

Gender Self-Endangering: The Sexist Issue in Nigerian Politics

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ABSTRACT Sexism has become a major problematique in Nigerian politics. Women have been politically considered an endangered species, and their low participation in Nigerian government and politics is often associated with cultural, religious and economic constraints, and male chauvinism. Economically, some feminists perceive women's marginality in the conduct and management of public affairs as arising from their entrenchment to the globalized capitalist relation of production. A relation, which ensures that majority of Nigerian women are peasants and housewives. Nonetheless feminists have failed to fundamentally unravel in their explanatory analysis, the feminine gender self-immolatory attitudes. Feminine gender - self - destructive factor in the decline of women participation in government affairs is often carpeted in sexist analysis. For instance, women account for sixty percent of Nigeria's population and by implication, half of the nation's electorates. This electoral power has not been converted to an assertive feminine electoral and political advantage over the years, and particularly in the 2003 elections. Besides, the female population seems not to know what it desires in terms of elective positions at all levels. Women seem to be lacking in confidence and courage that competitive politics demands, and therefore, comfortable with playing a second fiddle rather than assuming the front-role leadership. In addition to the complex factor, gender mainstreaming through the First Lady's office had over the years only been promotive of the privatized economic interests of the First Ladies. Utilizing a field survey, the basic concern of this paper is therefore to examine the self-defeatist behavioural manifestations of the Nigerian womenfolk. The paper believes that Nigerian women are largely unconscious of sexism in the contemporary world as a class struggle in non-production relational terms.

INTRODUCTION

Same sex discrimination is one of the barriers confronting the Nigerian women in electoral politics. Nigerian women, like their American counterparts, have won the agitation for equal rights, but are yet to achieve equality of rights in politics and governance. As Barber and Kellerman (1986: ix) observed, American women won, after generations of efforts, the right to vote. But a right, which up till today, meant mainly the right to vote for men. This misfortune for women is not limited to America, as it is also the lot of the Nigerian women, like many other parts of the world. The Nigerian women have, since independence, been denied opportunities of assuming political leadership at all levels of governance in the nation's federal set up. This is in spite of the anti-colonial, nationalist roles played by women before de-colonization. Besides, the commonplace rationalizations such as cultural, religious, economic and social inhibitions constraining gender equality in Nigeria, the womenfolk itself constitute a major hamstrung to advocacy against sexism. The Nigerian women have the advantage of higher demographic and electoral strength than men, but have unwittingly failed to convert it to political

capacity for achieving the much-needed empowerment by voting female candidates to power.

The study basically investigates the intra-sex-inflicted barriers to the gender-equality advocacy in Nigerian politics. In achieving this, the paper has six sections. Section one is the introduction while section two problematizes the sexist issue by explicating the gender marginality in real terms. Section three provides the traditional explanatory analysis engendering feminine marginality in politics and governance. Section four interrogates the participatory role and electoral performance of women in the 2003 general elections. Section five is the analysis of the surveyed responses on the sexist problematique in the nation's politics. Finally, section six summarizes the findings and suggests some affirmative actions for ensuring gender-main-streaming in the nation's politics.

PROBLEMATIZING THE FEMININE MARGINALITY IN POWER

Political and constitutional violence on the Nigerian women is a post-traditional Nigerian issue. Pre-colonial Nigerian women played active and productive roles in their respective traditional

political governance. For instance, in Yoruba - speaking, South-West, Nigeria, there were notable women such as the "Erelus", "Ayabas" and "Oloris" (King's wives), "Iyalodes" (Women's Leader), "Iyalajes" (Market Women's Leader), "Yeye Obas" (King's Mother) and "Iya Olosas" (Goddess priests). Others were the Moremi of Ife, Efunsetan of Ibadan and Emotan (Ojuolape, 2000: 1). Likewise, in the Hausa-Fulani traditional political emirate of Northern Nigeria, Queen Amina's contributions and influence in the political development of the emirate remains a unique reference point. However, existing gender literature and history have not sufficiently captured the relevance of women in that era. Rationalizing explanations for this intellectual discrimination and literary and historical injustice against women, Sadiqi (2000: 35) opines that conventional African history provides only fragmentary images of women because men wrote it.

The British colonial administration in Nigeria contrived discriminatory sex roles in the nation's politics. It reconstructed the feminine relevance in governance by divesting the women of their political powers. The colonial administration's gendered policies eroded sex equality both in politics and the economy as women were denied both electoral and job opportunities. In all the colonial political institutions, women were denied equal opportunities with men. In fact, a section of the women (Southerners) voted for the first time in the nation's electoral history in the 1959 general elections, while their Northern counterparts were disfranchised (Nwabueso, 1982: 54). It was not until 1976, fifty-four years after the elective principle was introduced to Nigeria, that the Northern women first enjoyed franchise rights.

Despite the gender-asymmetry in the colonial administration, the Nigerian womenfolk made itself relevant by its contributions to nationalist movements, which constituted vanguards against the colonial administration. Women collectives such as the Aba Women, rioted against colonial tax policies while at the individual levels, women, notably including Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Gamboare Sawaba, participated in the anti-colonial struggle, and took part in the negotiations for independence (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2000: 8-9; Ahonsi-Yakubu, 2001: 151).

In spite of women's contributions to the anti-

colonial struggle, they were marginalized in the post-independence politics and governance by the first indigenous administration of Tafawa Balewa (1960 - 1966) as no woman was appointed to the Federal cabinet. The 348 - seat national parliament had only two (0.6%) female members (Ukeje, 1998: 179). There were no women members in the regional executives and legislatures.

The military regimes of General Aguiyi Ironsi (1966), General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975), Murtala/Obasanjo (1975-1979) and Buhari/Idiagbon (1983-1985) sustained the post-colonial sexism in the nation's politics. The three regimes had no woman member in their respective Armed Forces Ruling Council, which was the highest policy-making body, and none was appointed as a minister, although, one or two women were appointed commissioners at the regional/state level. Meanwhile, the political institutions established by the Murtala/Obasanjo regime to midwife a new Republic were gendered. For instance, the 50-member Constitutional Drafting Committee had no woman and the 250 - member Constituent Assembly had only five (2%) women. The Buhari/Idiagbon regime seemed to have had no interests in gender equal opportunities at all, as no woman was appointed to a political post throughout its tenure of nearly two years.

The Babangida military regime (1985-1993) accorded women only marginal gains. The transitional institutions set up by the regime such as the Constituent Assembly had 150 members with only five (3.3%) women. The transitional Senate had just one (1.1%) woman out of 91 members. The House of Representatives (HOR) produced only 12 (1.9%) women out of 638 members. The president and speaker of the two Houses respectively were men. Despite the overbearing influence of the regime's First Lady, Maryam Babangida there were no women representations in the regime's Armed Forces Ruling Council and the Council of Ministers. There were also no female state governors.

The Sonekan Interim administration (1993) that replaced the Babangida regime, appointed a woman as Secretary (Minister). The regime lasted 84 days in office. General Sani Abacha's regime (1993-1998) succeeded the Sonekan interim regime. The General Abubakar regime (1998-1999) was enthroned after the demise of General Abacha. The regime had four female ministers out of about forty. The Abacha regime's First Lady, Maryam Abacha, like Maryam Babangida

before her, embarked on feminist advocacy through her programme, Family Support Programme, but not much was gained for women beyond the elevation by her husband, of the Women Affairs Commission to a ministerial status and the token ministerial appointments.

Nigerian women and feminists were expecting much from President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration's Fourth Republic because it is a democratic regime, which ordinarily should appreciate equal rights of all genders. The regime could as well be excused the gendered composition of the National Assembly in its first term (1999 - 2003), as the transitional general elections that heralded the administration was organized by the military. In the Senate, there were only five (4.6%) women out of 109 members. The House of Representatives (HOR), which composed of 360 seats produced 13 (3.6%) women. Men headed both chambers. The leadership of the Senate changed thrice, while that of HOR twice. Yet, women were not given any opportunity to lead the Houses. The executive cabinet composed by President Obasanjo had 43 male and 6 female ministers.

At the regional/state level, all the 36 governors were men. The only female deputy governor, (Mrs Kofoworola-Akerele Bucknor, Lagos State) was impeached before the end of her term by the male-dominated House of Assembly. The woman was subjected to both executive and legislative violence throughout the period.

Sexism is not restricted to the political sphere. Women are also subjected to discrimination in the nation's judicial system, the armed services and the banking sector. No woman has become the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court or the Attorney General of the Federation. Of in fact, the first female Justice of the Supreme Court was appointed in April, 2005 when Justice Aloma Mukhtat was so approved by President Obasanjo (Ugbagwu, 2005: 1). All the military service chiefs - Army, Navy, Airforce and the Police Force have all been men since independence. A woman also has not headed the Defense Ministry. Likewise, no woman has ever been appointed as the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria. In fact, the Deputy Governor of the apex bank, Mrs M.A. Mshelia was sacked by President Obasanjo for political reasons and replaced with a male (Oloja, 2005: 3). The question, therefore, is; when will the nation produce its first female President,

Governor, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and female Service Chiefs? It is apposite at this point to theoretically interrogate the forces propelling sex biases in the nation's politics.

THEORIES OF SEXISM

Feminists and gender scholars have rationalized varied justifications theoretically for sexism. These rationalizations are often situated within the boundaries of physiology/biology, tradition, culture, materials and modernity.

The fundamental physical and physiological differences between men and women, in part, account for the ascribed masculine supremacy, and patriarchy inevitability in societies (Kramarae and Treichler, 1988: 2261). Patriarchism is the most crucial form of feminine domination, the legitimacy of which ironically rests upon tradition. Sargent (1981: 90) consents to the differentiation in role allocation and eventual subordination of women as a by-product of bio-physiological differences.

Cultural gender determinists notably Ann Oakley and Sherry Ortner espoused the view that culture and society are the deciders of gender roles. In their respective analysis, they opined that culture is the sum total of human societies' accumulation of traditions, values, norms, prescription of behaviour, among other things, over the years of their existence (George, 1990: 25-26). Accordingly, these legacies are transmitted from generation to generation, and members of a culture determine gender roles, thereby, the universal subordinate status of women in politics is historical, having been determined by culture and society, and which members think of as absolute and unchangeable (ibid). In essence, the cultural order puts men above women. Accordingly, the order bestows on man the responsibility to guard the terms and the natural foundations upon which the development of society and the home is founded, while the woman guards the home unity and health as well as the integration of society through rearing, including the nurturing of the off-springs when they are young (Abayomi, 2000: 27-28).

The materialist (Marxist) analysis of the women question takes a different dimension on the feminist question. It examines the status of women in relation to the economic system, rather than the relationship between men and women. The end point of the analysis is that women's oppression is in connection with production.

Marxist feminists consequently focus on housework and its relation to capital, arguing that housework produces surplus value and that house workers work directly for capitalists (Sargent, *op. cit.*: 4). The men (husbands) act as the domestic capitalists or compradors, who subject the housewives to exploitation as the latter's labour in the home including providing services as laundry, cooking, cleaning the environment and child rearing, are not subjected to economic evaluation or monetization and be so rewarded accordingly. Women's oppression will cease to exist, in the projection of George (*op. cit.*: 27), when class oppression disappears as a result of proletarian revolution, which will invariably emancipate both men and women from capitalist exploitation. Unfortunately, the dream of women liberation and emancipation from men's oppression may not be attainable because of the demise of communism, which had intended to provide the ideological framework and foundation for such revolutionary putsch by the oppressed workers.

Gendered theologists in their justifications, rationalize religious injunctions as the determining basis for gender inequality in the society.

These theoretical factors are assumably deterministic of the sex roles in the society, and by extension, decide life opportunities and how far each sex can go in the societal scheme of things.

WOMEN AND THE 2003 ELECTIONS

The 2003 general elections presented women a good opportunity to navigate their way to power. Besides their demographic strength, which, according to the 1991 census, is at parity with that of men, women commanded a greater electoral standing than men as they constituted 60% of the registered voters for the election like what obtained in the 1990 local government elections and the 1999 general elections (Oshin, 2001: 14). However, compared to the 1999 elections, women voters recorded 5% improvement in their turnout in 2003 (Omede, 2004: 63-77).

In the party primaries, women were systematically discriminated against and subjected to the usual feminism by men. The unjust elimination of women from the primaries ensured the domination of the competitive posts by men

in all the parties. For instance, of the 20 contestants for the presidency, only three (15%) were women. Apart from the fact that the three parties that nominated them were in the minority and relatively unpopular parties without a nationwide membership spread, they were not known to have campaigned for electoral victory beyond the immediate domicile of the women aspirants. In addition to the unpopularity of the parties, only one of the three women contestants, Mrs Sarah Jubril, was relatively heard of before the election, others were politically unknown personalities.

Realizing the gender injustice that marked the primaries, women leaders in the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) had petitioned the National Chairman of the party and physically protested to President Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo merely affirmed that the socio-cultural context of Nigeria was not supportive of women's participation in governance (WRAPA, 2003: 9).

It was not a surprise however, that women were marginalized in the primaries. All the parties' national and state chairpersons were men, while men dominated the executive members. Though, many women registered as party members but did not regularly participate in party meetings and caucuses where important decisions were taken. They dreaded such party congregations because of fear of violence and the nocturnal character of the meetings, which they believe, only dirty and irresponsible women can attend (Mainman, 2002: 15).

Prior to the elections, there were campaign rallies, which were largely dominated by women. Women often made such political fora very much lively as they were the most active in terms of adorning the occasion with beautiful attires, dancing, shouting party slogans and singing endlessly the praises of electoral candidates and party leaders who were invariably men. Nonetheless, despite the active participation of women in the electoral processes, women marginality was sustained in the elections as they remain victims of traditional gender violence.

In spite of all the inter-sex violence on women, they still had ample electoral opportunity to acquire power and effect change by virtue of their greater (60%) electoral capacity. However, at the end of the elections, women voters failed to convey their electoral strength to political victory by not voting women contestants in the elections. Instead, they sustained their traditional electoral behaviour of overwhelmingly voting for the

opposite gender. For instance, none of the three women presidential contestants won. In fact, out of the twenty competitors, women candidates namely Sarah Jubril, Antonia Ferreira Jorge and Mojisola Adekunle Obasanjo came 6th, 16th and 20th respectively in the overall results. In that order, out of the total valid votes of 39,480,489 cast in the presidential election, they scored 157,560 (0.40%), 6,727 (0.02%) and 3,757 (0.01%) votes (INEC, 2003), while Olusegun Obasanjo, a male, who eventually won the election for the second term scored 24,456,140 (61.94%) of the gross votes (*ibid.*).

There were also three women vice-presidential candidates whose parties came 8th, 14th and 17th in the overall results. Mrs. Antonia Ferreira Jorge had no vice-presidential candidate for the election, implying that no man was prepared to pair with her as a second fiddle.

At the state level, the thirty parties, which contested the elections, did not field a single woman for the gubernatorial election, implying that all the 36 states' governors were men. There were only two (5.6%) female deputy governors (Ogun and Osun States) out of 36. The results of elections to the national parliament show that women won 3 (2.8%) of the 109 seats in the Senate, implying no improvement over the 1999 records. In the House of Representatives (HOR), women won 19 (5.3%) of the 360 seats as against 12 (3.3%) in 1999, implying a slight improvement in 2003. In the 36 state Houses of Assembly with a cumulative total of 990 seats, women won only 24 (2.4%) seats. Women had 20 (2.0%) seats in 1999. When analysed on state-by-state basis, many of the Houses had no female members while some, such as Ekiti State have just one member.

The leadership of both the national and regional assemblies, since 1999, has been gendered. No woman has been elected as Senate president and speaker of the HOR. In spite of the high turnover of the Senate presidency, which had changed five times between 1999 and 2005, no woman has been deemed fit to occupy the position. At the state level, in the 2003-2007 term, only two (5.6%) women were elected as speakers of their respective Houses of Assembly (Anambra and Ogun States) out of 36 states. However, the Anambra State speaker, Mrs Eucharia Azod was impeached barely three months of her election. Implying that there is now only one (2.8%) female speaker out of 36. The marginalization of women in the parliaments' leadership manifests deep bias

in their in-house politics.

Besides competitive elective positions, women have also been reduced to sideline actors in appointive posts at all levels of governance. At the federal level, Obasanjo's second term cabinet has only 6 (12%) women out of 49 ministers, the rest were men. Only three of the six were given substantive cabinet posts. None of the three is put in-charge of key ministries such as Petroleum, Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs and Defense. One of the three, (Mrs Mobolaji Osomo) has been sacked by the President for administrative impropriety on government's housing scheme (Ekenna, 2005: 24-25), thereby reducing women slots to five (10%) ministers. And out of 11 Senior Special Advisers to the President, only one (9.1%) is female. Appointment to ambassadorial positions and into the 36 states' cabinets and boards of public parastatals and corporations at the Federal and State levels are also lacking in gender justice and consciousness.

Besides, the composition of the on-going National Conference on Political Reforms constituted by President Obasanjo is deeply gendered. The 400 - delegate Conference has only 30 (7.5%) women (The Editor, 2005: 1). Of the total number, federal and state governments selected 366 delegates. The chief executives at both levels of government are all men. The discrimination against women in the conference's composition could, therefore, be expected.

The Conference is to re-construct the nation's future politics. It can therefore, be assumed that the final decisions of the conference will be skewed against the women since they suffer adequate representation in the dialogue. The outcome may not redress the plight of women regarding their marginalization.

The overall implications of the election results, partly from the electoral behaviour of women voters, are that women preferred to vote for men in the elections than their own gender. A situation akin to same sex violence and discrimination in electoral politics. Another is that nothing has really changed for women despite the varied advocacy for the political empowerment of women.

ANALYSIS OF SURVEYED DATA

The study surveyed women's opinions on their participatory roles in the 2003 general elections and their perceptions about party

politics and the office of the First Lady. A total of 900 women were randomly surveyed by way of giving them questionnaires. The field survey made use of cluster random sampling, which grouped the targeted women population into six geo-political zones namely; North East, North West, South East, South West, the Middle Belt and the Southern Minorities. Each zone comprised of six states to make a total of 36 states of the Nigerian Federation. The Middle Belt has, as part of it, the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The clustered grouping coincided with the official geo-political zoning system. The survey utilized simple random sampling method to pick three states from each zone. In this way, Borno, Kaduna, Jigawa, Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo States were chosen. Other states were Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Plateau, Kogi, Kwara, Delta, Cross River and Bayelsa. Clustered sampling technique was adopted in order to ensure collection of opinions from across all the geo-political regions and ethno-religious diversities in the country in order to collect a balanced response and ensure representativeness of sampled survey.

A total of 900 (N = 900) questionnaires were distributed for the survey out of which 682 (75.7%) valid responses were received. Frequency distribution of the age of the surveyed women shows that all were adults. Specifically, 179 (26.2%) of the respondents were between 18 - 30 years old, while 503 (73.8%) were above 30 years old. The essence of collecting information on age was to be sure that only adults of voting age were polled.

On the socioeconomic profile of the surveyed respondents, first, in terms of educational qualification, of the 682 valid respondents, 72(10.6%), 36(5.3%), 108(15.8%) and 36(5.3%) respectively had Primary School Leaving Certificate, Secondary School Certificate, National Diploma and Higher National Diploma Certificate. Others possessed first degrees (179 or 26.2%) and post-graduate degrees, including masters and post-graduate diploma (71 or 10.4%). Seventy-two (72 or 10.6%) were undergraduates. A total of 72 respondents had no academic qualifications. The essence of securing information on the respondents' qualifications was to be sure that they relatively understood what the survey was about and thereby, to some extent, be able to contribute to the gender issues at stake. The surveyed data show that most of the women, at

least, had elementary education. The occupational analysis of the survey shows that the surveyed respondents cut across varied employment. Of the N = 682 valid respondents, farmers were 45 (6.6%), traders, 72 (10.6%), administrators, 72 (10.6%), teachers, 72 (10.6%), civil servants, 250 (36.7%), house wives, 72 (10.6%), and students, 72 (10.6%). Only 36 (5.3%) respondents were not employed. The merit of the application of the survey instrument is that, the spread of the questionnaire across the identified trades and professions enabled the study to determine the level of gender consciousness and awareness of women in the various industries where they operate.

On the question whether respondents voted in the 2003 election (Q1), table 1 shows that 539 (79%) of valid respondents voted, while 143 (21%) failed to exercise their franchise rights. The preponderance of as much as 79% of polled respondents voting in the election shows that women were aware of their rights to vote in an election, which they actually exercised. In the 2003 election, three female and seventeen male candidates contested for the presidency. Q2 investigated which gender the respondents voted for. The survey results, as shown in the table, show that 502 (74%) of the same sex respondents voted for male presidential candidates, while none voted for any of the three female aspirants.

Q4 queried the respondents who voted for male candidates on the reasons that informed their electoral behaviour. Justifications included such arguments as: belonging to the same political party, and ethnic groups; directed by husband to do so; for continuity; wanted a good leader for Nigeria; hardworking man; men have capacity to deliver being in a male world; and men can perform better.

These responses are gendered, and are merely playing up and re-affirming the traditional biases against women in a sexist society. The respondents believed that men are more qualified, capable and suitable for the tasks of the presidency than women, and therefore, did not vote for any woman contestant. Another implication of the responses is that many women are still dictated to by men (husband) on what political decisions to take. The responses show that women, not minding the implications for their status in the system, have imbibed the biases and allow them to determine their fate in the system.

Table 1; Field survey: Response to specific issues (N = 682)

Questions (Q)		Response (Number and %)		
		Yes	No	No response
Q1:	Did you vote in the 2003 elections	539 (79%)	143 (21%)	
Q2:	If your response to the question above is yes, whom did you vote for in the Presidential election?	502 (74%)	00 (0%)	180 (26%)
	(a) Male candidate (b) Female candidate.			
Q5:	Would you like to vote for a woman to be President in 2007?	610 (89%)	72 (11%)	
Q7:	As a woman with political rights, are you a member of any political party in Nigeria?	108 (16%)	575 (84%)	
Q9:	If your response to question No. 7 is yes, as a member of a political party, do you attend party meetings and caucuses regularly?	72 (11%)	36 (5%)	574 (84%)
Q11(a):	Has your husband ever restrained you from attending political party meetings?	72 (11%)	431 (63%)	179 (26%)
Q11(b):	Were you restrained by your husband to be an active member of a political party?	70 (10%)	252 (37%)	360 (53%)
Q13:	Would you contest an elective post in the 2007 elections?	00 (0%)	646 (95%)	36 (5%)
Q16:	Would you say that the office of the First Lady is helpful to women political empowerment in Nigeria?	395 (58%)	252 (37%)	35 (5%)
Q18:	Has the Obasanjo administration been fair to women's political empowerment?	321 (47%)	321 (47%)	40 (6%)

Source: Field Survey August, 2004 - February, 2005.

Q3 asked a follow-up question on why the 143 respondents who responded negatively to Q1 i.e. did not vote in the 2003 election. The respondents opined that they had a lukewarm attitude towards the election because it had no benefits to them and that voting system had not truly worked in the country. They also stayed away because of anticipated violence. These responses actually reflect the level of ignorance and cynicism, which characterize the Nigerian women on electoral politics. Implying that women detest politics because of violence and vote rigging. Rigging is a major attribute of emerging democracies, which may not be overcome soonest because of allocational politics associated with it, and which invariably make politics in the developing world a deadly, do-or-die game. Staying away by women from electoral politics because of the associated fraud and violence implies exclusion and marginalization from the allocational politics/dividends.

On whether the women respondents will vote a woman to be president in the 2007 election (Q5), 610(89%) responded positively to the question, while 72 (11%) said no. Q6 requested respondents to provide reasons for their respective responses. The majority of respondents who claimed they would vote for a female presidential aspirant averred that a female presidency would create

more opportunities for women to empower themselves politically and at the same time provide avenues for women to prove themselves as better than men. They also believed that women are faithful, honest, caring and not prone to corruption, and therefore, women leadership would design policies that will be beneficial to all. However, some of the affirmative respondents still hinge their voting for a female aspirant on the conditions that, one, if the female contestant comes from their own ethnic group. Two, that if their husbands directed them to vote for a woman. The latter response is still a manifestation of the masculine domination, and the total dependence, of the whole thinking of many women in the society. The 11% respondents who claimed they would not vote a female candidate believed that woman just cannot get to the presidency. They argued that Nigeria is not yet mature for a female president. These responses are merely stereotyped gender biases. However, the majority affirmative view in favour of a female candidate is considered speculative and aspirational for now. This cynic view is informed by the outcome of 2003 elections and the fact that women are not yet conscious of the competitive power relations between them and the men-folk.

On the issue of political membership (Q7), 108(16%) respondents were registered political

party members, while 575 (84%) were not. The survey asked the latter group of respondents on why they did not join political parties (Q8). Non-civil servants in the group claimed that they were not politicians and therefore, not interested in politics. They also argued that bitterness, hatred, bribery and corruption and insecurity characterize politics in Nigeria. Consequently, it is not advisable for a woman to stick her head into politics. Some of the respondents also believed that politics in the country is too expensive, and therefore, the high level of poverty among women constrained active participation in party politics.

Q9 asked respondents who answered affirmatively to Q7 to indicate whether they attend political party meetings regularly. Seventy-two (11%) claimed they attended regularly, while 36 (5%) did not. The respondents in the two divides gave reasons for their responses (Q10). The first group believed that attendance of party meetings was necessary in order to gain relevance and to make business connections. Respondents in the second group did not attend because they did not have the time and those meetings are always prolonged into the dead of the night, which they could not afford. In addition, attending party meetings at night is considered risky as one's life is at the mercy of party tugs, armed robbers and assassins.

On the problem of family constraints on feminine participation in politics, Q11 interrogated the respondents on whether their husbands were restraining them from attending party meetings and be active members of political parties. Seventy-two (11%) claimed they were restrained by their spouses from meetings, while 432 (63%) responded no to the question. Non-response on the issue accounted for 179 (26%) respondents. On being active members of parties, 70(10%) respondents were restrained by their spouses, 252 (37%) were not, while 360 (53%) did not respond to the question, probably because they were not party members or detested politics in general. The affirmative respondents provided varied reasons for their response to Q11. According to them, they were restrained because their husbands did not like politics for the negative perceptions they have of it as being violent and risky.

The respondents were asked whether they would contest an elective post in the 2007 election (Q13). None of the respondents aimed at contesting for any positions, but as many as 646

(95%) categorically said they would not contest. Thirty-six (5%) did not respond to the question. Respondents gave reasons for their stance as required by Q14. The non-contesting respondents averred, among other reasons, that; one, they feared competitive party politics because it lacked the fear of God for its attendant violence and insecurity to lives and property. Two, that election finance is too expensive in the country and consequently, they had no such money for elaborate campaigns and bribing the electorate and election officials. The lack of money is coupled with the failure of women contestants to secure "god fathers" to foot their election expenses. Three that the electorate would not even vote for a female contestant, and therefore, there is no point wasting one's time, energy and resources. Finally, because of the skewed chance of being elected, which is against women, that they preferred appointive positions in government.

On the role of the First Lady in women political empowerment (Q16), 395 (58%) of the respondents believed that the office was helpful to feminist advocacy, while 252 (37%) did not share the view. Thirty-five (50%) respondents were undecided on the issue. The respondents who affirmed the opinion claimed that the occupiers of the office had used it to enhance women political status in politics through appointment of women as ministers, special advisers to chief executives and heads of agencies. That, through the office, women now have direct contact with the seat of power. However, respondents who opposed the view were, of the submission that despite the First Lady's office, the mass of women remains poor, uninformed and powerless, and therefore nothing to show for the justification of the office. According to these respondents, the First Lady is more noticeable on television screens. They believed that the office is wasteful, unproductive, and therefore, be scrapped. However, the preponderance of opinions (58%) that the office of the First Lady is promotive of the feminist cause contradicts earlier widely held view that the office is merely advancing the privatized economic interests of the First Ladies.

Furthermore, on the political empowerment issue, Q18 sought to know if the Obasanjo administration had been fair to the women's political empowerment course. There was a balanced number of respondents answering yes

or no to the question. A total number of 321 (47%) responded affirmatively and the same figure rejected the claim. Forty (6%) did not respond to the question. The affirmative respondents avowed that the regime had appointed women into cabinet positions and chief executive positions of some corporations and agencies such as the National Agency for Foods and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and the Nigeria Stock Exchange. However, the other equal number of respondents opposed to the view canvassed that the administration had failed to give more positions to women in government, and therefore, women remained a marginalized gender in the system.

The survey questionnaire provided for free comments at the end of questions on specific issues (Q20). The aggregated opinions brought out clearly three major submissions. One, women still have a long way to go in achieving gender equality and justice in Nigeria, and believed that women could be given a chance in political leadership if men acknowledged women's capacity and capability. Two, respondents noted that political appointments are still lopsided in favour of men as few positions are allocated to women. Three, that women politicians should respect the institution of marriage, and therefore, should not abandon their homes for politics. This latter position implies that women should remain subservient to men as culturally demanded, and consequently, should not be as active as men in politics. The paradox, therefore, is that women desire political empowerment and gender-equality based on an asymmetric relationship with men, a relation, which can only continue to consolidate gender-imbalance in national affairs.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Emerging from the findings is that women remain politically endangered specie in Nigeria. Not only that they have been subjected to inter-sexist biases powered by socio-cultural, economic and general systemic violence, they are also victims of self-immolation fuelled by intra-sexism arising from the fear factor, cynicism, lack of gender-competitive consciousness and gender-complex.

Nigerian women have electoral capacity to acquire power and thereby effect political change by virtue of their superior electoral strength over men, but are lacking in gender competitive

consciousness, particularly in a system entrenched with patriarchal hegemonic leadership, and with male political elite unprepared to accede to gender justice.

Intra-gender sexism and same-sex marginality are founded, first, on the dominant perception of politics as a "dirty game" by the Nigerian women. Politics is more basically seen from its negative attributes of violence, rigging and politically - inspired arson and assassination. Women fear participating in politics under these auspices. Second is the deviant factor. The few women who can summon courage to participate in politics under the murky and violent conditions, coupled with attendance of party meetings at nocturnal periods, are labelled as deviants, renegades, dissenting daughters and irresponsible women for abandoning their homes at odd hours. Significantly, this belief has made women voters not to vote for women contestants during elections. The fear of insecurity and name-calling, therefore, constitutes serious obstacle to gender-empowerment advocacy.

The fear factor, however, should be seen as a product of the social conditioning and religious/cultural indoctrination of women, which has made them to believe that politics is mainly a masculine affair. It should be noted that the negative characters of politics - violence, rigging, arson and assassination - are hallmarks of competitive politics, particularly in Africa and generally, in the developing world. Women cannot, therefore, desire power and at the same time detest competitive politics for its vices. It can, therefore, be reasonable to submit that the fear of politics as a dirty game by women will only consolidate feminine dis-empowerment and exclusion from the political process. The womenfolk need a new political cultural re-orientation as to the imperative of embracing and helping each other in competitive politics and reconstructing their psychological disposition.

Women have failed to acknowledge the existing gender competition in the contemporary world. Ideological cold war has been replaced by "gender war", war of sex equality and justice. The failure of women to realize this culminates in certain outcomes, which include perceiving politics as dirty, name-calling of female politicians as deviants and voting overwhelmingly for men contestants rather than women in elections.

The poor level of consciousness of women regarding the sex 'class' struggle between them

and men is a product of two deficiencies. One, is that the majority of Nigerian women are illiterates. As much as 61% of the women's 44 million population (1991 census) suffer from intellectual poverty (Ojuolape, 2000: 7). The majority is ignorant and unconscious because they are not lettered and most of the few that are educated are uninformed and apolitical. There is, therefore, the urgent need for a concerted effort to increase the literacy level of the Nigerian women. The state, civil society organizations and individuals should advance the education of the girl-child. The girl-child is a victim of societal neglect and institutional biases as the society and state give premium to the boy-child education. Two, is defective advocacy strategy. All gender-mainstreaming advocates are urban-based. Gender civil society organizations and other feminist initiatives are located in the federal capital, Abuja and the 36 state capitals. Implying that the target advocacy is just the urban dwellers. Ironically, 70% of the Nigerian women are rural dwellers. Another implication of this is that, the majority are excluded from the advocacy enlightenment.

In order to yield better dividends, feminist advocacy should employ grassroots mobilization strategy. Existing advocacy interventions should be territorially and institutionally decentralized from the urban locations to the rural areas, schools, religious centres, clubs and workplaces for wider coverage. Complementarily, advocacy language should reflect the divided character of the Nigerian State with more than 400 tongues. Advocacy, including political and voter education should be conducted in local languages for effective communication, understanding, and impact.

Contents of feminist advocacy also deserve re-examination for reformulation. It is not enough to preach gender-equality in national affairs. There should be a shift of emphasis to the need for women to individually be empowered (personal empowerment). Believe in personal empowerment will energize their sense of courage (ie. create anti-phobia for politics) and boost their self-confidence and self-image as having the capacity and competence for political leadership at all levels. Believe in personal capacity will enable women to contest elections and help themselves in politics.

Lastly, is the state factor in gender asymmetry in national affairs. The Nigerian state has consistently failed to abide by the internationally

agreed affirmative actions (1985 Nairobi and 1995 Beijing United Nations Declarations and the 1999 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) on gender equality in the political process. Political leadership at the three tiers of governance remains gendered. This, therefore, implies that official policies and actions are skewed against women. It is, therefore, not a surprise that Nigeria is rated lowest in efforts to empower women (Obe, 2002: 11) and criticized at varied international fora for consistently abusing women (*The Editor*, 2005: 7). Besides imploring the three - tiers of government to observe existing affirmative instruments for gender - mainstreaming, a Gender Character Principle (GCP) should be enacted as part of the nation's constitution. Enactment of a legal framework either by the National Assembly or the on-going National Conference on Political Reforms should make it mandatory for governments at all levels to ensure about a 30% - 40% women representation in all affairs of the state. Such gender - sensitive legislation will also alter the prevailing sexist attitudes, and therefore guarantee women's political future, particularly in the 2007 elections. Adequate inclusion of women in governance will give more meaning to the nation's emerging democracy. Any democracy that excludes a gender that possesses as much as 60% of electoral votes is an unjust and decorative democracy. Likewise, the concept of good governance must transcend governmental efficiency in social service delivery to embrace issues of distributional justice to all genders. Consequently, any official policy, which is insensitive to gender equality and justice, must be adjudged as bad governance.

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