

WOMEN'S QUEST FOR POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN NIGERIA: THE BARRIERS.

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ABSTRACT

Women's quest for access to political authority is the focus of this paper. Demographic surveys put women as constituting 50 percent of the nation's population; 60-80 percent of its work force and 54 percent of eligible voters. In spite of this numerical advantage and women's historical involvement in politics, they have been marginalized in political office holding. Yet the post Beijing clamour is not for representation but for active contribution in every sector of the economy. To achieve this, women have to be in positions of political influence and authority. It is in this light that this work examines women's quest for political power in Nigeria. It analyses factors inhibiting their inclusion in positions of authority. It posits that although, Nigeria signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985; as well as some constitutional guarantee of political equality for the sexes, a wide gap exists between policy and implementation by governments as regards women political authority and influence. It identifies chauvinism, a modern variant of male practices in a patriarchal society as a major factor inhibiting women's realisation of political power. It also discusses methods women have adopted to surmount this barrier while suggesting ways which the aforementioned barrier and others could be addressed.

KEY WORDS: Women, Marginalisation, Political Authority, Decision making, Barrier.

INTRODUCTION

I have mixed feelings...., women have not fared very well in this dispensation because it is a game of number...., we (women) constitute about 54 percent of the whole population, we are the voters who vote people into offices, positions of power and authority. ... yet we have not been able to position ourselves to secure power. And politics is about power struggle..., and power sharing. In the struggle for power we are always prominent but in the sharing of power, we have always been sidelined.... (Anisulowo.2004:21).

The above speech summarises the consternation surrounding the marginalisation of women in political office holding and influence. Gender issues in Nigeria's political development received little attention in national planning until the 1980's which was declared by the United Nations Organisation as its decade for women. The focus of initial discussions was on the apathy of women towards politics and other aspects of national life. Little emphasis was on the marginalisation of women in leadership positions until 1985, when data from a United Nations survey highlighted the disparity in power relations of both sexes. Nigeria also signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Nigerian women have always been involved in politics. Indeed the colonial and post-colonial periods were interesting ones for women political activists like Olufunmilayo Kuti, Sawaba Gambo and Margaret Ekpo, who were great mobilisers of women and their organisations to fight against male dominance in

decisions affecting them and the welfare of the community. These women were not only politicians but they encouraged women to take part in active politics.

However, it was in the 1985 – 99 period that the quest for political authority reached climax when women, sensitised and strengthened by resolutions taken at international conferences contested and won elections at the local, state and senatorial levels. Despite this increased awareness, data from a national survey show that average female representation in party leadership amounted to 4.11 percent and 12 percent for 1991– 93 and 1999–03 periods respectively. Majority of them were political appointees like ministers, commissioners and political advisers (Adingupu, 2004:17). Even at that, there is evidence that these women are being marginalised out of official responsibility (Osiruemu, 2001:124) Josephine Anenih, the national women leader of the ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) acknowledges that *there is a glass, almost invisible ceiling over women political influence in the Obasanjo administration* (Anenih, 2000).

Thus, the problem has ceased to be political participation for its sake. The question to ask is, what authority has women's involvement in party politics conferred on them? More than that, what factors perpetuate women's political powerlessness in the nation's politics?

This near exclusion of women in corridors of political power is a missing link in the chequered history of Nigerian politics. It is therefore, a significant theme in gender discourse which, has engaged the attention of historians. Uku, (1991), in concluding her survey on

Women and Political Parties points out that despite of phenomenal strides in equalising education, employment and political opportunities for women, they are yet to have appreciable voice in decision making apparatus of political-oriented associations. Customary attitude and beliefs, psychological resistance to change and values which attend home management are some of the barriers identified by her, as inhibiting the realisation of political authority by women. Igbofe, corroborates this view when he avers that it is *not biological incapacity that has hindered women from reaching their fullest potential in development but rather cultural barriers, expectations and conformity* (1991:30). Along this line, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 notes that *deeply entrenched attitude and practices perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women in public and private life on a daily basis* (UNCP, 1996: 2-3). The consequence is that women have been subjected to psychological situations whereby they perceive themselves as non-powerful and non-human. This paradigm not only leaves out women in the political process but also renders their existence mute and invisible (Babangida; 1991:8).

On his part, Sambo, (1991) imputes the disparity in power relations to the reflections of the sacrifices which women have had to make in the African society where the status and political authority of women never or rarely equalled that of men (53). Lockbury (1991) explains that civil freedom is a masculine attribute which, depends upon patriarchal rights which sons retain under paternal rule not merely to gain liberty but to secure women for themselves (320). In support of this view, Badejo, (1990) argues that women only got token and privileged institutionalised positions from men in African societies which could not be sustained in post independence years. During this latter period, in Nigerian politics, leaders were mostly men; the women were given obscure posts to contest for or just to canvass for votes that would launch the men into power (Yesuf, 1980:50). Thus for women to seek equal political rights with men, is to seek to be surrogate men. If they are to be fully represented as women, then the social contract has to be rewritten; the hidden sexual contract on which it was founded exposed and extirpated. This implies a struggle, wider and deeper than a political rights movement (Udeghe; 1998). Commenting only recently, Mordi, (1997) avers that women in post independence Nigeria have continued to play second fiddle in the affairs of the state. They appear to have accepted their position of disadvantage and subordination and therefore willing to accept with limitless gratitude whatever handouts or political crumbs they received from men (13); collaborating Gasteno Musco's argument that:

Political power never has been, and never will be, founded upon the explicit consent of majorities. It always has been and it always will be exercised by organised minorities which have had, and will have, the means.....to impose their supremacy on the multitude (Mordi, 1997:13).

Therefore, if women who are in the majority fail to organise themselves, the men folk who are in the minority will continue to rule over them. It is in light of these hypotheses that this paper which analyses the barriers inhibiting women's quest for political authority in Nigeria is significant. It posits that in spite of constitutional guarantees of political equality for all citizens, a wide gap exists between policy and implementation by the government as regards women's political rights and inclusion in positions of authority. It identifies male chauvinism a modern variant of patriarchal society as the major factor inhibiting women's realisation of political power. That male view of women as being politically unviable, incapable of coping with the tedium of politics and suited only as support tier is still tenaciously upheld. However to further facilitate our premises below is a retrospective view of women's access to political authority in Nigeria.

Women's Access to Political Authority

Of necessity, a discussion of this subject must expatiate on the concepts of politics, power, and political authority as adapted in it. Aristotle, the renowned philosopher once defined man as a political being. By inference, he means that politics is inherent in man irrespective of gender category. Less abstract definition of politics puts it as *the systematic reflections on power*. So politics is about power. According to Key, Jr., politics *deals with human relationships of superordination and subordination, dominance and submission of the governors and the governed...the concern of practising politicians is the acquisition of political power within the framework of the State* (Banfield, 1964: 515).

In the exercise of power, two actors have been identified by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as 'one who influences and another who is influenced'. The person who exercises political power is conferred with the right and ability to affect the actions of others; in effect to *produce alternations in their behaviour*. Power therefore confers authority. In short authority is one of the most important types of power. Here, authority includes *power which brooks no refusal, which is binding on the actor influenced; who does not pause to ask why but compulsively obeys an authoritative imperative* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974, 677). Even when the authority is not vested in individual but in roles, offices and positions, the effect is the same. So pervasive is the effect of authority that it controls over eight types of human values namely: Power, respect, rectitude, affection, well being, wealth, skill and enlightenment (Brown, 1964:524).

Viewed from this perspective, women's access to state political authority in Nigeria is a theme enmeshed in controversial discourse by writers of feminist history. Afigbo (1996) for example, argues that in pre-colonial days, no salic law imputing certain disabilities on women existed in Africa, and the society was equalitarian (89). Accordingly, Nigerian women

were powerful in the economic and socio-political sectors in the pre-colonial era. Some even accumulated fabulous wealth from genuine commerce and ruled vast kingdoms. In this category are included legendary women models like Queen Amina, who reigned over the Hausa State of Zaria as its twenty-second ruler in the fifteenth century. Her political influence was symbolised by the building of walled camps wherever she halted. So pervasive was her influence that city walls in Hausa land are called *Ganuwar Amina*. Her era was revolutionary indeed in defence strategy and state building.

In Yoruba land, Ormpoto who reigned around 1555, Yeye the 18th century Owa (king) of the Oyo empire, Madam Efunsetan and Madam Tinubu were women who influenced politics, fighting where men trembled to stand, to bring about a just and better society (Mba, 1982:5). The political power which an *lyalode* (women leader) in Yoruba land could possess was clearly demonstrated in the case of Madam Efunsetan of Ibadan who as a member of the town council and creditor to important Yoruba chiefs became the spokeswoman of a group of chiefs who opposed the aggressive foreign policy of the 'Are' (war chief) Latosa and his authoritarian government (Mba, 1982:4). So immense was her influence as *lyalode* that in the annals of history, Efunsetan is one of the few women in Southern Nigeria before 1900 to have engaged in open political opposition to indigenous government. For she acted not as the representative of the women but as the representative of a political group consisting of male chiefs. Before long, however, her fellow chiefs contrived against her and she was deposed but the office of the *lyalode* could not be eliminated.

Madam Tinubu is another woman who became so influential in the 19th century that she was able to lead a group who restored the exiled Oba Akintoye to the Lagos throne in 1851. She was so powerful after Akintoye that in 1853 when Oba Dosumu became Oba of Lagos, prominent Lagos chiefs moved to curb her influence. She was exiled to Abeokuta in 1856 where she organised effective defence against Dahomeyan invasions of Abeokuta in 1863 (Jones, 1861). She was made *lyalode* in recognition of her patriotism and by her new status became a member of the Egba Council of State. She once again became the power behind the throne, installing Oyekan as the Alake of Egba land in 1879. The Tinubu square in Lagos is named after this great woman political activist.

Women's political authority in Benin was far less important than those of the Yoruba women. This role differentiation is explicable in terms of the Edo socio-cultural system. Women in Benin played far less important role in the economy and religion than Yoruba women, with the result that their political roles were similarly circumscribed. Egharevba (1960) traced this loss of women's political authority to the case of Edeleya, the daughter of Oba Ewuare the Great who was to be installed Oba, but menstruated during the process resulting in the disqualification of women from the office of Obaship. In compensation, the title of

Queen mother was introduced in 1515 during the reign of Oba Esigie. Her court was set up at Uselu.

In Onitsha, Asaba, Osamaru, Illah and other Ika Igbo areas, there was the institution of the queen, the "Omu" and the Omu society. By the second half of the 19th century, the role of the Omu was well established and commented upon by travellers and missionaries (Johnson 1885:651). Like the Obishop, the office was confined to the royal lineage and was reserved for post menopausal women since the person of the Omu like that of the Obi was regarded as semi sacred and hedged around many sexual taboos. In all cases,

however, a woman selected was already prominent in trade and in society as a strong personality.

However, this romanticisation of woman political models in pre-colonial societies of Nigeria should be seen for what it is worth. As Badejo (1990) has argued, it is nothing more than the same tokenism which some privileged women enjoy, even today. The argument is that these institutionalised privileges did not survive power tussles, which were endemic to politics in history. The cases of madam Efunsetan and the daughter of the Benin monarch are apt evidences. Even in societies like the Ondo, Ife, Ibadan and Abeokuta of 19th century Yorubaland where the positions of *lyalode* were introduced to compensate women, the powers of the *lyalode* were also limited and when the actions of incumbent on such positions threatened the men, they were either relegated in importance or the positions were left vacant (Mba, 1982). This view is reinforced in Sambo's postulations that Nigeria women have not always been objects of power, and that the profile of women's access to political authority is a short one.

Indeed an analysis of the colonial and post-colonial eras reveal that even vestiges of women political power were completely eliminated. These periods were characterised by massive erosion of their political rights including even the right to vote. During the colonial periods, incessant and brutal suppression of the resistance movement led by the men, had given women some latitude to organise themselves. This need for collective mobilisation received impetus by the way the colonial government imposed new policies in disregard for the peoples cultural and economic susceptibilities. Thus women, who felt emasculated by these policies, had to mobilise for the recognition of their rights. It was only when women joined their men folk to redefine their own conditions of existence, and raised incipient voices of protest against the exploitative policies of the colonial state that actions which marked the collapse of colonial government gathered momentum (Coleman, 1985:139). In this regard, the Aba women tax uprising of 1929, Onitsha province oil mill protest of 1946 and the Abeokuta women tax demonstrations of 1949 are notable examples of militant actions taken by Nigerian women in the colonial state. In these cases, the government had to soft pedal on its policies and in the case of the Abeokuta women, the Alake had to abdicate temporarily.

The success of the Abeokuta women also kindled women's desire for political participation. Under the leadership of Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti,

encouraged by Margaret Ekpo in South Eastern Nigeria, the Nigerian Women's Union was formed in 1949 to articulate the opinion of women in the colonial state (Oyewusi; 1996:24-34). Thus by the time, the National Council of Women societies was formed in 1958, the collective consciousness of women had crystallised and it was with an urgent posture that women launched firstly into the politics of de-colonisation and later on, that of the First and Second Republics.

Constitutional changes between 1946-51 had led to the emergence of two new political parties, the Action Group (AG) and the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), and the National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC) to dominate Nigerian politics from 1951 – 65. Men dominated politics of the First Republic. In spite of their roles in the decolonisation process, women had no access to political power, even the basic electoral right to vote was denied a large portion of the women. For example, the dominant party at the federal level, the NPC was opposed to the enfranchisement of women in the North despite that their southern counterparts had been granted the right to vote from 1956 (Osiruemu, 2001: 124).

At the formative stages of the parties, using the NCNC as example, women either in their associations or on an individuals basis became members and participated in the elections held at various conventions. Indeed Margaret Ekpo, Henrietta Lawson, Keziah Fashina, Mary Ededem were elected as individual members at various conventions, yet none of them was elected as national officers of the National Executive Council (NEC) or members of Central Working Committee (CWC), so women never got included in the two most important decision making committees of the NCNC. More than that, none of the parties presented women for the federal elections held between 1959 and 1964. Thus during the first Republic, only two women, Wuraola Esan and Kerry Bernice could become members of the Federal Parliament.

The attempts by the dominant political parties to retain regional power soon led to ethno-regional struggle for control of the country which resulted in a coup d'etat in January 1966 (Osiruemu, 1995). Political activities in First Republic were thus terminated when the first military regime of General Aguyi Ironsi was inaugurated. The military ruled Nigeria from 1966 to 1979, during which period women had no access to political authority because there were no women soldiers in those corps of the armed forces which participated in coups that installed the governments of the period. Moreover, political parties, along with all ethnic and cultural associations in which women were active were often banned by each emergent military regime.

The Ironsi military administration was short lived. During the Gowon regime of July 1966 – 75, the Supreme Military Council (SMC), the highest ruling body in government expectedly, had no female members, neither were there women commissioners at the federal level; only states like Lagos, East-Central and North-Eastern States had women commissioners. Even the regime's attempt to enfranchise the women in the north was only partially successful because of the opposition

from the northern oligarchy who conceded voting rights to educated women only (Osiruemu, 2001:126).

Under the Murtala-Obasanjo regime of 1975 – 1979, only a few professional women were appointed as commissioners. Even in its attempt to return the country to civilian rule, only four women were nominated among the 49 members of the Constitution Drafting Committee, which drafted the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria whose provisions eventually granted complete electoral rights to all citizens. Thus women acquired the right to vote and be voted for; although women in Purdah could vote but only at night (Vogt, 1996:64).

In the Second Republic, Nigeria operated a multi-party system in which five parties; the National Party of Nigeria, (NPN), United Party of Nigeria, (UPN), Great Nigeria Peoples Party, (GNPP) the Nigeria Peoples Party, (NPP), and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) vied for political supremacy. Again as in the First Republic, women were neither given opportunity to be nominated as national candidates nor did they climb to the ladder of decision – making committees. Very many of them were relegated to the women's wing where the articulate ones were employed in canvassing and mobilising women to join the parties or to vote for men. It would seem that the function of the women's wing at this time was to entrench the male politician and further marginalise the position of his female counterpart in the power strata of political parties (Agee, 1996: 24). In a way, these wings were used by men to cause a gender problem for women because, in a situation where a man has a female opponent, his wife could mobilise women to vote for him while he attends to other pressing matters; whereas his female opponent would have to mobilise the women herself as well as attend to other matters, thereby not creating enough time to mobilise the women before election. As observed by Badejo (1990), by the time marital pressures and personal rewards were used, the women folk crumbled and like youths got relegated to wings of political parties (81). In the NPN, the women's wing was particularly useful for canvassing women to join the party. In this party, pragmatic women politicians like Celestina Saraki, Remi Ogunsola and Biola Babatope motivated people for the NPN which faced great competition from the UPN, but none of them were considered to be politically viable to be nominated for a national post, because they were considered not technical enough (Okoye, 2000:19). Franca Afegbua, the only woman leader who disclosed her senatorial aspiration was lampooned by opposing party members and her eventual nomination generated ripples within the party's inner caucus. She was even described as a political 'turn coat' (Okoye, 2000:20). However, Franca Afegbua became the only woman to be elected into the Senate towards the tail end of the Second Republic.

In the UPN, were women wing leaders like Queen Lota Christy, Titilayo Ajanaku and Tokunbo Dosumu who were used for motivation but never get nominated or elected. In the NPP, was Sawaba Gambo a great political activist who never got elected into state or federal position. However, in spite of the struggle by

women for access to political power, their plight of being treated as second fiddle did not change in both Republics. Although many women were actively involved in party politics, very few ever got nominated for national seats. This fact was lamented by the political Bureau Report of 1987 which noted that only about 0.7 percent of the federal legislators were women, while at the state level, the result was not better either. Among the ten special advisers to President Shehu Shagari, there was no woman. Thus the government of the Second Republic produced a very small number of women participating in decision making (Ojiako, 1987: 364).

The marginalisation of women in politics continued into the botched third republic. Again they were under-represented in decision-making bodies of the several political associations which sought registration from the National Electoral Commission set up by the General Ibrahim Babangida military regime of 1985 - 1993. It must be noted that it was the Babangida regime which took conscious measures to address the issue of the marginalisation of women in positions of authority. In fact, the regime's action is explicable by the fact that it came on stream during the decade declared by the United Nations Organisation for the enhancement of the status of women, and the activities of its agencies had sensitised the world on the need to involve women in active politics and decision making positions. So it was with this outlook that the regime made the novel appointments of two women, namely, Professors Grace Alele-Williams and Jadesola Akande as Vice Chancellors of the University of Benin, and Lagos State University respectively, in a move described by General Babangida as "a silent revolution to bring women directly into the main stream of the government and administration of higher institutions" (Vogt, 1996:25).

However, these token opportunities were not upheld in later years because even "the Better Life for Rural Women Programme", organised by the wife of the military ruler, Maryam Babangida, was centred mainly on the plight of the rural woman (Philips, 1993:32). Even in political associations which sought registration to become political parties during the transition-to-civil rule exercise organised by the Babangida regime, women were not envisioned as being included in the power strata, as the following analysis depicts. Whereas, the Peoples Front of Nigeria listed twenty-six officials, only two were women. The Nigeria National Congress listed twenty-two officials only two were women with unspecified positions. The Liberal Convention listed eighteen officials with Margaret Unikegwu and Kande Balarabe as National Women's Co-ordinators. The People Solidarity Party listed thirteen officials and none was a woman. Even the Nigeria Labour Party with a list of twenty-one officials, conceded only one office to Nana Aisha Gambo (File No. 26, Fed. Min. of Inf.). However, these associations were not registered by the Babangida military regime which rather created two government sponsored parties; the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Socialist Democratic Party (SDP) as alternative for all citizens.

Again in these parties, very few women rose above ward levels. In the elections conducted in 1988 - 92 period, only a hundred and thirty women were elected into executive positions at the ward level while a hundred and seventy-six won their elections at the local government and state congresses; and only two women, Bose Oshinowo and Helen Gomwalk got elected into the position of chairpersons of their state chapters while Mrs. Titilayo Ajanaka was elected local government chairperson in Ogun State (File No. 26, Ibid). Few other women like Tokunbo Dosumu, Serah Jubril and Suliat Adedeji who disclosed their intention to contest gubernatorial and presidential positions were soon alienated by party politics of their male counterparts who rather canvassed second fiddle roles such as co-ordinators of women and leaders of women's committee where they could not wield power and influence.

The point of stress is that women have been largely marginalised from holding positions of political authority and have not truly got access to state power. This is in spite of their great input into political development of the nation; indeed this political manoeuvring of the men folk only goes to reemphasise Professors Oyovbaire and Olagunji's assertion that post-independence Nigerian women were given token appointments in public places in spite of the fact that they competed fairly with their male counterparts (Oyovbaire, 1985:81). This brings to the fore, the barriers which have inhibited Nigerian women's quest for political authority.

The Barriers

A major barrier identified as inhibiting the quest of Nigerian women for political authority is the stereotyped roles of women in traditional patriarchal institutions, which deprives women of political legitimacy. In her analysis of the factors militating against women participation in political parties, Uku. (1991) notes that every culture in Nigeria determines the relative roles of men and women and it becomes novel to break out of this artificial barrier. In many Nigerian societies, man has been accepted as the seeker and breadwinner, full of activity while the woman is passive, homebound and always ready to accept the dictates of men. This view was corroborated by the Nigerian report to the United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. In its report, Nigeria paints the picture of societies where women were relegated to the background and stereotyped ideas drummed into and accepted by women from childhood. Women were to be seen, not heard. Brought up in such an environment, women are traditionally docile, subservient and powerless. Women, the fairer sex are not biologically and psychologically endowed like men and therefore are ill equipped to withstand the rigours of politics (Yesuf, 1991:63).

This sexist argument, when extended, leads to such conclusions as, even if women are to participate in politics, they should be just support tier as in the women wings and committees because women, being emotionally unstable should not be trusted with

leadership positions which sometimes require taking ruthless and unpopular decisions. Such arguments are supported with facts from studies on the hormonal imbalance of women during menstruation, pregnancy and postnatal periods which predisposes women to indecision and moody spells, hardly the qualities required for a leader (Yesuf, 1991). George Aigboni captures this thought line thus:

Men in this part of the third world are satisfied to allow women play subservient roles just because most men folk think that women lack the innate propensity to lead (Nigerian Observer, 14/9/82:8).

This mystification of the qualities required of a leader is an important component of the patriarchy of political systems of traditional African societies. An extrapolation of the concept of patriarchy and its effect on leadership roles of women in politics is desirable here. Patriarchy refers to male dominance. The concept 'Patriarchy' has its roots in the Greek word "Patriarchies" which means "head of the tribe" and owes its original prominence to the Old Testament account of the Bible where the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel were referred to as Patriarchs. Thus the notion of patriarchy holds that male dominance is a universal fact of human society. The only distinction lies in the degree of subordination women suffer in them. Although, Bumberger's study of African societies in 1974 shows that some are markedly matriarchy, these do not dispute historical and contemporary evidence that in such societies, real power still resides with the males, who exercise such powers ostensibly on behalf of the women, and the few instances where women appear to effectively challenge male dominance, men conspire to remove such political power from women. The above reinforces Sambo's hypothesis that in the Nigerian society, women political power rarely equalled that of men.

* Even in contemporary times where increasing international awareness about the status and rights of women has resulted in explicit guarantees in the Nigerian constitution on equal participation of sexes in politics, which should have made easier, the ride by women to political authority, residues of patriarchy still inhibit women. This is in terms of the venue, timing of caucus meetings of political parties. Such manoeuvres of party leadership as holding important caucus meeting in private locations rather than in publicly funded party offices, coupled with violence usually associated with politics in Nigeria work against women candidates. Hence, part of the feminine agenda against violence in the 2003 elections was the "zero-tolerance-to-violence", a programme designed by women leaders to re-orient and sensitise nascent women politicians on the antics of their male counterparts, and how to overcome it (Oshodi, 2002:19). Thus, it is only with this kind of determination not to be cowed or intimidated by men, that women can erase all vestiges of patriarchy.

A further reason adduced for the non inclusion of women in decision making positions in the processes

leading to the formation of democratic governments, is that women are hardly represented in the leadership of political parties and trade unions, which are the main channels for growth in politics (Chizea et al, 1991:85). The above may be the case; but it is no gainsaying that a factor which impinges on women's foray into leadership positions is financial constraints which affect effective mobilisation. Indeed in a country like Nigeria, for a politician to fully mobilise supporters, he will need the resources to travel back and forth to the various venues, in the country for meetings. Alternatively, he should be able to pay to get his aides or everyone to come to a place for an important meeting and decision making. This is one aspect women politicians are being short-changed because many of them aspiring to elective position, still depend on the financial muscles of their husbands and friends to meet these needs. This problem cuts across women contesting for elective offices at the ward, senatorial and gubernatorial levels. For example, Jamila Ahmed Salik, a lawyer and nascent woman politician who contested councillorship position in the 2002 local government elections in Kano State explained her fund raising strategy thus:

We group ourselves together under what we call 'mass oriented participation in politics'. This group is solely responsible for getting money together and then deploys it to help to run campaigns. But most important all my campaign funds are sourced from my husband, second to the aforementioned organisation (Sunday Guardian, 13/10/02:19).

In some instances such as the case of Kofo Bucknor – Akerele and Esther Uduehi, who aspired for governorship and senatorial positions, fund raising gala nights were organised to tackle financial limitations (NTA, Entertainment News item, 5/10/2002).

Financial constraint is linked to the imbalance of the number in men and women occupying elective positions of power; in that men are constantly in control because they have the financial muscle to push their way through. Kofo Bucknor-Akerele, erstwhile Deputy Governor of Lagos State explained thus:

Women don't show apathy. If you look at most meetings you will find that women are often in the majority. We do all the mobilising but the real problem is that it is the men who are in control of the political parties because they have the means to gain control. And so when it comes to sharing offices they share it among themselves and usually they give women token offices (Bucknor-Akerele, 2002:11).

Another dimension of this problem is the imbalance of the sexes in national executive of political parties which is largely male dominated and the tendency is to discriminate against female aspirants. Again, a case in point is that of Kofo Bucknor-Akerele,

who on disclosing her aspiration to contest for the post of governor of Lagos State in the 2003 elections, was sent a written order by her party, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) to shut down her campaign organisation thereby scuttling her bid to get to the state house on the aegis of that party (Sunday Guardian, 7/7/02:10).

Another barrier which inhibited women's quest for political authority can be traced to statutory obstacles, a situation where laws enacted by governments obstruct women's path to effective political representation. Indeed until the adoption of the 1979 constitution which enfranchised women of the northern states of Nigeria, women power was greatly curtailed in that region. Since in democracies, the electoral process is the most viable avenue through which oppressed groups can capture political power, the right to vote and be voted for, remains a major component of the electoral strategy of women towards an acquisition of state authority. It provides the key to women struggle for representation. Elections are concerned with questions of power. People contest election to win; the goal is political office. Holding office gives access to power. Thus voters exercise power in making a choice, the winner gains access to power by being elected while those represented expect to benefit as supporters of the victor.

As an oppressed group an avenue open to women to overcome this obstruction is for articulate women to organise and educate their fellow women to know their constitutional rights and duties expressed through their voting and lobbying. Even in this machinery is yet another constraint, which plagues women the world over and Nigerian women in particular.

That is effective bi-communication (Chizea et al 1991:86). There exists a great disparity between the urban rich women who parade themselves as the official representatives of the women folk and the rural poor women who do not see them as such because of their un-identical interest hence rural women feel more at ease with male politicians (Enajare, 1991). In this wise, women need to go beyond unidirectional communication pattern of Nigeria media system which beam visions of what they want the woman to do or hear and have no organised way of accessing their responses to the information. Thus women politicians will need to get to these women checking vital issues and disseminating decisions from party headquarters to them. For only in this way can women present a united front in their quest for political authority in the Nigerian State. It is in this wise that the "Voters Club" (Sunday Guardian, 13/10/02:19) strategy of women political leaders in the 2003 election should be appreciated.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis of women's quest for political power shows that at various stages of Nigeria history, women have had to struggle for recognition since the men folk always relegated their roles in politics. In the period before independence, although

active in politics, women were not in the vanguard of the power structure of Nigerian societies.

The First Republic witnessed the first experimentation of democratically elected government for the country. It was pointed out that in spite of constitutional guarantee of equal rights to participation in politics for all citizens, chauvinist practices by men, consistently hampered women's quest for leadership roles in government. This is evident in the few and limited representation women got in political parties and indeed in government.

Since politics is about power, which in turn determines the basis of creation of wealth and the allocation of values for any society, then it is imperative for women to challenge this male dominance of political authority. In this direction, determination becomes the keyword. Women will need to raise the level of political consciousness of fellow women in order to become active participants in politics as well as resist attempts by men to segment and limit their political horizon to only the women's wings of political parties. Women's commissions too, should seek recognition of their capacity to occupy posts like the administrative secretary of political parties where they can wield a lot of power and influence and thereby determine the path of development of the nation. If this is achieved then the possibility of the public spirited ones amongst them playing the role of king makers as Iyalode Efunsetan and Tinubu did in the past can be realised even where the would-be kings are women themselves.

There is also this great need to create awareness and re-orient the younger women to take their positions against the dictates of a patriarchal society. Younger women from the out set should be made aware of the rights and privileges guaranteed them by the constitutions of the Federation, "For whatever legislation, policies and programs are enacted and implemented whatever social reforms are affected, only a woman who understands herself, knows her principles, enforces and execute them is in a position to reap the benefits and advantages" (Uku, 1991:35). As Franklyn S. Haiman points out in the preface to *Women and The Law Rights are not maintained by words on a piece of parchment...only an eternally vigilant people willing to fight for them when threatened will be able to preserve their liberties* (Uku, 1991, Ibid).

Therefore attempts by the men folk to denigrate the rights of women to contest for any post or office should be treated as a case of outright discrimination and marginalisation within the interpretation of federal statutes. It is in this light that the legal action instituted by women against Governor Chimaroke Nnamani over their initial exclusion from the Enugu State Executive Council should be appreciated. Eventually, one of them was appointed a commissioner (Ekenna, 2000:26) which may appear insignificant, but it shows that Nigerian women are ready to adopt legal means to promote their quest for political authority. For the gender gap created overtime to be reduced and women brought on board in the development of the nation, government could adopt the following suggestions.

(a) Government should complete the

review process of the 1999 Constitution by making it more gender sensitive and non discriminatory. Failure to finalise this constitutional review offers room to anti-women agents to manipulate gray areas in it. In this wise, the inclusion of the minimum 30 percent affirmative measure will serve a temporary measure to close the existing gap between men and women.

- (b) Government should also ratify the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Indeed this document improvises for rights of women globally. Once legislated upon, it becomes justiciable. Women will not need to canvass for their rights piecemeal.

Conclusively, Nigerian women should be made aware of the benefits of realising their quest for access to political authority. For politics is about power, which determines the welfare of the people and the general development of the country.

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The use of 'Apathy' is in the sense that majority of women folk were not enthusiastic about participation in active politics in the period before 1985, because of seemingly insurmountable barriers, few of which can be read on pages 2, 12-13 (Uku, 1991, Igbafe, 1991; UNCP, 1996).

Few women participated like Mrs. Ramsome Kuti Saroaba Gambo and Magerat Ekpo had to fight these prejudices against women while at the same time "begin to encourage women to become interested in politics.

In fact, Nina Mba's books *Nigeria Women mobilised* university of California Berkeley, 1982 and *women in politics*, Malthouse Press, Lagos 1996. Awe, Bukunle, *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, Sakore Publishers, Lagos, 1992 Yasef, Bilkisi, *Women in Nigeria Today*, zed books, 1985, Ada Juhama – *mary the role of Women in Nation Development*, Hericon Publishers, Umuhau, 1997 and Ibrahim, Jibri, *Women Marginalisation in Politics in Nigeria*, Anima Osiwa Kaduna, 2004 are works which demonstrate the reality of this apathy of women to politics.

Infact women's apathy to politics was so real that it was subject of several local and International Conference. It need be noted that a recurring theme in the comunique of these conference was the political empowerment of women. That a few were active politically should not be interpreted to mean that the call for women participating and eventual empowerment politically was an imaginary call.