An Exploratory Study of Women in Political Leadership in Nigeria

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Abstract—This article raises the question of political leadership in the context of women's roles and responsibilities in Nigeria. The leadership question in Nigeria is disquiet to both academics and policy actors. In a democratic society like Nigeria, the parameters for a well-deserved leadership position is characterised by variables of equity, competence, transparency, accountability, selflessness and commitment to the tenets of democracy, but the failure of leadership is pervasive in all spheres of socio-political sectors in Nigeria. The paper appraises the activities of Nigerian women in the socio-political arena in Nigeria. It traces their leadership roles from pre-colonial through post-colonial eras with emphasis on 1914 till date. It is argued in the paper that gender imbalance in leadership is a bane to peaceful co-existence and development in Nigeria. It is a truism that gender-blind and gender biased political agendas can distort leadership activities. The extent of their contributions of the few outstanding women's relative tranquility is highlighted in the theoretical discourse. The methodology adopted for this study is an exploratory study employing the extended case method (ECM) (Kates, 2006) will be carried out among some selected Nigerian women politicians and academics. Because of ECM's robustness as a qualitative research design, it will help this study in identifying the challenges of these women thematically and also in constructing valid and reliable measures of the constructs. The study made use of ethnography and triangulation method which is used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives. Specifically, Investigator triangulation which involves using several different investigators in the analysis process was adopted for the study. Typically, this manifests as the evaluation team consisting of colleagues within a field of study wherein each investigator examines the question of political leadership with the same qualitative method (interview, observation, case study, or focus groups). In addition data was collated through documentary sources like journals, books magazines, newspapers and internet materials. The arguments of this paper center on gender equity of both sexes in socio-political representation and effective participation. The paper concludes with the need to effectively maintain gender balance in leadership in order to enhance lasting peace and unity in Nigeria.

Keywords—Gender, Leadership, Politics, Women

I.   INTRODUCTION

NIGERIAN women have played and have been playing critical roles as caregivers and development of leaders

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since the existence of amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914. These activities have contributed in shaping the political system of Nigeria. In the Pre-colonial to Post-colonial eras, Nigerian women have struggled to gain relevance in the political leadership and in most cases their efforts were being thwarted by men. Hence, Fayomi (2009) views this as limited conception of the political relevance of women which is responsible for their political marginalisation. While it is important to increase the number of women in public offices, the more fundamental question raised is about the character of democracy in Nigeria. Is it gender sensitive? Our findings in this article reveal that the Nigerian political terrain is gender-biased and insensitive to Nigerian women's political leadership exceptional qualities.

II.   CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

A.   Politics

The concept of politics has been viewed in different perspectives by various scholars that have written on the subject matter. According to Easton (1990), politics is the authoritative allocation of values for society. Politics is considered as a set of human interactions considered primarily with the allocation of scarce resources, which are considered desirable by the citizenry. Thus, politics is concerned with making or obtaining decisions about how these resources or values are to be distributed. However, those who should distribute the resources have left it for individuals, society and the nations to decide for themselves.

In short, the conservative idea that politics is exclusive preserve for males should be wiped out. Appadorai (1974) discusses politics as a science which is concerned with the State and the conditions essential for its existence and development. Following this view therefore, Dahl (1963) defines politics "as any stable pattern of human relationships that involves power and influence". In modern times, personalities like Crick (1998) defines politics as an activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in proportion to their importance to the welfare and survival of the whole community. Hence, all differing interests should be given equal participation in all aspects of society and that no one should be subjected to discrimination. For that reason, political participation is considered by Political Scientists as basic human rights, which must necessarily be guaranteed to

the people. It is also seen as an extension of democracy which promotes participatory democracy rather than merely representative democracy (Ayee, 2001).

B. Leadership

The growth and development of any nation falls on the quality or value of its leadership. Lyne de Ver (2009) reiterates that leadership as a concept matters for the growth and development of any community either locally or internationally. He further states that, Leadership must always be understood contextually, occurring within a given indigenous configuration of power, authority and legitimacy, shaped by history, institutions, goals and political culture. Hence, the dire need to give a clear understanding and application of the concept of leadership in this context.

A renowned scholar of leadership Bass (1990) cited in Lyner de Ver (2009) described the concept as universal. He defines leadership: *"an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perception and expectations of the members. Leaders are agents of change – persons whose acts affect other people more than other people's acts affect them. Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group...It should be clear that with this broad definition, any member of the group can exhibit some amount of leadership, and the members will vary in the extent to which they do so"* (1990: 19-20).

III. THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP

A. Great Man Theory

This theory assumes that the capacity for leadership is innate. This simply means great leaders are born not made. The theory portrays great leaders as heroic, mythic and destined to rise to leadership when needed. The term "Great Man" was used because, at the time, leadership was thought of primarily as a male quality, especially in terms of military leadership. This theory was popularised by Thomas Carlyle. The early leaders came from the privileged class and held hereditary titles. Very few people from the lower class had the opportunity to take a lead (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano and Dennison, 2003). The Great Man theory was based on the idea that whenever there is a need of leadership, a Great Man would arise and solve the problems. When the Great Man theory was proposed, most of the leaders were males and therefore, the gender issues were not negotiable.

B. Trait Theory

The trait theory believes that people are either born or are made with certain qualities such as responsibility, creativity, intelligence e.t.c that will make them excel in leadership roles. If particular traits are key features of leadership, then how do we explain people who possess those qualities but are not leaders? This question is one of the difficulties in using trait theories to explain leadership (Northouse, 2007). It is pertinent to note that, when this theory was produced, it was based on the study of the characteristics of successful leaders.

C. Behaviourist Theory

This theory concentrates on what leaders actually do rather than on their qualities. Different patterns of behaviour are observed and categorised as 'styles of leadership'. This area has probably attracted most attention from practicing managers.

D. Situational Theories

The Situational theories propose that leaders choose the best course of action based on the current situation. Different styles of leadership may be more appropriate for certain types of decision-making. One of the relatively lesser known leadership theories is the situational leadership theory. Research found that leaders emerged as a result of different situations. Therefore, the assumed leadership qualities were developed depending on the situation (Rost and Barker, 2000; Bolden et al, 2003).

E. Contingency Theories

According to this theory, no leadership style is best in all situations and that every leadership style should be based on certain situations, which signifies that there are certain people who perform at the maximum level in certain places; but at minimal performance when taken out of their element (Rost, 1993; Northouse, 2007). In a nutshell, the success of a leader depends on a number of variables, including the leadership style, the followers and aspects of the situation.

F. Transactional Theory

This leadership theory emphasizes that the ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others i.e. the followers into account. These leaders encourage participation and contributions from group members and help group members feel more relevant and committed to the decision-making process (Rost, 1993). However, the leader retains the right to allow the input of others. Also, it's important to note that, when its followers are successful, they are rewarded; when they fail, they are reprimanded or punished.

G. Transformational Theory

This theory focus upon the connections formed between leaders and followers. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task. These leaders focus on the performance of group members, but also want each person to fulfill his or her potential. Leaders with this style often have high ethical and moral standards (Yukl, 2010). The central concept here is change and the role of leadership in envisioning and implementing the transformation of organisational performance (Bolden, et al, 2003).

IV. HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

Leadership in pre-colonial Nigeria involved both men and some few outstanding women in various spheres of the society. There existed several historical perspectives of

bravery displayed by women in several dangerous circumstances either as individuals or in a group. Nigerian women in pre-colonial and colonial African states confronted and overcame oppression and violence. Women were able to confront the government and make it to reverse their decisions. According to Kolawole (1997), Nineteenth century was an outstanding period in African women mobilization. During the trans-Atlantic slave trade, some of the greatest acts of resistance and tenacious rejection of slave traders were led by women citing the invincibility of the Amazon women of Dahomey.

In what later became Nigeria, women have been active socially and politically in the affairs of their communities in Nigeria. In Northern Nigeria, the reign of the first Queen in Zazzau, Amina ushered in a new era for the state. The collapse of Songhay Empire created a new drive towards the reinforcement of authority by the dependent Zarakuna (rulers of the Hausa Land). Queen Kambasa, in the traditions of the bonny kingdom is remembered as a warrior queen. She became a patron of the artistic activities of men's cultural group. The queen trained a formidable army which ransacked the form of Opuoko for killing some members of the cultural groups.

In the Yoruba land, the most famous warrior was Efunsetan Aniwura who rose to become Iyalode or leader of women in Ibadan whose business acumen has given her undisputed influence not only in commerce but also in political and social life. Madam Tinubu was also powerful that she supplied arms to Egba people in the 19th century.

The Ijaw and Igbo women of Southern Nigeria were resourceful with trade guilds as their strong points of mobilization. Among the Igbo, the Omu signified strong economic and political influence. People with foresight like Okwei popularly remembered as Omu, prevented the imposition of British sterling on the trading groups of Eastern Nigeria. The British firms paid for produce in silver coins and currency notes. The local producers were unwilling to accept half the new currency in exchange for the old. The Okwei (Omu) had to contract to exchange currency notes paid to the producers by the firms with the local currency in circulations. This was made possible with the cooperation of the Niger Company and bank managers at Onitsha and other trading stations.

Ekejuiba (2001) describes Madam Okwei who was crowned Omu, the queen of Osomari in 1935 as an illustrious Nigerian woman. Okwei 's duties as Omu included advising the King and assisting him in settling disputes, especially advising on those that concerned women. She also hipped out some of her trinkets to those that could not afford it. In addition to her royal status, Madam Okwei (Omu) had military, religious and administrative functions. She was the field marshal and her canoe had to lead others in any military expedition.

Madam Olajumoke Obasa became involved in voluntary social acts in Lagos. She was deeply interested in women and did perform a great deal in promoting their welfare and championing their interest in 1930, when the market women were asked to pay rent for stalls in Ebute Ero, she led a delegation to A.W.S. rumens of the Lagos town council to protest against the order for rent payment. As a waiver, the order that women should pay monthly fees for their stalls was put on hold.

Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ransome-kuti founded Abeokuta women's union whose objectives transcended the alleviation of hardship to the removal of the cause of hardship. She insisted on the equality of all women and initiated that the illiterate women were mush bolder and more willing to sacrifice their personal comfort than the educated women. The objectives of the A.W.U. were the abolition of sole native authority (SNA) which was not gender-sensitive, and representation and participation of women in the reformed system of administration. Between 1946 and 1947, the AWU employed the strategy of writing petitions to colonials authorities to repeal taxation on women because women help their husbands to pay taxes; usually the women were responsible for the feeding and education of their children, women were already paying water rates. On May 10, 1944, about 12 women gathered to present their views on the need for a woman's organizational they resolved to form Nigeria's women party (NWP) because according to Johnson-Odim (2001: 182), " women were being cheated by our men and the government " and she told the founding members that 'we must as women demand our rights'.

During the inter-war era, when the two decades after the first world war, there was a mass protest against colonial policies by the Aba women in South eastern Nigeria in 1929. The Ibo market women were upset with a number of colonial policies that threatened their economic and social position. In 1929, the women staged a series of protests. The largest included more than 10,000 women, who had covered their faces with blue paints and carried fern-covered sticks. The women were able to destroy a number of colonial buildings before soldiers stopped the protest killing more than fifty women in the process. Not surprisingly in contemporary Nigeria, the Aba women are considered to be natural heroes.

The history of women's resistance to male reconstruction of traditional government level has certainly not abated, Mba (1982), reveals that between 1974-78 in Onitsha, Ikporo Onitsha (women of Onitsha) under the leadership of Veronica Uwechia Umekwulu Odogwu and Nneka Chugbo and a host of others, led the entire community against the administration of Ukpabi Asika, whose policy had the disastrous effect of diminishing the economic resources of Onitsha women. In deciding to fight the government policy, what the Ikporo Onitsha found outrageously bad was the cavalier manner in which the interest and urgent need for resources for women were dismissed as irrelevant. In the course of the protracted struggle, the officers of Ikporo Onitsha, including a number of seventy and eighty year old women, were routinely wounded by the police, arrested and detained on the ground of that they had convened an illegal government. These battles by women may seem ineffectual but they are not without casualties.

Nzegwe (2000) describes the first casualty in the battle between Ikporo Onitsha and the East central state government was the Obi of Onitsha, Ofala Okagbue. The community

ostracized him to protest his abdication of his constitutional obligation to fight for the traditional rights of Onitsha women. The second casualty was rights of Onitsha women. The second casualty was Adazia Enwonwu, The Ndichie who openly taunted women for lacking significance. He could not be buried after his sudden death as initially planned by his family until a formal rite of recantation was performed. The third casualty in line were the members of Asika family who publicly supported the administrator Ukpabi, They were social shunned and could not interact with the rest of the community.

The women continued their action even after Asika's rule abruptly ended following the coup d'etat of General Muritala Mohammed. As events unfolded the Owelle of Onitsha and the former president of Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, became a casualty when he assumed that the fall of his nemesis, Ukpabi Asika, automatically implied the end of women's grievances. Although he had once been a firm supporter of Ikporo Onitsha, his new position was defined as self-serving and antagonistic to what the women had defined as promoting their welfare. The women asserted that since they were dealing with a government policy that was still in place rather than an individual, it was mischievous of the Owelle to collapse the two and divert attention from the task at hand. Faced with the women's wrath and their continuous public assault on his person, the Owelle harshly retreated to Nsukka to live out the rest of his days in peace.

Furthermore, given the disappointment of women at how Nigerian government has approached issues affecting the rights and welfare of women in general, there is a growing discontent among women groups and activists. Women organization and women tend to spend resources researching, generating data and new form of knowledge on the problem of violence against women. This is an attempt to convince the government of gravity and importance of this matter.

V.   THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF NIGERIAN WOMEN IN THE POST-COLONIAL ERA

The roles and responsibilities of women in post colonial period has witnessed tremendous changes than it was in the pre-colonial and colonial era in Nigeria but it still showed a low participation level in leadership in Nigeria (Aina, 2004). Leadership in Nigeria in the post-independence era became ethnic, paternalistic and personality based. The role of women have been to support the male folk from their ethnic area without any consideration whatsoever for their personal interest. It important to note according to Ikpe (2004) that party and ethnic allegiance became more important than gender solidarity; women lost their power of collective action, which was important in their agitations during the colonial era .

From 1960-1965 only four women legislators were members of the House of Assembly. In 1966 there was the presence of the military which was obviously male-dominated which was detrimental to Nigerian women. In essence, men were at the helms of affair while the women played a peripheral role irrespective of the qualifications they possessed during the military regime. The regime had little or no regard

for constitutional interest balancing. It's interesting to note that no woman was appointed to the fifty-member Constitutional Drafting Committee, very few women were elected to the local government councils during the 1976 elections, and only Mrs Janet Akinrinade was elected to the Constituent Assembly (Ajayi, 2007).

However, the military leadership of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1985 changed the attitude of military rulers to women leadership. It was in his time that the concept of First Lady Syndrome came to reality (Aina, 2004). Closely followed was the Better Life for Rural Women but later renamed by the then First Lady, Mariam Babangida as Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). Afterwards, women intensified their interests in various leadership positions. Some recorded success while others recorded failures. Only one woman by name Sarah Jubril made several attempts for the presidential position which turned out unsuccessful.

The 1989 constitution that was drafted by the Constituent Assembly had only 5 women members out of a total membership of 150 while in 1990, out of 1,297 local government positions worldwide, women won just 206 (Babatunde, 2003).   The gloomy representation of women in leadership positions was witnessed in Abacha's regime. Senate had 3 women, the House of Representatives had 12 women out of the 360 members, and the State House of Assembly across the nation had 12women out of 990 members. At the local government level, out of 8,810 councillors across the nation, 143 were women while 9 out of 774 local government chairpersons were women (Akande, 1999). It is observed that from independence in 1960 to 1999 only about 3.1% of women were elected into political office and 5% into appointive position respectively.

Furthermore, the year 1999 marked the beginning of a new dawn as Nigeria returned to civilian government after the demise of military rule (Ngara and Ayabam, 2013). With the re-introduction of democracy, there has been a drastic increase in women political participation in both elective and appointive capacities. In spite of these increase, women are still highly marginalized considering the disparity in the proportion of men to women in leadership and decision making positions. For instance, during the 1999 general elections, out of 11,881 available positions throughout the country, women won just 181 positions (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2003). Only one female was recorded as Deputy Governor of Lagos State (1999-2003) Chief Kofoworola Akerele-Bucknor. The dismal performance of women in this election led to the national summit for all women politicians organised by the Gender and Development Action (GADA) International Human Rights Law Group, Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) June 28, 2002 in Abuja. It was organised to enhance women' active participation in politics and other leadership positions in Nigeria (Arogundade and Akiyode-Afolabi, 2003). Despite countless efforts put in place to ensure a significant increase in the number or percentage of women in leadership positions,

the 2003 elections proved otherwise. Women just had a representation of 8.8percent in national parliament (UNDP Report, 2005).

Also, the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) records showed in the 2007 elections held in April, a total of 7160 candidates which comprises of both men and women contested. Of this number only 628 women representing 8.8% of the total participated. In spite of the poor performance of women in the 2011 National Assembly elections, there is an improvement in the number of women political appointees as reflected in the number of women in the current Federal Executive Council (FEC) led by President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan. Out of the 42 ministers appointed before the 13th September 2013 cabinet reshuffle, 13 are women, representing 31.0 percent (Ngara and Ayabam, 2013).

It is interesting to note that handful of women have occupied important and key administrative and leadership positions since 1999. In most instances, these women have performed creditably well thereby leaving no doubt about the ability and capability of women to perform when saddled with responsibilities at all levels. The performances of such women are as stated below:

Dr. Sarah Alade, Deputy Governor of Central Bank; Mrs. Omobola Johnson, Minister of Communication Technology; Hajia Zaniab Mania, Minster of Women Affairs and Social Development; Mrs. Sarah Ochekpe, Minister of Water Resources; Mrs. Akon Eyakeny, Minister of Land, Housing and Urban Development; Ndi Okereke Onyiuke, former Managing Director of the Nigerian Stock Exchange; Prof. Dora Akunyili, former Director General, National Agency for Food and Drugs Control (NAFDAC) and Minister of Education before her demise; Dr. Obiageli Ezekweseli, former Senior Special Assistant to former President Obasanjo on Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (otherwise known as Due Process Unit); Allison Maduekwe-Ministry of Petroleum Resources; Mrs Evelyn Oputu, Managing Director of Nigerian Bank of Industry; Prof. (Mrs) Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai, former Minister of Education; Mrs. Ifueko Omoigui Okauru, Immediate past Executive Chair Federal Inland Revenue Service; Prof. (Mrs.) Grace Alele William, former Vice Chancellor, University of Benin; and Dr. Okonjo- Iweala who as Minister of Finance during Obasanjo's administration and currently in Jonathan's administration worked indefatigably and secured a reprieve for Nigeria's external debt among others. The role of these women have no doubt lifted the pedigree and profile of Nigeria's women as hard working, disciplined, thorough, creative, enterprising and productive. Their enormous contribution to national development is gradually engineering re-evaluation of the role, and capabilities of women in public capacities in positive light.

VI. CONCLUSION

Nigeria has, at different times and in different circumstances, experienced exemplary leadership in women but unfortunately much of these experiences were short-lived.

The emergence of effective leadership at different times in our history has been dictated by one crisis or the other, a situation which has a global outlook. But despite these improvements and achievements in women political leadership in Nigeria from pre-colonial through colonial eras, the representation of women compared to the men in leadership positions in Nigeria is still a far cry from the global benchmark of 35% affirmative action.

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