

WOMEN IN POLITICS: THE NIGERIAN FACTOR

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Abstract

In a typical patriarchal African setting, women are usually relegated to the background. They are seen, not heard in a man's world. In the religious circle, for instance, women are not expected to preside over men; they are not expected to be ordained as Priests, Pastors, etc. in most church denominations. Politics in Nigeria has always been a turbulent terrain. There is the usual male chauvinism that the male counterparts don't yield an inch to the opposite sex. The general age-long belief and practice is that men must always lead and the position of the female invariably is in the kitchen. Could that be as a result of the fact that a woman was created out of a man, which smacks of superiority and inferiority syndrome, a weaker vessel as opposed to a stronger vessel? Undoubtedly, as a result of man's dominance in the political space of our national life, in Nigeria, men have been able, for some-time, to garner economic power which they use to

fight or bargain for political power. This paper identifies and focuses on prominent Nigerian women who have blazed the trail in spite of the hurdles placed on women's way by the policies and structures of their male-counterparts. The objective of the study is to sensitize the women-folk on the need for leadership positions in the political arena. The main sources of data are the newspapers, journal articles, the internet, the library, interviews and questionnaires from the public.

Key-Words: Nigerian, Women, Politics, Factor, Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Politics in Nigeria is capital intensive and not many women can cope with their male-counterparts in gaining political power. Even when a woman wants a sponsor, she will ultimately look unto men, and not many men would want to stake their money for a woman to fight for political positions. This is as a result of both skepticism and stereotype on the part of men with respect to women participation in politics. It will even take a large-hearted man to allow his spouse to fight for a position of authority or look for men to sponsor her without putting her marriage on the line, according to Badmus (2007:1). These are some potent inhibitions and the male counterparts would only patiently wait on the wings to cash in on such loopholes with a view to getting to power usually at the expense of the womenfolk.

The scenario enunciated above is not peculiar to Nigeria even though it is more profound therein. It is a pervasive phenomenon in the African continent as a whole. From party organization to electoral process where one has to campaign for elections in Nigeria, a woman is in such a difficult situation that she can hardly gather enough votes even in her own family that can guarantee ascendancy to positions of authority, except she plays a second fiddle like being a running mate to her male counterpart. Even under such arrangement, the female-Running Mate or Deputy Governor, when the election has been won, must always toe the line of her boss and thus, be subservient if she wants to keep her job. Amidst all these odds, some Nigerian women have proved themselves to be prominent by blazing the trail in the Nigerian politics.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Our objective in this work is to examine and unearth the rationale behind the Nigerian women's defiance against coming out fully to participate in the politics. The research also intends to sensitize the womenfolk to begin to participate actively in Nigerian politics henceforth by vying for the posts of State Governors and even the President.

Background to The Study

The concept 'Women in politics: The Nigerian Factor' readily prompts two ideas, namely: The generality of women who are in politics, then narrowed down to some Nigerian women that are already pace-setting, path-finding and trail-blazing in the Nigerian politics as a case study.

Some Prominent Nigerian Women that Have Blazed the Trail

We do not have to go too far to get an example of an impeached female Deputy Governor for one flimsy reason or the other. For instance, Mrs. Kofoworola Akerele-Bucknor, the impeached Deputy Governor of Lagos State under Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Madam Virginia Etiaba, the so-called first female Governor in Nigeria, became a Governor by default and by the grace of the usual political bickering amongst her kinsmen of the Anambra extraction, the court eventually put paid to her Governorship ascendancy; she was demoted back to her position of Deputy Governor. Mrs. Eucharia Azodo, also in Anambra, lost her speakership in the Anambra State House under such rancorous and unwholesome power play by her male counterparts. One can rightly or wrongly say that she was a party to the "dance of shame" which, in turn, consumed her.

It appears that, more often than not, women are always there as 'spare tyres' to their male counterparts. The truth is that it has not been heard of any of the Governors who have women as their Deputies proceeding on a leave and making their Deputies Acting Governors. These Governors (the men) probably do not want these 'nosy' women (who are their Deputies) to know what is happening in their offices. We must not forget that there are no constitutional duties prescribed for Deputy Governors except as Governors may deem fit to assign to them.

This is a typical political setting in Nigeria. Events have not always been and are not always like that in the developed countries like India that is reputed to have an old history of independence where a woman held

sway as the Prime Minister. Reference is made to the enigmatic Indira Ghandi that made waves in India before she gave in to the assassin's bullets.

In the Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister and she called the shots among the menfolk. Her word was the law as she never wavered in asserting her presence even among the commonwealth nations of which Nigeria is a member. She (Margaret Thatcher) was a former Minister for Education when students found it convenient to call her 'Thatcher the milk snatcher' as a result of her stopping some soothing benefits in the education sector she headed. In Nigeria, she is known as the 'Iron Lady'.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that Maria Corazon Cojuangco Aquino (Mrs.) ruled in Philippine. Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of Ali Bhutto, a one-time Prime Minister of Pakistan, also became the Prime Minister of Pakistan like her father. Mrs. Hilary Clinton, a Senator and presently one of the presidential candidates for the Democratic Party in the United States of America (USA) is more popular than her husband who ruled the USA for eight years. Bill Clinton is always referred to as the husband of Senator Hilary Clinton as if one cannot know the man except by reference to his wife.

Before the mid-term election in the United States of America which saw to the ascendancy in the Democratic Party's fortune, there had been verbal bashing in the media between President George Bush and the congress henchwoman, Nancy Pelosi; but as soon as the result tilted in favour of the Democrats (a fall-out from the unpopular Iraqi invasion), President W. George Bush quickly invited Nancy for a breakfast. Who says men do not and should not revere women in power?

There is, at the helm of affairs in Germany, Angela Merkel. The wind of change in favour of women seems to be blowing to the West African sub-region by the emergence of a female president in Liberia in the person of Mrs. Ellen Sir Leaf Johnson who defeated, through a coalition of other contestants, a one-time footballer, George Weah. In the South American continent, women are not left out in the governing process of that continent. In Chile, for example, there is Veronica Michelle Bachelet Jeria as the president; there is also the 52nd president of Argentina in the name of Cristina Elizabeth Fernández de Kirchner; and, Dilma Vana Rousseff, an economist and politician, has been the President of Brazil, the 36th President of the country, from 2011 until her impeachment and removal from the office on 31st August, 2016.

In spite of the giant strides and good record of history that Nigeria is trying to make, for quite some-time now, in her political landscape, it is sad that no woman is calling the shots at the presidency. As earlier stated in this paper, the one that tasted it at the state level (Anambra State) did so by default. Dr. (Mrs.) Sarah Jibril has severally tried in different parties but has not succeeded in becoming the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This is what she, Jibril (2007) said: "... Nigeria signed as a member of the United Nations on 30% Affirmative Action for women but the party is still talking about 15%". She was talking about the People's Democratic Party (PDP), her party policies of allotting position to women based on 15% of existing positions at all tiers and the various consequences of the policy. She, like some women and men, strongly believes that women can make a big difference in the governance of Nigeria. To corroborate that, Ayansina (2014) remarks that:

The Special Adviser to the President on Ethics and Values, Dr. Sarah Jibril has called on state government and political parties in the country to emulate Jonathan's administration on 35 percent affirmative action for women in public offices. Mrs. Jibril made the call during a public presentation of a book 'President's Diary: Nigeria's ethical Revolution', organized by the Initiative for Advancement of Ethical Standard, in Abuja, while expressing confidence that if women were given chance to lead, it would fast rack the country's developmental process. She maintained that Nigeria was signatory to the United Nations affirmative action, but it was unfortunate that this was only fulfilled by the Executive at the Federal level. The SA explained that unlike other countries with more women on the floor of their parliaments, Nigeria, instead of increasing on the number of women parliamentarians, is decreasing.

Women can indeed sanitize Nigeria if given the chance; but she laments that when the chips are down, women can be held responsible for their being sidelined in the political set-up. Jibril (2007:18) asked why she was not voted for by her fellow women. Furthermore, this is what Shuaib (2011) says concerning that assertion:

Though there were allegations of manipulation of the electoral processes and the intimidation of some delegates to the convention, the insolent solitary (one) vote for Mrs. Jibril out of about 4000 delegates comprising males

and females, means that Sarah Jibril was the only person that voted for the womenfolk in Nigeria; invariably she was the only person that voted for herself.

To further validate that, the same author goes on to report that:

Sarah Jibril herself asked a rhetoric question that she put forward to womenfolk when she said: “What offence have I committed against the women of Nigeria? They should tell me so that I will know? They should check my records right from when I was a commissioner right from when I was chairman governing council and all other positions I have held in the past.” She added that: “Nigerian women should tell me what I have done wrong and how I have misrepresented them that made them afraid to vote for me.”

We have arrays of Nigerian women who have proved their mettle in their different spheres in our political space and who could be entrusted to paddle the great nation to safety.

Professor Dora Nkem Akunyili, for instance, made waves fighting against fake or adulterated drugs in National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC); Professor Jadesola Akande, an author and a former Vice Chancellor of Lagos State University (LASU) has shown, in no unmistakable terms, that she is able and capable of leading this country out of the woods if given the opportunity. Her track record as a former Vice Chancellor was intimidating. Professor Grace Alele Williams who was an iron cast former Vice Chancellor that never gave in to men’s manoeuvres as she piloted the affairs of the University of Benin as its Vice Chancellor at a very tumultuous period should also be mentioned; Okonjo Iweala who came and worked hard to give meaning to the Nigerian economy as the Minister of Finance, though made waves, is unfortunately more valued abroad than in Nigeria, her country; Obiageli Ezekwesili is a force to be reckoned with in the political realm. She, at the helm of affairs at the due process office, made sure that there was sanity in the award of contracts. She was then referred to as “Madam Due Process”. No wonder she was later appointed by the World Bank as its Vice President. She is being honoured, not in her own country but abroad.

Are these aforementioned women not capable of piloting the affairs of our country? It is, therefore, important to ask: Why can’t they be urged and encouraged by the menfolk to go in for Presidency or Gubernatorial posts? The Aba riot of 1929, according to Adigwe (1974:182), was spear-headed by women that were protesting against the colonial policy that was to make them liable to be paying taxes. The Aba riot has its own equivalence in the ‘war’ waged in Abeokuta, led by the late Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti.

In the private university sphere in Nigeria, the one-time past Vice Chancellor of the Covenant University in the person of Professor Aize Obayan who was saddled with the administration of the noble citadel of learning, a woman at the uppermost echelon calling the shots among males, is worth mentioning.

It is possible that women-in-politics advocate may be confronted with the issues concerning Patricia Olubunmi Etteh’s debacle at the National Assembly – the graft; she was eventually shown the way out. Before being taken up, we, the authors of this paper, would want to quickly say that they are aware of Professor Adenike Grange’s debacle at the Federal Ministry of Health. She was charged to court with others for sharing the unspent vote for the year 2007. While not giving excuses for her, we are sure that she must have been misled by the male workers surrounding her. She was never a civil servant; she was not a politician before being made a Minister for Health. Consequently, she crashed. People said she was a decent woman. The little hiccups from these few women above are just too inconsequential when one sees men being daily accused and charged to court for graft. The above scenario should not be an obstacle to women; rather, one should learn from their downfall so as not to fall into men’s traps.

History of Women in Leadership in Nigeria

Globally, women seemed not to have a fair representation in politics and leadership, so much that a unified voice cries out in every continent, in every country, in every state of the world for the affirmative action on women. In the modern times, the 1948 Seneca convention appears to be the focal point for women liberation, according to Ajayi (2007). This came after the world powers had instituted mechanisms that officially recognized the rights of women. For example, since 1893, women in New Zealand were allowed to vote, 1920 in the U.S., 1928 in the U.K., 1944, 1945 and 1947 in France, Italy and China respectively according to Ajayi (2007). Other countries stepped up their fight for women after the 1948 conference. Nigeria, for instance, secured franchise for women in 1957 according to Oni (2009). Although, the post Second World War seems to be replete with women activism, in Nigeria, women have been participating in leadership since the pre-colonial era.

In the pre-colonial period, women played significant political and socio-cultural roles in their different societies in Nigeria. From the north to the south, from the east to the west of the country, women participated at different degrees in the decision-making process alongside men. Many of them even participated in the formation of kingdoms. For instance, Ogidefa (2008) opines that Obele Ajanu founded Igala. Other women also reshaped the sub-kingdoms they found themselves. By way of exemplification, there were Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ile-ife, and Idia and Emotan of Benin as pointed out by Attoe (2002). These women fought wars led by men and won. They were a source of inspiration to both men and women in their times; and till today, people pay tribute to them, Attoe (2002) remarks.

In the colonial period, Nigerian women were not totally silent. Although, they were quite few in number, they complemented their male counterparts in providing the necessary grassroots leadership. The prominent ones among them were Chief Olufunmilayo Ransom Kutu, Janet Mokelu, Chief Margaret Ekpo, and Hajiya Gambo Sawabaas Attoe (2002) and Badmus (2006) observe. All these women helped in sensitizing their fellow women against some of the unfriendly colonial laws, on the one hand, and fighting for women franchise, on the other hand. Unlike in the pre-colonial period when women had their pride of place in their different societies, the colonial settings did not favour them. This was, according to Walter (2001), as a result of their being neglected by the colonial masters. Interestingly, however, the pre-colonial era paved the way for the Nigerian woman to participate in the political activities around her; it was during this period that women secured their right to vote.

Furthermore, the political enlightenment activities that began during the colonial period helped in ushering the Nigerian woman into the post-colonial politics and leadership in Nigeria. Notwithstanding the increased number of women in leadership posts in the early years of Nigeria's independence, the women that played key roles in the colonial period still dominated the political scenes. Thus, personalities such as Chief Margaret Ekpo, Janet Mokelu and Gambo Sawaba were prominent. Today, with the instrumentality of the Nigerian Constitution and the participation of the nation in many international conferences and forums that try to cast off the shackles against women, the Nigerian woman has a brighter stake in leadership. In corroboration of this assertion, Vanguard news online reports that a Lagos female council boss opines that:

The argument that many women are not in politics is not sustainable going by their numbers at political rallies and campaigns. Women possess the numerical strength to take charge of public affairs but unfortunately we are still too involved in politics at the parish and community level. If more of us can grow beyond the local government terrain in our political aspirations, capturing federal political power by one of us is assured in a short time... Women constitute an appreciable number of the educated class in this country and the electorate and therefore can use the potential power to change fortunes in the society.... (Vanguard, 2016: www.vanguardngr.com/2016/5/nigerian-women-will-dominate-politics).

This clearly shows that irrespective of the growing number of educated women in Nigeria, and their huge participation in campaigns and voting processes, they are still behind the menfolk in leadership participation. A cursory look at the performance of women in the recent elections into political offices in Nigeria will lend credence to this observation. According to Oladoye (2012), only 9.1% of the candidates seeking political offices in the 2011 polls were women, the rest 90.9% were men.

This continues to happen in spite of the assurance by the National Gender Policy to push for 35% affirmative action on women for elective positions in the country as Akpan (2016) observes. Table 1 below provides a summary of women standing in political participation in Nigeria.

Table 1: The position of women in political participation in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015

S/N	Position	NO. of seats	Number of women					
			1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	
1	Presidency	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Senate	109	3	4	8	7	8	
3	House of Reps.	360	12	23	26	26	14	
4	Governorship	36	0	0	0	0	0	
5	Deputy Governorship	36	1	2	6	3	4	
6	36 State Houses of Ass.	990	12	38	54	62	-	

	Total	1533	28	67	94	98	26		
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Source: Akpan (2016:19)

The 2015 figure for the 36 State Houses of Assembly was not provided because of the many incidents of inconclusiveness of the elections. However, Tsan (2015) argues that women representation in the 2015 elections was not much better than in the previous elections. Some analysts proffer reasons why there is less number of women in leadership position in Nigeria irrespective of the orientation. Ihonvere (2000) rightly summarises these reasons when he says:

...lack of transparency in the electoral process in Nigeria has been identified as the single most important factor inhibiting any effort at dealing with generalized exclusion... inaccessibility to appropriate information has restricted women ability to exercise their fundamental democratic rights. It then follows that without political consciousness in terms of knowledge of the process, civil culture and ethnics, democratic norms, awareness about the institutions of governance and politics, women generally can hardly participate at certain levels.

Given the available statistics of the number of women representatives in political offices, it suffices to argue that more needs to be done for women participation in Nigerian politics and leadership.

The Feminist theory is adopted in this research. By way of definition, the Feminist theory is a theory that examines women's social roles in the society, their experiences, interests, chores and feminist politics in a variety of fields. It focuses on analyzing gender inequality. According to Internet sources, it is a conflict that studies gender, patriarchy and the oppression of women. Its objective is to understand the nature of gender inequality in any given society. The theory is relevant to this study since it aims to foster a better understanding of what gender inequality is all about and this study focuses on adumbrating that women's representation in the Nigerian politics is relatively low as well as prompting the womenfolk to aspire to higher echelons in the political arena.

CONCLUSION:

Findings and Recommendations

From the foregoing, one can deduce that in the pre-colonial era, the Nigerian women had access to power and were privileged to participate fully in decision-making processes in their various respective societies. Unfortunately, with the advent of the colonial masters into the country, women were deprived of such privileges. This assertion is validated by Uchendu (1993:32) in his book where he states that:

The colonial administrators brought with them policies that had detrimental effects on the role of women. (...) The colonial government did not appreciate the important contributions of the women and their sense of independence in certain matters, their access to education, and failed to recognize their traditional important participation in the public affairs of their society.

They though participated in politics in the colonial era and are still participating in the current post-colonial era politics, their representation is relatively low when compared with that of their male counterparts. This can be attributed to the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society that sees women as not being capable of handling a high post such as that of the Presidency or the Governor of a state. The women on their own are not equally helping matters by shying away from coming up to participate actively, to contest for presidency; they rarely give their full support to their fellow women who venture to come out, as was validated by Jibril above. Our recommendations are therefore that it's high time the Nigerian women began to come out boldly to contest for Presidency and/or Gubernatorial posts in Nigeria. In a country like Nigeria where there are highly educated women who can leverage their difference as women amidst the menfolk and show that they are capable, being highly skilled at communicating their message to create a good followership, they (women) should come out en masse to participate actively in politics and exhibit their leadership attributes. They can be catalysts for change, development, peace, progress and unity. Many researchers and scholars have come up with findings that women leaders are more likely to be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of the general populace. In a true democratic society, there should be equal participation of both men and women in the national matters, in decision-making, formulation and implementation of all activities that concern the general populace. We conclude by joining our voice with that of Chuku (2009) who opines that:

... Nigerians should look to such countries as South Africa and Uganda, where gender-sensitive affirmative action policies have been adopted to increase the representation of women in governance and other decision-making processes.

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