


Chapter 4

The Historiography of Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

Gender equity in elective and appointive offices in Nigeria remains a tall dream, despite the vigorous campaign efforts aimed at bridging the gap between men and women. Therefore, Nigerian democracy is partially representative, because a significant part of the country's population is not actively involved in governance / decision-making. It is appalling to note that women's representation in Nigeria's government remains below 10%; a figure that is far below the 35% recommendation. On this backdrop, this chapter analyses the historiography of women's participation in Nigerian politics, because the present becomes fully intelligible only in the light of the past. The study finds out that the domination of Nigerian women in governance has been a constant in Nigeria's political history. Consequently, they have only been able to play a marginal role in Nigeria's national life. This has greatly undermined Nigeria's path to achieving sustainable economic development. Although scholars have rightly identified patriarchy, cultural, and religious factors as the root causes of the political cleavage, the chapter presents a more holistic and robust approach to the problem. Firstly, it argues the need for constitutional and party frameworks for adequate female representation in Nigeria. Secondly, it argues that women need to look inward and remain consistent in their struggle for political equity through greater unity and solidarity amongst themselves, while making it crystal clear that they do not seek to take the place of men. The study employs the historical research method, which primarily involves the collection and analysis of primary and secondary data.

Keywords: Challenges, Gender–Equality, Historiography, Nigerian Politics, Prospects, Women’s Representation

Introduction

Gender equality in governance is central to the realisation of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (UN, 2015). Yet, women remain under-represented at all levels of government in the world. According to a UN report in January 2023, women represent only 22.8% of executive positions in the world. Furthermore, only 13 out of the 195 countries in the world have women occupying 50% or more in the cabinet where policies are formulated and implemented (IPU, 2023). A similar situation has been reported in the legislatures of countries of the world. In a comparative study in 2021, Rwandan women enjoyed the highest representation in parliaments across Africa. The female gender in Rwanda accounted for 61.3% and 38.5% in the Lower and Upper Houses respectively (Mbonu, 2022).

One of the major pitfalls of Nigeria’s drive towards socio-economic development is the under-representation of women in governance (IPU, 2023). The implication has been the vast continued waste of human resources needed for development. This contravenes the Nigerian National Gender Policy (NGP) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023), which aims at building a just society that is free from discrimination, in order to harness the full potential of all citizens. Despite president Buhari’s continuous claims of being committed to having more women in governance because of their role in his victory at the 2015 polls, his appointments suggest otherwise. Women’s representation in both elective and appointive offices was way below the approved 30% by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN Women, 2015) and the 35% that the Nigerian NGP has endorsed. In the 9th Assembly, for instance, women had only 8 (7.3%) representatives in the Senate and 13 (3.6%) in the Federal House of Representatives; women’s representation in both houses stood at 4.5% (PLAC, 2023). President Buhari’s dismissal of his wife’s contribution to the debate on the effectiveness of his leadership in 2016 is not only unfortunate, but also, reflective of the general perception of women in Nigerian politics. In the words of the leader of the giant of Africa, during a state visit to Germany, “I don’t know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen, my living room and the other room” (BBC News, 2016). This provocative gender prejudice succinctly encapsulates the gamut of what women in Nigeria have been faced with in the political processes and outcomes of their country.

The outcome of the 2023 General Elections made no difference. The 10th Assembly has only 3 women (2.7%) in the Senate and 17 (4.7%) in the House of

Representatives, representing only 4.2% of women in both chambers (PLAC, 2023). It is not surprising that legislation in favour of gender balance, seldom passes through in the National Assembly. The failed Gender Equality Bills of 2015 and 2021 are good examples (Obadare, 2022). The marginalisation of women in governance violates not only the country's constitution but also its ratified gender policy and commitment to international norms and conventions.

The historiography of women's participation in the governance of Nigeria has raised contentious debates in the intellectual community. This is because the sustained effort towards securing greater roles for women in governance since 1999 has not yielded the much-needed outcome. The debates centre on the origins of discriminatory practices against women as well as the socio-cultural, economic and religious bases upon which they thrive. Other issues often raised are strategies capable of liberating women from the artificial limitations placed on them, and the likely benefits of increased women's participation in democratic governance (Mirza & Strobel, 1989; Ajaebili, 2015). This chapter is a contribution to the debates in historical perspective. It provides a detailed account of the status of women in distinct epochs of Nigerian history, the challenges they had undergone, their successes and recommendations on the way forward.

Women in governance in the precolonial era

The major focus of African historians at independence was empire-building and the process of governance in pre-colonial Nigeria. Their findings revealed that African countries had developed considerably and had the major paraphernalia of state institutions before contact with Europeans (Ajaebili, 2015). However, the historiography of women's participation in precolonial patriarchal societies suffered the consequences of gendering history. Early historical accounts focused almost entirely on politico-military aspects of societies, which was dominated by men (Mirza & Strobel, 1989). Consequently, the achievements of men were celebrated, popularised and exaggerated, while those of women were glossed over. The male-centric historical approach of traditional African societies gave the notion that women either made no historical contributions or were simply passive. Conversely, they were as active as their male counterparts, despite the cultural and religious limitations placed on them.

The dominant perspectives on the nature of women's role in pre-colonial governance and economy may be categorised into two. While the first argues that their roles were complementary, the second is class-based and contends that women were victims of male oppression and exploitation

in their social relations with their male counterparts (Parpart, 1986; Ogbomo & Ogbomo, 1993). But, narrowing down the social relations of males and females in this period to the later school is spurious, because there were traces of cordial relations that were complementary in nature. Although precolonial Nigerian societies were male-dominated and largely kingship-based, it was flexible enough to accommodate women of abilities and great talents (Parpart, 1986). Therefore, the roles of women were complementary and at the same time subordinate to those of men. It was within their subordinated roles that exploitation and oppression manifested.

Governance in pre-colonial Nigeria may be categorised into two broad groups; centralised and decentralised states. Some of the centralised states were the kingdoms and empires built by the peoples of Yoruba, Hausa, Kanuri, Edo, Jukun etc. According to Iweriebor (1982), they were characterised by hereditary rights and the monopolisation of state powers by individuals who enjoyed the loyalty of their lieutenants and subjects. On the other hand, were the states that were decentralised in nature and had powers shared amongst the various institutions of government and operated on the principles of democracy and republicanism (Iweriebor, 1982). The Igbo, Urhobo, Tiv, Idoma and Western Ijo precolonial systems were good examples. These broad groups can be further divided into constitutional (democratic) monarchy (Oyo Empire), autocratic monarchy (Kanem-Borno and Hausa states) and gerontocratic democracy (Igbo societies) (Afigbo, 1972). Although women were under-represented in the political affairs of these states, variations existed on the bases of their politico-administrative structures, customs, traditions, and religious leanings. For instance, the roles of women were more pronounced in societies where democratic principles guided governance. Constitutional monarchies and gerontocratic democracies fall under this category. In the case of Hausa states and Borno, increased Islamisation diminished the roles of women, who were subjected to the will of their fathers, and later, those of their husbands (Personal Communication with S. Wada, June 20, 2023).

Afigbo (1972) has categorised pre-colonial Igbo societies into two; the constitutional monarchies of the Western Igbo, where kingship institutions existed and the democratic village republics that were devoid of hereditary rights. Hence, the societies were greatly decentralised and lacked a uniform structure of governance. Decisions were made after deliberations dominated by males, who represented divergent interests. Nevertheless, the roles of women and women's societies were pivotal in the decision-making process. Their opinions were communicated to the council of elders through their representatives at various levels. Similarly, the village assembly, one of the most influential social-political institutions of the Igbos and equally

dominated by men, occasionally had women's groups in attendance (Taiwo, 2010). The assembly performed legislative, executive and judicial functions, which means that Igbo women took part in making laws, formulation of policies and programmes and the settlement of disputes between families and even kindred.

The *Isi Ada* (oldest daughter of a particular lineage) and *Omu* (mother of society) were some of the most influential women in the pre-colonial politics of Igbo societies. While the activities of the former sometimes led to collective actions by women and checked male political leaders, the latter was in charge of markets and exercised considerable religious and political influence (Chuku, 2009). For instance, the *Omu* of Onitsha was a signatory to one of the treaties signed with the British in 1884. Similarly, wives of chiefs wielded powers that were on a par with those of male elders. Also, there were cases in which women were monarchs or regents for kings who were under-aged. The roles played by women were determined by the fact that several Igbo societies accommodated dual sex political structures, in which women exercised political authority in well-defined areas (Chuku, 2009). There were many other powerful women and women's associations that also exercised political power and authority in Igbo societies during the precolonial period. Historical evidences have shown that these roles of women in Igbo societies also featured prominently in other decentralised states before the 20th century (Chuku, 2009).

Amongst the Yoruba people, the *Iyalode* was one of the most powerful chiefs in the precolonial period (Sudarkasa, 1986). She was assisted by subordinate female chiefs and personal servants and enjoyed the loyalty of all the women of the kingdom, who considered her the mother of all women (*Eiyelobinrin*) because she helped to aggregate all their concerns and grievances and conveyed them to the king. The position was popularly earned through election and had the backing of the laws of the land. The occupant of the office was usually wealthy, acted in the capacity of a queen and coordinated all women-related activities in the land (Awe, 1979). The *Iyalode* presided over a court, where she settled disputes amongst women. She also assembled and articulated the views of women whenever the kingdom mulled the declaration of war (Parpart, 1986). These roles gave her access to power within the kingdom, alongside her male counterparts. In the economy of the kingdom, markets were under her control and her influence was felt by all traders. There were also historical evidences that alluded to a female *Ooni* and four *Alaafins* of Oyo in the pre-colonial era (Oluyemi, 2016).

In the Kanem-Borno Empire, women had roles in the background and influenced decisions through their men. The Queen Mother (*Magira*) controlled all the domestic arrangements of the royal court. Some of them

became so powerful and occasionally vetoed the decisions of the *Mais* (kings) of Borno by virtue of mother-son relationships (Arnett, 1910). The eldest wife of the king (*Gumsu*) also wielded considerable powers in the empire. In Hausa land between the 15th and 16th centuries, the phenomenal warrior Queen Amina made history as the first to rule in the male-dominated Northern Nigeria. Her place in the history of Hausa land was the result of her heroic military campaigns, which expanded the influence of Zaria to as far as *Kwararafa*, around the Benue River Valley and the Nupe kingdom (Hogben, 1966). Her administration of Zaria brought about economic prosperity and created a lasting impression on the minds of feminists, who consider it replicable in modern times, if women are given a chance to maximise their potential (Parpart, 1986).

Her historical footprints are all over Zaria, especially on the wall she built called *ganuwar* Amina (Amina's wall) and ruins referred to as Amina's palace (Personal Communication with A. Sani, May 29, 2023). In addition, her name appeared on the Kano Chronicle, which provided the list of Kano kings and the periods of their reign because Kano was once a vassal state to Zaria under her leadership (Arnett, 1910). Disappointingly, her name was not included in a local chronicle of Zaria published in 1912 (Arnett, 1910). However, Abdullahi Smith (1970) has maintained that she did exist and her reign over Zaria most likely began after 1576; a gap which was evident in the local chronicle. Gender prejudice of a predominantly patriarchal and Islamised society, in which women were subjected to subservient roles, probably explained the rigging of Zaria's history in her disfavour. This may just be one amongst many others, which historians are yet to uncover. Even the legend of Bayajidda spoke of the existence of female kingship in the early history of Daura, the 'ancestral home' of the Hausa people (Smith, 1970).

It is eminently important to note that there is a consensus amongst scholars that women dominated economic activities such as agriculture, trade, crafts and so on, in Southern Nigeria. According to Samuel Johnson (1969), women appeared to be far more industrious than their men who had leisure hours and work-free days. They were involved in local and long-distance trade because they sold most of the foodstuffs required in the markets. However, this did not take the place of farming as the major occupation of women. In fact, other economic activities were secondary and prioritised only after farming seasons. Therefore, women were not alien to governance in pre-colonial Nigerian societies; a handful of them had authority, issued orders and secured obedience from both males and females. There were also categories of women who exercised informal authority through the kingly offices of their husbands. Although they were outmatched by men in the exercise of political power, they dominated several economic

tasks and influenced certain group decisions that imparted their societies positively. These roles were in addition to taking care of their husbands and children as well as the preservation of their society's cultural heritage, which they helped pass on to future generations.

The diminished roles of women: The colonial era in view

The conquest and occupation of the states that make up Nigeria during the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the British, signalled a new dawn in the political history of Nigeria. Although pockets of resistance against British rule continued up to 1914, France and Germany had come to terms with the fact that Nigeria was a possession of the British Crown. During the early phase of British rule, attention was focused on consolidating the gains made in Nigeria since 1861. Thus, the Southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated to ensure smooth colonial administration. Similarly, the Native Authority (NA) system was imposed for the maintenance of 'law and order.' Furthermore, colonial policies on land, labour, transport, taxation and agricultural production were formulated and enforced in order to strengthen their grip on Nigeria (Aloko, 2022). These policies created a conducive atmosphere for the exploitation of Nigeria's human and natural resources and disrupted the historical process in action before colonialism.

The imposition of colonial economy on Nigeria created economic opportunities through modern transportation systems, banking, monetary systems and rapid urbanisation. Although the economy was dominated by expatriate European trading companies, it did benefit a handful of the colonised people. For instance, the discrimination against Nigerian businessmen in the provision of credit facilities led to the establishment of indigenous banks during the 1930s (Aloko, 2022). A good example was the establishment of the National Bank in 1934 to support local businessmen, who were determined to break the monopoly of European trading firms (Aloko, 2022). Nevertheless, women faced greater marginalisation because the foundation of their involvement in governance during the pre-colonial period was tremendously eroded. They were relegated to an abysmal background and had the majority of their socio-political and economic privileges yanked off (Parpart, 1986). This was because colonisation systematically altered the pre-existing social relations of production, reinforced patriarchy and gave impetus to social inequality on gender lines.

The dominant explanation on the setbacks suffered by women in the colonial period is that the British introduced their patriarchal ideology which considered the home the most suitable for women (Chuku, 2009; Awe, 1979). It is instructive to note that the visibility of women in the British public space

was one of the aftermaths of the First World War. As more men were mobilised for the war effort, women gradually began to take up positions in industries and other key sectors of the economy (National War Museum and Memorial, 2024). This explanation, is however, secondary to the British perception of the customs and traditions as well as the organisation of the people and society that they had conquered. Their assumption was that it was completely patriarchal and devoid of women's participation in governance. This partly informed the decision of the British to introduce the NA (the Indirect Rule system), which was a male affair, in order to preserve the perceived existing customs and traditions of the people. However, the British only preserved the pre-existing structures in the emirates but imposed what they felt would work in favour of their economic interest in Southern Nigeria. The respect for the customs and traditions of the emirates was based on the agreement that its leaders reached with the British; they committed themselves to serving the British as long as the Islamic faith was not tampered with, while the British limited the access of the Christian missions to the emirates (Bourne, 2015).

In Southern Nigeria and the Christian-dominated parts of the north, the history, customs and traditions of the people were flagrantly disrespected. Their precolonial democratic and republican traditions were ignored. For instance, taxes which were alien to them were imposed. In Igbo land, the tradition of selecting leaders was quashed and warrant chiefs imposed on the people to ensure the centralisation of power and the generation of revenue to sustain colonial rule in the region (Afigbo, 1972). Therefore, the pre-capitalist economies of pre-colonial societies were transformed by the British and their agents in the private sector, to serve the objectives of colonial capitalism. According to Aina (1993), the British only preserved the pre-capitalist subsidiary systems, especially the patriarchal mode of production because it supported the new capitalist mode of production. The strategy conferred on the British a measure of legitimacy in societies where women's participation in governance was considered inappropriate.

Another factor that led to the diminished roles of women in the period was the nature of Western education. It was almost exclusively targeted at the male gender in the light of the colonialist's ill conceptualisation of Nigeria's socio-political and economic formations. It is pertinent to note that economic opportunities, social mobility and participation in governance during the colonial period became inextricably tied to access to Western education. This explains why in spite of the resistance to Western education in the emirates for fear of Christianisation, the children of the elite were educated. The privileged few such as Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa etc. who were educated, rose to eminence within the colonial state and played major roles at independence (Ampadu et al., 2018). Nigerian women became

almost entirely confined to the homes in the services of their husbands and the upbringing of children. The colonial authority equally ignored them in appointments to chieftaincy and scholarships. Not only were pre-colonial institutions destroyed, but the male Obi was made a salaried staff member while his female counterparts were unsalaried (Ampadu et al., 2018). Female access to land gradually diminished because the British thought that all farmers and producers were male. Thus, while female farmers were considered subsistent food crop producers, male farmers, thought to be at the heart of farming, were offered technical assistance and agricultural extension services to enable them expand cash crop production to meet the industrial needs of Britain (Parpart, 1986). Consequently, male farmers dominated the rural areas and accumulated surplus; a development which widened their advantage over women. The loss of access to land, economic opportunities and political power and authority crippled a large number of women throughout the period and laid a faulty foundation for them at independence.

In addition, women were disenfranchised until the mid-1950s for Southern Women and 1979 for women in the North (Aina, 1993). Hence, they had no say in government, even in matters that affected them directly. From the foregoing, women's limited access to Western education impacted negatively on their ability to compete favourably with their male counterparts in the colonial civil service, the central legislative council and regional assemblies throughout the country. The widened gender divide engendered by colonialism was the reason behind Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's mobilisation of women's movement during the decolonisation struggle (Mba, 1982). Her movement advocated changes in the political economy of colonialism and gender relations. Therefore, the struggle for gender equality and equity predates the postcolonial period.

The unpleasant experiences that women suffered was demoralising but failed to stop them. They demonstrated resilience in the face of dehumanising treatment and socio-economic and political quagmire. Interestingly, they remained active in the informal sector of the economy, primarily to mitigate the effects of colonial economy on their families. The major features of the sector were small-scale businesses, low income, intense labour requirements and low rates of growth. Women equally played incredible roles in the anti-colonial struggles that culminated in the attainment of independence for Nigeria in 1960. The first of their vibrant activism was the Aba women's riot of 1929. It was precipitated by the British provocative appointment of warrant chiefs to constitute the NA, where kingship did not exist and prominent local leaders were lacking. The licensed chiefs became oppressive, high-handed, imposed draconian regulations, seized poor people's properties and imprisoned those who openly challenged their delegated powers (Van

Allen, 1976). Furthermore, plans for the introduction of special taxes capable of driving them out of market and disrupting the supply of food, especially non-perishable goods to the colonised people, were announced (Ogbomo & Ogbomo, 1993).

Women, not men, confronted the colonial state and their internal collaborators, the warrant chiefs. The rioting women burnt colonial buildings, broke into the NA prisons and released as many prisoners as they could (Parpart, 1986). Despite the deployment of the military to stop the women, they fought on - 50 women were left dead and many wounded (Van Allen, 1976). Being the first major challenge to British rule in West Africa, the colonial governor on the directive of the Secretary of States for Colonies, set up a commission of inquiry, chaired by Akintoye Ajasa and Eric Moore to chart the way forward. The aftermath of the commission's finding brought respite to both men and women, as the NA system in the east was re-organised to reflect the customs and traditions of the people. Similarly, the powers of the warrant chiefs were hewn down and the proposed tax hike abandoned (O'Barr, 1975). A number of women were also incorporated into the NA, where they served in native courts. This was particularly important because the only known women to have served in the NA amongst the Igbos before 1929 were Madam Okwei and Ahebi Ugbabe. Okwei rose to eminence because of her role as an agent of the Royal Niger Company (RNC), which afforded her the opportunity to import European goods and distribute them to both wholesalers and retailers and also assumed a critical role in the colonial transport industry (Okejiuba, 1967). On her part, Ugbabe was reported to have provided critical information which aided the British conquest of Enugu-Ezike. She later became the Eze (King) of Ogrute until her passing in 1948 (Chuku, 2009).

Igbo women's achievements in Nigeria's independence struggle was replicated in the Western region. The first women's resistance to colonial marginalisation in the region was spearheaded by the Lagos Market Women's Association (LMWA). The pressure group closely and consistently examined colonial policies and their impacts on women's interests. Under the distinguished leadership of Alimotu Pelewura, the LMWA opposed colonial price control mechanisms between 1940 and 1944 until they were removed (Parpart, 1986). There was also the influential Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) which had a membership of about 100,000 (Wipper, 1982). Its principal objective between 1946 and 1948 was to challenge the non-participation of women in the NA system, which had an oppressive leader, the Alake of Abeokuta. The AWU boycotted the payment of taxes, organised numerous protests and sent a delegation to London under the distinguished leadership of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti to tender their case before the

Colonial Secretary of States (Wipper, 1985). Some of their demands were granted. For instance, the Alake of Abeokuta was forced to resign, female taxation was put on hold and women were enlisted in the interim council constituted before a substantive government was formed (Taiwo, 2010). During the last decade of colonisation, the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies formed in 1953 (formerly the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU) in 1949) under Mrs Ransome-Kuti, Mrs Janet Okala and Mrs G.I. Okoye as its vice presidents in the east, championed the Nigerian women's struggle for independence and representation in governance (Chuku, 2009). As a result of the enfranchisement of Southern women in the 1950s, women such as Mrs Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu were appointed into the Western and Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs respectively (Oluayemi, 2016).

The question that naturally arises is, where were the men who considered themselves superior to women in all of these struggles against the illegitimate authority exercised by the British? It may be safe to argue that they colluded with the colonisers to subdue women in order to preserve patriarchy, which had long served their interest, but was gradually being challenged before the imposition of colonial rule. In the emirates, however, there was no women's uprising because women had already been subdued by age-long male-centric traditions and reinforced by the tenets of Islam. It should be noted that the women who confronted the dreaded colonial authorities were all financially independent and had acquired Western education. This brings to the fore the role of educational and economic empowerment in the liberation of women. Little wonder why in 1959, the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS), a national society for all women's organisations, was established to improve the economic standards and welfare of Nigerian women and also to enhance their access to Western education (Oluayemi, 2016).

Postcolonial governance and women: Progress and setbacks

Governance in post-colonial Nigeria has reflected the trajectories of colonialism. Women remained subdued, largely confined to the home and scarcely found in the corridors of power, despite their salient and praiseworthy roles in the nationalist struggles that gained independence for Nigeria. The under-representation of women in the first republic (between 1960/63 and 1966) poignantly supports our assertion. The federal parliament had only two women out of a total of 365 members in the upper and lower chambers. They were Wuraola Esan and Kerry Bernice (Oluayemi, 2016). At the regional assemblies, only Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo, Mrs Janet N. Mokelu and Miss Ekpo A. Young were elected into the Eastern Regional House of Assembly (Osiruemu, 2004). In the North, the prominent politician, Hajia Gambo

Sawaba could not make it because of the long-standing disenfranchisement of women (Osiruemu, 2004). Again, educational backwardness, perception of women based on patriarchy, financial dependence on men and cultural / religious stereotypes hindered women from bringing to bare their full potential.

The regime of Ironsi Aguiyi was short-lived and left no record of women's representation in governance. The *Yakubu Gowon's* regime between 1966 and 1975 did not make much difference because of the nature of military dictatorship and the composition of the military, which was male-dominated. An example could be seen in the fact that until 2011, admission for female cadets into the regular combatant course of the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) was non-existent (Yobolisa, 2011). This unfortunate reality limited women's access to the highest echelon of military hierarchy. For instance, despite the presence of a few female officers in the Nigerian Armed Forces (NAF), the Supreme Military Council (SMC), the then highest decision-making body at the centre, had no female representatives (Ogwuda, 2011). In fact, Josephine Okwuekeleke Tolefe, the first female commissioned military officer in Nigeria in 1961, and the first to attain the rank of an Army Captain in 1963, voluntarily exited the military in 1967. This decision was influenced by gender biases and discrimination experienced by her and other female personnel of the NAF (Ogwuda, 2011). However, female commissioners were appointed in states such as the defunct North Eastern, East Central and Lagos states (Osiruemu, 2004). The Murtala / Obasanjo military dictatorship followed suit. More disturbing was the fact that no woman was part of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) that produced the 1979 Constitution for the Second Republic (Obasanjo, 2018).

Nevertheless, the Constitution granted franchise to all citizens. By implication, women all over Nigeria gained the right to vote and to be voted for. This constitutional provision increased women's participation in the politics of Nigeria but did very little to increase their involvement in governance. This is because only a few Nigerian women won elections into the Federal House of Representatives and States House of Assemblies. Also, Mrs Janet Akinrinade and Mrs Adenike Oyagbola were the only cabinet members at the centre during the Second Republic (1979-1983). This was in addition to a few women who had the same status at the state levels by virtue of being appointed commissioners (Oluyemi, 2016). It is interesting to note that Ms Franca Afegbua made history as the first elected female senator in 1983 despite the antagonistic stands of the National Party of Nigeria's (NPN) male members, who felt they were more qualified (Okoye, 2000). Her victory was however cut short by the military junta on the eve of 1984, which truncated

Nigeria's second attempt at democratic governance. Therefore, the Second Republic was largely a male affair, despite the enfranchisement of all women.

Surprisingly, the return to military dictatorship in 1984 introduced Nigeria's first institutional quota system for female representation in the executive arm of government. General Buhari ordered the 19 states of the federation to appoint at least one woman into their executive councils (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013). It is important to note that some states had up to three female members in their cabinet. Buhari's directive may not be unconnected to the women-centred events on the world stage. The period between 1975 and 1985 was the United Nations' (UN) Decade for Women (Philips, 1993). The initial objective of the declaration was to work towards increasing women's participation in the governance of their country. As a result of the discovery of the wide disparity in power relations between males and females, the declaration was refocused to address the marginalisation of women, especially in Africa, where patriarchy and socio-economic factors had impeded on women's prospects of fair power-sharing with their male counterparts. The Nigerian government participated in the process and even became a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985 (Taiwo, 2010). The international community backed up its action plan with sensitisation and awareness campaigns for women all over the world. The aim was to imbue in them the fact that political decisions have consequences on all citizens, both participants and non-participants. This was necessary because a large number of women had become politically apathetic because of the political and economic discrimination that they had suffered in the governance of their own country. They were made to realise that their involvement was necessary to ameliorate their suffering and was critical in paving the way for a better Nigeria.

The enlightenment campaign paid off considerably as it spurred women's interest in both elective and appointive offices between 1985 and 1993. The period witnessed a dramatic turnaround in women's involvement in Nigeria's political processes. Women contested and won elections at all levels of government viz. federal, states and local governments during the transition programmes of the abortive Third Republic (Osiruemu, 2004). Although their number in the machinery of government remained far below expectation and incommensurate to their level of involvement in the electoral process, it rekindles their interest and gave them assurances of greater heights in the future. The Ibrahim Babangida administration was also influenced by the climate of thought occasioned by the UN's mission of the 1980s, geared towards uplifting the status of women. For example, after the appointments of female professors Jadesola Akande and Grace

Alele-Williams as Vice Chancellors of the Universities of Lagos and Benin respectively, Babangida averred that his decision was a silent revolution designed to incorporate women in the governance of the country and in the administration of Nigerian universities (Osiruemu, 2004:4). The president's assertion was an admittance of the marginalisation of women in Nigeria's national life since independence and a commitment to the reversal of the scourge. He went on to appoint Latifat Okunu and Pamela Sadauki as deputy governors of Lagos and Kaduna States respectively. Furthermore, a handful of women were elected councillors and one a chairperson of a local government in the 1992 transition elections (Oluyemi, 2016). The uninspiring representation in Table 2 of women in the Federal Civil Service (FCS) from 1975 to 1988 may help to shed more light on the extent of the marginalisation.

Table 2: Gender Division of Federal Civil Service Staff between 1975 and 1988

Year	Total No.	Male		Female	
		Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
1975	111,941	110,108	98.36	1,833	1.64
1976	135,247	122,299	90.43	12,948	9.57
1977	124,503	112,890	90.67	11,613	9.33
1978	187,677	165,567	88.22	22,110	11.78
1979	195,919	174,204	88.92	21,715	11.09
1980	231,752	202,740	87.48	29,012	12.52
1981	256,334	224,431	87.52	31,993	12.48
1982	266,345	232,374	87.25	33,971	12.75
1983	292,985	253,396	86.49	39,589	13.51
1984	302,424	262,752	86.88	39,672	13.12
1985	255,892	233,343	87.28	32,549	12.72
1986	254,786	222,293	87.25	32,493	12.75
1987	254,737	222,211	87.23	32,526	12.77
1988	259,219	225,614	87.04	33,605	12.96

Source: Constructed from FCS Records between 1975 and 1988

The table shows a significant surge in the number of women in the FCS between 1975 and 1976. However, since 1976, growth in women's representation has been sluggish and at the same time fluctuating.

The Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLPRW), championed by the wife of the military president also contributed to women's greater

participation in the politics of Nigeria. The BLPRW was well-coordinated at all levels of government by the wife of the president, wives of the governors and chairmen of the local governments (Philips, 1993). The programme empowered women financially, boosted their literacy levels, increased their awareness of their rights and responsibilities to the state, and mobilised them towards seeking leadership roles in government. However, there was no female member of the cabinet and the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), the highest decision-making body of the administration. Similarly, there were no female governors at the helm of state affairs (Gberevbie & Oviasogie, 2013). Only Sinatu Ojikutu and Cecilia Ekpenyong of Lagos and Cross River States respectively were elected deputy governors (Gberevbie & Oviasogie, 2013), with little or no executive powers to effect changes that benefit women. Equally disappointing was the fact that only Kofo B. Akerele won a seat in the Senate and very few, such as Florence I. Giwa of Cross River State made it to the Federal House of Representatives (Olabode, 2013). The Ernest Shonekan-led Interim National Government, the Sani Abacha and Abdulsalam Abubakar Regimes between 1993 and 1999 made no difference to the status of women in governance.

Therefore, women's hope of a new beginning in Nigeria's uninterrupted democracy has been dashed. The regime of using women as grassroots mobilisers for men seeking elective office continued unabated because women are easy to mobilise and are also very loyal. The male chauvinistic conceptualisation of women as political misfits in governance is predicated on the ill-conceived notion that women are better as supporters in the background rather than taking centre stage. The result is that Nigerian women have failed to realise the 30% target of the Beijing action plan (UN Women, 2015) and the 35% of the country's NGP (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023). They have been continuously used and dumped by men in the contest for power. Table 3 presents a graphic picture of the under-representation of women in elective offices between 1999 and 2015.

Table 3 shows that both executive and legislative functions were comprehensively dominated by men in spite of the growing number of educated women in urban centres, who enjoy access to economic opportunities that make them financially stable and independent. There was not much difference in appointive offices for women within the period. In 2011, however, the Goodluck Jonathan administration had 28.6% of women as ministers (12 of 42) and 4 out of 20 special advisers (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013). Women's representation in the Buhari administration between 2015 and 2023 suffered a downward slide despite their pivotal role in his emergence as the 15th president of Nigeria. The Tinubu presidency has also dashed the hopes of women, as women constitute only 19% of his cabinet (Bailey, 2023). This also falls short of the 35% inclusion of women in cabinet, as he had promised.

Table 3: Women in Elective Office (1999- 2015)

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
	Seats Available	Women	Seats Available	Women	Seats Available	Women	Seats Available	Women	Seats Available	Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Vice President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3 (2.8%)	109	4 (3.7%)	109	8 (7.3%)	109	7 (6.4%)	109	8 (7.3%)
House of Reps	360	12 (3.3%)	360	21 (5.8%)	360	23 (6.4%)	360	26 (7.2%)	360	19 (5.3%)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
Deputy Governor	36	1 (2.8%)	36	2 (5.5%)	36	6 (16.7%)	36	3 (8.3%)	36	4 (9%)
State House of Assembly	990	12 (1.2%)	990	38 (3.8%)	990	52 (5.3%)	990	62 (6.3%)		
SHA Committee Chairperson	829	18 (2.2%)	881	32 (3.6%)	887	52 (5.9%)	887			
LGA Chairpersons	710	9 (1.2%)	774	15 (1.9%)	740	27 (3.6%)	740			
Councillors	8,810	143 (0.02%)	6,368	267 (4.2%)	6,368	235 (3.7%)	6,368			

Source: Nigeria Centenary Country Report on Women, December, 2013, cited in Oluyemi (2016)

Prospects and challenges

Nevertheless, the prospect of women in the governance of Nigeria is bright. The realisation of the fact that they have a role to play in rescuing themselves from male domination has made women, especially in urban centres, increasingly conscious of themselves and determined to become visible in Nigeria's political landscape. Also, women have come to terms with the fact that men will not give up on their age-long favourable gender relations through mere demands, without constructive, political engagements, strategies and action plans. This is because power is not given. It is earned through negotiations and effective mobilisation of people. In the course of their participation at national, regional, continental and international summits on women's status in governance and the economies of their respective countries, it has become crystal clear that greater effort is needed to mobilise women towards increased participation in governance. Therefore, women must work towards transcending relevance in the struggle for power while being side-lined in the distribution of power. With 47.5% of voters on the 2023 voters register but just 10% contestants (INEC, 2023), women need to encourage more women to seek elective offices and rally round them. In fact, unless women make up their minds to use their numbers to bring about a change for themselves, adequate representation in government will continue to elude them. A victory for them or a tight race against their male counterparts could lead to negotiations and concessions capable of fostering a balance in Nigeria's power equation.

This prospect has however been impeded by a number of critical factors, which need to be urgently tackled. Religious, regional, ethnic and social class are the most conspicuous factors inhibiting women's solidarity towards greater roles in the government of Nigeria. Achieving unity and common objectives amongst the predominantly Christian South and Muslim North have been a tall dream given their different religious orientations and inclinations to politics (Parpart, 1986). The result is that politics amongst the Nigerian women has been reduced to a Christian-Muslim competition for power, and the continued attempt by adherents of the two faiths to dominate each other (Personal Communication with K. Mohammed, June 20, 2023). This has been a major setback to women's attempts at bridging the gender gap. Similarly, while women in the Southern part of the country find it much easier to participate in politics and governance, it has been very difficult for Northern women. The rise of charismatic Christianity since the 1980s has brought much freedom to women who now take leadership roles in churches and in the larger society. This has been enhanced by the proliferation of statutory marriages, supported by several churches, which protects women and guarantees their right to inheritance (Personal Communication with

Pastor K. Dapo, June 10, 2023). These major developments have emboldened women in their relationship with men. Men have become afraid of risking divorce because of the financial implications that result from it.

For women in the North, the reverse has been the case. The Islamic religion and the *purdah* system associated with it has continued to limit women's access to public life. For instance, despite their enfranchisement in 1979, they voted only at night so their faces would not be seen by men (Vogts, cited in Osiruemu, 2004:3). More disturbing is the fact that their involvement in public life requires the approval of their men, who often consider it a threat to their leadership roles in the home (Personal Communication with H. Abdullahi, June 15, 2023). Only a few men have been gracious enough to allow their wives to take leadership roles. Many of their well-to-do men would rather have them stay at home and provide all their needs than let them participate in governance. The biggest challenge to the involvement of Northern women in politics lies in the fact that going against the teachings of their faith makes them rebels and they are consequently ostracised (Personal Communication with H. Musa, 31 May, 2023). Thus, the needed solidarity and synergy amongst Nigerian women for greater roles in governance has been undermined by the religious divide. Similarly, separate interests on regional and ethnic lines have frustrated several attempts at forging a united front in the struggle.

Furthermore, class division amongst women has slowed down their ability to reach their goals in the shortest time possible (Parpart, 1986). The fact that women are known to be highly class-conscious makes it very likely that those who rise to positions of authority will pursue an agenda that serves only the interest of women of their class, while ignoring the poor majority, mostly in the rural areas. Consequently, rural women have not been adequately mobilised, let alone carried along in the struggle for gender equality in the country (Personal Communication with R. Ekundare, May 31, 2023). It has also been observed that a good number of women tend to be more comfortable with being led by men because of the widely held notion amongst women that men are more considerate in the workplace (Personal Communication with M. Balarabe, June 10, 2023). Women's overdependence on men has undermined their drive towards gender parity as it has made them susceptible to control, manipulation, intimidation, oppression and exploitation both in the home and in the wider society. In order to maximise their chances in governance, women would have to love and treat each other fairly and also build trust in themselves, irrespective of class distinctions. The neglect of low class and poor rural women also needs to be quickly halted as they are also major stakeholders, given their numbers. In addition, elitist urban women should consider influencing or partnering with the government

to provide basic education and financial empowerment to female children at the grassroots level, so that their access to economic opportunities and leadership roles can be expanded.

It is important to note that their drive towards liberation from male domination and for fair representation in government, needs to be approached in a way that does not give men the impression that they seek to overthrow them in the home and in the public space. This is because of the ill-conceived notion in Africa that the goal of feminism is not egalitarianism but a drive towards new socio-economic and political formations that put women on top. This explains the stiff resistance that has emanated from men who are determined to preserve their advantaged position in society. The capacity of women to withstand such resistance is greatly in doubt because of the factors of patriarchy, financial impediments, cultural and religious limitations. Besides, the payment of a bride price by men, which women are not yet ready to part ways with, because of the legitimacy and respect it confers on them in marriage, is militating, because it gives men a measure of control over them.

Most importantly, a legal framework is indispensable to the realisation of equal representation in governance in Nigeria, as the case of the Republic of South Africa has shown (Hills, 2015). In this light, the constitution of Nigeria, and those of political parties, should stipulate a binding and non-negotiable percentage of seats for women in the National Assembly, State Assemblies and in the federal executive councils across the federation. This way, the political rights of women can be safeguarded. Similarly, all forms of discrimination, biases, and stereotypes based on gender can be eliminated, towards a more inclusive and equitable society. In addition, women should not relent in their efforts towards the passage of the Gender Equality Bill in the senate. In this regard, female members of the parliament need to intensify their lobbying of their male counterparts and perhaps, their spouses, to get the Bill passed into law. A combination of these legal frameworks hold the potential of increasing women's participation in decision-making, addressing gender-based violence, ameliorating unfavourable socio-cultural norms and tackling discrimination in the workplace.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that the under-representation of Nigerian women in governance has been consistent in all the periods of Nigerian history. In other words, participation without fair representation has been the major feature of women's participation in governance in Nigeria. However, the treatment of women in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Nigeria was not the same. Women enjoyed greater roles in the socio-political and

economic organisations of Nigeria during the pre-colonial period. Some of the opportunities they had were greater access to land and economic opportunities in general. Although there were women who exercised real political powers in the North, West and East of the country, women's authority in the period was largely based on the positions occupied by their husbands. During the colonial period, the British patriarchal orientations and leanings colluded with Nigeria's well-established patriarchal traditions to reduce women to the lowest ebb. Although they fought back and gained the attention of the colonial authority which made few concessions, the colonialists transferred power to the men, which they considered fit for the task ahead, while abandoning women in spite of their role in anti-colonial struggles. Post-colonial Nigeria remains a male preserve, despite the constitutional provision of political and economic equality for all the sexes since 1979. Therefore, women have reaped only a few benefits of democracy and have remained dependent on men in an independent country. In response to their challenges, they have developed a number of strategies to cope, some of which include withdrawal from politics (accepting their fate), speaking out against male hostile behaviours and demanding fair representation in governance, to enable them to influence legislations that favour women. The chapter concludes that the conspicuous determination of women to achieve fairness in representation in governance gives them hope of greater possibilities and opportunities in future. However, it is incumbent that they unite and overcome all the obstacles to the realisation of their political objectives, which also require the backing of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Failure to do so, through a constitutional means, would mean that Nigeria would continue to be a male preserve.

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