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## The marginalization of women in party-politics in Nigeria: A feminist theory critique

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### Abstract

The marginalization of women in party politics is not only a Nigerian phenomenon but a global one. The marginalization of women in party politics has been a major eye opener in recent times. This paper examines the marginalization of women in party politics in Nigeria, using a feminist approach critique as a reference point. It also analyzes the effect of the marginalization of women in party politics on the Nigerian political process. The study adopted a theoretical framework in explaining the marginalization of women and party politics. The methodology employed in this study in the collection of data and analysis is the secondary data and content analysis. However, it was discovered that the major factors responsible for the low participation of women in party politics are gender roles- patriarchy and virility of deficiency (i.e. women conception of party politics).

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Marginalization, Women, Party- Politics and feminist theory.

### 1. Introduction

Women are indispensable to any nation that seeks political and socio economic development. The marginalization of women as regards party politics has been a major eye opener in recent times. Women has experienced an immense marginalization as regards to the selection, appointment or election into various party positions. With the emergence of a number of political parties in this democratic era (1999-date) in Nigeria, the top hierarchy positions in the various political parties have been occupied by men.

In Nigeria, although women constitute 50 percent of the population and 51 percent of voters in election, yet they do not enjoy their full political rights as their male counterparts (Ofong, 2002). Women has been marginalized and relegated to play a second class role as regards party politics in Nigeria. In Nigeria, since 1999-date, political parties has been dominated by men, as no woman has ever been selected or elected to occupy the top position (e.g. national chairman/chairperson of a party) in any of the various political parties. Ogbogu, (2012), assert that "Over the years women in Nigeria have been relegated to the background and are circumscribed within the political arenas by structures, procedures and ideologies that favours men, as well as the existence of an invisible 'glass ceiling' that block their upward mobility and full participation". The marginalization of women in party politics is having an immense effect on the Nigerian electoral and political process. The marginalization of women in party politics has hindered the contributions, participation and role of women in party politics and the Nigeria's political process. The marginalization of Nigerian women in party politics and the political process has been traced colonial era. Esidene and Abdul, (2013) rightly stated that, "this gender bias in Nigeria's political system is often traced to the onset of colonialism in Nigeria". Thus the western cultural notion of colonialism woven around male superiority reflected in their relations with Nigeria (Esidene and Abdul, 2013). Furthermore, the marginalization of women in party politics in Nigeria has in recent times generated gender questions from scholars in the field. This research work is a critical analysis of women in party politics and its effect on the political process, using a feminist approach with a view to addressing the marginalization of women by their male counterparts as regards the appointment, selection and election into various party positions in Nigeria.

### 2. The Statement of the Problem

The marginalization of women as regards party politics has been a major challenge facing the Nigeria's political process. According to Ofong (2002),

“In Nigeria, although women constitute 50 percent of the population and 51 percent of voters in election, yet they do not enjoy their full political rights as their male counterparts”. Party politics and the political process has witnessed the immense marginalization of women by their male counterparts, as regards the selection, appointment and election of party members into various party positions in Nigeria.

Ogbogu (2012) asserts that, “over the years women in Nigeria have been relegated to the background and are circumscribed within the political arenas by structures, procedures and ideologies that favours men, as well as the existence of an invisible ‘glass ceiling’ that block their upward mobility and full participation”. Thus these political structures, procedures and ideologies tends to favour the men, above their female counterparts as regards party politics, and has hindered full participation and contributions of women in party politics and the Nigeria’s political process.

The Marginalization of women in party politics remains a recurring phenomenon as no woman has ever been selected, appointed or elected into the top hierarchy party positions (e.g. national chairman/ chairperson or publicity secretary) in the various political parties in Nigeria, since 1999-to date.

However, this research seeks to identify and critically analyze the above problems and its effects on the Nigeria’s political process. And also to made recommendations to the problem of the marginalization of women in party politics in Nigeria.

### **3. Conceptual Clarifications- Women and Party Politics**

For a clear understanding of the study certain concepts has to be defined. These concepts include women and party politics.

#### **i) Women**

The term ‘women’ literally refer to the generality of adult female. Women are vital to any nation that seeks political and socio-economic development as they constitute more than half of the world’s population. According to Makama (2013) “Nigerian women, like their counterparts, around the world, face a lot of discrimination that limit their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with men”. This means that the discrimination faced by women, around the world has limited their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with their male counterpart. Agishi (2014) assert that “perception of womanhood is useful to providing an explanation of the opportunity and structures available to men and women for self- actualization and effective participation in party politics, which ultimately lead to governance, leadership position and decision making”. By this, she meant that “in discussing the perception of womanhood, one is referring to beliefs, notions and ideas people have about females in terms of what they represent in their relationship to men as well as expectations about appropriate female roles” (Agishi, 2014).

#### **ii) Party Politics**

The term ‘Party- politics’ refers to partisan politics based on strict adherence to the policies and principles of a political

party regardless of the public or personal interest. It has to do with active participation in party meetings and caucuses; it can also be seen as partisan loyalism.

### **4. Theoretical Framework**

In this study, a theoretical framework is adopted to explain the marginalization of women in party politics in Nigeria. The theory adopted in this research paper is the feminist theory. This theory examines inequalities in gender- related issues. According to Open Stax College, Rice University Publication (2013), “it (feminist theory) uses the conflict approach to examine the maintenance of gender roles and inequalities.” The feminist theory however gives considerations to the role of the family in perpetuating male dominance. Open Stax College, Rice University Publication (2013), rightly stated that “in patriarchal societies, men’s contributions are seen as more valuable than those of women”. By this, they meant that women’s viewpoints tend to be silenced or marginalized to the point of being discredited or considered invalid. More so, Women has been relegated and made to play second class role in political parties in Nigeria, as regards party politics. Agbalajobi, (2010) rightly stated that “throughout recorded history in all part of the world, women have been subjected to domination by men. This is as a result of persisting cultural stereotype, abuse of religion and traditional practices, patriarchal societal structures in economic, political and social power dominated by men and the role women have historically played as followers of male political leaders”. She further stated that “this form of discrimination is not simply an African or Nigerian phenomenon but a global one” (Agbalajobi, 2010). In Nigeria, political parties has been dominated by men, as no female has ever been selected, elected or appointed to the top hierarchy position (e.g. national chairman/ chairperson of a party) in any of the various political parties.

### **5. Methodology**

The methodology employed in this research is the content analysis, applying a systematic approach to record and value information acquired from secondary data as they relate to the study at hand. This research adopted content analysis and secondary data in data collection and analysis, focusing on already completed work of other researchers and work written by historians, economists, political scientists and sociologists.

### **6. The Marginalization of Women in Party Politics in Nigeria**

Nigerian party politics has experienced the issue of gender inequalities. The marginalization of women as regards party politics by their male counterpart is not only a Nigeria phenomenon but a global one. Women has been relegated or marginalized to play a second class role as regards the appointment, selection or election of party members into various top party positions or as party delegates. In Nigeria, since 1999-2014, political parties has been dominated by men, as no woman has ever been selected or elected to occupy the top position (e.g. national chairman/chairperson of a party) in any of the various political parties. For

instance, using the People Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) as a case study, no woman has ever been appointed, selected or elected into the top hierarchy position (e.g. National Chairman/ Chairperson) of these two major political parties in Nigeria. The table below shows the Names of the Past and Present National Chairmen of the PDP Since 1999-2014;

**Table 1:** The Names of the Past and Present National Chairmen of the PDP since 1999-2014.

Names	Status
1. Chief Solomon Lar	Past National Chairman
2. Chief (Engr.) Barnabas Gemade	Past National Chairman
3. Chief audu Ogbeh	Past National Chairman
4. Senator Dr. Ahmadu Ali	Past National Chairman
5. Chief Vincent Ogbulafor	Past National Chairman
6. Dr Okwesilieze Nwodo	Past National Chairman
7. Dr Haliru Mohammed	Past Acting National Chairman
8. Alhaji Kawu Baraje	Past Acting National Chairman
9. Dr Bamanga Tukur	Past National Chairman
10. Dr. Adamu Mu'azu	Present National Chairman

(Source: Compiled by the Author)

From the table above, it is noticeable that out of the Ten (10) Past and Present National chairmen of PDP, that has been selected or elected since 1999-2014, are all male, and no female. Also, the table below shows the Names of the past and present National Chairmen of the APC since 2013-2014;

**Table 2:** The Names of the past and present National Chairmen of the APC since 2013-2014.

Names	Status
1. Chief Bisi Akande	Interim National Chairman
2. Chief John Oyegun	Present National Chairman

(Source: Compiled by the Author)

From the above table, it is noticeable that all the past and present National chairmen are all male. From table 1 and 2, it is clear that no woman has ever risen or chosen to the highest echelon in the various political parties especially in Nigeria since 1999-2014. According to Fatile and *et al* (2012) in Nigeria, many women register as party members but do not regularly participate in party meeting and caucuses were important decisions are taken. Women have contributed less to party decisions at party meetings and caucuses in Nigeria. This is largely as a result of women conception of party politics that women cannot compete in the turbulent environment as their male counterpart and the violent nature of party politics in Nigeria. According to Agbalajobi (2010) some consensus been of the belief that Nigerian politics is based on high political virility- those who have all it takes to compete in the turbulent environment; those who possess the wherewithal to take it by force when force is required; those that can march violence with violence. She went further to

explain that “this consensus belief that men possess that superiority strength, competitiveness, are self-reliant and are prepared to tussle in political endeavour, whereas women are considered too passive to engage in politics and governance” (Agbalajobi, 2010).

## 7. Effects

The marginalization of women in party politics is having an immerse effect on the Nigerian electoral and political process. The marginalization of women in party politics has hindered the contributions, participation and role of women in party politics and the Nigeria’s political process. The marginalisation of women in Nigerian political arena has affected the political participation of women in party politics which has lead to low participation of women in Nigerian politics. The major factors responsible for the low participation of women in party politics are gender roles-patriarchy and virility of deficiency (i.e. women conception of party politics).

## 8. Conclusion and The way forward

In conclusion, Nigerian women has experienced immerse marginalization in party politics. Women has played second class role to their male counterparts in party politics as regards the selection, appointment or election of party members into various party position or even as party delegates. It is not an offence, if a female is chosen to the highest echelon in a political party especially in Nigeria to be precise as the National Chairman/ Chairperson. Political parties in Nigeria should correct this injustice to ensure gender equity. Women must be encouraged and allowed to compete with their male counterpart in the selections and election of party officials

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