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Women's participation and representation in Nigeria's politics in the last decade (1999-2009)

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CHAPTER 2

WOMEN AND THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF NIGERIA

As stated in the introductory chapter, this chapter outlines Nigeria's political history and the contributions of women overtime. It will be highlighting the nature and level of women participation of women in the political arena throughout history through to the present. In order to showcase this, three periods would be looked at and they are- pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

2.1 A Brief history of politics in Nigeria:

The political history of Nigeria presents itself in three parts, the pre-colonial politics; colonial as well as post-colonial political dispensation. In Pre-colonial times what is known as Nigeria today was just a territory made up of a number of highly influential and diverse societies or kingdoms from the North, South, West as well as the East. Some of these kingdoms include the North Eastern kingdom of Borno, the Hausa kingdoms of Kano, Katsina, Zaria and Gobir in Northern-Central Nigeria; the Yoruba kingdoms of Oyo, Ife, Ijebu in South-Western Nigeria; Kingdoms of Benin and the Igbo communities of Eastern Nigeria (Sklar, 1963; ISS, South Africa). The territories were governed by monarchs- kings, their queens and the cabinet of chiefs; and their government was based greatly on their individual cultures and traditions. According to oral accounts, despite the individuality and diversity that existed in the setting, these kingdoms related in so many ways especially by establishing networks of trade, these networks span even across the Sahara.

The 15th century, marked the coming of 'the white man' to these kingdoms initially as missionaries, explorers, traders and slave dealers (Sklar, 1987). By the 19th century, with the abolition of such practices as the slave trade, foreigners gained deeper access to these aforementioned territories, especially for trade. By the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, they had come under the British rule as the British had conquered various territories and kingdoms starting with the annexation of Lagos. In order to ensure better management of the newly acquired territory, by 1914, there was an amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates into a single territory that is Nigeria today.

The name Nigeria was coined out of the phrase 'Niger area'. The political structure at this time changed from a pure monarchical administration in separate political entities to what was then referred to as an indirect rule system over this newly created single political entity, a system where the existing traditional rulers were employed by the colonial government to rule the people on their behalf, under their guidance and supervision. From thence, Nigeria went through various political transitions from indirect rule system to a unitary government and then to a federal system by the time they became independent either as a means to better accommodate the structure of the country because of the diversity that existed earlier or simply because of agitations for more freedom of government by the people (Sklar, 1983:24). By October 1960, Nigeria gained her Independence from the colonial administration, and became a republic by 1963. The Independence marked the beginning of yet another long journey in the political structure of the country. There have been various transitions, from the initial civilian administration to the various military interruptions and to the recent return to civilian rule. Nigeria today, operates a federal political structure, under a democratic civilian administration.

Nigeria's development since pre-colonial times, recorded various tangible contributions by women- politically and other wise. Various studies, literatures and oral accounts show that women have overtime contributed socially, economically and politically to the development of Nigeria although not much attention is or has been paid to these various contributions (Attoe, 2002). Traditionally, it was uncommon to have women coordinating their clans, they were seen as advisers to the clan heads who were usually the men, women were in charge of farming within the family, and women were prominent in the area of trade. Oral accounts recognized such figures as Madam Tinubu, Moremi, amongst others in the Western region, who was a powerful business woman even at the time colonization. In the area of politics, there were female rulers, female warriors, cabinet members- the queens and erelus' who were special advisers to the king, priestesses and other custodians of traditions.

2.2 Women in Nigerian politics and their contributions over a period of time:

Women's participations as well as their contribution in politics is often not sufficiently emphasized or showcased. According to Attoe, (2002), literatures on Nigeria's national development are relatively silent on the contributions of women, in fact Yusuf (in Badejo, 1985) along this line argues that 'looking back at the political development of the country, an independent observer would hastily conclude that women have contributed next to nothing in this very important aspect of human life'. However a closer observation shows that women made their mark in the political development of the country to what it is today. She argues further that women's participation can be grouped into different stages in relation to the general political structure of the country. These stages are classified under the pre-colonial era; the colonial era which she referred to as the era of inactivity, this era also cover the times of struggle for independence; the era of awakening which covers the early stages of independence and the break through era which covers the recent past to today.

2.2.1 Women in politics in Pre-colonial Nigeria:

As can be expected from the structure of the country at this time, the general position of women differed according to the cultural orientation of an ethnic group or region. According to Rojas (1994), their positions varied according to- 'kinship structure and their role within the economic structure of the society'. Traditionally, women assumed particular roles as mothers and caregivers. In some cases, although religion or practices did provide various means of controlling women and dictating their lifestyles, nonetheless, in many ways the society at that time still conceived them as complementary to men rather than subordinates. Power in the society was mostly based on seniority rather than gender (Rojas, 1994). Quoting another author (Sudarkasa), Roja (1994) argues that "many other areas of traditional culture, including personal dress and adornment, religious ceremonials, and intragender patterns of comportment, suggests that Africa at this time often deemphasized gender in relation to seniority and other insignia of status". At this time, women were not as inactive as they are made out to be today (Yusuf, in Badejo, 1985), they contributed immensely in the agricultural sector and in local and long distance trade. Socially they contributed in the sustenance of the kin groups, they were

prominent in the provision of health care; they also participated effectively in the administration of the states or the kingdoms (Attoe, 2002).

There are various accounts of women rulership in the various kingdoms 'for example Igala was said to have been founded by a woman named Ebele Ajanu' (Ogidefa, 2008). Others like Nana Asmau of Zauzzau, Idia and Emotan of Benin, and Moremi of Ife were amongst those who displayed tremendous bravery in politics (Attoe, 2003, The Guardian News, 2009). Some of these women played the roles of warriors, even spies in the political development of their kingdom. In pre- colonial Bornu, women were not just present in the process of state administration, rather they played active roles, 'they held very important offices in the royal family, including the offices of the 'Megira' (the queen mother) and the 'Gumsu' (the first wife of the Mai or King) (Ola, 1978 in Attoe, 2002). Historical records of ancient Zaria also gives kudos to the efforts of women. According to Attoe 2002, the modern city of Zaria, was founded in the first half of the 16th century by a woman called Queen Bakwa Turuku, she also had a daughter called Amina who subsequently succeeded her as queen. Queen Amina according to many literatures as well as oral accounts was well known as a great and powerful warrior. It is said that she went to wars and in many cases won. Attoe in his paper notes that Queen Amina amongst other things built a high wall around Zaria in order to protect the city from invasion and also extended the boundaries to her territory beyond Bauchi. In all, she turned Zaria into not just an ordinary powerful city but also a prominent commercial centre. In recognition for her achievements, the people of Kano and Kaduna – the neighbouring territories paid tribute to her (Attoe, 2002). Moremi on the other hand, was also a powerful woman who according to oral tradition allowed herself to be captured by their enemies in other to gain information so as to defeat them. Accounts show that these women were independently powerful and they are still looked upon as sources of inspiration for women today.

In other kingdoms also, women participated in decision making by forming part of the King's cabinet either as the ladies of the palace or as priestesses or diviners who advised the king. In general, one can say that women in this era were an integral part of the

political set up of their communities, although they assumed responsibilities different from that of men; in most cases these responsibilities were complementary to that of the men (Attoe, 2002).

2.2.2 Women in colonial Nigeria:

The era of Colonialism according to Yusuf (in Badejo, 1985) for Nigerian women was the era of inactivity especially in politics. This is because this administration brought with it the assumptions of 'European patriarchy into Nigerian society' (Rojas, 1994). Colonialism in many ways was biased against women and their advancement in the society because most of the 'legislation concerning women attempted to control them, their sexuality and fertility' and in many ways defined their subordination and the restrictions placed on them changed their positions in indigenous societies (Rojas, 1994). It has been argued that the origin of structures of inequality that has led to discrimination against women became more prominent in the colonial era with the promotion of predominantly male dominated social systems (The Guardian, 2009). Although structures of inequality existed in the pre-colonial times no doubt, however they were institutionalized as new legal structures under the colonial rule. At this time, women were marginalized in various aspects- economically, with the denial of access to loans, educationally by predetermining their school curricular and ensuring that girls enroll for things like domestic science as against other skill enhancing courses.

A major adverse effect of colonialism on women was glaring in the area of politics. First and foremost women were denied their franchise and as such the political field was completely dominated by men, women had little or no power to take part or contribute in this field and this was the case for until the 1950s. By the 1950s at the height of the clamor for independence, very few women were offered political or administrative appointments. The major reason given in this regard according to Walter (2001) was that the colonial authority simply refused to acknowledge and interact with female office holders or women association and as a result they faded into the background. Secondly, it was only at this time- 1950s that women in the South were granted their franchise while women from the North were still denied franchise until 1978 (Attoe, 2002; Yusuf,in

Badejo 1985). Nonetheless, three women to be exact were appointed into the house of chiefs and they are Chief (Mrs) Olufunmilayo Ransome kuti (appointed into the Western House of Chiefs); Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu (both appointed into the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs) (Attoe, 2002; Rojas, 1994). Furthermore, Badmus (2006) argues that although women did not have their franchise and as such did not contribute much within the political parties, they were still a force to be reckoned with outside the parties either in support of the various parties or just fighting for women's rights. For example, Mrs Ransome-Kuti independently organized women's revolt against taxation and other policies unfavorable to women in Abeokuta, she also supported Mrs Ekpo who was also fighting against unfavorable colonial policies in the Eastern part of the country. These revolutions later transcended the various regions into the federation of Nigeria with the mandate of bringing to the fore women's position in Nigerian society (Badmus, 2006). There were also other women who mobilized to support the political parties-the likes of Chief (Mrs) Bolarinwa and Alhaja Humani Alaga; and other who fought for the enfranchisement of the Northern women- prominent in the area was Hajiya Sawaba Gambo (Badmus, 2006).

Looking at the evidence presented, there is no doubt that colonialism played a huge role in the position of women in the political field. The colonial era was the time of formation of the bureaucratic state over tradition, this era in many ways has set the trend for the politics of today. On the other hand, one can also argue that the certain socio-cultural principles of the people were also underlying factors in this regard, in that it has helped in enhancing these colonial doctrines even after colonization. Although women played more significant roles in pre-colonial Nigeria, it was still not on an equal scale; cultures still devised some means to curtail their independence. Patriarchy for example is a socio-cultural principle, it is often applied to define the position of women, and it also applied in the definition of what societies in Nigeria define as value. This can influence the ability for women to gain the level of access in a male dominated field as politics as they would desire. A common and subtle application of this principle is shown in the use of marital status as part of ones title- the importance attached to the word 'Mrs' e.g. as above 'chief (Mrs)', or 'Dr (Mrs)' which is still very much a norm today. This is an

indication that some socio-cultural principles not only define the position of women within the society but also the way the women view and project themselves. It points to the fact that despite the women's aspirations to step out of the shackles of subordination, they still desire to conform to societal dictates. They still want to command certain social 'respects' which could be a form of handicap when they have to shine in a male dominated arena like in politics. From a feminist point of view one can argue that society especially a male dominated one, set these values to ensure for example that no matter the achievements of these women, there would always be that sense of being under the control or protection of a man. In other words, they can never be true competition for their male counterparts, and this could be a contributory factor to the degree of women's participation and representation in politics today.

The colonial era could be considered the most uneventful period in areas of women's participation and representation in politics, despite the fact that there were records of women's resistance for example, the Aba Women's riot of 1929. The lack of recognition at this time can also be said to have contributed to the state of women participation in politics today especially in political parties. This is because, this era marks the formation of political parties as well; and because of the inactive role of women at this time, these parties were formed without any visible role played by women (Yusuf, 1985). Although these parties were formed out of cultural organization which ideally recognizes women, the outcome was not the case as the colonial orientation had somehow distorted the perception and position of women in the country (Yusuf, 1985). At this time, the country could not boast of any prominent female nationalist and as can be expected the so called women's wing of the pioneer political parties 'possessed little or no functional relevance' (Attoe, 2002).

2.2.3 Women in politics in post-colonial Nigeria:

Post-colonial Nigeria is simply around the time of her independence, the beginning of self- rule through to the present. For women, Yusuf (in Badejo, 1985) refers to the initial stages of this period as, "the period of awakening because it marks the stirring of women from their seeming slumber in the political arena" (p. 213). This awakening in many

ways has been linked to the restoration of franchise to women in some parts of the country. Though at this time women had begun to showcase their abilities yet again especially in politics, the results was far from satisfactory. At this time, women were behind in education, economically and socially. The legal system adopted from the colonial times did nothing to improve the situation of women in the country's development.

In the first republic, the participation of women in politics was very minimal in terms of involvement in policy making and political appointments. Attoe (2002) notes, that this was the case despite the support of various women organizations like the market women amongst others for the various political parties. With the granting of franchise to women in some regions, by 1960 they started showing interest to be part of the new government. Mrs Esan from the West became the first female member of the federal parliament, by 1961 Mrs Ekpo also became a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly until 1966; Mrs Mokelu, Miss Ekpo A. Young also won seats in the Eastern House of Assembly (Attoe, 2002). By this time, in the North women had no say as they were still denied franchise because of the strict Islamic beliefs of the people. These beliefs enforce various practices that restrict women from public role for example, such practices as women seclusion 'Purdah' was very common at the time. Not withstanding, there were agitations in support of women and the likes of Hajiya Gambo Sawaba led the fight for the emancipation of Northern women. Given the level of women's involvement at this time plus the level of awareness in the area of women's rights, these aforementioned pioneers faced a lot of challenges in politics mostly from 'unsympathetic men who regarded them as troublemakers' (Yusuf, in Badejo 1985).

By the second republic (1979-1983), women in the North had been granted their voting rights, and accordingly a few more women won election and also got appointments. The constitution at this time (1979) guaranteed women's rights; generally it prohibits any form of discrimination on the basis of sex, it denotes that women have the right to vote from 18yrs of age and be voted for by 21 and above (Badejo, 1985). Unfortunately, socio-cultural as well as colonial influence or underlying factors still prevailed thus

affecting the level of women participation (Rojas, 1994). This one can say depicts the often discussed issue of pubic versus the private dichotomy of the society; it highlights the challenges of enforcing a written document on the public and private space. Feminists often debate that the concept of separateness of private and public spaces showcases a lot of contradictions. They described the private sphere as one of nurturing, care and bonding, the civil society in the narrower sense, it represents the individual and the family unit whiles the public sphere is the broader civil society, it covers public interactions, community interactions, the government etc; it has been described as a sphere that represents justice, autonomy and independence (Pomeroy, 2004). The public sphere centers on the idea of participatory democracy and political activities also steered by the public sphere. However in reality, the public sphere mediates between the private sphere and the sphere of public authority, mostly to the detriment of women's participation and representation in the broader civil society.

In essence, the conceptualized public and private sphere dichotomy consigns women's roles in the domestic sphere and sees the public space as traditional place for men, thereby bringing about discrimination and distinction on the basis of sex, thus resulting in exclusion and marginalization of women in politics and public life (The Guardian News, June 2009). A major goal of the feminist movement in this regard has been to create equity between both sexes both in the public and private sphere in other to create some sort of balance in the gendered spaces of men and women (Pomeroy, 2004). Therefore, for liberal theory to maintain freedom for women, the distinction of private and public sphere must be clear. Where this is not the case, it is often not ideal or practicable to enforce or fully implement the recommendations of such written documents as the constitutions thereby frustrating women's access to public spaces (Pomeroy, 2004).

As a result of the above, few women made waves in the political scene during the Second Republic (1979-83) especially within the political parties. According to Attoe (2002), in the House of Representatives such women as Mrs J.C Eze and Mrs V.O Nnaji won in the Eastern part of Nigeria while Mrs A. Babatope won in the South Western Nigeria. Only two women were appointed federal ministers- Chief Mrs Akinrimade

assumed the Office of Minister for Internal Affairs while Mrs A.E Oyagbola was made the Minister for National Planning. There was just one female permanent secretary in the Ministry of Establishment and later Federal Ministry of Health- Mrs F. Y. Emmannuel. And also one female won a seat in the Senate- Mrs F. Afegbua, thereby becoming the first woman to win a senatorial seat in the country. A handful of women were appointed commissioners and very few won at their various local government councils (Attoe, 2002). Just as in the first republic, the political arena remains largely male dominated especially the political parties. Despite the huge challenges in terms of access, and having just few women, one can say that these women made a few gains because they were the pioneer advocates for feminine emancipation; they spearheaded social movements that sought equal rights for women within political institutions and beyond in the interests of women and the nation. In all they paved the way for others to follow and their contributions are still felt today. On the other hand, there are arguments in this regard which states that though there were gains no doubt, these gains however were restricted to the elites and highly inconsequential (Dibua, 2006)

Subsequently, this recorded success was short lived as a result of the military coup by December of 1983 which led to changes in the political structure of the country yet again (Dibua, 2006, Attoe, 2002, Okome, 2009). Women participation took another turn as the military rule introduced the quota system as regards the appointment of women into government. The administration 'directed that at least one female must be appointed a member of the executive council in every state' (Attoe, 2002; pg 7), and accordingly all the states complied, some states even appointed two female executive members while other appointed three. This rather unusual development in a military rule of Gen. Muhammadu Buhari has largely been attributed to the fact that the beginning of the regime coincided with the end of the United Nations Declaration of the Decade for Women and as such the then government 'flirted' with women and their issues (Oyebade, 2002). Nontheless, women's representation and participation at this time can be classified as a 'token representation', women were very much the minority numerically, and there was an unbalanced gender ratio in the country's politics. This act did not reflect the recommendations of equal opportunity and emancipation of women in the constitution.

Even the subsequent military regime of Gen. Babangida in 1985 did not do much for women as it simply continued the trend of this 'token representation' of women with no woman representative in the federal cabinet (Okome, 2009). Even with the introduction of the office of the first lady and the program she set up to integrate women in the system, there were just a handful of women in the local government councils, one woman on every government parastatal. By 1992, in the Senate, only one woman- Mrs Kofo Bucknor Akerele won a seat in the house while very few emerged victorious in the National House of Assembly- less than 5 % (Attoe, 2002). Subsequently, in the bid to ensure transition to civilian rule as promised by the regime, a transitional council was appointed in January 1993, and only two of the appointees were women (Attoe, 2002).

This was the case for women participation for a while- the interim government of Ernest Shonekan, the military regime of Gen Abacha with a number of female ministers at various times in his cabinet, even the transitional government (1998-1999)of Gen Abubakar with only two women in the executive council (Attoe, 2002). In view of the above, one can say that women post independence have always occupied subordinate and mostly ineffective positions in politics in Nigeria, not only were they at a disadvantage in terns of head counts, they were not included in decision making positions per se. Although they were there in their small numbers to represent women, they really did not have a voice and they didn't have much presence to make an impact. As a result most of them made their mark by ensuring that feminine emancipation is widely understood and to some extent accepted for the sake of the newer generation. Today women are rising yet again in this male dominated field hoping to ensure a correction of the mistakes of the past.

2.3 Nigerian women in politics today:

The fourth republic started on May 29, 1999 and as can be expected, the new spirit of democracy, return of civilian rule and advancement of women in many areas of life has led to an increase in the number of women in the political scene. However, it is still obvious that women have a long way to go in attaining equality alongside their male counterparts. Many news media reports and studies attest to the continued

marginalization of women in politics especially in elective offices. In a public lecture by the Governor of Lagos state, Babatunde Fashola, on the 29th of April 2009, a comprehensive statistical record on women political participation and representation was made available. This report showcases the journey of women in politics since the return of civilian and democratic rule.

The record as presented by the governor (April, 2009) shows that in 1999, there were only 12 women elected into the state assemblies against 978 men. In the senate, there were 3 female senators out of 109 senators selected that year. Also 13 women were selected into the House of Representatives. By 2003, after the elections, the number of female parliamentarians had increased slightly. The number of women elected into the House of Assembly of various states increased to 39 against 951 men while 21 women won seats into the House of Representatives against 339 men. Also four women won seats in the senate from a total of 109 senators, making 105 men. According to the statistical record, appointments into elective offices from 1999 shows that 833 persons were appointed with 86 of them women, indicating an average of about 11.9% women's participation and representation so far. Unfortunately, a concrete record for the 2007 election cannot be collated from the Independent Electoral Commission due to the fact that some elections results are still being contested till date before the various electoral tribunals in the various states.

Despite the above, available records show that a total of 7,160 candidates contested in April, 2007 general elections. Out of the 25 candidates for the office of the president only one was a woman while five vied for the office of the vice president. 474 contested for the office of governors in the 36 states, 14 of them were women and 21 on the other hand contested for the deputy governor's seat. In the senate of the 799 candidates only 59 were women. Also of the 2,343 contestants for seats in the House of Representatives 150 were women while 358 women out of 5, 647 candidates contested for seats in the states House of Assembly. After the election, available records show that 9 female senators won out of 109. There were no winner for the post of the governor; however there were 5 deputy governors in Lagos state, Ogun State, Imo State, Osun State and Plateau State and the

House of Representatives once had a female speaker. The Speaker of the Ogun House of Assembly was once a woman (who was later impeached) and Lagos state has a woman as the deputy speaker. All together, there are 34 women members of the state Assemblies. According to the governor this result shows a mere 2% increase from the 2003 elections. (Statistical analysis adapted from the 1st memorial lecture in Honor of Prof Jadesola Akande OFR, by Gov, Babatunde Fashola, 2009).

Concluding Remarks:

The above have shown women's position in the area of politics over a period of time. It gives one a sense of their level of access, presence and influence in the country's political history. Although the pre-colonial era gave a bit of room for women's participation and representation, the various changes along the way brought with it new challenges for women inclusion and participation. Comparing to what was during the colonial era, today one can confidently say that women have come a long way, they are emerging but how easy has it been? Literatures show that, women have faced and in many ways still facing a lot of marginalization in politics. "Today women are coming out more but their visibility and leadership opportunities are still negligible, though the political and personal liberties of women are theoretically granted" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1985: 126).

Having discussed the position of women in the Nigerian political history from the pre-colonial times to the present, it is obvious that women have a long way to go in other to attain the level of representation they seek. As can be expected, various challenges have been identified as hindering factors to women's advancement. The next chapter examines these factors in details and identifies ways they pose challenges to women political advancement.