





## Chapter Two

# ‘You Belong to the Other Room’: Women and Gendering Democratisation in Africa


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### Introduction

Liberal democracy is undoubtedly the most popular form of government globally today. Democracy has been described by Omotoso (2016) as a ‘beautiful bride’ that every state, irrespective of the system of government or regime type in place, wants to associate with. The rising profile of democracy may not be unconnected with its inherent potential to protect and promote individuals’ liberty and the dignity of human persons, mitigate civil and political crises through negotiated consensus, retard the frontiers of malfeasance and promote transparency and accountability in governance by ensuring popular



participation in electoral and policy processes (Oladeji, 2019). Put in other words, democracy is often perceived as synonymous with good and efficient governance because it not only promotes mass participation in policy or governance processes but also makes the policies people-oriented. Consequently, democracy is paraded as a global agenda by civil society organisations, development practitioners, and international development or donor agencies to drive out autocracy and 'governance crisis' by pushing for open and competitive public space and the transparent management of state resources in transitioning states, especially in Africa. Liberal democracy is seen as the best policy to remove Africa from the woods and put it back on track to development and greatness (Oladeji & Ayiti, 2020).

The last three decades or so have witnessed a remarkable shift from the hitherto autocratic military or one-party regimes to competitive multiparty *democratic* politics in Africa. Recently, there has been an autocratic reversion in Africa with military coups in several African countries, including Mali in 2020 and 2021, Chad in 2021, Sudan in 2021, Guinea in 2020, Burkina Faso in 2022, Gabon in 2023, and Niger in 2023. The new wave of democratisation, especially adopting the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (WHO, 2018) and the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, has popularised women's political participation and representation, with gender inclusion as a priority target (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020). However, a critical assessment of the re-democratisation processes in Africa would reveal a *reincarnation* of the old order of authoritarianism witnessed under military rule or a one-party system. For instance, the new regime of electoral or party politics, instead of pushing the frontiers of popular participation, has ironically helped to shrink the democratic space and strengthen authoritarian tendencies in the form of 'dominant ruling parties', sit-tight *big man* leadership, and more importantly *male-biased democratisation*. The democratic experiences in many parts of Africa have worked to de-democratise the public space, while electoral politics is an antinomy of democracy (Momoh, 2015). However, democracy may seem in trouble almost everywhere in the world and

needs urgent revival. Its value, viability, and future are more contented now than ever in modern history, or at least since the 1930s (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [International IDEA], 2019).

No wonder, African democracy is ranked very low (41%) compared to 100% in North America, 93% in Europe, and 86% in Latin America. Africa only ranks better than the Middle East at 17%. African democracies are classified as weak, with the continent having the highest number of weak democracies in the world (International IDEA, 2019). The challenge of de-democratisation in Africa can be linked to limited gender equality, as male-dominated democratic processes hinder the broader involvement of women in politics and governance. Interestingly, despite its reputation for poor democratic standards (International IDEA, 2019), Rwanda stands out for its high level of women's political participation and gender equality (African Union Commission-Women, Gender and Youth Directorate [AUC-WGYD], 2022; Memusi, 2021).

It has been argued that the wellness of a democratic society is not only decided by the availability of suitable democratic organisations but also by the degree of freedom given to various social groups to take part in these organisations (Moghadam, 2008). That is, liberal democracy is not only conceivable in terms of democratic institutions – political parties, elections, checks and balances, constitutionalism, and so on – but also by inclusive citizenship and participation rights (Oladeji, 2019). In other words, democratic processes must engender equal power distribution and influence between a plurality of social groups, especially men and women, within a society. Women's political participation is essential to democratisation – democratic consolidation. Consequently, the empowerment of women and the establishment of gender parity and equity are critical elements of liberal democracy. Put in another sense, while women need democracy to flourish – to demand and exercise inclusive participatory rights in public affairs – democracy equally needs women to build a representative and inclusive system of government. In other words, the *gender* of democracy matters! Excluding women from active participation in public

affairs invariably results in what Moghadam (2008) calls *male democracy*, which results in gendering democratisation.

Thus, drawing on the democratisation experience in Nigeria since 1999, this chapter examines the issues of gendering democratisation in Africa. Specifically, the chapter examines the implications of the expression 'you belong to my other room' credited to President Muhammad Buhari in teasing out socio-cultural practices that continue to pose problems for inclusive citizenship and equal power relations between men and women in African democratic politics. The study was wholly qualitative, and data was gathered mainly from secondary sources. The study utilised a content analysis technique to analyse the data gathered. The rest of the chapter is arranged into a statement of the problem, a conceptual and theoretical review, women and democratisation in Nigeria, the other room and male democracy in Nigeria, a conclusion, and recommendations.

## **The Problematic**

Women occupy a very significant position in every society. Throughout history, women have been instrumental in driving the socioeconomic progress of their communities. In the specific case of Africa, historical evidence abounds to show that women had and have been contributing immensely to the economic development of their societies. Women have assumed such roles as mothers, home managers, producers, community organisers, political activists, and custodians of societal history. However, despite the key roles of women, evidence throughout the ages and societies reveals that there has been a preponderance of domination of males over females. Virtually all cultures, through the combination of traditional norms and practices that favour men, support discrimination against women whether at home, in school, in the office, at worship centres, and more importantly, in politics and governance.

In the specific case of Nigeria and Africa, women were known to be politically active and included in the decision-making processes in the traditional pre-colonial societies. In fact, in the traditional societies of present-day Nigeria,

women occupied such important positions as *Ìyálóde*, *Ìyál'òjà*, veteran warriors, and even the highest political position of being crowned queens. For instance, ample historical evidence indicates that women such as Efusetan Aniwura of Ibadan, Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ile-Ife, Emotan of the Benin Kingdom, Omu Okwei of Ossomari, Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana, Queen Iyannegi of the Mossi people in Burkina Faso, Candace Kush of Kush in Ethiopia, and Madam Yoko of Mende in Sierra Leone played key roles in the development of their societies. These women held influential political offices and played essential and complementary roles in economic, social, and cultural spheres in their respective communities. For instance, the city of Zaria in present-day Kaduna state was founded by a woman called Bakwa Turuku, who had a daughter known as Amina. Amina, who succeeded her mother as the Queen of Zaria, was a great warrior who built a high wall to defend the city against invasion, extended its boundaries, and transformed it into a major commercial hub. Similarly, Mọremí Àjàşorò was a legendary Queen of Ile-Ife, renowned for liberating Ife from constant raids by the Ugbo (Igbo) Kingdom (Orisadare, 2021). See Kolawole, et al. (2012) for a nuanced understanding of women's political participation and representation during the Nigerian pre-colonial period.

However, studies have shown that the inclusive nature of traditional African societies was reversed with the advent of colonialism, especially because of the hierarchical structure of the colonial administration, which favoured men over women (Madsen, 2021; Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021; Orisadare, 2021; Ingyoroko et al., 2017; Guyo, 2017; Agbalajobi, 2010; Yetunde, 2003). The colonialists introduced several policies and legislations that promoted patriarchy in Africa. In the British West African Colonies, gender-biased policies and legislation were introduced, which promoted patriarchy and discriminated against women. For instance, in Nigeria, the colonial indirect rule policy, imposition of taxes, and the appointment of Warrant Chiefs resulted in oppression against women. With the adoption of indirect rule, all powers resided in the colonial administrators through the traditional chiefs and customary elites, where

women were entirely excluded from decision-making and governance – which meant no female participation in communal affairs or Nigerian politics (Byfield, 2012).

Similarly, in Kenya, the shift of decision-making from local traditional mechanisms of power to the colonial capital or metropole resulted in a diminished influence for women, who had previously informally influenced the political decisions of male kin (Kilonzo & Akallah, 2021). Memusi (2021) discusses how colonialism impacted Maasai communities and women's political representation. She observes that the indirect ruling system allowed male leaders to redefine relationships and roles, leading to the exclusion and subordination of women in the political and domestic spheres. Memusi highlights how male political authority and economic control were strengthened through new sources of power and control over land for agriculture and cattle. The codification of customary law, perpetuated and protected by the Native Authorities and Native Authority Courts, highlighted the dominance of men and the powerlessness of women (Wambui, 2016).

While the French colonial empire initially granted voting and citizenship rights irrespective of gender, this changed after the Second World War. Thus, specific laws in each colony divided the empire's inhabitants into different citizenship categories, each with modified rights and obligations in the policy of association (Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021). In the specific case of Senegal, especially in the four urban sites of Dakar, Rufisque, Saint-Louis, and the island of Gorée, under the new selective suffrage, black women became citizens who could not vote (Fransee, 2016). Colonialism, therefore, reinforced the status and authority of men and created a new gender hierarchy in colonial Africa (Guyo, 2017).

Consequently, the post-colonial African state evolved into a patriarchal system, which a scholar defines as 'rule by men' (Heywood, 2007:98). Furthermore, the preponderance of military rule in Africa almost immediately after independence cemented male dominance of the political and administrative space with women relegated to the peripheries of public affairs.

Consequently, with the new wave of democratisation in Africa since the early 1980s, there is renewed hope for political inclusion to ensure gender parity between men and women. However, instead of the new democratisation bringing about political equality, it has been gendered, with men dominating the political space. Many factors can be attributed to this significant situation, including cultural, socio-economic, and political or constitutional issues. This shows that the African democratic experience is still far from being inclusive in terms of gender parity. Therefore, this chapter addresses the following questions: Do gender issues matter in democracy or democratisation? Has democratisation in Africa ensured gender parity or inequality? What could be done to ensure political inclusion for women in Africa? To answer these questions, as noted before, the chapter draws mainly on the Nigerian democratic experience from 1999 to date.

### **Gender and Democratisation: A Conceptual Review**

In everyday usage or parlance, gender is usually seen as a synonym for sex. Gender is often viewed in everyday practices as a dichotomy between women and men. However, gender is not a synonym for women, nor is it a derogatory stigma for the male opposite sex. While sex is a biological distinction between a male and female, there is something much more than this categorisation in the issue of gender. For instance, the language of gender, rather than just speaking about the sexes – men and women – as something natural or innate, speaks of these categories or identities as being ‘socially constructed’ (Randall, 2011). The implication is that these categories are not fixed but are historically and culturally varied, while gender connotes “a constructed inequality between men and women” (Enemuo, 1999:227). Put in another way, perceptions of gender are not rigid or fixed; instead, they vary over time and space and are determined by several factors, especially cultural values. Aina (2012:6) puts this in perspective when she argues that gender attributes are culturally specific and are subject to change across cultures and historical epochs. She further argues that each cultural system creates a set of beliefs and practices for men and

women that define their relationship. Therefore, the definition of gender must understand the situation or relation of men and women together and not in isolation.

In other words, gender points to essentialist arguments about women's nature that are often invoked to justify their political exclusion. Additionally, it opens up the possibility that women are too differentiated as a category for making meaningful political claims (Randall, 2011). But beyond being a subject category, gender is equally used in institutions as being *gendered*. In this sense, political institutions presuppose embodiments of gender relationships while at the same time influencing the construct of gender categories within society (Connell, 1990). It is from this standpoint that we can speak of gendered democratisation or gendered democratic institutions. But what does it mean for democratic institutions or democratisation to be gendered? Before answering this question, it is necessary to understand democratisation. Democratisation, just like the democracy from which it is derived, is essentially a nebulous and contested concept. However, democratisation involves efforts made to entrench stable democracy and ensure political liberalisation of the public sphere. In other words, democratisation is shedding undemocratic norms, cultures, and practices by 'embracing and strengthening or extending the principles, mechanisms, and institutions that define a democratic regime' (Osaghae, 1999:7).

Democratisation is the process or mechanism through which a society or regime becomes a democracy and deepens democratic culture and norms. That is, democratisation opens up the public space for equality of rights amongst members of society. It can, therefore, be argued that gendered democratisation normatively essentialised or mainstreamed gender to ensure democratic equality between women and men. According to Moghadam (2008), gendering democratisation aims at dismantling unequal power relations and/or distribution between men and women by institutionalising democratic policies and practices that reduce inequalities between men and women and increase the participation, representation, and leadership of women in politics and governance. Therefore, to

prevent 'democracy without democrats', policies to protect women's rights and to increase women's participation in political parties, the judiciary, executive, parliament, and civil society is essential. Put in another way, since democracy is about popular political participation, women's political exclusion either constitutes a major shortcoming of existing democracies or it means that they do not qualify as democracies at all (Randall, 2011, 2).

Empirical studies have established a strong correlation between women's status in a country and the health of democracy in that country. For instance, the research paper of Ortiz et al. (2023) shows that the status of women is strongly and significantly associated with all three dimensions of democracy – election integrity, freedom of association and assembly, and checks on executive power – with election integrity showing the strongest relationship. Their chapter demonstrates that women's status and democratic health in a country are strongly correlated. Similarly, the article by Nchofoung et al. (2023) finds that "political inclusion (political empowerment, civil liberty, political participation, and civil society participation) leads to better democratic (liberal, electoral, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian) standards" (p. 149). Similar findings, especially that gender political inclusion (women's empowerment) enhances democracy, were reported by Nikooghadam et al. (2018) and Lindberg (2004).

As argued by Asongu et al. (2021), the political inclusion of women encompasses a process that aims to enhance the benefits accessible to women, thereby increasing their capacity to influence political ideologies, engage in civil society organisations, and exercise their rights and freedoms. Because women make up the majority of the population in most countries, denying the majority of the population political rights will make a country nondemocratic (Nchofoung et al., 2023). Thus, gendering democratisation aims to transform the democratic systems supposedly developed by men to disproportionately disadvantage women against men to bring about gender equality in participation in politics and governance. Gender democratisation aims to establish

democracy amongst all genders, not just in theory, but also by acknowledging and respecting diversity through equal rights and opportunities. It is a model and organisational principle that seeks to dismantle and transform gender-based hierarchies and roles, which are still structural issues in social institutions and organisations (Gunda Werner Institute, n.d.).

Consequently, a key issue about gendering democratisation is ensuring inclusive citizenship and participation in government and dismantling socio-cultural obstacles to gender parity between men and women. To achieve gender democratisation, there is a need for socio-cultural change that will transform attitudes and people's lifestyles. In fact, and as argued by Wollstonecraft (1791, cited in Oluwaniyi, 2016:442), there can be little, if any, progressive political change without restructuring the sphere of private relations, and there can be no satisfactory restructuring of the private without major transformations in governing institutions. Thus, support for gender equality is not considered just a consequence of democratisation; it is a central component of the process of democratisation and the prerequisite for the creation of a sustainable democracy (Oluwaniyi, 2016:442). That is, gender democratisation and women's rights could not only be achieved through constitutional or legal means but also through a socialisation process that would recognise and entrench legal rights that promote women's interests and heighten their participation in politics and governance.

## **Women and Democratisation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

Nigeria's Fourth Republic started on 29 May 1999, when the military junta of Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar handed over the reins of power to the democratically elected president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Incidentally, the Fourth Republic has been the longest democratic experience in the country's history. It has lasted more than two decades and witnessed the transition from one civilian regime to another and the peaceful transfer of political power from a defeated ruling political party to the

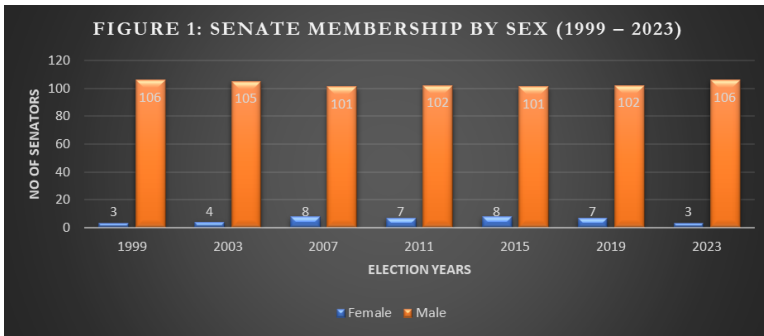
opposition. However, Nigeria's democratic experience since 1999 is still fledgling and remarkably constrained by serious flaws (Oladeji & Ayiti, 2020; Oladeji, 2019). This may have led a scholar of democracy to contend that Nigeria's democratic experience in the Fourth Republic is 'trapped in transition' (Omotola, 2013:171-200). The trapped transition is primarily because of the failure of the democratic process to enhance its democratic qualities, particularly its inability to open the political space for equal opportunities for all groups and interests. The democratic process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is gendered and has not brought about equal rights and opportunities for men or women in the political arena.

As noted earlier, democracy and democratisation are about the fair representation of all interests and groups in society, especially women and men. However, the Nigerian democratic experience since 1999 has been male-dominated, with women's participation very queasy. Since 1999, Nigeria has been under six administrations, with the executive and the legislative arms of these administrations dominated by men. For example, since 1999, there has been neither a female president nor a female vice president. From 1999 to 2007, President Olusegun Obasanjo was in office. President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua then served as president from 2007 to 2010, followed by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan from 2010 to 2015. Muhammadu Buhari held the presidency from 2015 to 2023, and currently, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has been in office since 2023.

Furthermore, appointments to Federal Boards of Public Corporations have followed the same pattern of male dominance over women. For instance, between 1999 and 2003, only 7 (5.6%) women were appointed as Board members out of 130 appointed for the period. Equally, out of 47 Ministers appointed by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration during the same period, just 7 (14.8%) of them were women. Women enjoyed more appointments in 2011, with 12 (30%) women appointed as Ministers out of 42, while 4 (20%) women out of 20 were appointed as Special Advisers to the President. While President Muhammadu Buhari appointed 6 (16.7%) women as Ministers out of 36, the incumbent, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu,

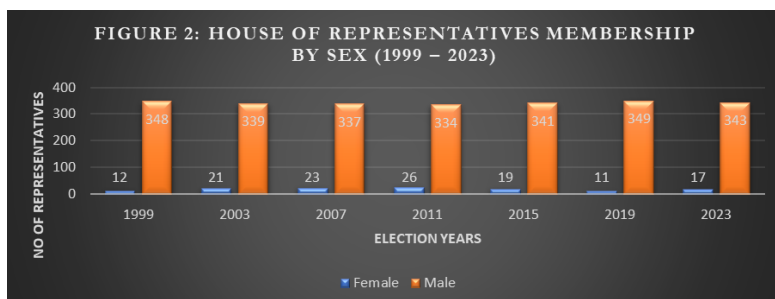
appointed 8 (17.8%) women as Ministers out of 45. Also, the state executive level has been predominated by male governors, except for 16 elected female deputy governors between 1999 and 2019. During the 18 March 2023 governorship elections in Nigeria, no female candidate was elected as governor. Out of the 24 female deputy governorship candidates, only six were elected (*Daily Trust*, 2023).

Furthermore, males have been dominant in the federal and state parliaments in the country. The data from Figure 1 clearly shows that the Senate has been predominantly male since 1999, with the highest number of female members, 8 (7.3%) out of 109 members, occurring in 2007 and 2015. This trend is also observed in the House of Representatives, as shown in Figure 2, where the highest female membership of 26 (7.2%) out of 360 members was recorded in 2011. From Figures 1 and 2, it is observed that the Nigerian 10<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, with women occupying 3 out of 109 seats (2.8%) in the Senate and 17 out of 360 seats in the House of Representatives (4.7%), which represents 4.3% of the 469-member Assembly, is not significantly different from the 9<sup>th</sup> National Assembly in terms of women's representation. The Figures show that after seven general election cycles, the number of women in the Senate of the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly has dropped to what it was in 1999 when Nigeria returned to democracy. The situation is not different in the State Houses of Assembly, where only in Ekiti and Kwara States did women record 23% and 21% representation respectively during the 2023 elections into state assemblies. In some states, no woman was elected into the assemblies (See Figure 3).



**Figure 1:** Senate Membership by Sex (1999–2023). Source: Compiled by authors using media reports.

We can, therefore, argue that Nigerian democratisation since 1999 is gendered and women have not enjoyed political inclusion and empowerment in the country. However, while the executive in Nigeria is gendered, it has not been a completely gloomy situation continent-wide in Africa. A major milestone in female presidency in Africa was achieved in 2005 when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected in a competitive electoral process as president of Liberia. Similarly, Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila was elected the first female Namibian Prime Minister in 2015. She has occupied the position since then. In Mauritius, Ameenah Gurib-Fakim was the first woman to be elected as the ceremonial President in June 2015. However, she had to step down in March 2018 following a corruption allegation (Ramtohul, 2021). In October 2018, Sahle-Work Zewde was elected as the first woman President of Ethiopia and she is currently Africa’s only woman head of state. Furthermore, after the death of President John Magufuli, on 19 March 2021, Samia Suluhu Hassan was sworn in as the first woman President of the United Republic of Tanzania to serve out Mugufuli’s second five-year term and she remains the only woman executive president in Africa.



**Figure 2:** House of Representatives Membership by Sex (1999 – 2023). Source: Compiled by authors using media reports

According to the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC, 2023), “as of December 2022 with a ranking of 183 out of 187 Nigeria was (and still is) the African country with the lowest number of women in parliament”. In Nigeria, low female parliamentary representation may be because of adherence to the plurality majority (first-past-the-post) electoral systems and refusal to adopt affirmative action policies such as gender quotas in parliament. Inversely, countries like Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Rwanda, and Uganda have been able to achieve a high level of women’s representation through the adoption of various affirmative action policies like legislative candidate quotas, reserved seat quotas, and voluntary candidate or party quotas (PLAC, 2023). Legislative candidate quotas require political parties to field a minimum percentage of women candidates, which could be achieved by conditional amendment or electoral law. Reserved seat quotas require a certain number or percentage of seats in Parliament to be set aside for underrepresented groups, especially women. This ensures a guaranteed minimum number or percentage of women in the parliament. Voluntary candidate or party quotas are non-binding targets pledged by political parties. As of June 2024, five African countries – Rwanda, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, and Mozambique – are amongst the top 20 nations for women’s parliamentary representation. Incredibly, Rwanda leads the rest of the world as the country with the highest number of women in parliament (61.3%) (IPU, 2024). Despite the increase in the

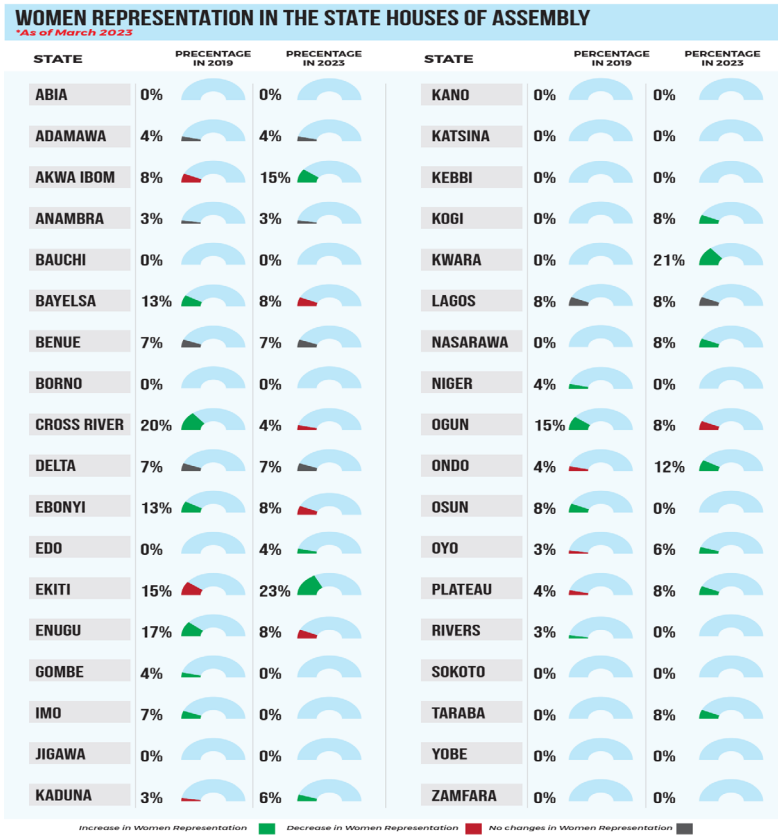
number of women in African parliaments, Mama (2013) cautions that “gender equality becomes more challenging as one ascends the political hierarchy.” Similarly, Memusi (2021) argues that the affirmative action policy adopted in some countries has had negative consequences as women limit themselves to those special seats and that politics is still dominated by political patronage involving huge costs for women.

### **‘You Belong to the Other Room’: Women and Male Democracy in Nigeria**

As noted above, Nigerian or African democratisation has been dominated by men, with the political space almost entirely closed against women. This development has given room for *male democracy*. With the political space almost closed against women, most men believe that women are supposed to take care of their *homes* – a belief also held by many women, while the murky waters of politics are left for men to swim in. Society frowns at women venturing into politics, and when they do, it must not be in opposition to their husbands’ directives or positions. Since the historic inception of Buhari’s administration in Nigeria, he has been criticised on many fronts, especially for being biased against women. However, some of the fiercest criticisms of the administration have come from the President’s wife, Aisha Buhari! For instance, in an interview with the *BBC Hausa* in October 2016, apparently out of frustration with the way things are going under her husband’s watch, Mrs Buhari stated that she may not support her husband’s second term bid, come 2019, if things remain the same. She is particularly worried that most people appointed by the President are unknown to him and were only forced on him by a cabal of opportunists, who have hijacked the government. She stated:

The president does not know 45 out of 50 of the people he appointed. I don’t know this either, despite being his wife of 27 years... These people had been sitting down in their homes, folding their arms, only for them to be called to come and head an agency or a ministerial position. A lot of people have been coming...to tell him that things are

not going the way they should. If it continues like this, I'm not going to be part of any re-election movement again (NBC News, 2016).



**Figure 3:** Women’s representation in the State Houses of Assembly. Source: Adapted from PLAC (2023).

Apart from the interview with the *NBC News*, Mrs Buhari is equally known to maintain an adequate presence on social media through which she has, either directly or by reacting to other people’s posts, bared her mind on some issues of national importance, regardless of whose ox is gored. For example, in a reaction to a post on Facebook by Senator Shehu Sani, who had alleged that in the absence of the president, “the sycophantic

prayers for the lion's recovery had waned", she posted on her Facebook page that "God has answered the prayers of the weaker animals. The hyenas and jackals will soon be sent out of the kingdom. We strongly believe in the prayers and support of the weaker animals" (*Vanguard*, 2018).

We inferred that Mrs Buhari was talking about the opportunists' cabal, who dominated President Buhari's government, as hyenas and jackals in the post. Moreover, the then-First Lady of Nigeria was in the habit of retweeting some tweets of the opposition on *Twitter (X)* about the failings of the Buhari-led government. For instance, she reposted a tweet of Senator Ben Murray-Bruce, a Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Senator from Bayelsa state, wherein he criticised the Buhari government for not doing enough to protect citizens against the killings of herdsmen in Benue State and other places (*Vanguard*, 2018). With these damning reactions to or comments about her husband's administration, Aisha Buhari must have eaten the forbidden fruit and must face the consequences. Consequently, in faraway Germany, while fielding questions from journalists, apparently to dismiss the criticisms from his wife and to affirm his lordship over her, President Buhari stated:

I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but *my wife belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room*. It is not easy to do away with opposition or people who did not follow you along your campaign trail. I hope my wife will remember that I was in the field for 12 years; I tried three times, and the fourth time I managed to succeed. And I ended up the first three times in the Nigerian Supreme Court, so I *claim superior knowledge over her...* It is not easy to satisfy the whole Nigerian opposition or to participate in the government (*The Sun*, 2016).

Ironically, Mr Buhari made his statement while standing next to the then-German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who was reputed to have been one of the most powerful women in the world. But what are the implications of Buhari's statement for gendering democratisation in Nigeria or Africa? First, it suggests that women's roles in society should be limited to being wives with

the traditional responsibilities of bearing children, cooking for their husbands, or taking care of their families and not being in political competition with men in politics. Second, it reinforces the cultural sentiments that men are more knowledgeable and invariably superior to women. Thus, if men are superior, women must not only take instructions from their husbands but also always support their husbands, even when they are wrong. It becomes even more abominable for a woman to attack her husband in public. This must be what Reuben Abati had in mind while reacting to Mrs Buhari's outburst on her husband's administration when he wrote:

It is very rare in politics to see a First Lady publicly slamming her husband. Many First Ladies and other women married to politicians have stood with their husbands through thick and thin, even when their husbands were doing things much worse than appointing people their wives did not approve of... If she had concerns about his leadership, she should have raised them with him in private, but not by disparaging him in public. She should have protected his reputation in public, even if she may have disagreed with him in private, at least to avoid washing dirty linen in public. The biggest challenge a man can face is to have his wife 'fight' him in public (Abati, 2016).

Third, it shows that in most cases, women's - especially married women's - citizenship rights are contingent on those of men or their husbands. To such an extent, as noted before, a woman can only exercise her political rights if granted by her husband, and while doing so, it must be to reinforce or protect her husband's political interest or image. This is exactly what Abati (2016) had in mind when he stated that "with all the reported cases of dalliance and cuckoldry during the Bill Clinton Presidency, Hillary Clinton stood by her husband". Guyo (2017) observes that women in Africa are another form of property to be controlled, probably by men. Fourth, it is capable of producing feelings of low efficacy amongst women, which can impede

their active interest in an area normally portrayed as male-defined and male-occupied, such as politics and governance.

From the foregoing, it can be safely argued that the democratic space or democratisation in Nigeria is far from being ungendered based on equality between men and women. Gender inequality mostly finds footing in the patriarchal cultural nature of society. This patriarchal structure of society is based on the assumption of social-biological theory, which assumes that biological dissimilarities between sexes – men and women – are responsible for the division of labour in societies based on sex. Supporters of the theory believed that women were naturally created as weaklings, who could only handle domestic menial duties of cooking and tendering to their husbands and children, while men should handle hard labour including brain-tasking and energy-sapping tasks of politicking and governing (Izugbara, 2013).

### **Gendering Democratisation: Concluding Remarks**

The chapter uses the democratisation in Nigeria since 1999 and a *derogatory* response of President Buhari to his wife's comment about his government to show that democratic practices in Africa are still mostly based on patriarchal *male democracy*. The chapter shows that the political structure in Nigeria favours men against women, which is based on the assumed cultural and biological superiority of men. This clearly shows that the ideological basis of most societies in Africa is very undemocratic and unfair to women. It has raised questions about the morality and rationality of the organisational structure of political systems in Africa. It demonstrates that democratisation in Africa is far from being neither ungendered nor, clearly so, it is gendering. What could therefore be done to activate gendering democratisation in Africa? In our opinion, the best way out of the conundrum is a 'gender political opportunity structure' (Rodríguez Gustá & Madera, 2017:93).

The concept of political opportunity structure is originally from the literature on social movements and refers to formal political structures, as well as the capabilities and configuration

of political elites that permit the eventual success of social movements. The concept has been expanded by feminist sociologists to include political dynamics and cultural meanings that frame relations amongst actors, especially men and women. Applying this concept to this chapter means abandoning a 'restrictive paradigm', through which the democratisation process is stripped of the mobilisation of social interests. That is, the democratisation processes should be structured in such a way as to bring about equal opportunities for men and women in the judiciary, executive, and legislative arms of government. The important elements of the gender political opportunity include the existence of a greater presence of women in politics, especially in parliament, to push agendas in favour of women, the density of the links between the state and social organisations in the context of devolution, and a legacy of civil society mobilisation. It equally involves discursive content as a vehicle for meanings that frame the exercise of rights (Ball & Charles, 2006).

Conclusively, gendering democratisation will involve three dimensions - organisational, discursive, and relational. The first dimension will involve effective women's rights advocacy for civil society groups, women's caucuses in parliament, and commissions for gender equality to formulate gender policies. The discursive dimension will focus on the conceptions regarding the recognition and full exercise of rights embedded in the organisational repertoires. Lastly, the relational dimension involves the links or interactions that the repertoires allow and through which parliamentarians engage actors in the other arms of government. Thus, to engender gendering democratisation, the interactions of these three dimensions must translate gender inequality into a national or regional agenda for socio-political action. In other words, and as Wollstonecraft (in Oluwaniyi, 2016:442), argued, "if the modern world is to be free of tyranny, not only must divine rights of kings be contested, but also the divine rights of husbands as well". Consequently, gendering democratisation in Africa will require the shedding of some old, obnoxious cultural practices which see women as men's *property*. Equally, it requires open political space and equal

opportunities for men and women. That is, women's political rights as citizens, beyond being wives and home managers, must be recognised to stop *male democracy* in Africa.

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