

Colonialism and gender inequality: The case of political representation in Nigeria

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[Nigeria ranked 130th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap report](#). Neoliberal tropes have posited this as a regional problem, whereby gender inequalities have prevailed as intrinsic to a 'one-size-fits-all' African culture. In turn, Western influence has ironically been framed by Liberal institutions as holding the answer to African women's emancipation.

Gender inequalities were present in Nigeria pre-colonization. However, in contrast to colonial gendered hegemony, pre-colonial dual sex structures extended [women's](#) roles beyond the private sphere to include political, social and economic arenas.

Subsequently, implying that contemporary gendered political power imbalances cannot be exclusively attributed to culture. Rather, the systemic entrenchment of gender inequalities within formal networks of power is rooted in Colonialism.

Colonial Officers, Administrators and Christian Missionaries possessed a monopoly on social hierarchies, identifying the existence of women in Nigeria to be that of "the other of the other," based upon their race and gender. This patriarchal system reflected Victorian ideals of domesticity, which banished women into the private sphere and diminished their political voice.

In turn, hegemonic masculine ideologies legitimized male-dominance. Through the institutionalization of gendered divisions, colonialism naturalized individualism, contrasting with the communal political authority exercised by both men and women pre-colonization.

Colonial gendered institutionalism prevails in the Nigerian Fourth Republic. [Women occupy 3% of seats in the Senate and 4% in the House](#)

of Representatives.

From the perspective of colonial theory, these figures can be understood as a reflection of gender norms institutionalized by British colonial powers. This becomes clear in a survey whereby [only 50% of male respondents said a woman can be president](#), primarily as a result of a male fear of women taking their roles. Thus, indicating that unequal gender representation in contemporary politics reflects the intersubjectivity between dominant masculine and subordinate feminine norms rationalized by colonialism.

[In the 2023 election, the largest party in Nigeria, APC, set the cost for expression of interest forms at \\$67,269.](#) The colonial entrenchment of a private/public dichotomy heralds this a gendered issue.

Since the colonial subordination of women solely to the domestic sphere, the overall ability of women to independently possess such funds has remained limited compared to their male counterparts. In turn, this financial dependency limits their access to the political arena.

Although the pre-colonial patrilineage system similarly limited female economic independence, the absolutist control exercised by the colonial administration served to formally limit women's power. Moreover, the lack of female representation decreases the visibility of gendered issues. At present, [only 30% of legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality have been achieved in the areas of employment and economic benefits.](#) Thus, reproducing a cycle of [gender](#) inequality.

While we cannot yet grasp the end of this cycle, its structural origins can be traced to the patriarchal institutions and attitudes mainstreamed by colonialism, which have endured to keep women out. Arguably, it is the work of African feminists which provides pivotal hope of deconstructing "the colonial existential epistemology". And ultimately, emancipating

Nigerian women as political actors.

More information: Whose human security? Gender, neoliberalism and the informal economy in sub-Saharan Africa.

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