



Research Paper

The Nigerian State and Women Political Participation: Challenges from The 4th Republic, 2003-2015

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ABSTRACT

The opening years of the new millennium was positively acclaimed for inclusive democratic participation. The Nigerian 4th republic was transitional from one democratic regime of Obasanjo to another through to the Musa Yar'Adua/Goodluck Jonathan administration. In the light of this therefore the participatory role of women becomes an interesting agenda for interrogation. Politics is actualized in the struggle for power within the context of a political framework. The authoritative allocation of resources is also designated politics. The competing actions by men and women in this struggle are political participation. Culture, especially in Africa, favour men more than women in this important struggle. This is because most African Cultures are patriarchal in practice. In Nigeria, women, despite the Beijing Conference and further affirmative actions have not participated in ways proportional to their population as relative to that of men. African cultural practices and the Nigerian peculiarity have not favoured women participation. Nigerian cultural practices inhibit women interest in politics as most negative cultural practices are hostile, derogatory, relegating and embedded in religious indoctrinations that further reduce women to docility. Political strategies to increase women participation have not been positively encouraged in Nigeria. This situation created the lacuna which this paper addresses while focusing on the challenges and how to overcome them within Nigeria's fledgling democracy. The paper therefore examined the challenges to women political participation in the 4th republic. It identifies cultural, social and economic factors, specifically within the context of the 4th republic, as hindrances to women political participation and suggests solutions to this cultural hegemonic practice.

KEY WORDS: *Women, Political Participation, Challenges, 4th Republic, Nigeria.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

There are waves of argument to support the idea that women political participation in Nigeria leaves more to be desired. The place of women in politics during the pre-modern period is sufficiently familiar. It is scholarly argued that the propensity of struggle for power and assumption that men are more capable and competent, get themselves involved in politics have resulted to low female visibility and political involvement. (Arifalo, 1995:118, Efah, undated, Eno, 1997, Ogidiefa, 2008, Olubu, 2004). In Nigeria, Women are historically regarded as weaker sexes owing to socio cultural value adjustments, norms, and beliefs. This has negated their meaningful contributions and have placed them in a subordinate position to men in the nation's political structure. Aside precolonial segregations, "sexual division of labour" in the political system is often traced to colonialism. The 1922 Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution disenfranchised women and limited the participation of adult male to the wealthy, thus the colonial order made gender discrimination more pronounced

(Eno, 1997). The 1999 return to democratic governance necessarily required a level of gender parity consideration consequent upon the activities of human right organizations and gender regimes that favoured mainstreaming the female gender into participation in socio political and cultural environs. The arena of politics presents an important theatre to measure participation and adherence to the rules of international bodies for gender inclusiveness. The peculiarity of the fourth republic is herein addressed consequent upon the reintroduction of democratic practice, after a period of military dictatorship that enlisted the country for international opprobrium and external pressures to return to democratic rule.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Africa presents one of the most serious instances of women relegation. This practice is embedded in cultural and religious practices that have over time become subconscious tenets with rigid adherents. Politics from traditional African purview is considered a male dominated environment. Historically women political participation are shrouded in mythological considerations and colonial historical agitations; such are those of Moremi of Ile Ife, queen Amina of Zaria, Efunsetan, the Iyalode of Ibadan, Madam Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and Mrs Ekpoof the Nigerian colonial agitations and a host of others. African conception of political participation is robed with cultural embellishments and further seasoned in religious beliefs and practices. Culture, especially in Africa, favour men and accord docile roles to women; this is substantiated with derogatory language and practices. Proportional representation is the campaign of women empowerment. African and Nigerian culture reduces women interest and political strategies to increase women participation have not been positively encouraged. This situation is overwhelmed with challenges which can only be overcome with cultural reorientation, political readjustment with domestic borrowing from the United Nations affirmative action, attitudinal change from both men and women, and political acceptance. This paper examines the challenges to women political participation within the 4th republic. It identifies cultural, social and economic factors as hindrances to women participation and suggests solutions to this cultural hegemonic social malaise. The paper concludes that, this is a major hindrance to development and the attainment of its sustainability. This paper is subsequently divided into Historical Survey of Women participation in Nigeria, Concept Clarifications, which includes; Democracy, Women Political Participation, Challenges to Women Political Participation in Nigeria, Overcoming the Challenges, Summary and Conclusion.

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

Women have been considered not only intellectually inferior, but as a major source of temptation and evil. Ugah (2004), reaffirmed the historical Greek mythology in which Pandora was believed to have opened the forbidden box and brought plagues and unhappiness to mankind. This has till today created the proverbial sentence, he opened the Pandora box i.e. the Greek woman's name is used to represent evil (Ugah, 2004). Early Roman law described women as children, forever inferior to men. Early Christians perpetuated these views, a 4th century Latin father of Christendom said, "Woman is the gate of the devil, the path of wickedness, the sitting of the serpent, in a word, a perilous object." Thomas Aquinas, a 13th century theologian, maintains that woman was created to be man's helpmeet, but for her unique roles in conception, for other purposes man would be better assisted by other men" (ibid). In Nigeria, women are not better acknowledged, in fact their representation is far worse, for example, in Ibo culture, a woman is not allowed to pick the kola (an object to represent acceptance and social respect) until the youngest male in a gathering has performed the same right. (this might be the woman's grandson).

A historical journey into women political participation however reveals that despite cultural inhibitions women had political positions and political relevance in traditional Nigerian cultures. This however does not excuse the negative cultural practices, as such positions in traditional Nigerian culture were given to women with a larger than life personality and allowed in most instances to coordinate other women or influence certain political actions such as a coup to oust a reigning Oba in Yoruba land.

Yoruba oral traditions recall female *obas* in several areas of Yoruba land i.e Oyo, *Sabo*, *Ondo*, *Ijesha*. In *Ijesha* for example, five of the thirty eight *Owas* (kings) had been women, but there had been no female ruler since *Yajeori*, the eighteenth *Owa*. Queens were given official chieftaincy titles of *Eyesorun*, the head of the female slave officials were also called *ilari*, and the *Obas* wives were *IyaAafin*, after the demise of the kings. There were also female regents, to stand in gap at the period between the death of an *oba* and the selection of a new one. These women performed religious roles and sometimes exerted political authority. The Iya Oba, queen mother was present with the *Basorun*, when the *ogun* rituals were performed and she was the feudal head of *Basorun*, the *Iya -Aafin* acted as political and religious advisers in this instance and the citizen's approach them for political favour with the king. (Ogidiefa, 2008), *Emotan* was a paramount warrior woman of Benin tradition and there were othersundry instances across Nigeria. During the colonial era, women's loss of political power became eminent as men were dominant in administrative positions. Colonialism, by making women to feel victimized and deprived provided them with reasons for protest in eastern Nigeria; there was protest against lack

of political recognition and authority; the December 1929, Aba woman's riots, Onitsha is a case in point here. This agitation was against the water rate of 6 dollars and political participation. The intervention of women activists like Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti was active attention drawer to the facts of little political representation. Kuti led *Egba* women, Abeokuta women's union AWU, to demonstrate against tax discrimination. There were women wings of political parties, Mrs Kofo Abayomi formed the women's party where agitations for vocational schools for girls and educational opportunities were agitated for. Political nomination of women into positions began since 1958. Mrs Oluwole, Margaret Ekpo, Janet Mokelu of the eastern Nigerian house of chiefs, rose to prominence. Since 1960, tickles of women have risen in political power and other professional areas. Mrs Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Hon. Abike Dabiri Erewa, Oby Ezekwenzili, Prof. Dora Akwunyili, Chima Chikwe, Dr. Amina Ndelee, Mrs Modupe Adelaja are notable women political leaders of the decade. Tradition and religious adherence has promoted child marriage, reducing the efforts to allow women to rise. In the Political parties, very few women were nominated for elective office at the federal and regional levels. In the senatorial election of 1992, Mrs Kofo Bucknor Akerele was the only woman in the senate, chief Florence Ita Giwa was elected into the house of representative under the NRC Calabar constituency. President Babangida in 1983 appointed two women as members of the traditional council.

In the 4th republic, the political terrain witnessed a beef up in the number of women appointees. In May 29th elections of 1999, women emerged as chair persons of local government councils, councilors, deputy governors in Lagos state, three senators at the national assembly and few at the state assembly levels across the country. At various times women were appointed as commissioners. In the Obasanjo executive cabinets, some female appointees were privileged and little improvement has added to this record till date.

CONCEPT FRAMEWORK

DEMOCRACY, WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Democracy as a concept is multifaceted. Diverse meanings present different things to different people and at different times. Its meaning is also individualistic, group oriented and state system dynamic. It all depends on cherished interests and values. In this wise, Alani (2003:77) took a historical look at this dynamism through the Greek city states, where it connotes the rights of the citizens to participate directly in the act of governance i.e. popular government. In line with this Alani (ibid) argued,

Democracy or polycentric regime is a system of governance that underscores the plural nature of politics; hence it gives recognition to the diversity of social forces in any political community. A democratic regime accommodates these forces officially, but enables them to interact with one another in diverse ways, in competition, collaboration or cooperation. Democracy exists when the government abides by the principles that the state is at the service of the citizens and not the citizens at the service of the state, and that the government exists for the people, and not vice versa.

In a perfect democracy therefore, such issues as institutional, national, political, and environmental sustainability, empowerment of the people, particularly, the poor and the weak and disadvantaged, ensuring their mobilization and participation in the development process is germane, Okeke (2003:56). Oke (2010:35) argued that democracy involves the opportunity to participate in decision making in the political process. He further emphasized that it repudiates arbitrariness and authoritarianism. The consent of the governed is important and the protection of human personality and values are essential (Oke Cited Ake, 1991). Whenever democracy is practiced, it portrays fundamental recognition of popular sovereignty, equal opportunity for all, majority rule, representativeness, minority rights, right of choice between alternative programmes, popular consultation, consensus on fundamental issues and more importantly periodic elections and widespread participation in decisions by all adult citizens including the women (Oke, 2005:45).

Women political participation is the involvement of women in political role playing in a political system. It is the apolitical open door for equal involvement with men in governance. It is the level of involvement of women in participation in a political regime or at a historically determined epoch in governance. Different societies exhibit different levels of such participation depending on their openness to gender parity laws, historical antecedents and their acceptance and adoption and practice of the United Nations affirmative action rules. European Nations and America are at the forefront of women participation and have historically spearheaded gender parity practices.

On the 29th May, 1999 after a long period of military interregnum in the politics of Nigeria from the 1966 coup d'état with the overthrow of the first civilian government and many failures of military transition programmes, Nigeria finally returned to party politics in 1998 with the establishment of the independence electoral commission (INEC), by the Abubakar military regime which eventually culminated in the inauguration of the Obasanjo civilian administration on May 29th 1999. (Ebenezer, et al 2017. Apparently since 1999, five elections have been conducted, viz 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015 and 2019. In terms of Administration, 1999, 2003, and 2007 elections have been described as shoddy, muddled and shabby (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006,

Ojo, 2006, Suberu, 2007), all pointing towards democratic relapse in Nigeria. Only the 2011 and 2015 elections have shown improvements in Nigeria's electoral process. Though many Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief after the transition because they were of the believe that, at least undemocratic, autocratic, authoritative, legitimate, repressive governance and the absence of equity and justice in governance relationship with the people will be replaced by constitutionality, legitimacy, justice, fair play, freedom, in one word, a democratic form of government and fair gender playing ground would be epitomized in the Nigerian political scene.

DYNAMICS OF POLITICS IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC.

The crux of the argument is historicizing the political power play and understanding the trajectory of democratic setting in Nigeria since the fourth republic. Molding a distinct political form through the deconstruction and transformation of the Nigerian State from its inherited form is the most important task before many Nigerians. In the immediacy, however, and leading up to the present political dispensation, the background could be traced from the demise of the military strongman, General Sanni Abacha , who died in 1998, and his replacement with General Abdusalami Abubakar, who initiated and superintended the transition to the fourth republic that saw a return to civil rule in 1999(Agbu, 2005). The Fourth Republic is sequentially the republican government of Nigeria from 1999, deriving its powers from the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. A widely Monitored 1999 election saw the emergence of former military ruler , Olusegun Obasanjo, on the platform of the People's Democratic Party(PDP).The Election ,though widely regarded as hugely flawed, was grudgingly accepted by most of the citizens (Ibid) especially in consideration of the existing prevailing political situation.

The General election of 2003 was no better, and was roundly condemned as lacking transparency. Again, in the controversial general election of April 2007, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of PDP was purportedly elected. He was reported to have said the election that brought him to power was not free of error. The internal processes of the party which threw him up were obviously flawed as later events were to show. It was generally believed that his candidacy was imposed on the country by the party "godfathers". By February 2010, after much political permutation and intrigues, President Musa Yar'Adua was temporarily replaced by acting President Goodluck Jonathan through the intervention of the national assembly as an obvious lame executive council of the federation lacked the will and courage to take a decisive action on the health status of Mr. president. This became Necessary as the Nigerian ship of state slowly but surely headed for the rocks. As at 2010, no one knew how long the acting President would last. But mercifully, the 2011 general elections proved much better in its organization and execution by INEC, and delivered to Nigerians better elections and better candidates. Goodluck Jonathan was elected terminating his temporary status (ibid).

The 2015 general election was rated fair and credible by both foreign and local observers. The elections have proved to be very positive for Nigeria's democracy. The high level of success of Nigerian 2015 general election was unexpected, considering the difficult political and security environment in which the elections were conducted. Mohammadu Buhari, candidate of the newly emerged national opposition party known as the All Progressive Alliance Congress(APC). , defeated the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the presidential election. The peaceful outcome of the 2015 election came as a surprise to many Nigerians considering the difficult political and security environment in which the elections were conducted (Nwachukwu,2015). This is the background against which we seek to re-visit the role of women in political participation, challenges and ways of overcoming the challenges of low participation in the fourth republic. Enyi(2015), argued that Nigeria has not improved beyond what existed in the military era. The Nigeria's fourth Republic is not people oriented as their ascension to power was through unethical means. The judiciary does not have true independence and this rubs them off their role as the last hope of the common man.

CHALLENGES OF WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

Several challenges inhibit the full participation of women in politics in Nigeria. Most of these challenges are culturally embedded; some have religious foundations while others are attitudinal or environmental. Traditionally, family finances are managed by men, inheritance also favours men, and this is a limiting factor to enterprise and entrance into politics. History and tradition delimit political participation. The concept of divide and rule applies to belittle gender.i.e men's attitude set them against each other. This could be intentional or otherwise. Husbands would make small talks about women politicians and societies, in an attempt to dissuade their wives from pursuing such goals. When women are in political positions, scandals and negative publicity is rapt, the societal expectations of failure ensure a do or die attitude. An extra mile of stress is added, reducing the success in other areas such as family life.

Male chauvinism, gender and professional disparities, cultural disparities, stereotypical language and attitude which subconsciously brain wash,derogate and place a bar on women, limiting their interest, active participation and ambition further entrench this negative practice. Political parties blueprint also favour male candidates. Male candidates are preferred for certain positions because of the general assumptions that women

are usually encumbered by domestic and social demands which run counter to the purely political objectives of the party. Inferior positions to that of men are reserved for women (this is still true in terms of comparative positioning).

Nigerian women are rarely involved in labour leadership as a means of putting forward their specific demands. They prefer to listen at political parties and union meetings. This is culturally grounded and in religious ideologies i.e women are expected to keep quiet. This provides the trend of women prevalence in caring professions such as nursing, daycare centres etc. Globally, women membership of trade unions though proportionally less than men, is often substantial relative to the Nigerian situation. In 1980, membership of Britain's National Union of teachers was made up of female, yet women accounted for less than ten percent of its national executive (Efaah Ettoe, undated). A comparative study showed that women in the former eastern Europe including Russia, played a more active role in labour unionism, than their western counterparts despite their relative short exposure to the formal labour market (ibid). Active participation of women in labour unions is a means of encouraging political participation in leadership and leveling all forms of discrimination (Tijani, 2010:46-56). Little access to bank loans, available male sponsors for male candidates stifle female opposition. Women are usually faced with little or lack in funding of registration and campaigns. There is little fundamental political knowledge, little awareness of rules of politics and fear of sourcing information. Constitutional provisions do not address matters of women participation. This is because of little concern and lack of support from the men. Male chauvinism ensures disrespect bullying and putting down. Women are not allowed into the inner circle of men groups and these male caucuses form the core of political parties. In gender disparity campaign of superiority by men, disrespect and verbal put down, role assigning, and negative cultural practices are rapt. Job designation within the household is classified by gender, i.e women cook, and men do other works. Women kneel to greet, men prostrate in Yoruba land. In Ibo culture, all male must pick the kola (an object to signify acceptance and welcome before the oldest female in any gathering). Women are not allowed to enter into the *oro* cult inner secret. It is important and necessary to have an attitudinal change and a cultural and political reorientation. African women occupy a complementary rather than a subordinate role to that of men in political participation.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

It is important to abolish laws, customs, and practices that impede participation. Negative governmental policies should be changed or adjusted to favour women. A woman rising in political participation requires access to power, male allies, and sometimes training elements within the society, such as language, values, and habits, traditions which influence gender perception and delimit political participation. Negative cultural practices should be readdressed for value reorientation, adaptability and persistence is very important for the female politician. A programme of sustained reorientation, education, reverse discrimination, role modeling, and religious fairness is also important. Religion should not be a hindrance to equity of participation. Cavanus (1989:90-91) emphasized that "sexual segregation" of activities does not permit the development and potentials as it exists in the individual. An implementation of women supporting political policies and programmes is herein relevant, the few women in political leadership should be role models. Political slots should be reserved for women with interest. Most importantly academic recommendations should not be relegated to the realm of the archives but implemented to correct society's anomalies. Women constitute a higher percentage of the population, whose voice in a humanitarian, rule of law guided society should not be relegated to the background.

II. CONCLUSION

Women participation in Nigerian politics is an issue of great importance. Women have been pushed to the political background for years, this has engendered a consciousness of women under representation in public life. However, the situation of most women in participation is basically to support their male folks, this is their substantive responsibility as socially contained in traditions of post-colonial practice and it is even on the platform that most women still successfully emerge as public office holders. They use women opportunistic platforms such as women movements as veritable advantage to seize political power and consolidate the power on this same platform. Be that as it may, there is an increase in women participation on these bases and women's movements are promising in achieving gender equity and equality.

Political perennialism (sit tightism), abuse of power, violations of human rights, mis-management of the economy, and under development have been sordid realities of the past four decades when men are saddled with power. The fact of an emerging spectrum of feminine leadership resources across the continent is no longer controvertible. Each country in Africa is birthing women professionals that possess requisite leadership potentials that can catapult the continent to the new heights whenever they were given such a chance. Gender equality presupposes giving a chance to a marginalized gender (in this case women).

The saddle of leadership is long overdue and need to be ceded to the female folks. It is high time prejudice is eschewed, bias, chauvinism, subjectivism, and other less than wholesome oddities of the human nature need to be jettisoned. It would be obvious in no time how much progress would be made by this great country and the continent at large in the area of good governance, infrastructural development, rule of law, economic stability and progress, health and education. Making concession for the feminine gender to have a shot at leadership does not erode the hegemony or male opportunity, nor does it make a woman less feminine.

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