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Published & Printed by
SNAAP PRESS LTD.,
1 Snaap Drive, Independence Layout,
P.O. Box 11204, Enugu. Phone: 042 - 459902

Vol. 1 No. 3, June 2002 ISBN 978-8010-62-8

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KOINONIA

ST. JOSEPH MAJOR SEMINARY STUDIES

KOINONIA
Aims And Objectives

Koinonia is a bi-annual Journal published by the academic staff of St. Joseph's Major Seminary,Ikot Ekpene, Nigeria.

The primary aim of the Journal, as *the Koinonia* implies, is to share scholarly ideas through well-researched articles on various aspects of theology and philosophy, with particular emphasis on how these disciplines should contribute to solving the socio-political, economic and religious problems of Nigeria in particular and Africa at large.

The Journal therefore, is intended to be a forum for the exchange of insights among scholars, especially from Africa and the so-called "third world," on the manifold problems of Africa and Africans.

Although, the main focus of the Journal is to publish articles on the two related disciplines of theology and philosophy, it nevertheless accepts for publication, well-researched materials from other related fields such as sociology, cultural anthropology, political science, economics, and even history, etc., provided such materials satisfy the primary aim of exploring the diverse problems of life in Nigeria/Africa and attempting to offer solutions to them.

Women Empowerment And Participation In Politics:

AN IMPORTANT INDEX OF NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY

By

Ikenga K. E. Oraegbunam

Preface

At times one wonders whether there is anything wrong in being a woman. Until recently sociology of various religions and cultures reveals that the disdain of women was not merely occasional. It was widespread. According to Indian theories of reincarnation and Karma, a woman cannot enter into paradise (nirvana). She must first be reborn in a man. And if a man leads a wicked life, Hindu-Buddhist thought expects him to reincarnate into a woman by the next life. The dualism of Persian religion too associates men with the good and women with evil.[1] In Judaism, women are regarded as religious and legal minors; and in some mainline Christian sects, they are denied the power of the pulpit for reasons mainly of tradition rather than theology.[2]

In Nigeria, the problem of Women may not be merely religious. It is also cultural and socio-political. Various Nigerian cultures in their ethnic diversities have more or less relegated women to associate positions. In some, women are generally looked upon as labourers and child bearers in marriage institutions that look like mere baby factories. In others, perhaps until recently they were generally denied opportunity for education and thus employment attendant to such educational opportunity. They had little or no leisure nor do they have recreation and control of their own lives. Politically, women are already looked down upon by a worldview, which sees them as a mere property of the man expected to be available at every beck and call in the midst of a thorough-going partriachal society. Hence that a woman rules over a man cannot be conceived of in the gamut of traditional Nigerian life.

Presently, not only that Nigeria is a male-dominated society, it is also one in continuous romance with all manner of absurdities and complex anatomy of corruption. It ranges from the Trinitarian forces of economic profligacy and tatteredness, political subterfuge, and neo-military dictatorship to executive lawlessness, looting culture, cult of ethnicity, religious bigotry, praise singing galore, and orgy of sycophancy. Yet it is

in a complex society like this that the womenfolk desires to take on a political role.

The aim of this essay is to explore the social status and sociological attitudes to women. From there, we shall look at the possibility, the problems and prospects of Nigerian women's political involvement. We shall not before then fail to adumbrate the various attempts already made by women to alleviate their problems. Our approach will be largely sociological.

Antiquities Of Women Subjugation Through Social Studies

The Nigerian attitudes towards women are not different from those of any other patriarchal society. Therefore it may be necessary to go beyond Nigeria in order to illustrate by excavating the common denominator inherent in the feminine predicament. A sociological tour to various parts of the world brings this feminine problem to the fore. Hence in Asia, a newborn baby is buried alive, and in oriental countries, a toddler starves to death in an orphanage, unwanted and unattended. The story is not different in some countries of West Africa where a businessman buys a nine-year-old child. Sociological studies reveal that a common denominator links these tragedies: All the victims are girls. Their being females meant that they were considered dispensable.

These are not isolated cases. In some parts of Africa thousands of girls and young women are sold into slavery, some for very little money even in modern times. And it is reported that each year hundreds of thousands of young girls are sold or forced into prostitution mostly in Asia. Worse still, population figures for a number of countries indicate that as many as 100 million girls are 'missing." This is evidently due to abortion, infanticide, or sheer neglect of females.[3]

For many years, females have been viewed this way in many lands including the today Nigeria. Why? Because in such lands a greater value is placed on boys. There it is felt that a boy can continue the family line, inherit property and take care of parents when they get old. This apartheid of gender does not end when girls reach adulthood. Gory and lurid tales abound of the humiliating attitudes of men towards women in the ancient Greco-Roman world. Women were often treated like labour tools in the mechanical workshop of their husbands.

Among the Romans, the female status was generally so low that they were mostly left uneducated, regarded as chattels and treated as legal minors. Ancient Greece too saw women as "necessary evils." This is consequent upon the influence of Aristotelian Biology which regards

man as the active, life and form-giving principle in procreation and woman as merely passive, offering only the matter.[4] According to this biology, only men ought to be born and women if born at all must be seen as failures and defects, maimed men of a sort. Thus Demosthenes the Greek Orator is said to have declared that:

> *Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.*[5]

This sub-human feminine existence finds its most eloquent expression among the Jews. Contemporary Jewish sources are full of animosities towards women who according to Josephus, the Jewish historian, are in every respect inferior to men.[6] Men are advised to talk very little with their own wives, still less with other women. Women lived as far as possible withdrawn from public view. In the worshipping community of the Jews, women's access to the temple is limited only to the women's fore court; and in regard to obligation of prayer, they were in the same category as slaves. They could be married as early as the age of twelve. The female divorcees are the most socially beaten, battered and bruised by a system that even finds a codified justification in the Torah.[7] A woman in Hebrew culture can never constitute a count-head and that explains why she is not counted in any serious population census.[8] No wonder the daily prayers of the Jews contained a thanks-giving which praises the Lord for not creating them women. The surrounding Arab world deeply infused with Islam does not paint a different picture. For although it is sometimes incorrectly said that the Koran denies women a soul, their concrete social condition in the Moslem community (Ummah) is one of great restriction on their freedom and total subbordination to the authority of their husbands.[9] Recently, the president of the World Bank explained:

> *Women do two-thirds of the world's work .... Yet they earn only one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property. They are among the poorest of the world's poor.*[10]

According to a United Nations report, more than 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people of the world who live in dire poverty are women. "The number of rural women living in absolute poverty rose by nearly 50 percent over the past two decades. Increasingly, poverty has assumed a woman's face."[11]

Even more traumatic than the grinding poverty is the violence that

wrecks the lives of so many women. Rape is widespread. Other forms of sexual harassment against them abound. Driving the message homewards, one notices that the mass of Nigerian women are among the most oppressed in the world. "Many Nigerian women are denied basic social and cultural rights enjoyed by men. Infertile or childless women are often treated like stigmatised members of society. Females are sometimes contracted into polygamy and other forms of marriage against their will. Women are often victims of imposed traditional mourning rites and rituals. Refusal to comply with these rites often attract stringent punitive measures including ostracism. In our days many Nigerian young girls are induced into peddling nudity, which is in essence a derivation of prostitution."[12] Female trafficking is becoming common. In Nigeria, 80 percent of rural women are illiterate."[13]

The above represent only a tip of an iceberg of socio-cultural ordeal encountered by women be it in the wider world or Nigeria in particular. At this juncture, we ask: what have women done to alleviate their problem? This launches us into the next section of this essay.

The Plight Of Women And Women Struggle

For many years of existence, it was taken for granted that women are inferior to men. This idea was not only held by the malefolk but also by women themselves. Thus Alfred Tennyson, the renowned English Poet of 19th century puts it succinctly:

> *Woman is the lesser man, and all thy passions, matched with mine, are as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine.*

Tennyson merely voiced the common place sentiment of most men and women that women are the weaker and men the stronger, sex. The implications and all that go with this assumption constitute the lot of women. Therefore there was the situation whereby women were not even aware of being discriminated against. It was only in the 1950's and 60's mainly that this consciousness was raised, this time largely in Europe and America. This later gave rise to certain reactions which aim it is to better this fractured and fragmented existence of women. Both in Church and State, in public and private lives, the watch-word became "Women Empowerment," Women Liberation" or "Women Struggle." It became the abiding intention of the agitators to seek for equality, relatedness, and inclusiveness in disfavour of hierarchy, separatism and patriarchal power dominance. This intention also gave birth to the slogan: "Whatever a man can do, a woman can also do it, even better." Women began to

permeate into every strata of human profession: politics, economy and industry, religion, sports and in very recent time footballing, all in search of equality. This egalitarian movement too crystalized into an idealogy known as Feminism.

Feminism rooted as it were, claimed in women's experience of sexual oppression engages in a critique of patriarchy. The movement pivots around every effort to demolish every divide between spirit and body, humanity and nature, transcendence and immanence, and above all femininity and masculinity. Unfortunate excesses of this movement include abandonment of the kitchen and the family, entry into professions that are even hazardous to feminine health, war against the preborn especially if it is described as unwanted. Yet women are regarded as those who give life, nurse it and nourish it. It was to awaken the awareness with regard to women status that the world in 1995 was called together in Beijing, China. While this is on global level, what can we say of Nigeria? How have Nigerian women sought to protect their rights and interests? This leads us to the Nigerian circumstances.

Women In Nigeria And Liberation[14]

Like elsewhere, women in Nigeria are subjugated by a male-dominated culture, traditional restrictions, religion and age-old practices. "Frailty, thy name is woman" is a statement which as Hamlet, most Nigerian men and many women would make. It is also good to note that over 80% of Nigerian women are rural and are bedeviled with a lot of socio-political and economic problems.

To an average Nigerian woman, being a woman means one thing: work, more work. Waking up at five o'clock every morning to the drudgery of their daily lives, they remain on their feet until they retire to bed at nine. The rural women constitute a large percentage of the nations population yet majority of them lack education and wallow in palpable ignorance and poverty. The international Labour Organisation's record shows that 75 percent of agricultural output in Africa is the result of women's effort. This is also true in Nigeria. Until recently very minimal percentage of children enrolled for primary education are females so that women education was the exception, not the rule. This happens despite the obvious fact that the woman is the mother of the Nation. In the rural areas, most of the kids who do not go to school or who discontinue their education after primary education are girls. Many are pregnant sometimes before they are two years into puberty. Soon they become mothers who never prepared for motherhood and who do not have the

qualification for any job or knowledge of any trade. As a result they wind up selling oranges and other fruits, palm oil and other petty wares with their babies strapped to their backs. Yet, this aduous task rarely brings the women enough money to feed themselves, buy clothes and drugs, send children to school or generally have decent living. At the micro level, this cycle of rural poverty, which easily translates to national level, remains unbroken.

On the average, most Nigerian rural women have about six children whom they spend all their lives and energies trying to sustain. Yet in the end, rural woman is a bird of passage. She is often forgotten not only by the society but even by the children and husband she laboured so strenuously to sustain. She ends in a cycle of servitude. As soon as she starts aging, her husbands looks for a younger woman to meet his biological needs.

Women in Nigeria are barred by some native laws from sharing in the estates, of either their fathers or husbands. These laws have been in the country's marriage status for a long time. Up till now, women in Nigeria are yet to be accepted to stand bail for suspects at police stations. It is influenced by the same logic which excludes women from tax rebates and holidays, the same syllogism which allows the man fatter leave grants than his female counterparts. It is no matter that the husbands of these women may be unemployed. Until recently, women's tax queries in Britain were forwarded to their husbands.

But in the midst of this gender colonialism, the Nigerian women have not been sitting down bemoaning their status. The Nigerian women have borne the cross of their own struggles, sometimes very gracefully. Many women, according to Ray Ekpu, "are in their strenuous struggle to wear the trousers. They are arming themselves with a sound education."[5] In fact, the percentage of female enrollment in schools in Nigeria is becoming far greater than that of males. They are in handshakes with sound professional skills, with drive, with the can-do spirit. So they are acquiring veritable ammunitions in the battle for identity, for recognition, for relevance, for sunlight rather than moonlight, for wine rather than water. Hence they mean in Nigeria, to prove Tennyson and other male chauvinist pigs wrong.

Apart from some organizations, co-operative societies, religious and international organizations which have been trying to liberate the Nigerian rural women from clutches of disease, poverty, servitude and ignorance, there have been fleets of women Associations in Nigeria founded either by women themselves or by the government. Some of

them are:

1.	National Council of Women's Societies	*NCWS*
2.	National Commission for Women	*NCW*
3.	National Association of Women Journalists	*NAWOJ*
4.	Women in Nigeria	*WIN*
5.	Association of Professional Women Engineers	*APWEN*
6.	International Federation of Women Lawyers	*FIDA*
7.	Medical Women Association of Nigeria	*MWAN*
8.	Professional Insurance Ladies Association of Nigeria	*PILA*
9.	Society of Women Accountants of Nigeria	*SWAN*
10.	Association of Lady Pharmacists	*ALPS*
11.	Nigerian Army Officers Wives Association	*NAOWA*
12.	Naval Officers Wives Association	*NOWA*
13.	Nigerian Market Women Association	*NMWA*
14.	Police Officers Wives Association	*POWA*
15.	Nigerian Air Force Officers Wives Association	*NAFOWA*
16.	National Association of Women in Business	*NABW*
17.	Women Health Research Network in Nigeria	*WHERNIN*
18.	National Association of Media Women	*NAMW*
19.	Better Life for Rural Women	*BLRW*
20.	Family Support Programme	*FSP*
21.	Women in Development	*WID*[16]

These associations have all tried in their various capacities to alleviate the problems of women in Nigeria. But they also have their own problems. We shall discuss few of them to show their objectives, successes and failures.

National Council Of Women's Societies (NCWS)

NCWS is the largest and the most widely known of the above adumbrated organizations. It was founded in 1958 to, among other things, promote the welfare and progress of women, laying emphasis on education and training in various fields. As an umbrella organization, membership to it includes diverse women from all works of life. Although the Council has often spoken vehemently against repressive laws, especially those against women, its officers have always emphasized the fact that NCWS is not a liberation movement and that it prefers to work on issues quietly. It was recognized by the government as the representative body for Nigerian women. However the council was accused of being elitist and lukewarm in its drive for the upliftment of Nigerian women. It failed to pay enough attention to rural women for which reason Maryam Babangida founded the Better Life for Rural Women Programme.

Better Life For Rural Women

The programme, as evidenced from its name was established primarily for the benefit of the rural women. It was meant to integrate them into the scheme of things in the country. According to Maryam Babangida in the address she read on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Better Life fair for rural dwellers at the Tafawa Balewa Square Lagos on the 18th of September 1988, the main objectives of the movement was to emphasize those aspects of development which would help rural women to develop their personal abilities.

This objective was predicated on the fact that "natural economic development cannot be totally effective without the full participation of rural women." Thus the objectives were designed to facilitate[17]:

a. The encouragement and stimulation of these women towards improving their living standards, their families and environment.

b. Achieving a more fulfilling life for women, and thus emphasizing self-development in the area of education, small scale business and recreation.

c. Sensitizing the general populace to the plight of rural women.

d. Mobilizing women for concrete activities towards achieving specific roles in all spheres of national life, and thus bringing them together for a better understanding and resolution of their problems through collective action thereby raising the consciousness of women about their rights and social, political and economic responsibilities.

But be these objectives as they may, how well the programme has succeeded in alleviating the problems of rural women was a subject of emotional debate around the country. While some hold that it made significantly positive impacts in the life of rural women, others including rural women themselves maintain that the programme was no more than another pipeline to siphon public funds and another means through which government functionaries can feather their nests. Others yet prefer to call it "propaganda gambit". "Better Life for Ruling Women", or" Bitter Life for Rural Women". But the most important criticism against the programme is that it lacked rural representation. It was sort of an urban package for the rural women, being more popular among the educated city women than the rurality for whom it was made. Hence there was danger of paternalism.

Practically, all the women associations in Nigeria want to prove to the male-dominated Nigerian society that women can no longer be regarded as second class citizens or appendage of men. Probably the greatest achievement of these women associations is that they have heightened the level of awareness about women issues in the society.

Today, not a few Nigerian women have held very important posts in the government and in various companies and institutions. A simple call of the roll will make the matter clearer. Among the academics and university professors are Grace Alele-Williams, Jadesola Akande, Mene Kisekka, Ucheaga, Theresa Okure, Sr. Prof. Theresa Abang and many of whom have been Vice Chancellors and Deans of University Faculties. Many women have also made inroads into top administrative positions in the Companies, Banks and financial institutions. Kuforiji Olubi, Adenike Adeniran, Cammila Shittu, Violet Arene readily come to mind here. In the Judiciary, women who have big names are legion. They include Zainab Duke, Ansa Edet Mbanefo, Dorothy Eyamba-Idem Sit, Moni Fafiade. In fact today, many faces of women peep through the flapping ears of the grey wig. The magistrate courts have a battery of women and the legal profession has a beehive of them. The medical sector and Engineering, Sciences, hard and soft are all filled up with women. But it is in arts, literary and fine including music, that women achievers are countless. Onyeka Onwenu, Evi-Edna Ogholi-Ogosi, Christy Essien-Igbokwe, Fumi Adams (musicians), Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Hauwa Ali (writers) are only an example. There is no point going into designs and theatre arts for want

of space and time.

What, therefore, we are saying is that since women are found even successful in many areas of human professions, what then can prevent them from equal participation with men in Nigerian politics? What barres them from top political positions including the presidency? This ushers us into women participation in Nigeria politics.

Women In Nigerian Politics

Worldwide, women have always been latecomers in their countries' political participation, a malady that is often caused by male chauvinism and consequent denial of their suffrage. It was only when "Women's suffrage Movements"[18] were founded by women in different parts of Europe and America that things began to fare better. Hence according to Broom and Selznick,

> *Women gained the right to vote in national elections first in New Zealand (1893), then in Australia (1902), Canada (1918), U. S. A. (1920), Japan (1926), England (1928), France (1944). Suffrage was the beginning of a series of legal changes tending towards sexual equality. (Hence), in the U.S.A., the inclusion of the word sex in Title VII of the civil Right Act of 1964 gave women an important tool in their efforts to obtain equal employment.*[19]

In Nigeria, it is to be noted that women had the first exercise of their franchise only in 1977.[20] Today however, there is constant consciousness on the part of women to get to the position of first citizen. Allusion is always made to Margaret Thatcher, (Britain) Indira Ghandi (India), Corazon Aquino (Philippines), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Golda Meir (Israel) who have all ruled their countries. Nigerian women want political power and leadership; and according to Chuba Okadigbo:

> *By power we refer to the acquisition and control of state apparatus and the exercise thereof in the processes of dispensation of the human and material resources of the State. By leadership, we refer to the personality at the helm of national affairs and the manner of his exercise of given or appropriated powers with respect to the dispensation of national resources and this approach to the well being of the people.* [21]

May we note that many Nigerian women have tasted this power and leadership either in party organizations or in the government? Some

instances will be helpful. A. I. Peppie, in the third republic, was the clerk of that Republic's senate. At the same time Latifat Okunnu and Pamela Sadauki were deputy governors in Lagos and Kaduna states respectively, while in Oyo state alone, 130 women were elected into executive positions at the ward level and 176 women won their elections at the local governments and state congresses. On the party level, many were the women in third republic who headed the parties then. For instance, Bose Oshinowo, former speaker of the House of Assembly in Lagos State defeated nine men to head the National Republic Convention (NRC) in the state. More, Helen Gomwalk also defeated six men and became the Chairperson of the NRC in Plateau State. Similarly, Victoria Aguiyi-Ironsi was the Vice-Chairperson of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in third Republic of Imo State. In the fourth Republic, many are women who have been elected into party executives, local government councils, states gubernatorial systems and legislatures, and federal legislatures.

There are still other women whose names cannot be forgotten in the politics of the country. Magaret Ekpo, the veteran politician who was the lone woman voice in the Eastern Region Parliament is one. Others are Catherine Acholonu, Sarah Jubril, Lizzy Ajufo, Tokunbo Dosunmu, Onike Oshodi, who respectively were outstanding in the political race to the presidency. Wuraola Esan, it must be remembered sat as the only woman in the senate of the first Republic.

But there is still room for improvement and Nigerian women are conscious of this. Thus, representatives of Nigerian Women from all walks of life rose from a conference in Abuja, in 1999 to mark the International Women's Day, with demand that 30 per cent of political appointments into the cabinet of the civilian administration of the forth republic be reserved for women. The demand which they said was in consonance with the Affirmative Action Resolution (AAR) was arrived at during the Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing 1995, was contained in the Communiqué of the Conference which was organized by the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD) and the British Council on 10 March 1999.[22]

Although competitive partisan politics for women was highly encouraged by this conference attended by women politicians, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Women in Development (WID) and other eminent women, the conference still "mandated the NCWD to produce a list of eminent and professional women to guide the selection and nomination of women into different positions in government."[23]

This is a clear indication that despite the tremendous progress being made by women, they are still sour-footed and marginalized politically, the reason for which they are employing various means. It then becomes necessary to probe into the root causes of this malaise that plague the Nigerian women's political drive to greater heights.

Problems Militating Against The Full Political Participation Of Nigerian Women

Generally, Nigerian women are grossly and unfavourably handicapped in several ways, to effectively join or challenge the menfolk in the game of politics especially in a society where just "anything" is thrown into it with reckless and scandalous abandon. Some of the factors include:

Lack Of Finance

Nigerian women are very poor while politics has become an extremely expensive venture. Nigerian women are regrettably seriously handicapped in this regard. A society that had for long neglected the proper education and economic empowerment of women had wittingly or unwittingly ensured that her womenfolk are kept in the dark politically. Because of this economic neglect women are poor, and Broom and Selznick observed this:

> *The economic status of women is a special case because of their prestige and authority are... seen as a by-product of the achievement of their husbands, because their position in the labour force is ambiguous and intermittent...*[24]

In other words men control, dominate and distribute the earth's resources according to their fancies. While women make up 50 percent of the world population, women receive only 10 percent of the world's income. Only one percent of the world's property is registered in their names. In Nigeria, the figures will be very dismal compared to the world's. It is also a statement of fact that in sub-Saharan Africa, only 47 percent of women, aged 15 and above are economically active compared to the 85 percent among the menfolk.[25] Therefore poverty as statistics make clear is a militating factor against the Nigerian women's soaring to greater political heights.

Dearth Of Public Employment And Consciousness

Only 20 years ago, precisely 1982, women accounted for only 14 percent of all employment under the Federal Civil Service. [26] Although

situation has today improved considerably one can still understand that this lack of public exposure is a no mean factor constituting an obex in the road towards Nigerian women's political involvement which will even be perhaps a more tasking employment.

Socio-Cultural Factor

Despite the efforts made by Chinweizu's book "Anatomy of Female Power"[27] to adumbrate the various powers possessed by women, Nigeria is still a society where women are yet regarded as the weaker and at times inferior sex whose tasks are not more than nuturant, caring and supportive; and therefore cannot be expected to aspire to leadership, let alone political leadership.

Moreover, politics is about power and position. It can also sometimes bring about pride and prejudice. Both cannot be separated from related concepts such as authority, control, influence and domination. Also related to this is the fact that the notion of power has to do with the ability of an individual or group to influence the course of events in a given society or organization. This considered, there is no gainsaying the fact that the male-dominated society of Nigeria will not readily subject itself under feminine rule. Customs and traditions are always there to support this attitude.

Furthermore, some Nigerian traditional ethos have numerous myths of origin which hold that actions of women have been held responsible for failures of men and at times for the breach of relation between men and their gods. So that just like "Eve in the Bible, through the Greek disaster of Pandora, to the Dinka lady who mortally offended her divinity (Nhialic) by hitting him in the eye with her pestle"[28], Nigerian women are viewed by many men as objects of disaster. It has only to be expected that this type of attitude should translate into matters political.

Finally, Nigeria gives the impression that it is a Moslem country. And we know that just as Maurice Duverger observes, "the social position of women is generally worse than that of men particularly in Moslem countries".[29]

Nigerian Government

Nigerian government has always established several councils and commissions for women development. Babangida Government set up the National Commission for Women (NCW) in 1990 while Abacha Government inaugurated the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. The unfortunate thing is that these same governments see these as avenues to

siphon public funds and even exploit women themselves through hidden agenda. At the end, the women's political ambition, inter alia, is pulverized but left at bay.

Women's Attitude

Many Nigerian women are apathetic or indifferent to politics either because they regard it as dangerous, risky and mud-slinging game or that they have over the years been conditioned to believe that politics is for men alone. Thus women most of the times are antagonistic towards fellow women politicians and would not vote for them. This is why despite their large number, there are very few women elected into political posts.

Again, as Broom and Selznick write, *women tend to have low aspirations, thereby perpetuating their disadvantages. For example, even though many young women have the ability to be physicians, they do not aspire beyond becoming nurses.*[30] This is very true in Nigeria where "Women ... have less imagination, less impulse suppression, a greater fear of the unknown, and a greater apprehension that they will not succeed.[31]

The "Nigerian Factor"

Many people in Nigeria and outside of it have come to see Nigeria as a repository of official corruption. There is wide scale looting, abuse of power in such a way that Nigerian politics has become a major vehicle for corruption of appropriation. On the wider measure, the 1998 corruption perception index of 85 countries reveals that Nigeria took the 81st position. That is to say, it was the 4th to the last most corrupt country in the world. This is so that many have come to identify this system of corruption as the **Nigerian Factors.**

Although women participate directly or indirectly in the perpetration of this corruption spotlight, they can hardly compete with men in a polity that has substructured itself and its politics with corruptionist ideology.

Shortage Of Women Activists

Shortage of women activists is another factor. It is hard to come by women equivalents of Gani Fawehinmi, Bala Usman, Eskor Toyo, Olisa Agbakoba, Matthew Kukah, George Ehusani. One scarcely finds a woman who takes a serious and pronounced stand on important national issues. They all prefer to play safe, even at very crucial periods when they can add their voices to correcting the many ills of the society.

Where this is the case, women cannot fight for or at least hold to their rights towards more political participation.

These mentioned above and many more are some of the factors disturbing Nigerian women's higher political involvement. But what can be done to remedy the situations?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Education

Education is the substructure or the key to any genuine development even politically. So if women are to get to the desired political positions in Nigeria, they should go into education. In recent times, many females are enrolled into institutions of learning far more than the number of males. This can be an advantage to them.

Unity Among The Womenfolk

The saying, **united we stand, divided we fall** must apply to women if they want to emerge political giants. Unnecessary antagonism against one another must be eschewed. They should speak with one voice and avoid sycophancy.

Cultural Change

The socio-cultural denigration of women as inferior sex based, as it were, on sheer patriarchy or at times chauvinism should consider a change of attitude. Some argue that nature and culture have made women inferior. And it is true that man is created by culture. But it is also true that man is a creator of culture for which reason human civilization which emphasizes fundamental human rights and the dignity of the human person, male and female, should demand a process of cultural change. A lot has to be borrowed by way of cultural diffusion,[32] from Christian religion's attitude to women, attitude that seems to give them a considerable position.

Consciousness Raising

Awareness should be awakened in women that they have a lot of potentials in them. Let them too not always think that their status is so low in such a way that they have less aspirations. But care must be taken by them not to denigrate the values of the family, which as it were, are placed under their watchful eyes.

Contributions Of Religious Bodies

The religious bodies should help conscientize the masses on the need not to regard women as subhuman. That is to say, if the religion in question is among those relegating women to mere associate positions, a change of attitude can be called for. It is also the task of these religious bodies to be alive to their prophetic roles in condemning government's marginal attitudes towards women.

CONCLUSION

As Nigeria is embracing democracy and its ideals, it is expected that every segment of the society including women should be encouraged to participate actively in it. This should be part of a process towards women genuine empowerment in its social, economic, political, cultural, religious, moral and spiritual dimensions. True democracy cannot be divorced from this integral liberation of women from several clutches of their lots. For such a democracy would be people and not gender-oriented. Partnership and gender partnership must be sought and consciously too. This is one of the ways in which democracy can be sustained.

As the new millennium is already with us, the nation will require the full participation of all segments of the society. "Good Luck", shall we say, to any society which by commission or omission is bogged down by archaic customs and traditions that inhibit or relegate women. Same goes for anyone that fails to identify and harness their productive and leadership potentials. Democratic nations such as Britain, Israel and India that, at one time or the other, had women political leaders, came out better for it.

Even if we are to achieve this through allocation of political roles to women, so be it. The U.S.A. does this in the name of "Affirmative Action." Afterall, governments exist to promote and protect the interest of all their citizens including the weak, infirm, handicapped and women. This feminine participation in politics will go a long way towards effecting women's liberation and consequent empowerment in all dimensions.

References And Notes

[1] **Karl H. Peschke,** *Christian Ethics*, Vol.2, Bangalore: Theological Publication. In India, 1994,p. 404.

[2] **George O. Ehusani,** *A Prophetic Church,* Ibadan: Intec Printers Ltd., 1996, p. 129.

[3] Cf. *Awake: April, 1998*, A Special Edition on **Women,** published by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, p.3.

[4] Today we know that man merely contributes the male seed (sperm) to the conception of a child. It is only in fusion with the egg from the woman does it become a human being.

[5] **F. Cervantes,** *"Women" in The New Catholic Encyclopaedia.* Vol. 14, p. 993; citing DESMOTHENES, "Oration Against Nearea," 59. 122.

[6] Cf. **Josephus,** *Jewish Antiquities.*

[7] **Roland de Vaux,** *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, London: Longman, 1973, p. 39. Torah consists of the first five books of the Biblical Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) and serves as the Ancient Israel's legal body of rules.

[8] **The Holy Bible.** Cf. the feeding of the five thousand or the four thousand (Jn. 6:1- 15).

[9] Cf. for instance its pudha system.

[10] *Awake!,* op. cit. p. 4

[11] Ibid.

[12] **Ehusani,** *op. cit*, pp. 20 –21.

[13] **Dorothy Nwodo,** An Interview she granted to *The Times* vol. 3 No. 7, p. 25. Dorothy Nwodo was the Chairperson of Better Life Programme in Enugu State during the Third Republic.

[14] For this section, I leaned heavily on December 10, 1990. Edition of *News Watch* captioned *Women in Nigeria.*

[15] **Ray Ekpu,** "The Lesser Man" in Ibid. p. 24.

[16] Cf. **Soji Akinrinade,** *"Women Associations"* in Ibid, p. 31.

[17] Walter Ihejirika, "Better Women For A Better Life" in *The Times,* vol. 3, No. 7 1993, p. 17.

[18] Cf. **Leonard Brood & Philip Selznick,** *Sociology,* 5th ed., London: Harper and Row, 1973, p. 263.

[19] Ibid. p. 182.

[20] **Victor Osarenren,** *"Re: Politics: Where Are the Women"* in *Vanguard,* April 1, 1999, p. 9.

[21] **Chuba Okadigbo,** Power *And Leadership in Nigeria,* Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publication, p. 1

[22] **FARUK ABEJOH-AUDU,** "Conference Wants 3000 of Political Appointments for Women" in *The Punch,* March 15, 1999, p.4.

[23] Ibid.

[24] **Leonard Brood & Philip Selznick,** op. cit, p. 174.

[25] **Victor Osarenten,** *Art. Cit,* p. 9.

[26] **Mike Akpan,** *"Vehicle of Liberation" in Newswatch,* op. cit. p. 37.

[27] **Chinweizu,** *Anatomy of Female Power,*

[28] Cf. **Angela P. Cheater,** *Social Anthropology,* London: Routledge, 1989, p. 241.

[29] **Maurice Dverger,** *The Study of Politics,* Great Britain, Thomas Cromwell Comp; Inc., 1972, p. 50.

[30] **Leonard Broom** and **P. Selznick,** op. cit, p. 116

[31] **D. Fitzgerald,** *"Social Participation and its Effects on Personality"* quoted in Melvin Tumin, *Social Stratification,* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1967, p. 7.

[32] Diffusion refers to the dynamics which result when there is contact between differing cultures with a borrowing of cultural traits (cf. RITCHIE LOWRY, et all, *Sociology, The Sciences of Society,* New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1969, p. 581).