftaincy titles attacked by colonial policies. Beyond the aberration that surrounded the imposition of taxes, the colonial authorities exploited this anti-women policy by denying women voting rights and political privileges. This paper, however, contends that firstly the

imposition of taxes on women in colonial Nigeria was a political attack aimed at hastening the economic subservience of women. A 1940 petition undersigned by members of the Lagos Market Women and Traders Association, under the leadership of the revered Madam Alimotu Pelewura, basically revealed the repulsiveness of the colonial tax policy. The women in their petition said:

... Throughout the whole period covered by the history of the town and island of Lagos, it has never been known that the imposition of income tax on women was part of the traditional Native Law and Custom of the Native population in any form ... also women are already deprived economically in every way.³⁹

The above declaration by the Lagos Market Women is extremely illuminating. This statement exposes the historical fallacy of the colonial tax regime and also the backward economic state of women. The Commissioner of the colony of Lagos, Mr. C.B. Williams, in his response to the above petition, stated that the tax was only applicable to women whose income exceeded 50 pounds, but Alimotu Pelewura in her rejoinder was quick to state that "all women in Lagos were equal in a wealth standard and all are very poor; many are greatly in debt."⁴⁰ For Alimotu and her comrades, the economy of the colony has not favored women. They in fact argued that sometimes their husbands placed the burden of home care on them. Although eventually these women were taxed unjustly by the colonial authorities, their resistance is fundamental in assessing the anti-women roles played by colonialism. In spite of the imposition of tax on the women, Alimotu and other female traders in colonial Lagos had to struggle years later against their political exclusion. The slogan of these women as documented by the *West African Pilot* in 1943 was "No taxation without representation"⁴¹. Unsurprisingly, it was not until 1950 that women in southern Nigeria were allowed to vote. In northern Nigeria, women had to wait for several years after the attainment of independence in 1960.⁴²

Notwithstanding the foregoing analyses, the political oppression and marginalization of women under colonialism was more instructive. To critically examine this reverberation, an exploration of the historical dynamics of colonial establishment is pertinent.

One of the forces that enabled the occupation of colonies in Africa in the first place was the activities of European commercial capitalist firms. The economic activities of the Royal Niger Company, formerly the National African Company, was primarily responsible for the British takeover of the territories that make up present-day Nigeria. Through the signing of several so-called protectorates with the natives by some of these commercial firms, the British colonial framework and structure was created. By 1905, the colonial government had spread its tentacles across what is modern Nigeria through the amalgamation of the southern protectorate with the Lagos colony. Suffice to state that the British colonial government, as a result of the enormous efforts of the commercial firms, was able to accomplish this exploit through the use of force and diplomacy.⁴³ In 1914, formal control of Nigeria began with the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates. Against this backdrop, the colonial government invented a political system under the umbrella of an indirect rule system. This system laid the foundation for the withering political roles of women in colonial Nigeria.

The indirect rule system was initiated to enable the colonial government to govern the people through indigenous rulers and tradition.⁴⁴ Colonial native courts were set up in the colonies, and they were headed by the Oba or Emir and, in some other climes, by the warrant chiefs. With the presidents of these colonial courts being men and also the court clerks, women were systematically excused from playing any fundamental decision-making role in these courts. This system became the base of the political system of colonial Nigeria so much so that in places where there was an absence of apparent political heads, the government created a warrant chief system supervised principally by men. Hence, the indirect rule system was ultimately a male-dominated affair. In the absence of apparent political heads in Igboland, the colonial government appointed a number of warrant chiefs into the native authority system, often without the consent of the people. The primary duty of the chiefs revolved around the maintenance of peace and order on one hand, and the control of the native court system on the other. For the teeming population, especially the women, the indirect rule system was an aberration because they had never had their rights surrendered to a group of men, who were often deceitful.

Across colonial Nigeria, archival documents⁴⁵ varying from court proceedings and personal memoirs have exposed a preponderant number of cases bordering on exploitation and oppression of women under the colonial native authority system. Unjust taxation, imposition of levies, imposition of market tolls, amongst other germane issues relating to the corruption of the native authority system, were recurring subjects in colonial Nigeria. The dissents of women against this system subsequently snowballed into the 1929 Aba Women Revolt and several other protests. These movements were representations of the disenchantment of women against their extreme political and economic exclusions. As a matter of fact, some existing institutions wherein women controlled politically *ab initio* were destroyed under the colonial political dispensation.

In precolonial Igboland, women generally had gatherings wherein political, economic and socio-cultural issues that affected them were often discussed. In precolonial Igboland this gathering was known as *Ogbo*.⁴⁶ During colonial rule, however, *Ogbo* became *Mitiri* (corruption of “meeting”). But by the end of the British colonial regime, *Mitiri* had vanished. Two factors can be given to this outcome. After the Aba women’s revolts of 1929, the colonial government carried out an organized genocide on all existing women-dominated associations and organizations in southeastern Nigeria. To weaken the roles of well-respected Igbo women, the colonial government outlawed the legal rights that women’s organizations such as the *Mitiri* had in settling disputes, not just amongst women but also between men and women.

Beyond Igboland, studies have shown that a similar fate befell a number of women’s political institutions such as *Iyalode*, *Iyaloja*, *Iyaoba*, *Olori*, etc., in colonial Yorubaland. These offices were essentially instituted to be the political, economic and socio-cultural voices of women. The office of the *Iyalode* in the Old Oyo Empire, for instance, was fundamentally instituted to ensure equal representation of women in governance. The *Iyaloja* on the other hand, was meant to consistently protect the interests of the economic backbone of society — the market women.⁴⁷ In lending her voice to this discourse, Awe Bolanle argued that precolonial Yoruba women played a considerably important role in social and material productions through farming, marketing, and trading.⁴⁸ However, consequent to the

sexist colonial policies, by the end of colonial rule, the power and influence of the above organized women's institutions had diminished. This can be deduced from the dearth of these institutions in the indigenous political system of some postcolonial Yoruba societies.

Precolonial political institutions in Benin also provide us with a classic example of the political and economic roles of women prior to the advent of capitalist processes. An examination of the office of the *Iyoba*, otherwise known as the queen mother, reveals the existence of an important political office that not only represent the interests of women in the King's council but pertinently the interests of women across the empire. The *Iyoba* was so highly regarded in the King's council that tradition dictates that the Oba of Benin during the precolonial times could not embark on a war campaign without first receiving the consent and blessing of the *Iyoba*.⁴⁹ Suffice to mention that an examination of the African political system will reveal that in societies where there was an office of the queen mother, the queens wielded so much power that the Kings were just mere puppets.⁵⁰ Be that as it may, consequent to the advent of the colonial native authority system, all of these rights and privileges disappeared.

Hence, Nigerian women under colonialism, like their counterparts in other African societies, lost their economic cum political power and influences. The loss of economic power will subsequently have an unfortunate social consequence. Some bourgeois European scholars have attempted to suggest that prostitution was not the creation of colonialism.⁵¹ But all indications as to what prostitution is points to the flaw in the suggestion of these scholars. This paper is of the strong opinion that, whether in colonial Nigeria or Kenya, a section of the already dispossessed women in the colonial "male-dominated," "money" economy, made their way from the rural areas to the rising urban centers to auction their bodies for survival. Prostitution in colonial Lagos became so apparent, and consequently a such menace, that no week passed by without dailies having two articles or more on it.⁵² In a society where virginity was most cherished, sexuality became highly commercialized. This points to the extreme importance of material forces for any historiography.

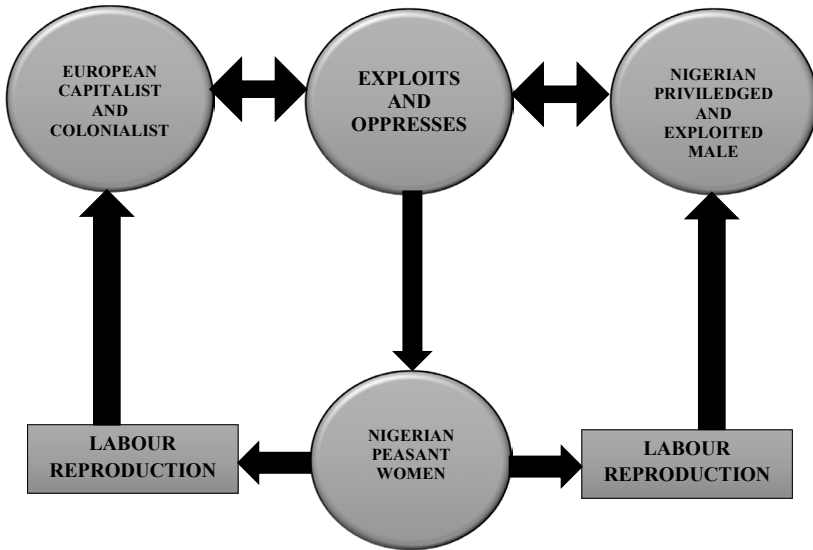


Fig.2. A depiction of the chain of the exploitative and oppressive social relations colonial Nigerian peasant women suffered under capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.⁵³

Conclusion

Capitalism as an economic system places profits above human needs, hence its major paradox. The system explains why a chunk of Nigerian women today suffers extreme marginalization: oppression in the educational sector, labor markets, politics, and in the households. This paper has examined the nexus between the colonial capitalist economic system of the 20th century and the subjugation of women in Nigeria. It has been argued that the entirety of the policies enacted by the British to seclude women in colonial Nigeria were in fact meant to lubricate the exploitation of the vast labor and raw materials of the colonized people. Treating colonial Iragbiji as a case study, it is glaring that the colonial cash crop economy was not in any way meant to liberate but to oppress women. By way of fulfilling the agenda of the European capitalists, the colonial government intentionally paid little or no attention to the education of girls. This abject neglect engendered the entrenchment and institutionalization of the political and economic subservient state of women. It is against this background that this paper argues that since the capitalist mode of production is an inherently sexist,

male-chauvinistic, classist, exploitative, and oppressive system, it cannot in any way guarantee the poor, oppressed women in any society economic and political emancipation.

It will be practically deceptive to continue with the entrenchment of capitalism and expect that the peripheralization of the roles of women today will naturally vanish. This paper has established that regardless of the volume of policies enacted by governments and non-governmental bodies to alleviate the social status of women in any neo-colonial, class-oriented, capitalist country like Nigeria, the exploitation and oppression of women will continue to linger. Obviously, this paper is a clear departure from most bourgeois, feminist works that have discussed the oppression of women from the paradigm of culture and religion. Since social consciousness is a product of material forces, it is thus erroneous and ahistorical to discuss any form of exploitation or oppression outside the context of material forces.

It is critical to state here that this study is not in any way putting forth the struggle for gender equity before class struggle (between the oppressed and the oppressor, regardless of the gender), as it is evident that many women today are also part and parcel of the class of oppressors. Nevertheless, this is to establish that under capitalism, the exploitation of women, beyond men, can best be described as double-exploitation. Under a capitalist mode of production, women are not just being exploited in the factories or in their respective workplaces, but also in their private homes. The ultimate goal of this paper has been to establish the synergy between gender and class struggles, in the same way that race and class struggles can be synergized. The basic point to be made is that the struggle against the persisting systematic, organized oppression and exploitation of women globally is inseparable from the need to get rid of all structures, chains, paradoxes and characteristics of the capitalist, profit-motivated mode of production.

Notes

¹ See Cheikh Anta Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987); Christine Saidi, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010); Awe Bolanle, "The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System," in *Sex Stratification: A Cross-Cultural View*, ed. Alice Schlegel (New York: Columbia University, 1977).

- ² See Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa-Essays on Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Julius Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism: Uhuru Na Ujamaa: A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1965-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); John Henrik Clarke, *My Life in Search of Africa* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1999); Jane Fishburne Collier, *Marriage and Inequality in Classless Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).
- ³ See Saidi, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa*; Bolanle, "The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System."
- ⁴ See Kwame Nkrumah, *African Socialism Revisited* (Prague: Peace and Socialism, 1967); Kwame Nkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa*, (London: Panaf Books, 1970); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1976).
- ⁵ Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 121.
- ⁶ See Bolanle, "The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System."
- ⁷ Dobson B., "Polygamy and Women's Place in Africa," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 1, no.12 (May 1954): 57.
- ⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Merlin Press, 1998), 18.
- ⁹ See Veronica Beechey, "On Patriarchy," in *Unequal Work*, ed. (London: Verso, 1987); Eisenstein Zillah, "Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. E. Zillah (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); Michele Barrett, *Women Oppression Today* (London: Verso, 1980); Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
- ¹⁰ Beechey, "On Patriarchy," and Barrett, *Women Oppression Today*.
- ¹¹ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 34.
- ¹² Paul D'Amato, *Marxism and Oppression* (UK: International Socialist Review, 1999), 31.
- ¹³ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1985).
- ¹⁴ Marx had expressed that "the immediate, natural and necessary relation of human being to human being is also the relation of man to woman." See Brown Heather, *Marx on Gender and the Family* (London: Brill Publication, 2012), 28.
- ¹⁵ Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property, and the State*, 34.
- ¹⁶ Chris Harman, *Engels and the Origins of Human Society* (London: International Socialism, 1994), 55.
- ¹⁷ National Archives of Ibadan, CSO 26: 14962, "Lagos and its people"; Blue Book Report on the Colony of Lagos, 1881.
- ¹⁸ Lindsey German, *Material Girls*, (USA: Bookmarks publication, 2007), 58.
- ¹⁹ Lindsey German, *Sex, Class and Socialism* (USA: Bookmarks Publication, 1989).
- ²⁰ Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa* (Nigeria: Longman, 1981), 34.

²¹ This was put together by the researcher to illuminate the inherently exploitative and oppressive social relations of the capitalist mode of production. As depicted, even oppressed men under the capitalist system invariably oppress and exploit their women at home, and beyond this, the bourgeoisie still exploits the labor of women in their various workplaces. In addition to the illustration, the oppressed and exploited women despite their state remain the backbone of capitalism by assuring the system a consistent reproduced labor through procreation, and also preparing the present labor (husbands or sons) for daily social production activities.

²² Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa*, 50.

²³ Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 123.

²⁴ Melinda Adams is one of the leading proponents of this bourgeois stance. In one of her works, "Colonial Policies and Women Participation in Public Life: The Case of British Southern Cameroons," *African Studies Quarterly*, 8 (July 2006), she made an apologetic statement that whilst colonialism restricted women in Africa, it also opened new opportunities for education and salaried employment. This is not just an ahistorical statement but also a major contradiction. A number of women did go to school in colonial Africa, but their number was amazingly insignificant. Women were not encouraged to go to school by the colonial government because their focus was productively not on women but men.

²⁵ Fagunwa Temitope, "A History of Iragbiji from Earliest Times to 2000" (M.A. diss., University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 2015)

²⁶ Colonial documents on Iragbiji, a southwestern Nigerian town, had shown that the rate of divorce in the colonial courts skyrocketed exceptionally, to such an extent that the courts were called "Kotu Koko Koko" (translation: "divorce courts"). See National Archives Ibadan, Osun Division Office Papers, Ref Osun Div. 1/1-9/8, titled, Iragbiji Native Court: Matters Affecting, under Judicial Records. File. No. 171/Vol.IV. 1949-1954.

²⁷ See National Archives Ibadan, Osun Division Office Papers, Ref Osun Div. 1/1-9/8, titled, Iragbiji Cocoa Roads, 1953-56, File No. 2184. National Archives Ibadan, Osun Division Office Papers, Ref Osun Div. 1/1, titled, Return of Tax Collection, 1952, File No. 6/2153.

²⁸ NAI, Osun Division Office Papers, File. No. 170/12. 1947.

²⁹ NAI, Ref Osun Div. 1/1, titled, Return of Tax Collection, 1952, File No. 6/2153.

³⁰ Oduwole, oral interview, May 23rd, 2017.

³¹ See National Archives Ibadan, Osun Division Office Papers, Ref Osun Div. 1/1-9/8, titled, Future Development Education Ifelodun District. File. No. 1007/2. 1945.

³² Abdou Moumini has expressed that "colonial education corrupted the thinking and sensibilities of the African and filled him with abnormal complexes." Sourced from Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 212.

³³ Sophie Oduwole, oral interview, May 23rd, 2017.

³⁴ Denzer LaRay, "Women's Employment in Government Service in Colonial Nigeria, 1863 – 1945"; *Working Papers in African Studies*, No. 136. Boston: African Studies Center (October 1989): 13.

- ³⁵ Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 120.
- ³⁶ See NAI, Lagos: Colonial Annual Report, 1903, No. 427; Nigeria: Annual Report, 1945, No. 2314; Nigeria: Annual Report, 1955, No. 3422; Nigeria: Annual Report, 1957, No. 4123, etc.
- ³⁷ NAI, Osun Division Office Papers, Iragbiji Cocoa Roads, File. No. 123/10. 1923.
- ³⁸ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 87.
- ³⁹ Ram 1.1.29, "Lagos Market Trading Women: Petition Against Taxation of Women," Lagos State Research and Archives Bureau (LASRAB).
- ⁴⁰ Ram 1.1.29, "Lagos Market Trading Women: Petition Against Taxation of Women," Lagos State Research and Archives Bureau (LASRAB).
- ⁴¹ West African Pilot, Lagos, Wednesday, November 14th, 1943.
- ⁴² Falola and Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History*, 86.
- ⁴³ Toyin Falola, *The History of Nigeria*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 54.
- ⁴⁴ Falola, *The History of Nigeria*, 60.
- ⁴⁵ See for instance, NAI, Osun Division Office Papers, Ref Osun Div. 1/1-9/8, titled, Iragbiji Native Court: Matters Affecting, under Judicial Records. File. No. 171/Vol. IV. 1949-1954.
- ⁴⁶ Judith van Allen, "Sitting on man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," *Journal of African Studies*, 6, no. 2, (August 1972).
- ⁴⁷ Madam Alaja Nimotu Ogunale, oral interview, August 7th, 2014.
- ⁴⁸ Bolanle, "The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System," 29.
- ⁴⁹ Jacob Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891; The Making of a New Elite*, (Nigeria: Longmans, 1965), 45.
- ⁵⁰ Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 120.
- ⁵¹ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch is one of the leading proponents of this ahistorical position in her work *African Women: A Modern History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).
- ⁵² Akin Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria*, (London: University Press, 1968), 56. See also, Saheed Aderinto, "Sexualized Nationalism: Lagos and the Politics of Illegal Sexuality in Colonial Lagos, 1918-1958" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 2010).
- ⁵³ This was put together by the researcher to illuminate the inherently exploitative and oppressive social relations colonial Nigerian women encountered during colonization. The supports how 19th-century European capitalists gave leeway to colonialism. The colonialists thus literally created colonies in Africa on behalf of the capitalists. The entirety of Nigerian men and women, their wage labor, and their raw materials were this exploited under the colonial system. Under this dispensation, however, women were super-exploited.