

Political Marginalization and Exclusion of Women by Women in Nigeria: The Sarah Jubril Experience

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Abstract

Women across the world face several forms of victimization and harassment hence, this study examined the various forms of marginalization faced by women in the process of participating in politics with specific reference to the plight of Nigeria's Sarah Jubril. The study adopted structural functionalism as its theoretical framework in order to explain the problems and obstacles confronting women in the process of participating in politics in Nigeria. Data for the study was drawn from secondary sources (textbooks, newspaper publications, internet materials etc.) while the analysis was done qualitatively through content analysis. Emphasis was placed on the travails of Sarah Jubril in the in the 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that several factors including economic, social, religious, cultural and political factors limit and restrict the chances of women in politics. Further findings also shows that the greatest threat hindering Nigerian women from active political participation is discrimination of women by women themselves hence, there is urgent need for women groups and organizations to look in-wards with a view to addressing the infighting and power play among women in Nigeria and Africa.

Keywords: *Women, Political marginalization, Exclusion, Sarah Jubril, Politics and political participation.*

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Background to the Study

This study examined the problems faced by women in the process of political participation in Nigeria. It will be recalled that after the Beijing conference representatives of 157 countries gathered in July 1985 in Kenya for the largest, best publicized international conference ever hosted on African soil. The several thousand delegates and observers at the world conference sought to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations decade for women equality, development and peace. In addition, they sought to chart a new course for women in order to encourage serious efforts by all states which had ratified major human rights documents, to reduce economic, political, and social barriers to the advancement of women through conscious and pragmatic efforts. In spite of these efforts, in Nigeria, the issue of political participation has been dominated and high jacked by the man who erroneously believe that political leadership belong to them by birth and that the role of women should be in the kitchen.

What is the relationship between gender and performance in public office? Is there any relationship between cultural and religious values and the alienation of women from the political process in Nigeria? Are male chauvinism and intimidation reasons for the exclusion of women in the political process in Nigeria? Are social status, class and political party affiliation responsible for discrimination and alienation of women by fellow women in Nigeria politics? Answers to these questions and other problems confronting women in the process of participating actively in politics forms the major trust of this paper.

Methodology and Scope

This aspect of the paper provides a description of the sources of data used and the applicable methodology. Thus, the data used in the study were curled from published scholarly works such as text books, published articles, journals, newspapers, magazines and internet materials. Data collected were analyzed through qualitative method and content analysis. However, emphasis was placed on the 2011 Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential primaries which took place in Abuja from 13th - 14th January, 2011. In other words, the study is a review of the 2011 Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential primary election results.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted structural functionalism in order to explain the problems and obstacles confronting women in the process of political participation in Nigeria. Functionalist theorists view society as being made up of interdependent parts called social structure and that each part of the social system exist to serve some function for the survival and stability of the society. Structure here refers to the composition of something while the elements make up the whole. For instance, the structure of the human body is the various parts that make of the human body like the eyes, the ear, stomach, brain, the legs etc. thus, the function therefore consist of the role played by each component part in relation to the whole and to maintain the whole as an ongoing concern. Structural functionalists therefore regard society as a system because it is made up of inter-connected and interrelated parts which in some way affects every other part of the system

as a whole hence, implying that the basic unit of analysis is society while social institutions such as the family, religious, economic, the educational and political systems are analyzed as part of the social system rather than as isolated units. Structural functionalism is relevant in this context because women in Nigeria constitute a large proportion of Nigeria's population hence, their exclusion and alienation from the political process could lead to crises which could in turn affect the whole entity called Nigeria. It will be recalled that exclusion and marginalization of Nigerian women from the political process led to the famous Aba women's riot of 1929. Structural functionalists therefore argue that to ensure peace and political stability within any political structure or system societies and states must build consensus which implies that each society, has basic values that nearly everyone in the society agrees upon in order to achieve order, cooperation or solidarity. They reiterated that when these basic needs are met, society will remain in a balance or equilibrium and it will remain in that position until it is forced to change by a new condition. Lastly, the concern of functionalism is:

- (a) What holds the society together?
- (b) How do individual actions contribute to the larger society
- (c) What basic requirements are in place to make the social system or group to endure

Advocates of structural functionalism include Onigu Otite, August Comte, Herbert Spencer, Malion Owski, Cliffe Brown, Talcot Parsons and Rober K. Merton.

Literature Review

Milbrath and Geol (1984) in their work "The power of participation" examined how and why people get involved in politics. They described political participation as the process of people involving in the politics and governance of their geographical environment. From the cultural perspective on the deprivation and exclusion of women, Uku, PFB (1962) in her contribution cited in Chizee and Njoku argued that it is not biological factors that have hindered women from reaching their fullest potentials in development but rather she attributed the problems facing women to cultural barriers. Iyabo Oloyede (1982) while corroborating the views Anne Oakley maintains that the discrimination of women in politics is not a universal phenomenon: According to her, in some societies, women are giving equal opportunities with men. Citing the pre-colonial states in Northern Nigeria where women acquired tremendous access to political power with the emergence of Queen Amina of Zazzau (now Zaria in Kaduna State) a renowned military and political leader who ruled over men and women in Hausa land and also conquered several kingdoms and territories. While affirming this position Iyabo Oloyede quoting the Kano Chronicles stated thus: at this time, Zaria under, Amina conquered all the towns all the towns as far as Kwara and Nupe. Every town paid tributes to her. The Sarkin Nupe sent 40 eunuchs and 10,000 kolanuts to Hausa land. Her conquest extended over 34 years.

While condemning the use of gender (sex) and other barriers to determine political participation in Nigeria and other African societies, Abu Obe, former president of Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), while addressing a group of participants at a workshop

organized by the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) at the University of Lagos conference centre in 1999, urged Nigeria and African women not to be deterred in their fight for justice and equity but rather challenged them to first, liberate themselves from the shackles of illiteracy and ignorance. In a related development, Dr Mrs. Bouloere Nwoakafor Ketebu, former ambassador and one time president, National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) and former Secretary to the Bayelsa State Government, while addressing a cross section of women in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State in 2009, urged them not to discriminate against one another. According to her, “the greatest problem of women in Nigeria is women themselves, especially the literate professional women who often isolate themselves from ordinary women (peasant women such as market women and traders)” she lamented angrily. In the same vein, Eze (2014) in his work titled “Reflections on violence against women in selected African states; issues and challenges” published in the journal of behavioral sciences and development studies lamented that women face all forms of violence and abuse in Africa. According to him causes of violence against women in Africa emanates from cultural and religious practices which allows African men to be Imams, kings, chiefs and leaders in the society. In his words; “African women are seen as materials, commodities or property due to bride price called “dowry” paid to the women's family during marriage...” He therefore added that women in Africa suffer domestic and sexual violence regularly in the third world hence, women require protection especially during war or conflict situations, he concluded.

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This aspect of the paper examined and analyzed the views of scholars and victims to prove that cases of intimidation and political exclusion of women by women actually exist in Nigeria. In a newspaper report captioned “I was battered for daring to contest ACN Senatorial Candidate, published in The Punch Newspaper of 4 February 2011, Action Congress of Nigeria senatorial candidate for Kaduna Central, Hajia Halima Tijjani, in an interview with punch correspondence, kemi Ashefon, explained her ordeal in the hands of hoodlums who beat and seized her nomination forms on her way to the Independent National Electoral Commission headquarters, Abuja. In her words: I came to Abuja and was fortunate to meet the national chairman for the first time and he asked after my form. I said I had submitted it to the state chairman. He said he was giving me another form but the problem was that all my documents had been removed from the file. I was surprised and asked who did that... This incident clearly indicates that violence and intimidation perpetrated by men greatly hinder women from effective political participation in Nigeria. While explaining the plight of women in Africa Eze (2014) contended that when African men become the chiefs, kings and leaders of their families, they are regarded as super powers, autonomous, controlling because they provide necessities to their families hence, most African men see their jobs as bringing food home, money and discipline. In his words:

These nomadic responsibilities purported African men to subdue some women who want to be independent or in competition with their husbands. Due to this inequality of power, women become powerless

and dependent on their husbands or father for their survival. Unlike the American women, African women are subdued, put in their places so they can accept the men who run their homes. It is uncommon for some men to have special "belt", to discipline their wives and children. This continuous inequality of power in Africa contributed to violence against women. (Eze, 2014:p.13).

This further explains why it is difficult for women to contest and win elections in Africa. Thus, the result of the 2007 National Assembly elections in Nigeria revealed that out of the one hundred and nine (109) seats in the Senate, women had only eight (8) seats. Similarly, out of the three hundred and sixty (360) seats in the federal House of Representatives, women had only twenty seven (27) seats hence, indicating that Nigeria's National Assembly and indeed the entire political sphere is dominated by men. Although a good number of women contested and lost out in the 2011 elections, they were compensated with ministerial and board appointments by the then president. The table below further shows the level of political marginalization and exclusion of women by women in Nigeria.

A table showing the final result of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential primary elections which took place at the Eagle Square, Abuja from 13th -14th January 2011.

Table 1: Final Result of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Presidential Primary Elections

S/N	STATE	JONATHAN	ATIKU	JUBRIL	VOID
1	Abia	80	1	0	-
2	Adamawa	76	31	0	1
3	Akwa-Ibom	141	0	0	0
4	Anambra	47	8	0	0
5	Bayelsa	67	0	0	0
6	Bauchi	46	44	0	5
7	Rivers	128	2	0	1
8	Sokoto	32	84	-	-
9	Taraba	62	16	-	-
10	Yobe	29	20	-	-
11	Zamfara	7	70	0	0
12	FCT	24	3	0	0
13	Lagos	52	3	0	0
14	Gawa	100	17	0	0
15	Nassarawa	53	8	0	0
16	Osun	99	1	0	0
17	Benue	72	15	0	0
18	Ondo	69	6	0	0

19	Gombe	55	18	0	0
20	Borno	33	26	-	2
21	Imo	125	3	0	0
22	Kano	12	98	0	0
23	Cross River	105	0	0	0
24	Edo	60	0	0	0
25	Ebonyi	82	2	0	0
26	Kwara	61	26	0	0
27	Enugu	89	9	0	0
28	Delta	144	7	0	0
29	Katsina	147	11	0	0
30	Ekiti	76	1	0	0
31	Kogi	84	24	0	0
32	Plateau	70	2	0	0
33	Oyo	107	10	0	0
34	Ogun	80	3	0	0
35	Niger	16	94	0	0
36	Kaduna	82	41	0	0
37	Kebbi	33	44	0	0
	TOTAL	2,736	805	1	9

Source: The Nation Newspaper of Saturday, 15th January, Volume 5, No. 1640, p. 5, 2011.

The data above clearly shows that a total of three thousand five hundred and fifty-one (3,551 delegates participated in the People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential primaries which had two males and one female contestant (Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Atiku Abubakar and Mrs Sarah Jubril). Although, the then incumbent president, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won the primaries with a total of two thousand seven hundred and thirty-six votes, available records also revealed that out of the four hundred and ten (410) female delegates that participated in the primaries, none voted for Mrs Sarah Jubril, the only female presidential aspirant in the 2011 elections. Analysis of the above table also shows that the four hundred and ten (410) female delegates that did not cast their votes for Mrs. Sarah Jubril include Mrs Josephine Aneni, the then minister for women Affairs, wife of the then incumbent president and other prominent female professionals from the 36 states of the federation including Abuja. Further analysis also revealed that the only vote recorded in favour of Mrs Sarah Jubril belong to her as an automatic delegate. Thus, indicating that the greatest problem facing women are the women themselves. While acknowledging this fact Mrs Sarah Jubril, in a newspaper report captioned presidential primaries; women disappointed me" published in The Punch Newspaper of Friday, 4th February 2011, stated unequivocally that Nigerian women are not united and focused. In her words:

that vote has been pricking the conscience of women, Nigerians, PDP board of trustees and the political class. I thank God for not allowing any other vote to cause confusion. I sympathize with the women

because that votes is affecting their conscience. Why are the women folk using the media to call me a serial contestant? I have forgiven them”

In a post-election speech, the female presidential aspirant challenged male politicians to stop high jacking the conscience of Nigerian women who according to her constitute the engine of the nation in terms of population. While appraising the factors responsible for her defeat, Mrs Sarah Jubril blamed her defeat on the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Ministry of women Affairs and the PDP Women leaders. While urging Nigerian women to be steadfast, resolute and consistent in politics she declared that she will remain in PDP and also support the winner of the 2011 PDP presidential primaries despite all odds. It will be recalled that Mrs Sarah Jubril was rewarded and appointed Special Adviser to the Nigeria President on ethics, national rebirth and re-orientation between 2011 and 2015. The ordeal of Mrs Sarah Jubril as reflected in this study no doubt affirms the fact that political marginalization, exclusion and alienation of women by women exist in Nigeria and in other parts of the world.

Conclusion

It is therefore imperative to state unequivocally clear that several factors including economic, social, religious, cultural and political factors restrict the chances of women in politics. Despite these factors, the study shows that some women have remained fearless and resolute in their various constituencies and wards. The case of Mrs. Sarah Jubril clearly indicate that the greatest threat hindering women from active political participation in Nigeria is discrimination, marginalization and exclusion of women by women themselves hence, there is urgent need for women groups and organizations to look in wards and address the infighting and power play among women especially the privileged professional and educated women in Nigeria. It is on record that these highly placed educated women often describe other category of uneducated women like artisans, market women and rural dwellers as inferior women. The paper therefore argues that women must unite and resolve their differences in other to compete favourably with men in the political arena.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will no doubt help to enhance the chances of women on the process of political participation in Nigeria:

1. All discriminatory laws, policies, cultural and religious practices that subject women to the role of child producers should be discarded because women as managers of the home can still function effectively as public servants if given the opportunity.
2. In other to take over political leadership from the men in Nigeria, women and women groups, clubs and associations must move away from mere rhetoric to concrete action plans that will ensure that the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and other international treaties and promote the course of women are not only ratified but strictly adhered to by Nigeria and African governments.

3. Women and political aspirants interested in the 2019 elections in Nigeria and elsewhere must start early with pre-election mobilization and campaigns at least two years to the election date. It is therefore imperative for women to also engage in networking and formation of political parties, groups and organizations that will promote their interest and aspiration. The trend in Nigeria is that women always wait and take the back stage only to complain at the end of the political process.
4. The constant appointment of men to head sensitive government agencies and institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), National Orientation Agency (NOA) etc at the expense of women should be stopped forthwith. This is necessary and fundamental because it is not the exclusive prerogative for men to control such offices. It will be recalled that right from 1960 to date, no woman have been appointed chairman of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission. This again implies that women must intensify their level of involvement and participation in the political process at all levels.
5. All forms of waivers and special privileges given to women by the government and political parties should be removed while the field or political space should be made free and accessible to both male and female politicians who are interested in politics. Anti-gender scholars believe that such waivers and special favours will create an erroneous impression that women are generally not industrious hence, they must be assisted to get to the peak of their career and leadership. If the education system in Nigeria is structured without according preference to gender, scholars have wondered why we need such special privileges for women in politics.
6. Women groups and organizations should demonstrate commitment and solidarity to female contestants during elections. In the 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria, it was obvious that the minister of women affairs, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) women leaders, including the National Council of Women Societies all aligned itself with the government in power hence, abandoning Mrs. Sarah Jubril, the only female contestant in the election.

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