

## Postcolonial Masculinity and Access to Basic Education in Nigeria

This paper offers an analysis of gender inequality in education regarding the effect of masculinity on retention by drawing on the findings of a qualitative study that involved 30 participants in three major ethno-cultural groups in Nigeria who had dropped out of basic education. We discuss how the masculinities affected educational decision making and choices from a post-colonial feminist perspective. We argue that a key distinguishing factor between precolonial and postcolonial masculinity lies in the colonial transformation and impact, and highlight that the history of masculinities in Africa is marked by colonial conquests, alterations, and destabilisation of the existing power relation structure and weakening of the sociopolitical power of the women (Broqua and Doquet, 2013). The findings show that there is a hybrid masculinity shaped by local tradition and colonial gender practices that exacerbate the ways in which men control the educational opportunities of both girls and boys, and such masculinity interacts with poverty, early marriage, and religion, determining and contesting who gets to access education, but it is also dynamic and changes across the regions, occasionally determining the threshold of schooling that women should achieve.

### Introduction

Nigeria currently has amongst the most persistently poor access to education and social inequality in the world. Save the Children (2016, p.3) reports that “Nigeria has an estimated 13.2 million school-age children (6–14 years old) not in school – the largest out-of-school population in the world”, of which “fully 12.6 million (95 per cent) are in the north of the country, reflecting a clear north/south divide”. Being out of school has both regional and gender dimensions; gender disparity in basic education enrolment has historically been in favour of girls in the southeast and of boys in the northern Nigeria (Humphreys and Crawford, 2014; Gersberg et al., 2016; Unterhalter et al., 2018). These prevailing regional and gender disparities are the result of various historical factors such as colonialism, religion (girls are denied education in some parts of the northern Nigeria – where Muslim populations live – for cultural and religious reasons), and the early marriage that is prevalent in some regions, and which tend to work against girls more than boys (Gersberg et al., 2016).

Over the years, there has been extensive intervention with and research on gender issues regarding Nigeria’s basic education with the aim of promoting inclusiveness; however, only limited progress has been made to date (see Akunga and Attfield, 2010; Unterhalter et al. 2018). These intervention programmes, run by both national and international development agencies, have ultimately not been very successful. For example, in 2006, the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria stood at about 7.4 million (out of Nigeria’s then 142.5 million), which increased to about 10.5 million when the country’s population was 158.5 million in 2010 and 13.2 million out of the country’s estimated 186 million population in 2016 (Humphreys and Crawford, 2014; UNICEF, 2012). This is because interventions mostly concentrated on promoting girls’ education and mitigating out-of-school pull and push factors like poverty, early marriage, infrastructure, hygiene, and school feeding (Humphreys and Crawford, 2014; Gersberg, et al., 2016). They missed the underlying factors that underpin the increasing rate of the out-of-school phenomenon in the country such as the masculinity. Leaving men behind and not exploring the influence of masculinity in gender equality may be counterproductive, therefore, there is a need to attend to the social constructions of masculinity and how they may have been possibly implicated in the persistent increase of out-of-school children in Nigeria (see Christian Aid, 2015; Pasura and Christou, 2018).

An effective interrogation of masculinity demands a historical, cultural, and contextual approach (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This necessitates an examination of masculinity in Nigeria in its colonial and

postcolonial contexts because historical reports point to the colonial penchant to support males' education and development at the expense of girls' education, and this had been carried over to postcolonial socioeconomic and political practices (Van Allen, 1982; Lindsay, 2007; Korieh, 2001). Therefore, this paper employs a postcolonial feminist perspective to explore how masculinity manifests itself both in educational choices and the lives of people who have had to drop out of school in Nigeria. To this end, we discuss postcolonial feminism and masculinities in the following section.

### **Postcolonial Feminism and Masculinities**

Feminist postcolonial theory attempts to explain the recurrent impact of socioeconomic, political, and cultural colonisation of the non-Western societies from a gender perspective and the lived experiences of non-Western women (Lewis and Mills, 2003). It argues that colonial legacies along with capitalism across the Global South are the reproducers of the gendered oppression or inequality women experience today and that have an impact on postcolonial societies (Mohanty, 1988). While postcolonial theorists generally contend the colonial and neocolonial misrepresentation of people in postcolonial societies to be weak and inferior, postcolonial feminists have relatively more complicated responsibilities and contentions. Tyagi (2014, p.45), for instance, explains that postcolonial women suffer from certain forms of 'double colonization' and have simultaneously experienced "the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy". Thus, the colonised man became the oppressor of the colonised woman in her struggle against colonisation. This is particularly where the impacts of masculinities that emerged or survived colonialism arise from and need to be interrogated.

**This** paper aims to understand the formation of postcolonial masculinity and its manifestations in the lives of women and men in order to determine how it affects access to and completion of basic education. The feminist postcolonial approach provides a robust basis for this analysis of postcolonial masculinity in Nigeria because in most African states, colonialism succeeded in altering countries' entire social systems along with their political and economic perspectives, and became a major historical factor and a defining moment in the people's history. Therefore, it is important to unpack the masculinities that emerged from colonialism. However, the current conceptions of masculinity in the mainstream academic literature are widely influenced by Western constructs (see Connell, 2005). The postcolonial perspective of masculinities is still developing, and there is an emerging reference to the concept of masculinity in postcolonial societies in comparison with Western conceptualisation. For example, focusing on the shared experience of postcolonial masculine subjectivities, Kabesh (2013) highlights the widespread tendency to compare such masculinities in relation to the differences between purported rational Western man and purported oppressive and patriarchal Middle Eastern man. Likewise, some of the existing attempts to explain masculinities in the study of African and postcolonial societies (e.g., van Boheemen-Saaf, 2001; Morrell and Swart, 2005; Stanovsky, 2007; Newell, 2009) have borrowed extensively from the existing Eurocentric perspective.

Another section of the literature that attempts to explain masculinities from postcolonial perspective draws on Frantz Fanon's work like the *Retched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Mask - 1952* (e.g., Stanovsky, 2007; Newell, 2009). Fanon (1961: 35) describes postcolonial masculinity as something that replaced colonial masculinity: "at whatever level we study it... decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men". Stanovsky (2007) notes that the changed people are the product of colonialism and decolonization processes, which transform and produce a new consciousness in people. One common trend in the postcolonial literature is the tendency to explain rather than encapsulate and define the concept of postcolonial masculinity (see van Boheemen-Saaf, 2001; Stanovsky, 2007). So, the extent 'masculinity' may be defined (if it may be defined at all), it "is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place

in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (Connell 1995, p.71)

Whether from a Western or postcolonial perspective, what we know from the literature is that masculinity(ies) relates to social construction, theories, and practices that address men's position and power in society, as well as how these contribute to influencing human relations, the position of women (and other men) and societal development (Connell, 1995), and have implications for education. Therefore, in the following section we briefly review the body of work on postcolonial masculinities and education literature on which this research builds.

### **Postcolonial Masculinities and Education**

The work on masculinities in Nigeria is relatively narrow and mostly focuses on sexuality and reproductive health (e.g., Odimegwu and Okemgbo, 2005), migration (Raimundo, 2008; Pasura and Christou, 2018), issues pertaining to religion, socialisation, and perceptions of masculinity (e.g., Uchendu, 2008; Obiyan, 2015) and conflict (e.g., Nigerian Stability and Reconciliation Programme, 2016). These highlight an extant gap in the scholarship on the possible roles of masculinity in education in Nigeria, despite the vast amount of research globally on masculinity and gender equality in school (Longland, 2008; Coffey and James, 2014; Jacobson, 2018), curriculum, teaching and learning about men (Imms, 2012), and masculinity and educational outcomes (Lucher, 2011). Still, relatively few studies have examined masculinity and access (including retention and completion) in education, and many of them are from Latin American countries (e.g., Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2013) but little exists in terms of studies that focus on Africa and particularly in Nigeria where males access has become a critical issue in some parts of the country.

While a comprehensive list of trends in masculinity and education is not claimed, the above trends suggest that significant attention has been given to binary categorisation of boys and girls in education and important questions may have not been asked about how masculinities equally influence boys and girls alike regarding the interest in education, school choice, progression, completion, and transition. Also, while the above fields are important and provide relevant information about boys’ and girls’ experiences at school, they leave out important questions such as access and retention of boys and girls equally in the context of masculinities and its interaction with socioeconomic and political factors. Additionally, a focus on school factors and practices (e.g., Longlands, 2008; Coffey and James, 2014; Jacobson, 2018) tend to separate in-school masculinities from the mainstream masculinities in society. Examining embodied masculinities along with their development and construction in schools is important but we cannot analyse these outside the socioeconomic, political, community, and household beliefs and practices that produced and bore in-school masculinities. Hence, as described in the methodology below, we aim to understand the principal ways in which masculinity is constructed and relatively transferred and manifested in schools and families.

### **Method and Context**

This research aims to examine the Nigerian Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba’s (three different ethnicities in Nigeria) culturally idealised forms of masculine characters and how these contribute to shaping access to and completion of basic education among females and males in the three ethnocultural groups. It is pertinent to note that Nigeria is a Federation of 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory in Abuja. These states are further grouped into six geopolitical zones (north-central, northeast, northwest, southeast, south-south, and southwest) that partly reflect ethnic lines. Out of the over 250 ethnocultural and linguistic groups and 510 living languages in the country, these three are the main ethnic and cultural groups in Nigeria. The name and languages of these three groups are, respectively, the same.

Hausa (which largely dominates the northern zones) constitutes 25.1% of Nigeria's total population of 201 million, while Yoruba (in the southwest) and Igbo (in the southeast) have total proportions of 21% and 18%, respectively (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016). The three ethnocultural groups thus constitute over 64% of the country's population. They also represent the north-south divide in education, religion, and development. The Igbo and Yoruba are located in southern Nigeria where Christianity is a dominant religion, while Hausa is the dominant ethnic group in the north where Islam is dominant.

The research took place in Anambra State (which is one of the five core Igbo states in the southeast and a home of precolonial Igbo kingdoms), Sokoto State (which is a core Hausa/Fulani state in the northwest and has historically remained the seat of the Islamic Caliphate in Nigeria), and Oyo State (which is the political headquarters of the Yoruba ethnic group in the southwest and home of the precolonial Yoruba kingdoms). While these states do not fully represent the totality of these ethnocultural groups, their central importance to each group has been given significant consideration, and references to Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba in this paper refer to information collected in these states that is indispensable to these groups' cultures, histories, and backgrounds. Information from the 2016 Nigeria Education Indicator (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016) shows that Anambra State primary school (aged 6 to 11 years) Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for 2016 stood at 109.28 (105.53 for males and 113.14 for females) while completion rate was 105.38 (100.76 for males and 110.14 for females). In Oyo State, primary school GER was 89.04 (91 for males and 88.54 for females) while the completion rate was 132.98 (128.39 for males and 137.60 for females). In Sokoto, primary school GER stood at 78.40 (95.46 for males and 61.11 for females) while the completion rate was 45.34 (55.79 for males and 34.75 for females) (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016). The completion rates indicate that at the primary school level, females are more likely to complete primary education than males in Anambra and Oyo while males are more likely to complete primary education in Sokoto.

The research drew on 30 semi-structured interviews conducted in each of the study locations (five females and five males, totalling ten from each of the three locations) who did not complete their basic education. The participants were recruited through snowballing sampling that allowed identification and selection of individuals who dropped out of school at the basic education level. We are aware of the small number of samples from each ethnicity (ten) and therefore do not argue for generalisability from our thirty interviews but we believe that the specificity of understanding post-colonial construction adds context and detail to our conceptualisation. Although this small number of interviews may be seen as unrepresentative and may not allow for generalisation, it gives us the recurrent and some key issues that impinge on how post-colonial masculinity manifests itself in education. The participants were ensured of confidentiality and anonymity prior to the research during the participant information meeting, recruitment of participants and getting consent phase, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point, but none withdrew from the research. The interview questions were intended to elicit their experiences of being out of school and their accounts of post-coloniality, including their lived experiences of the circumstances that created out-of-school conditions. As we analysed the interviews, we first set out how masculinities are socially constructed across three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria and then explored how they intersect with schooling and education.

## **Masculinities across Three Dominant Ethnic Groups in Nigeria**

It seems pertinent to begin this section by briefly explaining the pattern of gender relationships across the ethno-cultural groups. The three ethno-cultural and linguistic groups have some major differences besides their languages. The Hausa-Fulani culture is largely intertwined with Islamic religious tradition (in which male dominance is the hallmark), while Igbo culture has been largely influenced by Christianity (which has a more relaxed male dominance than that of Islamic tradition). Yoruba culture lies somewhat between the two. Gender practices in the Hausa culture were already influenced by Islamic tradition before the arrival of colonial powers, while Yoruba traditional relationships were largely based on seniority rather than gender; gender was marked in precolonial Igbo culture but both females and males could achieve levels of political, economic, and spiritual authority, and how these worked in practice differed across various acephalous precolonial Igbo communities (Oyewumi, 2002; Igboin, 2011; Aboluwodi, 2014; Toit, 2017).

An understanding of the local characterisation of masculinity is very important and has been particularly linked to access to education in some parts of Nigeria (Voice 4 Change, 2015). What it means to be an ideal man in all three ethnic groups was similar, but the positions of power that men occupy varies across the three groups. The participants define the culturally idealised character of males with similar terms and relate it to gender roles and socioeconomic expectations of males. They generally used expressions such as 'educated', 'strong', 'defender', 'honest', 'caring', 'married', 'providing for his family members'. Some of these also related to gender roles:

*Man's role is to go out and get money for feeding the family. In the family, the man's role is to go out and struggle to get money and feed the woman and children, clothe them and if he has not built a house, he makes effort to build a house and buy a car. These are males' roles and efforts*  
- **AMAKA IF**<sup>1</sup>

Participants mostly suggested that males maintain dominant positions in households and other levels of social formation (such as traditional, political, and religious institutions). Men's aspirations and efforts to achieve such positions, maintain control, and exhibit a strong-man image influence the nature of gender and power relations in the society. Men's quest for these is also accompanied by the readiness and ability to take necessary risks to achieve these qualities. Dowd (2008, p.30) explains that men truly "pay a price for privilege... Yet uncovering the price paid might be a way into undermining privilege or the appeal of seeking or having it". However, we chose to recognise both the privilege and the price as there is a need to balance these sides in order to arrive at an inclusive theory of masculinity (more about the balancing sides later). For example, men's or boys' school dropouts (as observed in Ezegwu, 2012), to make money in order to marry the women of their choice is the educational price they have to pay for their position. Therefore, economic status is observed to play an important role in the characterisation of an ideal man. An ideal man may be said to be a wealthy married man who provides for, leads, and protects his family and also promotes societal development through leadership and financial contributions. During the interview, one participant from Anambra mentioned:

*When I was growing up, the person that was regarded as an ideal man was someone that is wealthy and has money that provides for himself, family and does what he wants to do. In the eastern part of Nigeria currently, an ideal man is a man that can take proper care of the family without any external assistance and protects the family and, maintains integrity in business and family – **IBEH IM**.*

IBEH IM's observation (about when he was growing up and linking this to today's eastern Nigeria) suggests that this has been true both in the past and the present. Another way to sum up the economic

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<sup>1</sup> Each respondent has been assigned a code for both anonymity and identification purposes. The following are the codes used for each gender and ethnic group: e.g., IF – Igbo Female ii. IM – Igbo Male iii. YF – Yoruba Female iv. YM – Yoruba Male, HM – Hausa Male, HF – Hausa Female

view of the “ideal man” is that he is brave, honest, and capable of protecting and representing the family and society. Within these characterisations are seen the social acceptance of males' dominant position and which point to the world of power in which males operate. Kaufman (1994, p.142) observes that "in a world dominated by men, the world of men is, by definition, a world of power", and this power constitutes the structured part of the existing sociopolitical, economic, and social organisation, including religion, family, and education system. As the interviews show, power on an individual level is associated with masculinity and men's capacity to exercise such power and control.

This realm of power, dominance and control is reflected in the respondents' definition of an ideal man that it is sustained by economic position, individual abilities, religious and cultural values that help to sustain the system. For example, both religion and colonialism-influenced cultural values that strongly uphold males as family head and breadwinners (provider for the family) – whether every male can fit into this effectively or not – is not expected to be discussed (Lindsay, 2007; Ratele, 2008). Instead, as AMINU HM notes:

*A man that failed to meet up to societal expectations, people see him as a lazybones that has wasted his years, but they also have patience with him, hoping that someday he will get something*  
– AMINU HM.

This nature of the realm of power varies across the ethnic groups. While respondents across the three states were in agreement on such features as ‘strong’, ‘defender’, ‘providing for his family’, ‘contributing to societal development’, ‘playing leadership roles’, and ‘hardworking’ as features of an ideal man, there are also few areas of slight difference across the three states. In Anambra and Oyo, most respondents described the ideal man based on wealth and social position: more respondents in Anambra, followed by Oyo, discussed the ideal man in relation to individual's wealth, public image and capacity to represent the family and society. In Sokoto, the ideal man was related to be the sole ruler of the house, and has the capacity and freedom to be in a profession like the police, military, or medical practices. LOLA YF explained that a man that is mature and qualified to marry ought to be able to take care of the family and should have a house. Similarly, OBI IM stated that “ideal man is a rich man”. AMINU HM describes an ideal man as a “powerful man of the house” who controls every other person in the house. AMINU HM's claim was backed up with religious maxims, such as “God placed men above women” (MULIKAT HF) and “man rules everybody” (UMARU HM). These underscore a strongly held notion of male superiority over females (again, while this is widespread in the three states, it is particularly strong in Sokoto).

In her work on how the breadwinner ideal emerged in the colonial southwest of Nigeria, Lindsay (2007, p. 242) notes that breadwinner ideal was introduced in Nigeria by colonialism but Nigerian males and their wives “were active agents in the process” – indicating that it became a tradition after some period of ritualised performativity. In the southeast, Ezegwu (2012) reveals how the belief that men are households' breadwinners causes boys to drop out of school to go into business apprenticeships to acquire wealth before they marry. In northern Nigeria, where early marriage is prevalent, reports likewise have highlighted how each additional year of education may make it difficult for girls to marry because of males' interest in underage girls and the belief that females are not expected to provide for males (see Erulkar and Bello, 2007; Akunga and Attfield, 2010). Also, a well-educated woman or ‘breadwinning’ woman may not represent ‘ideal wife material’ to some men because they are expected to be submissive and serve their husbands obediently. These also relate to males' power over women at the household level and more broadly the social construction of masculinity.

Some postcolonial feminists (Oyewumi, 2002; Toit, 2017) have also chronicled evidence of colonial alteration of both gender constructions and gender relations, which implicate colonialism in the

development of the pattern of construction and characterisation of the maleness highlighted above by the respondents. For instance, in Yoruba culture, Oyewumi (2002, p.3) argues that:

*The traditional Yoruba family can be described as a non-gendered family. It is non-gendered because kinship roles and categories are not gender-differentiated. Significantly then, power centres within the family are diffused and are not gender-specific. Because the fundamental organizing principle within the family is seniority based on relative age and not gender, kinship categories encode seniority, not gender. Seniority is the social ranking of persons based on their chronological ages...Seniority principle is dynamic and fluid; unlike gender, it is not rigid or static”.*

While we may not generalise this claim to all other Nigerian cultures, including Hausa culture, these examples highlight the magnitude and impact of colonialism on gender and power relations in Nigeria. Igbelina-Igbokwe (2013) explains that the positions of women in pre-colonial Nigeria varied across the country's ethnic groups, but women were largely viewed as complementary and not subordinate to men. The foregoing should not be taken as a denial of the existence of patriarchal structures in precolonial southern Nigeria, however. As Morrell and Swart (2005, p.104) note, some aspects of masculinity “have their roots in the precolonial period and are still valued” - such as the expected roles of a respected good man, taking care of his family, having a wife that does not roam about, being good to his people, and helping to solve community problems (see also Silberschmidt, 2001). However, the dominant version benefited from colonial transformation and the colonialists who defined themselves “not only as superior but also as masculine, keeping in mind that masculinity characterized colonialist action” (Hamadi, 2014, p.43). Having explained the construction of masculinity across the three ethno-cultural groups from a postcolonial perspective, we now focus on how it manifested itself in relation to influencing the decisions regarding education within the household.

### **How do Postcolonial Masculinities Impact Decision Making regarding Education?**

One of the direct and prevalent ways masculinity influences both girls' and boys' access to and completion of basic education relates to who makes the decisions and how decisions are taken at the household level. In all ethnic groups (but more pronounced in Sokoto, followed by Anambra), fathers decide who should be allowed to enrol or remain in school. Interview responses indicate that fathers' position played an important role in the determination of who is sent to school and who the family is more willing to sponsor:

*The father takes the decision and would say it is this son that I want to send to school. The wife will support the husband for them to train the boy so that if he becomes somebody, he will benefit the family... The father is the pillar that holds the house and the one that says what will happen in the family because he is the owner and what he says is what will happen. The father is the one that went and married the woman to come and be with him as his helper; so, if the father decides, if it is not good, the woman can tell the man, no, what you said is not good, but it is the father that will talk first before others will look at it - **IKE IM**.*

Both male and female respondents mentioned that their fathers took critical decisions about their education. Some of the female respondents also experienced situations where their fathers chose not to support their education because they were women. ADA IF said that:

*My teacher made efforts to ensure I continued with my education. He called my parent, my dad, and explained to him and pleaded to train me but my dad asked him, ‘will you marry her after training her?’ The man told him ‘no, I only see this girl is intelligent’. He said ‘no, leave my daughter for me, do not train her, or will you marry her after training her?’ – **ADA IF***

The decision-making power in the households is also underpinned by economic power, which males control. In ADA IF's case, her father was not willing to finance her education and was only willing to allow her to continue her education under the teacher's sponsorship if the teacher agreed to marry her (taking over the overseeing power from the father). Hence the father and the teacher, both males, had the funding and power to decide if she would go to school or not. Her intelligence, interest, and future career were not determining factors; it was rather her father's authority and potentially her teacher's willingness to take her as a wife. "The teacher was already married and would have taken it up to train me and marry me after training me" said ADA IF, and she was forced to marry her teacher. Her challenge reflects men's control and dominance through economic power, which is an area that overlaps in both Western feminists' and postcolonial feminists' contentions (see Bouilly, Rillon, and Cross, 2016).

Like fathers, husbands also retain the power to decide if the wife can continue her education after marriage. A male participant, YUSUF HM, said he was training his daughters to an extent in education and would not go much further when they marry, though if their husbands want, they can allow them to continue their education in their husbands' houses. UMARU HM noted that not all men have the heart to allow their wives to go out because of fear of possible infidelity. Possibly due to this fear, while government and some religious groups and schools introduced second chance education programmes, some husbands still did not allow their wives to attend such classes. A female participant, ZUWAIRA HF, mentioned that she did not have any option (between education and marriage) and had to marry, yet sometime after her marriage, a member of her religious group who was a vice principal in a secondary school where they lived encouraged women during religious meetings to enrol in the programme and brought forms for them to complete, but her husband refused to grant her permission to take advantage of the opportunity to further her education in this manner (the adult classes provided by her religious group). While the husband's rejection of his wife's efforts to return to school was reported in Sokoto, it could happen in other places in Nigeria, including Anambra and Oyo.

In the Igbo and Yoruba cultures, the decision power varied; some respondents said women had little or no say, while some said both husband and wife decide if children should go to school or not. IBEH IM noted that in Igbo culture, even though the father may have the decision-making power, the mothers often influence the father's decisions. He adds that:

*It varies, but in most families it is the woman because the woman is always close to the children and understands the capacity and capability of each child. If she knows the one that can do well in school, that is the one she will be influencing the husband to send to school. The ones that are disobedient to her may be denied the opportunity to go to school. The ones that are disobedient to her may not have the privilege or may not have her protection in the husband's decision... While the father is the head, the woman is the neck, and it is where the neck turns the head that it goes –*

**IBEH IM**

*In my family, I am the one that decided that all my children would be given an equal educational opportunity and my wife supported me. If I decided otherwise, my wife would not agree. If a husband refuses and the wife agrees, there would be confusion and chaos –*

**NONSO IM**

It was only in the Hausa/Fulani culture that most respondents emphasised the man is the sole determinant of who goes to school. In situations where females were mentioned to have had some influence (e.g., AISHA HF), it was the grandmother that was mentioned. Despite experiencing her grandmother's negative influence on her education, AISHA HF confirms that:

*Man is supposed to be the one to decide whether children should go to school or not since he is the head of the family. In decision making, the man has the final say because the man is already placed above the woman and because of that whatever he says is the final -*

**AISHA HF**



Whatever male decision-making power is, in its strongest or its weakest form, it flows from the postcolonial masculinities that have been produced and structured by persisting performative citation and also by the pre-existing cultural scripts' repetition (Stanovsky, 2007). Postcolonial scholars have contended that in many African societies, the concept of gender may be considered historically inappropriate because precolonial social relationships were marked by generational criteria (Oyēwùmí, 1997). However, following the colonial disruption of the pre-existing social relation structures, power and decision-making structures are currently defined according to Western traditional gender binaries rather than the seniority that previously determined who held the power to decide in the precolonial Igbo and Yoruba societies (Oyewumi, 2002). What may be considered as the history of masculinities has a direct link to and has been marked by the colonial conquests that transformed their forms (Broqua and Doquet, 2013). This was achieved by destabilising the existing power structures as well as weakening the sociopolitical power held by the elders (McCullers, 2011; Broqua and Doquet, 2013). Thus, masculinity has emerged as the ruler to constitute determining factors both in households and the society at large.

### **Masculinities, Marriage and Threshold of Girls' Schooling**

Masculinity is one of the key factors that underpin early marriage practices, which appears at the surface as simply a cultural practice and directly prevents girls from schooling in northern Nigeria, whereas in the south the shift to marrying educated women opens a space for girls to further their education. For instance, in Sokoto (northwestern Nigeria), mothers and elder women members usually tend to encourage girls (e.g., AISHA HF and ZUWAIRA HF) to marry 'once they are mature' while they are still within the age range being sought by males (often between 13 and 18 years old).

The roles played by households, especially the women (grandmothers and aunts) in the promotion of early marriage undermines girls' education as if women are the leading champions of the practice, but underneath their agencies lies a historical silencing system that produced the observed trend. Some scholars (e.g. Bertrand, 2018) have, from a postcolonial perspective, emphasised how colonialism silenced women, destroyed their confidence and also robbing them of their voice. Bertrand (2018, p. 281) drew on postcolonial and feminist writings to highlight a 'silence-problem' that characterised "colonial relationship whereby certain voices cannot be heard, while other voices try to speak for those who are silenced". While the women lead the action, the decisions are made or influenced by males. According to TIJJANI HM:

*The father is the one that makes decisions most of the time. Once he sees the girl's peers marrying and his daughter is still at home, he would also give her in marriage... Most times the mothers would solicit for more time and request for the girl to be allowed to continue so that she can use the time to prepare herself, you know when they are getting them ready for marriage, they usually get some things for them, but the fathers do not listen to the suggestions.*

The silencing system became entrenched in postcolonial societies' cultures through the colonial sociopolitical and economic fiats, which advanced the European culture that elevates men as superior to women (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2016). A deeply ingrained ideology, philosophy, or other powerful culturally backed narrative can become a very strong disabling frame (Bertrand, 2018). Onor (2017, p.24) explains that Nigerian women are still "viewed from the perspective of the "Colonial mind", with which they are "adjudged weak, oppressed and peripheral to developments in their respective societies". Such carryover from the colonial era, in which, as Bertrand (2018) explains, the silenced cannot speak up for themselves still plagues gender relationships in the postcolonial era. The silenced cannot speak for themselves or for others because, on the one hand, they are structurally excluded from the channel of communication (which characterised the (post)colonial sociopolitical and economic systems), whilst on the other, they cannot speak up for themselves because they are already silenced and are expected to remain silent. For women, who have been silenced over

time, they have acquiesced to their relegated situation, which has also been sealed with religious doctrinal ‘plasters’ (such as “that is how our religion says”, as AMINU HM declared) and closing any remaining opportunity for them to speak up. Over the years this silence has been performed, they appeared to have developed a form of ‘invasive agency’, a condition in which the oppressed and silenced accept and openly support the perpetuation of their oppressed and silenced position rather than voicing their true feelings and opposing such conditions (Bertrand, 2018).

In the southeast (Igbo and Yoruba), men's marriage preferences tend to shift and reflect a ‘more progressive’ attitude whilst still failing to see women as subjects of their lives. Men’s desire to marry educated females pushes females to get more education. During an interview in Abuja, an Igbo male from Anambra state stated that “no one is interested in marrying uneducated woman these days”. He added that when it comes to who should be sent to school, “people tend to do all they can to train the females up to tertiary level because the males can go into apprenticeship and may still have the opportunity to get education later. Getting an education later suits my own experience”. IBEH IM explained that:

*Most men no longer look for females that are not educated, they go for already made females, those that have graduated [from the university]... Men are mostly looking for wives who are [university] graduates; this is why most families now are thinking twice about who they send to school. Depending on the family, if they consider that if they do not train a female in school and males will not come to seek her hand in marriage, they will definitely send the female to school in hope that before she graduates, males looking for already-made products would come and grab her and get married to her.*

The southeast experiences indicate that men are the ones leaving school to meet both their marriage expectations and those of society. While this works in favour of girls' education, it still reflects the masculine influence and females (and their households) working to satisfy males’ preference for educated females, even when the males are not educated themselves. This trend is considered normal in society.

Further, masculinity has both direct and indirect influences on early marriage that ultimately affect girls’ education. It is direct because men’s preferences constitute a pull factor. As a push factor (indirect), men’s preferences interact with early marriage, and this varies across Nigeria’s geopolitical zones (Erulkar and Bello, 2007). Greene et al. (2015, p.2) observe that masculinity contributes to the creation and maintenance of the practice of early marriage because, on the one hand, “girls' unpaid household labour are commodities valued and purchased by men”, whilst on the other, males are socialised as both dominant and assertive, as society’s decision makers. For instance, FATIMA HF was asked to go and marry after her primary school and was told that females should marry early because they will eventually marry and not all the males that would allow their wives to go out and work. This implies that the interest and position of the future husband are being considered to determine whether a female should go to school or not. Thus, we argue that masculinity is implicated in the determination and sustenance of what constitutes an acceptable social expectation such as the need for females to marry early in the Hausa region or continue education to comply with the expectations of men in the Igbo region. In either situation, females are under some pressure to conform to societal expectations.

## **Conclusion**

The nature of masculinities teased out in this paper is largely a product of colonial and postcolonial dynamics. We cannot, therefore, easily talk about masculinities that are purely Nigerian or as pristine

masculinities in Nigeria (at least in the three geopolitical regions studied). What exists today reflects a hybrid of local tradition and colonial gender practices that exacerbate male ascendancy in ways that deviate from what historically existed. The study observes that local constructions of masculinities are (to some extent) similar across the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa cultures (possibly as a result of colonial generalised alteration) and also (to some extent) differ between the northern (Hausa) and southern (Igbo and Yoruba) regions of the country.

While masculinity is implicated, we note that postcolonial feminist scholars have continued to contend that colonialism created the conditions that contribute to shaping socioeconomic situations that weaken women's opportunities to access education and develop themselves in ways they have reason to value. It also contributed to the creation of the existing unequal gender relations that empower males to a greater extent than females and exacerbate males' dominance, which is also reflected in the differential access to education for females and males in the postcolonial society (see Oyewumi, 2002; Hamadi, 2014).

In this paper, we attempted to retell stories and interpret experiences from this hybrid masculinity and highlighted how diverse factors, such as poverty, early marriage, and religion, contribute to push or pull people out of school and how masculinity interacts with these factors to keep people away from school in Nigeria. Culturally idealised masculine characters, as observed in this study, vary across Nigeria (to some extent and in some respects) but share some basic elements such as the headship of the man and associated male dominance. The observable differences open up a need to investigate each frame further in relation to other perspectives of masculinity (besides the postcolonial perspective). Also, while there may not be a single Nigerian masculinity, how it works in different contexts (not just in education), but in the relationship between education and market and non-market settings or pedagogies at schools, are also important to further theorise Nigerian masculinities.

As a way forward, considering that households tend to determine who is sent to (or withdrawn from) school and given into marriage or sent into apprenticeship (which also depends on the family's resources), creation of a functional and effective system of economic empowerment that reduces females' dependence on males would contribute to addressing children's educational needs and encourage households to allow everyone to go to school.

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