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**Intersectionality In Organizations: Exploring The Relationships Between Gender, Ethnicity, Religion And Women's Work In A Postcolonial Space.**

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## **Intersectionality In Organizations: Exploring The Relationships Between Gender, Ethnicity, Religion And Women's Work In A Postcolonial Space.**

### **Summary:**

There is evidence that more women in Nigeria are going into higher education as both students and academics. However, a key issue is that women are underrepresented in academic employment and leadership roles within institutions of higher learning. In Nigeria, women experience inequalities in the workplace not only due to their gender but also due to their ethnic or religious background. A major criticism of feminist studies of women's experiences at work is that these have been dominated by Western feminism, with critics arguing for the need to give voice to women in the global south such as in postcolonial locations. This paper is a case study of three universities which have been selected in order to bring to the fore, the regional differences which could influence the gender attitudes, ethnic and religious affiliations in Nigeria, their intersections and how they impact women's employment and career progression in academia.

**Key words:** Gender, Ethnicity, Religion, Employment, Career progression, Academia, Organizational culture, Postcolonial feminist theory, Intersectionality.

## 1.INTRODUCTION:

Ogbogu (2011) tells us that women in Nigerian universities are mainly represented in the lower and middle level academic and administrative positions with their participation decreasing at higher levels. Ekpo (2015) tells us that in Nigerian universities, women make up 4% of professors and associate professors, 10% senior lecturers and 15% of Assistant lecturers. This is indicative of the challenges faced by women in the workplace in Nigeria, thus leading to the question of the causes of these glaring inequalities in the workplace. In her review of Okeke-Ihejirika's (2004) book *Negotiating Power and Privilege*, Ejikeme (2012) points out Okeke-Ihejirika's argument that women are discriminated against in the workplace and that there is an underrepresentation of women in education or even a total absence of women in some fields of education, especially the better paid fields. The labour market provides opportunities for participants to earn incomes and is crucial to determining their welfare; however, very few women in Nigeria are employed in the top management levels of organizations within the formal sector (Iweagu,2012). This could be as a result of the socio-cultural attitudes to gender in Nigeria. There has been some research done on discrimination faced by women in the Nigerian workplace which have focused on the difference in gender roles (see Makama, 2013; Owoyemi and Olusanya, 2014, Oyeyinka and Adeyinka, 1998). Labour laws at work have been put in place to guard against discrimination with regards to recruitment, training, evaluations, policies for promotion, remuneration and disciplinary action (Owoyemi and Olusanya, 2014). However, there remains, a significant gender gap in education, economic empowerment and political participation in the Nigerian formal labour market (Okpara, 2006; Social Institutions and Gender Index, 2016).

The Nigerian society is a patriarchal one, with social stratification and differentiation based on gender, thereby providing advantages to men while limiting the roles and activities of women (Makama, 2013). In Nigeria, men have traditionally been considered to be a more appropriate choice than women in cases of appointment to executive positions (Anakwe, 2002). Qualities associated with masculinity such as drive, objectivity and an authoritative manner are perceived to be what a successful manager should possess (Omar and Ogenyi, 2004). This could explain why there is a lack of women in leading academic roles. Morley (2013) tells us that though women are entering into academic leadership, it is in small numbers. Thus, a lack of women in leadership across the global academy indicates the under-representation of women in decision-making activities, including recruitment panels, boards and committees. There are gendered inequalities within the hierarchies of organisations and a consistent under-representation of women in senior positions in countries with differing geopolitical and cultural contexts (Morley et al. 2006, Singh 2008).

However, gendered organizational practices at work are not the only challenges faced by women in Nigeria. Fajana et al (2011) point out that there is a tendency to overly rely on culture, language, religion and gender as a basis for employment in Nigeria. Thus, ethnic and religious influences are also pervasive in employment of women. High levels of poverty in Nigeria has led to the intense competition for resources including jobs, which has resulted in exclusions of individuals based on their ethnic group (Davis and Kalu-Nwivu, 2001). The study by Togunde (1999) revealed amongst its findings that a significantly higher number of Igbo and Yoruba women have a higher likelihood to be employed than Hausa women. It also found that the likelihood of Muslim women being employed is less than their Christian counterparts.

This study focuses on the impact of gender, ethnicity and religion on the employment and promotion to leadership positions for women in the Nigerian higher education sector, and how these factors serve as the bases for the creation and reproduction of inequalities. A key issue is the determination of the most appropriate approach to intersectionality within this study in order to adequately identify and analyse the inequalities faced by women in the Nigerian higher education sector. In order to identify these patterns of inequality within the organizations and influenced by the surrounding society, this research views Acker's inequality regimes as an appropriate approach to conceptualize intersectionality through the lenses of postcolonial feminist theory.

The following section will examine how these categories of difference (gender, ethnicity and religion) intersect and influence the recruitment, selection, promotion and career progression of academic women in the Nigerian higher education sector.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Gender, recruitment and selection**

According to Aina (2016), gender inequalities still exist in higher education institutions in Nigeria, particularly in the recruitment and promotion of staff as well as in administrative programmes and policies. Furthermore, there is a failure to fully accept women into senior leadership positions, with only a handful of institutions employing women in top level jobs. She has argued that gender mainstreaming should be at the core of universities practices. Studies on institutional practices reveal that contemporary gender identities and inequalities are produced and reproduced in everyday interactions in Nigerian universities (Adedokun, 2004; Pereira, 2003). As Odejide et al. (2005) tell us, being seen and treated as inferior or subordinate is part of the lived experiences of women in Nigerian universities.

In Nigeria, there is legislation against discrimination (Owoyemi and Olusanya, 2014). Also, several agreements have been entered into, by the country to counter discrimination such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (2004) (Gberevbie et. al, 2014). However, how much have these laws and agreements been implemented and impacted the Nigerian work place in terms of equality? In 2016, the Gender and Equal opportunities Bill was rejected due to opposition from various groups in the society including religious groups (Makinde et al, 2017). This reveals the depth of the challenges of achieving equality in Nigeria.

### **Gender, promotion and career progression**

Empirical literature tackling the gender-based disparities in higher academic institutions, argues that due to subliminal, gender-based biases culminating in the devaluation and marginalization of women, career progression through the academic channels has been considered slow for women. (Carnes et al, 2008; Young, 2004; McTavish and Miller, 2009). Aguirre (2000) notes that women and minority academics were considered to be less competent than their white male counterparts and viewed themselves as suffering from salary disparities and an unfair remuneration system. Furthermore, McTavish and Miller (2009) note that gender inequality, along with organizational practices which are male-friendly, exacerbated by the

limited opportunities for the acquisition of leadership skills (Madsen, 2010; Kodama and Dugan, 2013; Acker, 2010) have been pinpointed as important factors contributing to a high rate of gender inequalities within academia. Indeed, Okeke-Ihejirika (2004) argued that while education has provided the tools and opportunities for women to pursue careers, social attitudes to stereotypical gender roles persist in keeping women from going into the labour market and achieving career progression.

Omar and Ogenyi (2004) looked at the experiences of women managers in the Nigerian civil service and surmised that while women in Nigeria are experiencing greater access to occupations such as teaching, medicine, computing and politics, they do not play a significant role in management. They suggest that Nigerian female managers are faced with problems which can be attributed to socio-cultural factors. A discussion of this is relevant to the paper as socio-cultural attitudes permeate different aspects of the Nigerian society and are very influential in determining leadership roles in organizations including higher education institutions. Gender roles constructed by societal expectations place a burden on women aspiring for higher positions and affect their promotion prospects. An example of such roles includes the perception of women as care givers for their families. Work-family conflict has been found to exist as pressures from work and family roles are mutually exclusive (Twomey et al. 2002; Wulson and Moyes, 1998 in (Dorcas et al. 2014). In Nigeria, a country with well-defined gender roles and where women are mostly left to contend with the burden of child care and other family responsibilities, career advancement could be difficult to manage. Burn (2005) noted that the real and perceived responsibilities of women to home and family may prevent upward mobility in their career. Thus, to what extent does gender influence recruitment, selection, promotion and career progression in the Nigerian workplace? In addition to social attitudes to gender, women experience challenges with organizational culture and practices which could impact their promotion. The next section will examine some of these organizational practices.

### **Organizational culture**

In Nigeria, the fast growing and intricate federal university system has made it a challenge to efficiently manage the system and individual universities (Saint et al, 2003). Questions are being raised about the way universities are tackling the demands of contemporary knowledge economies and how this has impacted on gender relations within academia and the implications for gender balance in institutions of higher learning (Blackmore, 2002). El-Khawas (2001) attempts to produce answers to this question by distinguishing between rigid and responsive institutions of higher learning. A rigid institution is resistant to implementing changes in institutional behavior, often dismissing potential changes without taking into consideration, the feasibility or desirability of such changes. On the other hand, a responsive institution is more flexible, considers any changes in circumstance, determines suitable ways to adjust in order to accommodate these changes, and takes responsive actions.

In their study of women leaders in higher education in the African context, Sader et al (2005) suggests that women are affected by rigid institutional structures that do not provide adequate support for the domestic responsibilities they bear. The ramifications are considerable: young women academics, especially in the sciences, cannot establish the academic track record necessary to attract postgraduate students and funding, both of which are crucial to success in their academic careers, as readily as men can.

As Mahler (1997) notes, an organisation's culture is determined by several factors including the influences of national culture, the contrasting personalities and orientation of the individuals and past events in the organization. Thus, organisations are usually influenced by the culture of the wider society. This means that, in Nigeria, the patriarchal nature of the society, which is then also reflected in its institutions and organizations could be seen as being behind the low numbers of women in leadership within academia. This therefore lowers the availability of top female academics who can mentor junior academic women in order to increase their chances of promotion. As Dever et al. (2008) note, reports indicate that women academics receive less sponsorship and mentoring than their male colleagues, with this situation starting early in their academic careers.

These inequalities due to gender have been explored by feminist theorists. However, Harding et al (2013) are of the view that more theoretically sophisticated work that is to be found in feminist and gender studies has not yet been explored in much depth. This implies the need for more research in this area to explore these lingering inequalities in organisations. This is true in the case of Nigeria, where there is a lack of research within feminist and gender studies. The next section will discuss ethnicity as this is very important in determining employment in Nigeria.

### **Ethnicity and Employment**

Young (1997) argues that many problems faced by modern Africa are a legacy of colonialism. Following the Berlin conference of 1884, European colonizers brought with them, a novel system of boundaries and frontiers never before seen in Africa; they put in place infrastructure which till this date, greatly influence trade patterns and built economic systems based on mining and the sale of cash crops. They also left a legacy of their religions, cultural practices and languages. All these impacted the identities of the people and how different ethnic groups inter-related. According to (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005), these identities have roots deeply embedded in the way these groups related in the pre-colonial era, and the unjust practices and ethnic inequalities established by both the colonial regime and carried on by administrations after independence. Practices by the colonial administrators such as discouraging integration of southern migrants in the North by housing them in Sabon Gari or strangers' quarters encouraged conflict and territoriality.

These colonial practices appear to have formed the roots of ethnic conflicts in postcolonial Nigeria. These inequalities are visible in the Nigerian public sector. Adeleye et al (2014 in Klarsfeld et al.eds. pp.195-216) note that in the Nigerian public sector, there has been a protracted struggle in the pursuit of a "real" equitable, inclusive and diverse representation. Rather than allocating official and political roles based on merit, they are awarded on the basis of state of origin and ethnic/tribal affiliations. This has fostered desperation, with individuals in some cases, lying about their states of origin and ethnic group in order to avoid discrimination and be selected for various professional and political jobs in the country (Odeku and Animashaun, 2012).

Awe (1992) note that the differences in cultures across Nigeria imply that discrimination occurs in different ways in various regions of the country. This is particularly important with regards to this paper as Alex-Hart (2016) notes, Nigerian women are by no means a homogeneous group and this ethnic diversity is highly influential on women's experiences at work and the society in general. Indeed, in their analysis of women's decision-making authority in Nigeria (Kritz & Makinwa- Adebusoye (1999) agree, with their data from researching the

Kanuri, Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba and Ijaw ethnic groups revealing that culture, which is an integral element of ethnicity, is a crucial part of women's experiences in Nigeria. The Kanuri and Hausa ethnic groups allow for a division of inheritance by both sexes, while the Ibo and Yoruba are patrilineal whereby only male relatives are allowed to inherit property. On the other hand, matrilineal system practiced by the Ijaw allows women to inherit property. Within the Kanuri and Hausa ethnic groups, women are kept in seclusion with their education and employment outside the home very much restricted. Conversely, the Ibo, Yoruba and Ijaw ethnic groups educate female children and encourage women's work outside the home.

These cultural differences between ethnic groups indicate the importance of studying the interactions between gender and ethnicity in Nigerian organisations by revealing how Nigerian women's ethnic affiliations impact their lives. Therefore, this is relevant to this study as women in Nigeria are doubly affected by their gender and their ethnic identities, which as has been noted can also serve as a basis for discrimination.

Generally, in identity politics, ethnicity is regarded as the most fundamental and important identity in Nigeria. This is because Nigerians are more likely to identify themselves based on their ethnic affiliations than any other category of identity (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). However, this has negatively impacted in many aspects of life in the country including employment. Kamoche (1992 in Nyamgbera, 2011) noted that in many African countries, ethnicity is demonstrated in various ways including outright favouritism in the recruitment and promotion of staff of a particular ethnic group. This could lead to the minority staff feeling excluded, undervalued as well resentful towards the ethnic majority staff.

Therefore, in order for universities to create more women friendly work environments human resources department have to pay particular attention to the disadvantages presented by the entrenched organizational practices and even their own ethnic prejudice in order to ensure a level playing for women from all ethnic groups to be equitably recruited and promoted without any form of favouritism. Thus, in addition to dealing with gender discrimination, women also deal with discrimination based on their ethnic affiliations. The next section addresses the impact of religious and cultural issues women's employment and attaining of leadership positions through career progression.

### **Religious influences on employment**

Religious identity also plays an important role in the social, political and economic institutions of Nigeria. Religious identities in Nigeria are mainly divided into three groups: Christian, Muslim and Traditional (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). They also tell us that in some parts of Northern Nigeria, particularly in states such as Zamfara, which have adopted Sharia law, religious identity is regarded as more important than ethnic identity. Thus, for example, Lewis and Bratton (2000) suggest that the Yoruba (Southern Nigeria) were much more likely to define themselves by their ethnicity, while the Hausa-Fulani, in the north preferred a religious identity (Muslim). These religious identities are no less visible in the public domain including the labour market. Also, there appears to be a relationship between religion or religious identity and gender equality within the society.

In countries such as Nigeria, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, where the issue of women's rights are at the forefront of a seemingly unending struggle between religious extremists and the more moderate minded, development has been hindered by patriarchal and conservative practices which are often supported by religious values (Coleman 2004 in Temesgen, 2008). However, Noland (2005) argues that Islamic practices vary widely so that grouping together across all of



the countries in which Islam is a major religion, may be too vague to be useful in any analysis. Interestingly, Seguino's (2011) study found that no particular religion stands out as continually having a more gender discriminatory impact than the other religions. Instead they note that the intensity of individual's religious beliefs and how frequently they participate in religious activities, regardless of the religion, has a constant negative correlation with gender attitudes and outcomes. These religious attitudes have a direct impact on women's employment and progression to leadership positions in the labour market.

Overall, there seem to be compelling intersections between religion and gender inequality as well as ethnicity and gender, which adversely affects the position of women in the labour market. This has been largely fostered by colonial legacies such as the policy of uneven development in which Christian missionary activities and education were excluded from the predominantly Muslim north, thus, causing a disparity in westernization between north and south, which till this day, continues to haunt the country (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). This encouraged ethnic rivalry across institutions and the weak policies by subsequent postcolonial administration have failed to improve the situation. This means that in addition to gender inequality, women have to navigate ethnic tensions and religious attitudes to work and female leadership in order to reach their potential in different organizations including the higher education sector.

This is even more pertinent given the volatility of religious relations across regions. The upsurge of religious crises in Nigeria has led to leading to discrimination particularly in private companies and in the governmental organizations. Therefore, those involved in the management of these organizations need to ensure that there is no employment discrimination on the basis of religion as the constitutions is against religious discrimination. (Odeku and Animashaun, 2012). This discussion of religion is relevant to this paper as it attempts to investigate how religion or religious identity impacts on participants of the labour market, particularly women, their employment and progression within the formal economy in Nigeria.

Thus, there is a need to address inequality within organisations in Nigeria, not just focusing on gender but examining the other salient categories such as ethnicity and religion. The purpose of this research is to contribute in an important manner, to the empowerment of women by identifying and analyzing the interrelationships of gender, ethnicity and religion and the barriers they may present to academic women's equality at work in Nigeria. One way to analyse this is by using a theoretical framework constructed with postcolonial feminist theory and intersectionality.

The next section will attempt to construct a conceptual framework for analyzing the interactions between gender, ethnicity and religion and their impact on academic women's recruitment and promotion to leadership positions in the Nigerian Higher education sector.

### **3.CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Postcolonial feminist Theory**

Nigeria was colonized by the British for a hundred years (1861-1960) from when it annexed Lagos as a colony (Commonwealth.org, 2018) and legacies colonial rule still have an indelible impact of various aspects of the Nigerian society including in the labour market. This is because its educational and economic policies impacted pre-colonial gender relations, privileging men. These policies also laid a foundation for tensions between ethnic groups in the struggle for resources in postcolonial Nigeria. Women have to navigate these tensions within the labour

market in addition to dealing the overarching patriarchy in the Nigerian society. It is therefore pertinent to analyse this situation from a postcolonial standpoint, giving voice to the 'other' (hooks, 2000), as western feminism theory is inadequate to theorize on women's issues in postcolonial locations.

Majority of the studies on inequality and career progression in professional organizations have specifically focused on understanding the experiences of white western women (Hammond, 2003), while a few studies direct their attention on Latin America and in the Caribbean (Annissette, 2003; Ruiz Castro, 2012). Thus, very little is known about the various ways in which inequalities intersect and the manner in which those intersections are brought about by culture in specific socio-cultural contexts, particularly as globalization influences professions, thereby impacting developing economies (Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012). This is pertinent as many of these developing economies are in postcolonial locations.

Postcolonial feminism explores how colonialism and neocolonialism intersects with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities taking into context, the lives, subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights of women (Schwarz and Ray, 2005). This is a key issue for feminist researchers within non-Western locations. Understanding the construction of African/Pan-African feminism as a form of Postcolonial feminism, is key to setting the stage for advanced non-Western feminist theorizing and research (Martin, 2016). In the face of globalization, it is important to choose the appropriate approach to theorize on feminist research while taking into account, the experiences of women everywhere including those in postcolonial and transnational spaces. Indeed, Mohanty (2013) notes that the aim of "Under Western Eyes" was to make the operations of discursive power visible, to draw attention to what was left out of feminist theorizing, namely, the material complexity, reality, and agency of Third World women's bodies and lives. This is particularly important for feminist researchers as it allows more insight into women's experiences globally.

Therefore, Postcolonial feminists have argued that it would be inappropriate to employ Western feminist models to conduct research on women in post-colonial sites (Olesen 2011 in Denzin and Lincoln, eds., 129-146). Olesen also points out that contemporary national contexts such as those of postcolonial nations have an influence on the form of feminism undertaken. Mohanty (2003), in investigating gender issues, states that there is still a need to focus on the domination of Eurocentric or Western feminisms and emphasize the importance of postcolonial feminisms especially when dealing with formerly colonized territories and fluid borders. This is because legacies of Nigeria's colonial past and impact on gender relations have particular resonance in the workplace. However, the literature is lacking in the conceptualization of these concepts in higher education in Nigeria, which is a postcolonial site.

This notion of national contexts is important to postcolonial feminism. It would be quite difficult to view women's issues in Nigeria through the lenses of Western feminist theories which may give insufficient weight to contexts, complexities and subjectivities. Indeed, (Mohanty 1991; Lewis and Mills, 2003, ) criticized Western feminism for its seeming ethnocentricity and disregard for the differences and complex experiences of women in postcolonial countries or sites. Due to these constructions of differences, research amongst feminist scholars indicate the utility of conceptualizing postcolonial feminism and intersectionality (Dhamoon, 2011, Chambers in Newins and Davies, eds. 2015, p.5, Kerner, 2017). Kerner (2017) suggests that both perspectives would gain a lot from integrated and should be conceptualized as complementing each other. Furthermore, due to the growing body of social science research utilizing intersectionality, it might provide empirical support for

postcolonial feminist investigations, in the long run. Thus, as intersectionality research becomes more global, the knowledge gained could prove useful to postcolonial feminism (Kerner, 2017). However, there is a gap in the knowledge base of literature conceptualizing postcolonial feminist theory and intersectionality.

### **Intersectionality**

Atewologun et al (2016) view 'intersections' as drawing attention to the location of individuals across multiple identity categories or dimensions. Arya (2012) further suggests that intersectionality is a methodological tool whose importance lies in its ability to identify differences and multiple perspectives. Bradley and Healy (2008) have argued that with regards to difference, intersectional analysis provides a better grasp or understanding of ethnic relations more than a poststructuralist approach which tends to focus on discourse and identity. Intersectionality allows us to understand various categories of social difference including gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion and others as simultaneously interacting at individual, institutional and socio-cultural levels. These intersections result in complex inequalities due to the interactions of privilege and disadvantage, are beyond the analysis of a single category or merely summing up the different categories (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2015; Cho et al., 2013; Weber, 2010 in Ruiz Castro and Holvino, 2016). Acker (2006), suggests the idea of 'inequality regimes' as an analytic approach to understanding the creation of inequalities at work.

This approach depicts the interconnected practices and processes that produce persistent inequalities in all work organizations. In evaluating the causes of reproduction of inequalities, work organizations are very important locations, as considerable societal inequality emerge from such organizations. Inequality regimes tend to be highly fluid and are influenced by inequality in the surrounding community along with its socio-cultural attributes, history and politics. Some intersectionality scholars have found Acker's 'inequality regimes' useful for conceptualizing the simultaneity of multiple inequalities as well as pinpointing of impediments to equality at work (Atewologun et al, 2016). By drawing on the concept of inequality regimes, Healy et al (2011) showed that Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women experienced inequalities supported by formal and informal activities even in public sector organizations that increasingly encourage inclusion. Thus, it is relevant in order to draw out the multiple inequalities experienced by women which have been influenced by societal structures and organizational practices in Nigeria.

This analytical approach will be used to carry out my study as it will be particularly useful to examine the barriers to equality at work for women in Nigerian universities. While Acker (2006) focused on race, class and gender as the main bases of inequality, the study will examine ethnicity and religion in addition to the traditional category of gender. This is because as will be discussed in the text, these two factors are influential in employment decisions in Nigeria. In order to achieve this, the research will be conceptualizing postcolonial feminist theory and intersectionality.

In Nigeria, there are a few studies on intersectionality. A search of literature revealed relatively few studies on intersectionality research in sub-Saharan Africa, with much of it being in South Africa (Elu and Loubert 2013; Groenmayer,2011; Booysen and Nkomo,2010). So far, very little attention has been paid to research on the concept of intersectionality within social equality or organizational studies in Nigeria Wallace (2011), other existing studies are mostly focused on the diaspora (Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015, Umolu, 2014;). Also, there are no studies in Nigeria conceptually linking intersectional analysis, inequality regimes

and post-colonial feminist theory in work and organization. Therefore, this study will fill a crucial knowledge gap in intersectionality research in work and organizational studies.

#### 4.METHODOLOGY

Thus, the use of a case study method has enabled this research to understand the experiences of women in the higher education sector by investigating within a real-life context of universities located in different parts of Nigeria and dominated by particular ethnic groups and religion.

#### **Ethnicity and Religion as basis of selection**

Cases selected include the University of Nigeria (UNN), located in the Southern part of Nigeria. This area is dominated by the Igbo ethnic group, with most of them being Christians. The second university is the University of Lagos (Unilag), dominated by the Yoruba ethnic group, who are predominantly Christians and is located in Western Nigeria. The third case study is the University of Abuja (UniAbuja), the capital, located in Northern part of Nigeria which is dominated by the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group, who are predominantly Muslims. Therefore, this study will explore the issues of gender, ethnic and religion and the impact on academic women in Nigeria on a regional basis through case study research.

**Table 1: Management Of The Three Case Study Universites by Gender**

	UNN	UniLag	UNIAbuja
Position	Gender	Gender	Gender
<b>Vice-chancellor</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)</b>	<b>Male</b> (Academic)	<b>Male</b> (Academics and research)	<b>Male</b>
<b>Deputy Vice-Chancellor</b>	<b>Male</b> (Administration) (Nsukka Campus in the case of UNN)	<b>Male</b> (Management services)	<b>Male</b>
<b>Deputy Vice-Chancellor</b>	<b>Male</b> (Administration) (Enugu Campus in the case of UNN)	<b>Female</b> (Development services)	<b>Female</b>
<b>Registrar</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>Bursar</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Librarian</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Female</b>	
<b>Director-Information and Communication Technology (ICT)</b>	<b>Male</b>		

Sources: UNN (2018), UniLag (2017), UniAbuja (2016)

The table above shows that with the exception of one female, all the principal officers at the University of Nigeria men, Unilag has one female principal officer who is the Librarian, while UniAbuja has two females. This indicates the lack of diversity in the top management positions within these universities.

**Table 2: Academic Staff Strength Of Case Study Universities by Gender**

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Female</b>
<b>University of Nigeria, Nsukka</b>	<b>1436</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>2074</b>	<b>30.76</b>
<b>University of Lagos</b>	<b>1079</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>1627</b>	<b>33.68</b>
<b>University of Abuja</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>654</b>	<b>25.38</b>

**Source: National Universities Commission Statistical Digest (2017)**

This table indicates that there is a great disparity between the male and female academic staff of the case studies. UNN has the highest number of staff out of which only 30.76% are females. The situation is similar in both UniLag and UniAbuja with female academic staff constituting 33.68% and 25.38% respectively. This reveals the wide gaps in employment of males and females within academia.

**Table 3: Number Of Full Professors In Case Study Universities by Gender**

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Female</b>
<b>University of Nigeria</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>19.61</b>
<b>University of Lagos</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>26.14</b>
<b>University of Abuja</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>16.33</b>

**Source: NUC Statistical Digest (2017)**

In senior academic positions such as professorial rank, the table above has shown that this gap persists even after employment and during the course of their career progression. Women make up 19.61%, 26.14% and 16.33% of professors at UNN, UniLag and UniAbuja respectively.

### **Interviews**

The researcher conducted 24 semi-structured telephone interviews in order to evaluate in greater detail the qualitative themes. The participants were purposefully selected to include academic women across all levels ranging from Assistant lecturer to Professor in order to provide rich data for the study. Structured interviews with fixed questions with pre-determined wording and order (Robson, 2011) were not used as Kelemen and Rumens (2008) note that feminist researchers have argued against this method of carrying out interviews in which the interviewer stays detached from the interviewee. The feminist theorists have criticized the hierarchical relationship through the use of structured interviewing techniques, arguing that the interviewee constitutes an object. Thus, the interviews were semi-structured so as to give priority to the interviewees as well maintain a bit of structure. The researcher used an interview topic guide to provide some structure to the interview. However, questions not in the guide were also asked by the interviewer in order to obtain rich data and provide clarity. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using NVivo software.

## **5.FINDINGS**

### **Gendered practices**

Following a thematic analysis based on the interviews, there was a perception among the women that gender was influential in employment at the universities as more men were employed and promoted. Gender was considered the most influential factor followed by ethnicity. However, this was mostly due to stereotypical gender roles. Most of the academic women from the three universities were clear on the fact that career progression was greatly influenced by socially assigned gender roles, stressing that men were more likely to progress faster in their careers than women, due to the family responsibilities women have in the Nigerian society. They noted that bearing children, childcare, their roles as wives and carer of the homes were the challenges that they faced in career progression. The participants generally agreed that having a balance between family life and work was critical to progress. However, they conceded that there were no gender policies within their universities, to tackle these issues. Men were seen to be able to publish more as they did not have as many family responsibilities.

On the other hand, some women particularly in UNN and UniLag, thought that gender was not an important factor for career progression. While they agreed that women had responsibilities due to children and caring for family, some participants, particularly professors from UNN insisted that gender had no influence and that women should not expect special treatment in order to progress their careers. These views are in contrast to what is portrayed in the available literature on women's experiences within higher education, thus highlighting significant changes in the impact of gender on career progression within academia. It also highlights the fact that all women's experiences are not the same, an important concept underpinning postcolonial feminism. This is because women have various forms of difference influenced by socially defined gender attributes, ethnic and religious influences which have shaped postcolonial Nigeria. Interestingly, none of the participants from UniAbuja, a university in a predominantly Muslim area of Nigeria shared these sentiments. This indicates that these changes are not evenly distributed across the country. Therefore, there were mixed views from the women on the effect of gender on the progression of their careers.

### **Ethnic influences**

Ethnicity was seen as important in employment and promotion within the universities, supporting the position of the literature on the relevance of ethnicity within the Nigerian labour market. However, some participants noted that people preferred not to apply outside their states, and so did not experience any discrimination based on ethnicity. All the participants except for a few women, were of a different ethnic group (Igbo) from the dominant ethnicity at Unilag (Yoruba) and only one woman (Igbo) at UniAbuja, a university dominated by Hausa/Fulani, a different ethnic group. These same women of a different ethnic group commented that ethnicity and religion were influential in how things were organised within their universities as people whose ethnic group dominated the geographical region within which the university was situated usually received preferential treatment. Those participants who were an ethnic majority at their university usually commented that there was not ethnic bias or influence on recruitment, selection or promotion. This could be because they were unaware of any inequalities due to the fact that they were in the majority. As Acker (2006) suggests, the position of individuals influence their perception of inequalities. 'Men and ethnic majorities tend not to see their privilege and may be of the view that inequality does not exist in their environment' (p. 452 ).

### **Religious influences**

Some of the interview participants also indicated that religion was influential in the employment practices and the general administration of the universities, pointing out that people generally preferred people of their own religion to be appointed and also be at the helm of affairs. This indicates that universities are not abiding by the federal character principle (reflecting the country's ethno-cultural, linguistic and geographic differences) to ensure fairness when recruiting within the public sector (George et al, 2017). According to this policy, employment in every federal or state government organization must endeavour to reflect the federal character of Nigeria by being inclusive of all ethnic groups. This policy was a notable attempt by administrations in postcolonial Nigeria to manage tensions among ethnic groups due to perceived inequality of access and eliminate discrimination.

Religion was considered more influential on recruitment or promotion in some parts of the country than the others, particularly in the northern part of Nigeria in which UniAbuja is located. Furthermore, women from UNN and Unilag (universities in the south-east and south west respectively) thought that religion had some influence on recruitment, selection and promotion, particularly at university management levels, while it was considered to be much more influential in the north in which UniAbuja is located. Using intersectionality as an analytical tool and focusing on the interaction between religion and ethnicity, the comments from some women revealed that religion was considered less important than ethnicity in producing inequality at work. The intersection of gender, ethnicity, religion as revealed by interviewees comments across the three universities clearly indicate that both ethnicity and religion were considered secondary to gender in the scheme of things.

### **Organisational culture**

Further exploration during the interviews revealed that there were ambivalent views amongst the women regarding their experiences as academics. With regards to organizational culture, many of the women interviewed across the case studies were of the opinion that having internal contacts and connections within the universities were important for recruitment, selection and promotion in academia. On the other hand, they also mentioned that publications and experience were critical for promotion. At the individual level, many of these women are interpreting their situation as more successful than portrayed in the literature. While they pointed out some gendered practices such as the interview panels having more men than women, more men being employed and in higher positions, there was also some positivity on the part of some participants that gender was not influential and that societal views are changing, as they felt more women are getting into higher education and employment and that they felt generally satisfied with recruitment, selection and promotion. It could be that changes in social values or in their own personal circumstances have influenced the way these women view their situation.

### **Societal Structures**

A common theme emerging is that societal structures influenced the women's academic careers and their agency. Within the universities, their identities as women to whom society has ascribed gender roles as mothers or wives, influence their work experiences and also how they perceive and interact with organizational culture and societal practices within an already gendered society such as Nigeria. The empirical data support the claims in the literature that



women's careers are influenced by stereotypical gender roles such as caring for children and other family responsibilities, assigned by the society (Omar and Ogenyi 2004, Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004). The academic women seemed to accept that within the Nigerian socio-cultural landscape, women have more responsibilities than men in taking care of children and other domestic duties and while these could be a setback for women, many felt that they needed to work extra hard in order to progress in their careers. To them, it was a fundamental part of their culture and it was their duty.

This focus on family in the gender activism of participants is a characteristic that highlights their agency as different from that of Western feminism. Hudson-Weems (1993) suggests that the preservation of family is at the core of African women's gender agency. This could provide an explanation for some of the responses of the academic women. While the agencies of the women in Nigeria may be comparable to the agencies of women in Western contexts, there are various ways of interpreting family across different cultures and contexts. Arguably, the individualistic culture of the West allows for women to view their gender identity in isolation of other identities, thereby perceiving themselves to be independent agents. By contrast, the implication of the collective nature of African societies is that the female identity is inherently linked to the family.

Thus, within a postcolonial space such as Nigeria, postcolonial feminism can provide a logical explanation of the differing views of the academic women. There is emphasis on women's difference and specificities, thereby dismissing oversimplified theories which focus on the homogeneity of women in non-Western societies (Hamam 2014, p. 15). The views of the various participants indicate the relevance of intersectionality and postcolonial feminism as mainstream feminism would not adequately explain the women's multiple differences, experiences and priorities at work which are influenced by the Nigerian socio-cultural context.

## **6.CONCLUSION**

In order to investigate the different ways in which women face discrimination, postcolonial feminist theory has been conceptualised with intersectionality. Intersectionality is particularly valuable in examining the multiple inequalities occurring simultaneously due to gender, ethnicity and religion in the lives of these academic women within the workplace. The study employed inequality regimes as an analytical approach to conceptualizing intersectionality. This had utility in exploring the inequalities experienced by women in a post-colonial space such as Nigeria due to identity at work, as intersecting with those produced by societal influences brought about by gender attitudes, ethnicity and religion on the one hand and institutional structures including HR practices such as recruitment/selection, promotion and organizational culture on the other. The field work revealed that there were structures in place at both organisational and societal level that influenced women's employment and experiences and that how women perceived these structures contributed to their level of agency. Thus, they are the internal organizational and the external societal structures influencing women's employment and career progression. This data from the empirical studies supports the notion of simultaneity of differences in organization studies (Holvino, 2008; Ruiz Castro and Holvino, 2016) in examining how gender, ethnicity, religion and women's perception of organizational intersect at the individual, organizational and societal levels to create and foster advantages and disadvantages across multiple dimensions of difference. Future research could examine whether the experiences or changes reported by these women were brought about by policies at the organizational level or governmental level or paradigm shifts in societal values.

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