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Book Review

Ifi Amadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women Struggle for Culture, Power and Democracy* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2000), xviii+300 pp.

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Ifi Amadiume's book *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women Struggle for Culture, Power and Democracy* is about the development of the women's movement in Nigeria. It is the final part in her sequel and trilogy on women and gender in Africa that includes *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Sex and Gender in African Society* (1987) and *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (1997). Drawing on the Marxian dialectics of class and historical materialism, Amadiume sets out to examine the tensions in the genealogy of transforming women's organizations in Nigeria. While she couches her study in the Marxist materialist conceptions of class, she is quick to identify other factors at play in the process of shaping gender relations such as cultural perceptions of women in Africa. Thus, Amadiume considers gender, class and race to be central to the historical explanation of the ideological underpinnings of the women's movement in Nigeria.

On another level, Amadiume analyzes the contradictions in the rhetoric and practical approaches to issues and interests of women in the women's movements in Nigeria – the contradictions and struggles for power and control. She argues the contradictions exist because the articulation of women's needs in Nigeria, as in the entire continent of Africa, have largely been formulated by "the internationally informed language of rights; the laundry-list approach to women's issues in women and development rhetoric; and the more volatile, combative and subversive language of civil discourse on social justice at the local level" (p. 1). Amadiume further argues that international women's organizations largely represent the interests of upper class women. Thus, she asserts the approaches women's organizations have adopted in tackling day-to-day issues of gender in post-colonial Nigeria do not

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benefit the ordinary women but instead benefit the top leaders of the women's movement as well as elite international women's groups.

Amadiume argues that the colonial and post-colonial Nigerian state and the International Development Agencies (IDA) cannot be absolved of mismanaging the country's political economy. Gender biases also are an everyday social experience of men and women – yet it is the women who bear the brunt of discrimination. State apparatuses seem to reflect these biases, being reconstructed in masculine terms, despite the fact that social relations and gender spaces in pre-colonial societies were not ruthlessly biased against women.

In post-colonial Nigeria, public spaces and by extension political leadership, are seat of patriarchy and male dominance. Women have systematically been socialized into domestic roles – thanks to colonial administrators who used institutions such as church organizations and women's club to re-organize gender spaces. By re-organizing the state to mediate power relations the state was effectively gendered. To comprehend gender relations in Nigeria, researchers must seek to explain the roles of women against those of men. Indeed, state legitimacy is determined through control of power rooted in class, gender and race struggles.

But conceptualizing gender relations in terms of power struggles, Amadiume is in effect saying that the competition for scarce social and economic resources has given rise to impetus for the various interest groups to manipulate multiple cultures and identities to their own advantage. She quickly identifies two categories of female actors – the 'daughters of imperialism' and 'daughters of Goddess'.[1] Amadiume argues that colonial imposition of a new capitalist economy and government systems at the close of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, Islamic, church and state laws, changes in marriage practices and gender relations, and property inheritance regulations led to a new rigid gender ideology of power, demarcating public space and power as male domains to the exclusion of women. The European colonists used the school system and church organizations to socialize indigenous people of Nigeria into the cult of western eliteness or what are sometimes described as evolué. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and the Girl Guide Association and Ladies Sports Club would come to play an important socializing role in Nigeria. Amadiume asserts that:

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[1] According Amadiume (p. 12), 'daughter of Goddess' represent women who fought the nationalist and liberation struggles for independence, while 'daughters of imperialism' inherited the post-independence successor state and partners in corruption and transgression of rights of Nigerians.

> The YWCA as an instrument of socialization for eliteness preceded that Nigerian state project of class reproduction of civil virtue. The YWCA is a branch of the British YWCA and was started in what was not even quite Nigeria by upper-class women who were wives and daughters of the ruling elite (p. 39).

In fact, most Nigeria's women leaders of organizations such as the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) are a creation of the YWCA socializing process (p. 43).

Amadiume argues from the outset that women elites who ran the women's organizations were able to manipulate social, political and economic spaces in Nigeria to their own advantage under the guise of fighting for women's rights. Given their superior education, the patron-client relations the elite women forged with powerful male administrators of the state. These women were bound to enjoy the class privileges and material benefits that went with their high profile positions in the movement. It is for these reasons Amadiume concludes these patron-client relations have undermined the majority of women's initiatives to effectively agitate for gender equality not only in Nigeria but the entire African continent. The patron-client relations that elite women groups entered with the men in power are responsible for splitting the women's movement in Nigeria, being largely expressed in cutthroat competition for control power.

From colonial time the so-called "progressive" women's leadership on one side, and "opportunist" elite women and state governors and international agencies on the other have jostled for power. Amadiume postulates further that backward and gender oppressive attitudes and cultures created new institutions that were inimical to women's welfare. The same attitudes were carried into the organization of nationalist political parties in Nigeria. Thus, on attainment of political independence male leaders would break progressive gender equality promises they had made to women during struggles for liberation promises to ensure that there was gender equity in all spheres of life. Men relegated women to second-class citizens whose legal rights were more circumscribed than they were in many pre-colonial socio-political systems. But Amadiume notes that pre-colonial systems in Africa "had clearly demarcated, instituted women's spaces and rights both in the private and public spaces even if they were hotly contested" (p. 22). She attributes the marginal position women came to occupy in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria to a political dispensation that inscribed patriarchal dominance in the process of law. While this argument appears plausible explanation for the continued subordination of women it is highly debatable.

It is important to note that the state in Nigeria imbibed the formalized language of development based on blueprints developed elsewhere in Western countries. This state of affairs meant that local women's interests have been shunted to the fringes of national priorities. In the texts under review Amadiume argues further that gender asymmetry in contemporary Nigeria have been made worse by earlier structuralist economics, and later neo-classical economics of development, which have guided the post-independence state in Africa. She argues, for example, that with the post-colonial state succumbing to structural adjustment programs (SAP) instituted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), they have only managed to recycle poverty and forced maldevelopment on Africa women (pp. 26, 282). Not only have IDAs and SAPs led to uneven development, bred corruption and provided propitious conditions for corrupt officials to ransack the exchequer, they aggravated apathy with women's groups.

Amadiume decries the fact most women are forthcoming about discrimination and biases against them. She asserts that any women who joined the professions in the late 1970s, especially those who 'made it', deny experiencing sexism, for instance. For example, one doctor, after denying that women are discriminated against, said, "It is only a few cases when you have a male patient with symptoms of a venereal disease and you have to examine his genitals he will insist to see a male doctor" (p. 95).

If top posts in women's organizations such as the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) have suffered bad leadership characterized by naked opportunism, it is because some women have taken advantage of the existing client-patron relations with their male handlers. That the post-colonial state in Nigeria is not suitable in the eradication of poverty among women and gender inequality cannot be gainsaid. Patron-client linkages have given rise to the "cult of first lady" – the phenomenon where the wife of the head of state increasingly assumes a public role. The first lady then makes a spirited effort to involve herself in national women's organizations.

The main reason for the first ladies' involvement in the women's movement stems from their desire to control women's organizations and to enrich themselves (pp. 248-253). Maryam Babangida, wife of a former President of Nigeria, Ibrahim Babangida, set up a women and development group in the presidential building in order to control women and their finances, ostensibly on behalf of the state's concern with the affairs of women. Maryam Babangida patronized the Better Life program and Family Support Program, a program that became infamous for its corrupt money laundering activities. Maryam Abacha, wife of Sanni Abacha, also played a role similar to her predecessor's of patronizing women's organization and engaging in

shamelessly corrupt deals. In Amadiume's estimation, the first lady cult has become an instrument of grotesque class reproduction and a process by which wives of heads of state in Nigeria enrich themselves. Is it any wonder that first ladyism has undermined the process of democratizing the women's groups and impacted the autonomy of the movement as a formidable instrument of redress in Nigeria?

Amadiume's study gives gender studies a new leash – a fresh application of the Marxist materialist paradigm to the study of gender relations in Africa. Moreover, the book raises fundamental issues concerning place of women in the women's movement, not only in Nigeria but Africa as a whole – its eloquence and incisiveness highlights roles of elite women in the feminist movement in Nigeria. The author has ruthlessly analyzed the elite women's leadership, suggesting the need to have a well-represented women's movement of poor and rural women in Nigeria. Amadiume argues that for elite women to play a role in the movement, they need to put in place a democratic culture. In this regard, the author lauds the efforts of Women in Nigeria (WIN) as a progressive movement working towards improving women's conditions – she argues that WIN was formed in absence of any women's group or organization to study scientifically the conditions and roles of women.

It is disquieting, however, that Amadiume barely engages in a sustained critique of WIN. Instead, she plays the role of a consultant advisor for the WIN leadership, calling upon WIN to shed off its urban-based cloak and define its agenda in more practical terms as they affect the women of Nigeria. The author also fails to acknowledge the gains and achievements of the women's movement in Nigeria, turning out to be extremely cynical about the role of elite women in the women's movement in Nigeria. The shortcomings of the elite women notwithstanding, these women have no doubt sensitized women to rise up and claim their position in society. It is my submission that resistance takes various forms and should not only be interpreted to be manifested in outright opposition to the status quo – sometimes resistance is best actualized in performances such as exhibited by what the so-called daughters of imperialism have undertaken.

Nevertheless, Amadiume's book goes an extra mile in contributing to gender studies from an African point of view. Whether one agrees or disagrees with this text, it has made a great contribution to feminist scholarship. It is an extremely useful book for feminist and non-feminist scholars seeking to understand the women's movement in Africa from another perspective other than the mainstream western perspective.