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

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2010-08-12
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8404

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CHAPTER 3

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS TO THE LEVEL OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA TODAY AND THE ROLE OF PARTY POLITICS.

Women have never occupied apex positions in Nigerian politics and this is not because of lack of trying, they still have a long way to go in establishing themselves in the area. Various factors have been identified as contributory to their position or their lack of advancement. This chapter therefore will be looking at these various factors that constitute challenges to women participation and representation in politics. In addition to these factors, party politics have also been identified as a major contributory factor to women's marginalization in politics, this chapter will also look at the nature of political parties in Nigeria, their origin, structure and a close attention will be paid on activities of the three major parties in Nigeria today, the position of women, their level of access, their presence and influence within.

3.1 An overview of the concept: 'participation in politics':

Afolabi (2009) analyzed politics as "a system of administration that ensures that there is orderliness and development in a society". Representative democracy, such as practiced in Nigeria currently (2009) entails conferring responsibilities on a few on behalf of the general community or at least the majority to represent their interests (Afolabi, 2009). In order to ensure this in the true sense of it, there should be proportionality of the two genders in the representative body. However as it stands in the case of Nigeria, one gender (men) dominate, thus relegating the other (women) to the background, thereby defeating the main idea of a representative democracy.

Participation in politics generally refers to the ways the citizen of a community exercise their rights over the government process. Milbrath (1955: 18; Afolabi, 2009), presents this to include, "voting, taking part in decision making, holding party and public offices, being a candidate for office, soliciting social funds, attending caucus meeting, attending political rallies, contributing time to political campaigns" etc. From all indications as pointed out by Afolabi (2009), the concept of equal representation is a part of the general

concept of 'democracy'. Quoting the Council of Inter-Parliament Union in Cairo, 16th September 1997 the first principle of democracy states that it is…

"….a universally recognized ideal as well as a goal, which is based on common values shared by people throughout the world community irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic differences. It is thus a basic right of citizenship to be exercised under conditions of freedom, equity, transparency and responsibility, with due respect for the plurality of views, and the interest of the polity"

(In Afolabi, 2009)

This therefore indicates that every legal citizen regardless of gender or class has a right to be part of the decision making process that would affect their lives and that of their community (Afolabi, 2009).

In Nigeria, however, this principle manifests very little in the political setting and as a result affects the profile of women participation. Despite the fact that women constitute about 49% of the country's population, their participation and representation in the governing process of the country remain in the shadows. According to Badmus (2006) studies and literatures on women in politics often highlight various reasons for the masculine super- ordination/ feminine subordination dichotomy (Pg. 60) often experienced. These reasons subsequently give rise to the challenges or obstacles to women advancement in political participation and proper representation.

3.2 Challenges to the involvement of women in Nigerian Politics:

According to the Honorable Commissioner for Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation in Lagos state Nigeria, Mrs J.Adefulire "….generally politics have been seen or perceived to be a no- go area for women, that when you venture into the terrain you are conceived as someone that has lost her way or something along those lines… even till today though not as compared to such times as the first republic". (Interview, 2009)

Ever since the beginning of modern politics in Nigerian after colonization, in 1960 to be precise, women have encountered and are still encountering a lot of challenges in their quest to be part of the country's political process and a number of or a combination of

factors are responsible for this. Although challenges are common to all women throughout the country, it is also important to note that sometimes they manifest in different ways or different degrees in the various regions in the country for example because of the cultural norms and Islamic belief in the North which is based on the Sharia law, Northern women tend to face greater obstacles than women in the South West and the Easterners. Also the cultural norms in the East where the woman is seen as the jewel of her husband, as one who must under any circumstance be submissive to her husband, a culture where the man has the final say tends to also marginalize women , although not as much as women from the North. These challenges generally emanate from various factors in the society, and they are mostly interlinked. The major factors that bring about these challenges include-: socio-cultural factors and myths, religious, economic factors as well as the political environment. To make a successful entry into politics according to Yusuf (1985: 213), and "to continue to tread the path of success requires certain skills and resources that are not easily accessible to the average Nigerian woman, who apart from competing with male chauvinists also has to fight off various myths" associated with the role of women in the society.

Socio-cultural factors and myths consist of the various perceptions, beliefs and practices of a given society which basically form their norms as well as their values. In the case of Nigeria, there has been a transition or corruption of the traditional norms and values since colonization to incorporate some colonial induced perceptions. In Nigeria today women are often relegated to the background, patriarchy is the order of the day. According to Mrs Adefulire, "the country supports a widely accepted myth that women are supposed to be seen and not heard or their place is in the kitchen" (Interview, 2009). These conceptions are then applied in many ways to define their position within the field of politics and beyond. Every culture in Nigeria defines the role of women in line with traditional norms and expectations and it is often a huge challenge to break out of this mould (Chizea & Njoku, 1991). Various respondents in this study acknowledged that even in the midst of educated men, these perceptions prevail, as not many of them would allow their wives venture into such areas as politics. As Badejo (2006) rightly argues, patriarchal norms limit women's political expressions to entertaining and voting for a

candidate preferred by their husbands, most likely men. Furthermore, the outcome of a study carried out in a rural community in one of the Eastern States, Anambra State to be precise, men thought it abominable to be under a woman's leadership (Badmus, 2006), that in line with the traditions of the land, men are naturally the leaders while women ought to be the followers or the subordinates. This concept is not limited to this particular community; it is a common concept within the various regions within the country. Women are expected to be the ones to nurture and take care of the home and they are not expected to be vocal in the presence of men. Therefore in the case where politics is considered a game for men, even with increased educational as well as economic qualifications on the side of women, this underlying factor still affects the way women are perceived and treated as the society have bestowed upon men such mentality that women are not supposed to be at par with them.

In line with the above argument, men are not the only defaulters; some have equally argued that women sometimes are major contributors in this regard either consciously or otherwise. According to Mrs B. Akeredolu-Ale, a journalist and political analyst for Channels Television, Lagos State; "patriarchy and similar socio-cultural inhibitions does not just emanate from the opposite sex (the men) alone, sometimes women uphold it even more than the men. This because, these traditions and societal beliefs have been inculcated into many generations of women and it is being passed down accordingly, thus making women believe and accept these positions to the extent of discouraging fellow women from breaking out of that mould" (Interview, 2009). Along this line Mrs Tonia Ike-Ejeiye, the executive manager news and head of reportorial for the African Independent Television, argues that "at times women are their worst enemies, as some fight to uphold these cultural or societal subjugation….some women regard those that make the attempt to break free as rebels and in most cases show no faith in them. She argues further that in many instances you would find a woman would rather support a man than their fellow woman, and instead they embark on what is commonly referred to as 'the pull-me-down' practices, where women themselves bring about the downfall of their fellow women by not believing in their abilities" (Interview, 2009). However arguments on this issues raises a crucial point that sometimes it not due to any other

reason, other than the fact that it is what they have grown to know and believe. Many societies within Nigeria, still have women as custodians of tradition and it is their duty to train the upcoming generation in the ways of their predecessor via some traditional practices for example 'becoming of age or preparation for marriage'. In the southern part of Nigeria for instance when a woman is ripe for marriage, there is the practice of exclusion in a fattening room for brides to be where they are taught what is expected of them. These traditional practices are essential to them and practiced to a large extent even amongst the educated and they are used to inculcate such beliefs as the rightful place of a woman in the family amongst other things.

Education is another avenue whereby the society has created a hurdle for women advancement in general. Female enrollment in higher schools have lagged behind the males and in most cases women are enrolled in vocational courses as against politically oriented ones (Chizea & Njoku, 1991) and this dates back to the colonial era. According to Chizea & Njoku (1991), this is so because of the fear which colonial government had for women who despite their lack of education at that time challenged the government; they felt it was unsafe to arm them with education. Consequently, education considered a luxury for women; the girl child was often denied the right to proper or even basic education as it is regarded as a waste of money since she is expected to get married and stay home with the children. As a result, women constitute a larger percentage of the illiterate in Nigeria (Attoe, 2002). The National Adult Literacy rate in 1999 was estimated at 50-58% for males and 41% for females. The estimate for urban males was 75% and 59% for females while that of the rural males was 51% compared with 34% for rural females (Obaji, UNGEI Report, 2005). In the area of access to formal schooling, "it is estimated that 7.3million children of whom 60% are girls are not in school, the dropout rate is more pronounced at grade 6 level where more than 17% of children drop out yearly" (Obaji, UNGEI Report, 2005).

Currently (2009), with interventions like the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, there is now an increase in the level of girls' education. From 202-2004, UNGEI report reveals a 28% increase in girls' education retention and about 80% decrease in drop out

rates (Obaji, UNGEI, 2005). Although the situation has improved literacy difference still vary between geographical zones for example, in some areas in the Northern part of Nigeria, it is still considered a waste of time and money to send a female child to school as many of them are given off into marriage at an early age. Education is a key material for empowerment and therefore essential for women's advancement in the area of politics (Chizea & Njoku, 1991)

Religion is another avenue used to promote patriarchy. The modern day Nigeria recognizes two major religions, Christianity and Islam. These religions promote certain teaching which in themselves can be ambiguous and often misinterpreted. These religious interpretations and teachings be it in the Islamic or Christian setting at times promote conservative ideologies that undermine women's roles in the society for example such teachings that suggest that a woman should behave in a compliant and submissive manner is often upheld to mean that women should not be heard in public. This notion about women regulates and relegates their ideas, expertise and leadership skills to the private sphere (Kalu, et al 2005). In the Northern part of Nigeria some practices in the Islamic religion does not even allow the women to enjoy their basic constitutional right for example the Purdah system. This is a system that encourages women seclusion whereby, the women under this law are not allowed to have contact with people outside especially men other than their husbands, they are only allowed outside at night for a short period of time, they are not allowed to work or be seen in public. Fairly new on the scene now is the adoption of sharia law by some States. From 1999-2001 a total of 12 Northern States announced their adoption of Sharia law in Nigeria, a law that in many ways suppress women's chances in political participation.

Participation in politics requires substantial finances and women are often constrained in this area thus posing a huge hindrance to their ability to participate fully. Women's economic standing in Nigeria cannot be compared to their male counterparts. This is because few women hold important economic positions and few are professionals. According to Chizea & Njoku (1991) opportunities for wage labor are fewer for women

and even when available women with equivalent education and work experience tend to earn lower wages and advance slower than their male colleagues.

Again, women are often believed to have a lot of distractions, that they are constrained by sexual division of labor- child bearing and nurturing which takes up a lot of their time, thereby limiting them from proper participation in political matters. The political institutions or the political environment in general have capitalized on this view to deprive women of what Chizea & Njoku (1991) refers to as their political legitimacy. Apart from all the aforementioned challenges which also manifest in the everyday life of many women, the cradle of politics which are the political institutions that more or less pave the way for political participation do not leave much room for women either. Studies have shown a lack of political will on the part of the government to incorporate more women in leadership positions (Badmus, 2006). Analyzing the work by Agina- Ude (2003), Badmus (2006) points out that government capitalize on gender issues to gain support during elections but never really take practical steps to increase women participation in the governing process.

In the 2007 campaign, various parties promised to address inequality issues within and outside the party, the Peoples Democratic Party for instance promised to increase their number of women representatives at the different constituencies ranging from delegates to government congress at the local and state levels, to increasing the number of female members that make up their board of trustees. Other parties promised to give more women chance to represent them during election. According to the Commissioner of Women Affairs, the ministry in itself was the brain child of the Lagos state government, to organize and equip women to take part in politics by bringing about encouragement from the grass root and also alleviating poverty which is one of the major problems women face in many of the developing countries. In other words, government often present this consciousness towards gender equality, in other to gain majority votes since women make up about half (49%) of the population. However, these promises often just remain promises because women at the end of the day are neither given the opportunity at election nor appointed as promised. Quoting Agina-Ude (2003 in Badmus, 2006)

"nothing stops the state chief executives from appointing a sizeable number of women into public offices to make up for the short fall in all elective offices".

The political environment poses yet another challenge mostly common in Nigeria known as the **'son of the soil factor'** also known as the 'Indigene-ship' factor. This is the issue lack of proper accommodation and recognition first and foremost as a citizen before ethnic group. In the case of Nigeria's political environment, the ethnic group comes first in most cases and this has a huge effect on women's level of participation. In the Nigerian tradition, when women get married especially to someone outside their own ethnic group or region which happens all the time, her state of origin automatically changes, she is assumed to have become a member of her husbands ethnic group. However or rather ironically, in an instance like leadership/politics, the woman is not fully regarded as a full member of that community rather she is seen as a foreigner and a member by marriage only. This is a blend of socio-cultural issues interpreted or misinterpreted in this case in the political field. This is used against women political aspirants from regions outside their current constituency, they are often denied electoral bid, for it is assumed that politicians tend to fail if they go for positions without being an indigene of that particular constituency they are contesting for.

The political environment often capitalizes on this issue, thus using it to limit women's chance to participate fully in elections or in politics as a whole. This often does not apply ordinarily in the country; however it becomes an issue when a woman wants to contest for an elective post. In Nigeria, the society bestows respects on women based on such things as marriage and it is something regarded as important for every woman, however in the political scene, this very crucial expectation for women is often used against them to frustrate them form participating properly. Based on the fact that a woman comes from a particular area and upon marriage moves to another, in the political environment it is conceived that the woman is neither here nor there, that she is somewhat an alien and therefore should not be given the right that should be for the 'son of the soil'.

One of my respondents experienced this restriction first hand in 2007 elections- Senator Grace Bent. Senator Grace Bent is from the Southern part of Nigeria but married to a Northerner from Adamawa State. Although she now occupies the senatorial seat of Adamawa state, in narrating her experience she points out that "this practice is mostly prominent in the political environment and can be very frustrating". She argues further that in this instance culture is twisted around to be used against women in the political arena. In her own words, "it was the major issue raised during campaigns to discredit me but I was persistent, I wanted people to get to know me and not where I come from and along the line people saw past that and I won the seat and I must admit Adamawa state is one of a kind, a state that is ready to embrace change and they have shown that through this singular act". She notes further that this is however, not common, Adamawa state has paved the way for a new frontier and have proven that women do have hope in the future of Nigerian politics" (Interview, 2009). The general issue here is that a 'foreigner' does not have the right to make decisions or be part of the decision making body for the 'citizens' of the land. This sets a limit to gender equality participation in the political environment as it hampers women's electoral bids. The case is even worse for a foreign woman married to a Nigerian because she may never be appointed into any noteworthy political office because she can never be considered a true 'indigene' of any state (CEDAW, 2008).

In addition to the above challenges, a lot has been said about the role of political parties in the level of women participation in politics. According to the data of the United Nations meeting of experts on 'Equality and Political Participation and Decision making' held at Vienna, Austria, from the 18th to the 22nd of September 1989, one of the major factors why women are not put forward as candidates for election into political positions is that they are not well represented in the leadership of political parties, in other words they have limited access within these parties. The report notes that it is a huge issue as the political parties are regarded as one of the major channels for a successful political career (Chizea & Njoku, 1991: 85). In the case of Nigeria, the general view is that right from the onset of party politics in Nigeria, it has always been a male affair, little attention has been paid to the inclusion of women in their structure; also not much of attention is paid on the

issues regarding women within and outside the party. The general argument is that parties simply do not encourage the proper participation of women in politics on the contrary; through so many avenues they pose the greatest challenge to the advancement of women in the political field. In Nigeria, since independence, except for the military era, given the structure and system of government, political parties have always played a key role for women participation in government.

3.3 The rise and structure of political parties in Nigeria:

Political party system in Nigeria dates back to the last decade of colonization, the era of the struggle of political independence. According Sklar (1983: xiii), the origin of parties "lay in the multitude of associations that were devoted to community improvement, political reform and radical liberation". Parties at this time were formed to represent the various regions and they were commonly identified by ethnic group interests instead of having a national approach. By the time of independence Nigeria had four political parties firmly established on a broad territorial basis (Sklar, 1983: xiii).

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has adopted or experimented with the widely accepted multiparty system. However, given the structure or nature of these parties, there were conflicts of interests; none of the parties really presented a true federal front. Arguments emerged, that a multi party system promotes irregularities and pays little attention to national unity. In search of a more acceptable party structure, the Babangida administration, a military administration on the road to transition to civilian rule to mark the third republic, decided to give a two party system a trial. Although this was intended to curb the irregularities common in a multi party system, this two- party system was not entirely free of the impediments, according to Akpan (The Pioneer; 2008), "despite the absence of ethnic coloration in the formation and spread of the two parties, they were not entirely free from the shackles of contradictions that characterized the party system in the past". Nonetheless proponents of this system still believe it is a better option for a country like Nigeria.

Despite the above argument, the failure of the third republic due to the annulment of the June 12 elections saw the return to yet another military dispensation in 1993 and this dispensation favored and resurrected the multi-party system. By 1998 the interim government of Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar registered three political parties, the Peoples Democratic Party, All Peoples Party and Alliance for Democracy and these parties started the politics of the Fourth Republic (Report of the Electoral Committee, vol. 1, 2008). Currently (2009), according to the Independent Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC), Nigeria has over fifty registered political parties. However of these fifty something parties, there are only three major ones- Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and Action Congress (AC). These parties are the pioneer parties of the present dispensation although in some cases some have under gone some reforms.

3.3.1 A brief background to the three major parties in Nigeria at present(2009):

According to Ruben Abati, a political analyst for the Nigerian Guardian Newspaper, of all the numerous registered political parties, the PDP, ANPP, and AC are the major ones. He also argues that the rest are more or less narrow vehicles with limited appeal and most without infrastructure.

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP): According to records, this is currently the ruling party in Nigeria. It is the largest and commands most seats in government. Since the return of democracy in 1999, PDP has won the presidential seat till date that is in 1999, 2003 and 2007 respectively. This party also commands majority seats in both the House of Representatives and House of Assembly. The PDP, rule in 28 out of the 36 states of the federation, 87 out of 109 seats in the senate and 263 out of 360 in the House of Representatives (Badmus, 2006; Betty Akeredolu-Ale, interview,2009; African Elections Database, 2007). The Peoples Democratic Party was formed in 1998. According to Mrs Akeredolu-Ale, a political analyst and journalist it is made up of the elites, the men of power, mostly those that have occupied positions of authority in the past dispensations. Mrs Akeredolu-Ale also notes that the founding fathers include, ex-military officials, people of great influence in the Nigeria's political history. In other words, the members of this party have a long history of shaping the country's political, cultural and policy

landscape (Interview, 2009). In terms of ideology, this centralist party has a neo-liberal stance on economic policies and they equally maintain a conservative stance on various societal issues for example the introduction of sharia law in some Northern states. According to Badmus (2006), their success can be attributed to the fact that they somewhat present a more federal outlook unlike the others that have a stronger ethnic/regional outlook.

All Nigeria peoples Party (ANPP): The ANPP, formerly known as APP- All Peoples Party into being in 1998 as one of the first three parties that led the way into the fourth republic. However after the first elections they incorporated some newer and smaller parties into their fold and a fraction of the AD thus changed their name to All Nigerian Peoples Party- ANPP. According to Senator Karibu Gaya, a former governor and a serving senator for Kano West, and also the senate deputy minority whip, the ANPP is the second largest political party in this dispensation and the major opposition party. He also highlighted that one of the reasons why they merged with other parties was to form an even stronger opposition in government (Interview, 2009). ANPP is a household party in the extreme north of Nigeria. It is also made up well known and influential politicians that have been in the helm of affairs in previous dispensations. It has been described as a right-wing conservative party with mass appeal in the North. Furthermore, it is said to draw its strength from the predominantly radical regions in the North and strives to maintain the status quo of radical politics in the Nigerian polity (Independent Daily, 2008). At present the party controls 3 out of the 36 states of the federation, 23 out of 109 seats in the senate, and 63 out of 360 seats in the House of Representatives and it won about 27% of popular votes in the last elections (African Elections Data Base, 2007; Senator k.Gaya; Interview, 2009).

Action Congress (AC): AC is a classical liberal party formed in 2006. Just like the ANPP, this party emerged from a merger of some newer and smaller parties and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) that was originally formed in 1998 (AC official website), it equally has some well known and influential politicians mostly from the South- western parts of Nigeria as the founding fathers. AC is at present considered the country's third

strongest party and also part of the opposition to the ruling party. Action Congress is dominant in the South-western part of the country, controlling only 2 out of the 36 states in the country, 6 out of 109 seats in the senate and 30 out of 360 seats of the House of Representatives (African Elections Database, 2007; Akeredolu-Ale, 2009, AC official website, 2009).

Although the structures of these parties as analyzed by my respondents and as shown on their websites present a little variety in ideology, in reality however, in my opinion they seem to operate in similar ways. My findings in this regard show that they are yet to operate according to their proposed ideology for example the Action Congress that claim to be a liberal party in theory but the reverse is the case in reality. Nigerian political parties according to various respondents are still at the stages where ideologies matter little to them, they are yet to incorporate their various ideologies in the ways they operate.

According to arguments especially from my female respondents, party politics to a large extent defines the position of women in politics. And as I have learnt from the numerous interviews, the role political parties have played in the representation of women in politics today dates back to the origin or the emergence of political parties just before independence. Before independence was colonialism and the colonial era marked the formation of the bureaucratic state which extends to the formation of the pioneer parties in Nigeria. This era recorded a rise in patriarchy which restricted women's rights especially in the area of political participation. In this era women faced a lot of challenges in the quest for political recognition despite their contribution towards the fight for independence. For example women were denied franchise and it was only by 1957 when women apart from the Northern women were granted their franchise that about three women were allowed into the National House of Assembly after much struggle. Now, given the fact that there are not many changes as regards party structures today, because the politicians of yester years are still active in the parties today, one can argue that the parties still consciously or unconsciously uphold women marginalization in politics that existed then. The issue or argument remains that the position of women within the

political parties' over time is nothing to write home about. Various factors within the parties have also been identified as underlying factors to the position of women today.

3.4 The Position of Women in the Nigerian political parties:

The general views gathered from the interviews conducted for this research as well as studies (Badmus, 2006, Afolabi, 2009, Odah, 2007) on the position of women in Nigerian political parties' points to the fact that they have insignificant positions in this area. Mrs C. Nwagha, a political scientist from the University of Lagos and a graduate in International law and Diplomacy also from the same school, argues that women have always been sidelined within political parties in Nigeria right from the formative days. She notes that, "although political parties in the beginning emerged from various community based organizations where women contributed one way or the other e.g. market women association that led tax protests amongst others; when it came to the formation of the pioneer parties' women were significantly neglected. Records did not show any form of effort to include women or encourage them. Women were never a part of the formation of the pioneer political parties as patriarchy as well as other forms of subjugation were the order of the day at that time, and this trend has somewhat continued till date" (Interview, 2009). In other words, one can say that unwritten rules and structures of pioneer political parties still has some form of influence on the parties of today; after all, some if not most of the founding fathers of the new political parties in this republic emerged from these older parties.

The current political parties have a lot to do as regards ensuring gender parity or equity within so as to encourage women's participation in politics. Walter (2001) supports this fact by arguing that women do not have a voice within political parties. She points out that their marginalization has contributed significantly to their lack of access in politics. The three political parties used as a case study for this research present a pattern that confirms the above argument. According to some party members that were interviewed as well as the 2008 CEDAW report, "although women are increasing in the area of party membership than what was in the past, these parties are yet to demonstrate gender

equality in the areas leadership". According to Senator Grace Bent, a serving senator under the umbrella of the PDP, "it is still an uphill task for a woman to secure a ticket for an elective position within ones party, it is almost as if our right to vote and the increasing number of women in the political scene is regarded as an achievement and that's that" (Interview, 2009).

Although the manifestos and party policies from the respective parties portray gender equality at all levels, this is mostly not the case in reality. For example, at the latest national convention of the Peoples Democratic Party, a lot of issues were tabled for amendment in their constitution, and in the area of women, the publicity secretary Prof. Rufai Alkali commented on the National Policy on Women proposal for a 30% affirmative action for women in various aspects ranging from delegates to government congresses at the local and state level. He notes that provisions were being made to select two women from each of the six geo-political zones to join the board of trustees of the party (Thani: Daily Triumph, 2009), thus ensuring that women participate in decision making in the party and not just being ordinary members. Considering the fact that this is amendment was only made in April of this year, confirms the fact that women have not had much of an access, a presence or influence in the political parties in this case PDP. A party member equally argues that although the party controls the majority of the seats in the country, the women within the party are yet be part of the majority ruling class, she argues that all their activities are still relegated to the women's wing of the party where they are still "just women in the party, and supporters of their male counterparts" (Interview, 2009)

Evidence gathered from the other two political parties did not reveal much of a difference. The AC claims to have a more liberal approach to tackling gender related issues, but in reality, they are still struggling to accommodate women more. The Hon. Commissioner for Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Lagos state, Mrs Adefulire, a member of the AC in her interview painted the picture that women are still relegated to a corner in her party. She points out that they are seen quite alright in terms of the increase in membership, but the level at which they are being heard within the parties is another

issue altogether. She argues that there is simply no level playing field in the political parties not to mention politics in general; men still rule the political arena (Interview, 2009). Along the same lines, findings on the ANPP alludes to the fact that being a party most popular in the North, presents challenges for women due to the strict nature of Islamic beliefs prevalent in the areas where it is most popular (Sen. K. Gaya: Interview, 2009). These beliefs to a large extent are present within the party and as can be expected women are supposed to conform to these settings. Even with the level of enlightenment today, Senator Gaya notes that centuries of doctrines will not just disappear in just ten years but the party is working hard to encourage more women to participate more.

Mrs Tonia Ike- Ejeiye of the African Independent Television summarized the position of women in an interesting way. Although she acknowledges the fact that in the recent years women have increased in numbers in this once forbidden territory; however she points out that this increase in numbers does not mean much when we are talking about proper participation and representation. In her words, "…. at the moment women are mostly relegated to the what is called the women's wing where they are just mere sycophants, expected to sing and chant for their male colleagues as they campaign for election….. as it stands women are only in the lime light of the parties when it is time for elections not as equal participants but as mere supporters for the men" (Interview, 2009)

The various arguments above strongly suggest that aside from socio-cultural, religious challenges, in Nigeria the political parties generate their own challenges for women seeking a place in politics. The structures, activities, systems within these parties, tend to be male dominated even when their internal documents and ideologies in theory state otherwise. Furthermore various factors emanating from the political parties have been identified as underlying factors to the poor level of women participation especially in the last decade.

3.5 Ways political parties inhibit women in Nigerian politics:

Akpan (2009) points out that the political Parties are the foundation and major agencies for the enthronement of political leaders. Oviasuyi (2006: 56) argues that their functions

include political recruitment of potential candidates for elections, interest articulation, interest aggregation, political socialization political education that involves the training of political leaders and political communication, in other words they hold the key to ones participation in politics especially in a place like Nigeria where independent candidacy for election is not an option. These functions ought to be established regardless of gender, ethnic group or religion but this is always not the case. In the Nigerian setting these functions are mostly tailored towards men and they tend to benefit more than their female colleagues in this regard. Badmus (2006) amongst others argue that partisan politics in Nigeria rates low when it comes to gender equality. He argues further that they have unwritten policies against female aspirants and since they determine who gets the ticket for elections, they control women's level of access as well as their presence and influence in politics (Badmus, 2006). First and foremost, evidence points to the fact that this clamor for women's presence and influence and not just mere membership within the political parties is a relatively new thing and as such new to the parties. According to Attoe (2002), at the moment, men still dominate the party hierarchy and are at an advantage when it comes to influencing the party's internal politics and often sidelining women.

A well known factor in the Nigerian political arena that poses huge challenges for women in the political parties is the issue of '**Party godfatherism'** (Odah, 2007). Party 'godfatherism' is a situation whereby the party is unofficially under the control of a few influential individuals. Political parties in Nigeria today are in many ways a product of various influential individuals, politicians that have been around from the onset of political independence, even ex- military official, men of 'timber and caliber' as they often call themselves. These individuals somehow are the backbone of these parties by providing a lot of financial assistance when and where needed amongst other things. Relying on their wealth, they influence the decisions that are taken within the parties, they secure party nominations for candidates of their choice, sponsor their elections including manipulating the electoral process, thus creating an unfair advantage for a few to the detriment of others (Oviasuyi, 2006; Odah, 2007; Akeredolu-Ale, interview, 2009).

In the face of such unfairness, women who are relatively new on the scene lack that level playing field for participation. Evidence also shows that most of these "godfather represent what is known as the 'old school' politician that herald patriarchy and as can be expected for them it is close to a taboo for women to be at par talk less of ruling over them" (Akeredolu-Ale: Interview, 2009). This factor contributes immensely to the marginalization of women and relegating them to the background in the parties.

Furthermore, not only are women labeled cultural deviants even within the party when they want full participation; these parties have also devised various techniques to discourage women participation. Odah (2007) explains that party executives in most constituents set out to label women aspirants with less than required commitment to the party. Since various degrees of financial commitment is required to establish and sustain party membership, women's poor financial status in comparison to their male counterparts have always been used against them especially highlighting their exemption from paying nomination fees. Although parties agreed to this development as a means to encourage more women, however when it suits them they use this against women arguing that it portrays a lack of commitment to the development of the party. The indigene-ship factor discussed earlier is equally one of the ammunitions used by the political parties. Instead of eliminating this challenge by encouraging more women to participate more in the electoral process and providing a level playing field for them, they often use it to disqualify women or discourage them form being flag bearers for the party during elections since they believe the political environment is hostile to such candidate that fit the profile and the only candidates at risk of this form of marginalization are women.

Other elimination strategies include the **'step down technique'**. This is a way whereby candidates who have clearly scaled through and are eligible to contest are asked to step down for a more 'suitable' candidate, in most cases men. During the party primaries, everyone is allowed to indicate their intention to run for office and a preliminary election is carried out. However despite the outcome of this pre-election, some candidates are often bullied into stepping down for another or to allow the person a better chance of winning in the main election. Hon. Adefulire of the AC party confirms that this is a major

challenge for women as they are often the target in this regard. She notes that in the last election being a determined politician she rallied many women to contest for various post and eventually about eight of them emerged victorious, however before the main election she was away on leave, but on returning she discovers that there were just about three of them left to contest alongside the men. She admits that this is very discouraging but in most cases the women are too afraid and in the bid to avoid violence they prefer to relinquish their position to settle for any other form of compensation ranging from a lesser position or an appointment later on (Interview, 2009). This is a trend that exists within many if not all the political parties not just the AC.

Another technique often used, is the relegation of women to the women's wing of the party. This issue has sparked a lot of debates, arguments range from the need to incorporate women into the party as equals; others argue for the need to encourage it as a means of providing a starting point for the women, a forum for them to grow. However, considering it as a challenge for women can be said to be valid in the sense that it is mostly used as a yard stick for women. Party executives see it as the extent of position women are expected to attain. Mrs C. Nwagha, speaking as a political observer argues further that the women's wing of the parties is often regarded as "the right position for women, their own little forum within the party where they are allowed to do their own little things and they are not expected to rise above that" (Interview, 2009). Women are therefore relegated to the background by this means thus limiting their access to participation in higher positions or the ability for other members to perceive them as capable and more serious candidates.

Corruption is a huge issue in the Nigerian politics. Campaigns entail a lot of spending or a form of bribery often referred to as 'vote buying'. Most respondents in my research claim that votes are not properly campaigned for but often bought from people. Politicians manipulate the economic situation of the country by embarking on various forms of money politics by giving out money, food stuff and other material things to voters or communities as a whole in exchange for their support. This puts women at a disadvantage when they cannot measure up, since no one would be interested in what

they have to say or stand to offer in advance. This also leads to women loosing support of their fellow women. The argument is that because women are the poorer group in the community, they are often tempted to accept what is offered to them in exchange for their votes to the detriment of those that have nothing to offer. Politics in this setting is not based on merit and it is a huge challenge for women.

Apart from the various forms of corruption and indiscipline that leave women at a disadvantage within these parties, violence is a huge deterrent as well. Nigerian politics have often been described as a game for the strong hearted a dirty game where women do not easily fit in. Badmus (2006: 62) notes that "male politicians even at the party level believe in political thuggery, elimination of political opponent (by any means), incitement of ethnic and sectarian violence, vote rigging, intimidation and other clandestine midnight meetings" which hold at secret locations most times making it impossible for women to be part of thus forming a means of excluding women from participating fully.

Dissemination of political information is listed as one of the functions of the political party and where this is lacking one would only be exploring in darkness. In Nigeria political setting however, Badmus (2006: 62) points out that "numerous empirical studies have shown that information about politics is disseminated through channels that men have more access to, not to mention the language of politics can appear to alien to women", thus frustrating their chances of better participation and representation in politics as a whole. The above factors and more work together to create or promote a political environment that sidelines women but instead according to Badmus (2006) helps in recycling the same class of male politicians in the country.

Concluding Remarks:

It is evident that a wide range of issues pose challenges for women in politics. These issues not only affect women's numerical growth, but more important their ability to attain effective positions. As experienced in many developing nations, socio-cultural, religious and economic issues form the major challenges that lead to discriminations that

thwart women's ability to gain proper access into politics. Even in a democratic setting as has been the case in Nigeria in the last decade, the political environment in many ways frustrates women from participating and making an impact in politics. Through so many avenues women are not given equal access in the political field. Considering the various functions of the political parties in a representative democratic dispensation such as practiced in Nigeria today, one cannot but agree that they in so many ways determine women's level of participation and representation. With reference to the above issues, it is obvious that women would have a lot of battle to fight in other to make their voices heard. The political environment in Nigeria is not a friendly one for women who are more or less newcomers in the game.

Although obstacles to women's effective participation in politics are daunting from every angle, all hope is not lost just yet. Efforts are being made to encourage women despite these challenges to forge ahead at least in the last decade. These efforts come in the forms of policies, political reforms and orientations or reorientations as the case maybe. The next chapter explores these measures in details and also highlights impact they have had since their inception.