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The Bi-Polar World System and Impact on Nigerian Foreign Policy
Franc Ter Abagen & Selumun Tyona 1

The Making of Nigeria as a Colonial State and the Challenges of Development
Omonigho Amos Owem 17

Synergy between Christian Ethics and African Social Ethics: A Discourse
Robert Iornenge Katsina & Vershima John Terkimbi 35

Re-thinking Military Leadership and Legacies of Governance in Nigeria, 1966-1999
Rotimi Olajide Opeyeoluwa & Cordelia Oluwafunmilayo Ilori 49

Community Policing in Nigeria's North-East Region: Assessing the Performance of Civilian Joint Task Force in Maiduguri, 2012-2020
Ombuguhim Salman Umar & Lawan Jafaru Tahir 66

The Islamic Woman and Access to Western Education in Nigeria
Mohammed Tukur Aliyu 78

The Evolution and Development of Arab League
Umar Inuwa Musa & Musa Abubakar 89

International Relations in Pre-Colonial Africa South of the Sahara
Barnabas M. Atime & Kingsley T. Akange 104

An Assessment of the Growing Threat of Cybercrime/Insecurity and its Implications on the Nigerian State
Panshak Lar 115

CamScanner

The Impacts of Iron Working in Central Bauchi Region: A Study of Oral and Archaeological Evidence from Siri Ancient Smelting Space
Abdullahi Ahmad Musa
130

The Role of Women in the Colonial Economy of Okura District, 1903 - 1960
Abdul Hamza
147

An Overview on Historical Development of Digitisation/ Digitalisation of Ahmadu Bello University, Library, 1967-2015
Bashir Maitwada
167

Abortion Law and Policy in Nigeria: Implication on Sustainable Development Goals
Moses Osamudiamen Izevbizua & Felix Sado Osayande Osaghae
180

Natural Resources: A Determinant for Major Powers Relations with African Countries
Abdullahi Garba & Youbaere J. Ekpea – Abdullahi
195

Poverty, Development and Hunger in an Unequal World
Bimbo Ogunbanjo
212

British Occupation of Zazzau Emirate and the Creation of Giwa District, 1902-1907
Sani Haruna
255

Women Involvement in Politics in Ilorin, 1960 – 2007
Eliasu Yahaya
275

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Women Involvement in Politics in Ilorin, 1960 – 2007

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Abstract

This paper examines women involvement in politics in Ilorin, 1960 – 2007. This area of study has been neglected by scholars but this present effort intents to assert that women have been part of political development regardless of their various background in Nigeria, Ilorin not an exception. It is the contention of the paper that although it is true that before the contemporary era, women participation in politics was abysmally low and poor but through western education and encouragement of political actors as enumerated, women have started to see the benefits of joining politics in Ilorin, 1960 – 2017. Therefore, in carrying out this work, the writer makes use of both the primary and secondary sources of historical materials and hopes that more efforts would be made to capture significantly, the place of women in Ilorin politics.

Introduction

Men have always assumed some complexity over women and by implication dominate the world and put women in the background. This problem manifests itself in almost all spheres of human life in respect of politics which is the central focus of this work. However, much insight has not been given by scholars to appreciate the roles and contribution of women in politics in Nigeria, Ilorin not an exception. It is against this background that, we intend to highlight women involvement in politics in Ilorin. Attention have been given here to address this area of scholarship. This forms the major bed-rock of the problem and rationale for the study.

However, women have contributed tremendously in the various spheres of life and particularly in the growth and development of many nations politically. For instance, Mrs. Golda Meir of Israel, Mrs. Bandaranaikie of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Aquino of Philippines and Indira Gandhi of India to mention but just a few. However, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan in particular was regarded as the first women leader in the modern Islamic world. And of course, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom distinguished herself as a

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respected women leader in Europe (Punch 17). In Nigeria, the educated female elite class championed by Mrs. Charlotte Obasa formed the Lagos Women's League and since 1923 to 1944 advocated for more job opportunities for women, vocational training for girls and so on. Similarly, in 1944, Lady OyinkanAbayomi established the Women's party and sought for job opportunities for women, equal pay for equal work and more training in the areas of typing, nursing cookery, teaching and so on. In Southern Nigeria, women embarked on activities that were political in nature. The most popular report in historical records of the colonial period was the women insurrection in Eastern Nigeria, the famous Aba Riot of 1929. (Awe 31).

In Western Nigeria, the women organized a political action against the British Indirect rule which vested power in the hand of the traditional rulers and which marginalized women from participating in decision making. Leadership in this direction was given by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti. Her elite club culminated into the Abeokuta Women's Union in 1946 and had both literate and illiterate market women. Its objectives were among others, encouraging women to get political power, equal rights, to vote and be voted for. Moreover, in Ibadan, a very strong women wing was formed by Chief Elizabeth Adekogbe. She led a delegation of women to the Governor-General and protested against the Electoral College system which did not favour women if they won election at the primary level (Awe 32).

Thus, it must be stated that women, in spite of their marginalization, have been actively involved in party politics. They have achieved gradual progress in the political history and issues of our modern time. For instance, in Lagos, Madam Pelewura's Market Women Association coalesced with the Nigeria National Democratic Party headed by Herbert Macauley; Abayomi, Adekogbe, Wuraola Esan, Alhaja Humani Alaga and H. Alade stayed with the Action Group of Chief Obafemi Awolowo; Ekpo, Kuti and Mokelu were with the National Council of Nigerian and the Cameroon, while Alhaja Gambo Sawaba took solace with the radical Northern Elements Progressive Union (Awe 33).

Thus, we would look at the antecedence in Ilorin politics before 1960, the initial attempt by a few pocket of Ilorin women in Ilorin politics by 1979. More importantly, women involvement in politics during the second republic and sensitization of women in politics in Ilorin in respect of duo namely, Drs. Abubakar Olusola Saraki and Abubakar Bukola Saraki respectively and the

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level of transformation of politics in Ilorin during the period under consideration.

Historical Survey of Women in Ilorin Politics Before 1960

The historical origin of women participation in politics could be difficult to trace and decipher. However, their background could be linked up with the Ilorin Talaka Parapo (1954 – 1959). The Ilorin Talaka Parapo (commoners party) was the first mass political party in the history of Ilorin. It was founded in 1954. It must be pointed out that what really led to the formation of the party was to fight against the reformed native administration under the guise of tradition. There were complaints and dissatisfactions against the ruling oligarchy then. Wonder then that the Ilorin Talaka Parapo had to form an alliance with Action Group, the opposition party then. Historical records have not done much to relate the political activities of womenfolk. However, some of these women that participated in the political past are still alive today but available record has not given them recognition.

It is a recognizable fact that it cannot be denied that men started the party. Among these men was Sulaiman Maito of Alanamu Ward who was the first president of the party, Jimoh Adelabu of Ajikobi Ward who later became the president of the Ilorin Araromi Congress and also Sulaiman Baruba of the Aare Ward. Others were, Yahaya Kannike of Gambari Ward, Salau Gegele of Magajin Geri Ward, Adebimpe Oniyeye of Alanamu Ward and Dogo Agbogi of Alanamu Ward and he was also the chairman of the Ilorin Talaka Parapo (Whitaker 138).

Among the women that participated in the party were late Adetoun of Popo Giwa and Alhaja Abebi Akosile, a leading women political activist, politician and at the same time the former *Iyalaje* of Ilorin (Market women leader). She was conferred with this title by the late Emir of Ilorin, Zuluqarnain Gambari Muhammad (1959 – 1992). It must be mentioned that during the period under review, women had no right or did enjoy right to vote in the whole of Northern Nigeria, Ilorin not an exception. According to Abebi Akosile, she participated in politics in both the Ilorin Talaka Parapo and of course, in the Northern Peoples Congress. (Akosile 2001). She recalled that in the past, only 5 pounds was used to build a polling booth then. She narrated her experiences on the collapse in Ilorin Talaka Parapo. She pointed out that the party ran into problems in Ilorin when it attempted to form a merger with the Action Group in the West. Abebi Akosile's contemporaries

as women community leaders, political activists and merchants were Alhaja Sobalaje Eleran and Alhaja Abiodun Orisankoko (Jimoh 317).

Women and Political Participation in Ilorin 1960 – 79

By 1960, women seemed to have welcomed the independence period with enthusiasm and believed that with their male counterparts they would join hands and build the nation. But it must be stated that despite this, the role of women in politics was not encouraging. This may be as a result of the attitude of womenfolk towards western education. Despite that the level of transformation that had taken place in the development of Western education in Ilorin was of little significance, still, it surpassed that of the classical emirates in Northern Nigeria (Eliasu 48). Women seemed to have lagged behind in this effort – a cankerworm that had continued to eat deep into our womenfolk. But by 1979, or thereafter, some women were found to be actively involved in politics in Ilorin. Some of them include, Adeoti Isiaku Amura of Aare Ward I, Oloduowo of Agbaji Ward, Mero Sango (Zango) of Sango Ward, AbibaBaruba of Gambari I, Awele Ile Gobir of Gambari II, others included, Iya Popoola of Alore Ward, Amasa Oloje, women leader of Oloje, and Fatima Osin to mention but just a few.

The major roles of these women leaders in their various wards were to campaign and to mobilize the entre womenfolk to exercise their civic and political responsibilities. It must be pointed out also that these women although, largely illiterates at least from western perspective commanded respects in their various assigned wards. For instance, one of them, Adeoti Isiaku Amura was given a certificate of recognition as a woman leader in her area of jurisdiction. There were other women leaders known as the general women leader. Among such was Sobalaje Eleran and of course, Obafolahan, deputy women leader and Biodun Orisankoko (Adeoti 2001).

Women Participation in Politics during the Second Republic 1979 – 1983

By the time the military disengaged in 1979, politicians made things worst and succeeded only in making Nigeria an instrument of ridicule among the various nations of the world (This Day 12).But later Ilorin recorded a remarkable transformation in politics.Thus in Ilorin, we must mention the name of political actor and political giant in the state and Ilorin town in particular. Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki was one of the first to get to the parliamentary peak by his appointment as the Senate Leader in 1982 having been the majority leader in the Senate from 1979 to 1982. He was among the

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leading political personalities and of course, a leading political leader in the then ruling National Party of Nigeria (N.P.N) starting from the formation of the party in 1978 till its proscription by the Military Government in December, 1983.

More importantly, Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki sensitized women in the entire Ilorin emirate to their political right, weight and made them very active in politics. His philanthropic gesture helps at least in alleviating the suffering of the womenfolk in Ilorin to some extent though. It was in realization of this fact that a Kaduna based weekly newspaper called "Today" (Jimoh 313) commented thus:

> You only need to be at his house and you are assured of your three square meals while all women who converge in his house during his stay in Ilorin go home with 50 Naira (then) each of every day Saraki is in town. This strategy has worked. The guy knows that when it comes to voting, it is women. From research carried out, 30 per cent of our men folk in Ilorin said if there is an election today they would not bother to cast their votes while on the other hand, 85 per cent of the women interviewed would go to the polling booths. As long as the women remain the major instrumentality by which elections are won in Ilorin, Kwara State, Saraki can jolly well, go to sleep as his nominee in any election is likely to win (Jimoh 314).

Thus, women participation in Ilorin politics cannot be over-emphasized. But it should be pointed out that some women in their preponderance converged and collected gift from Saraki's party. Some tenable reasons can lend credence to this. But one of the major reasons was that majority of the women voters at the grassroots level in Ilorin werepoor and in point of fact cannot seek for any political office. Thus, the gifts so given to them was to compensate them for such services they rendered as voters and party loyalists. Furthermore, the little amount of money they enjoyedwas not when politics comes up only but even after the political rallies and campaigns. Hence, wherever any information was received about Saraki's presence in Ilorin, the women would move to a house popularly called *Ile Loke* (Saraki's house) to get something for their sustenance.

Women Participation in Politics during the Military Regime, 1983

The past seventeen years of this period witnessed testy period in the Nigeria's chequared history. We can recall the duo of MuhammaduBuhari (now

President Federal Republic of Nigeria), Tundeldiagbon who came into the Nigerian scene with great promises. They made stern policies and stood by them. After 16 months in power. They were relieved of their positions by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, popularly called IBB. He too seemed to have started well but for the so-called hidden agenda which almost took eight years of his administration to become clear (This Day 12). Without doubt,it was during his administration that the National Commission for Women Decree of 1989 was promulgated. Section 2 of the Decree mentions the objectives of the commission out of which only two would concern us because of relevance, it was fashioned out to "stimulate actions to improve women civil, political, cultural, social and economic education; andWork towards total elimination of all social and cultural practices tending to discriminate against and dehumanize womanhood among others".

Better Life for Rural Women programme. The Nation Council of Women Societies of Nigeria (NCWSN) and Women in Nigeria (WIN) were also established. (Pepple 51 – 52). Despite all these, the level of participation of women in politics in Nigeria was and still very low in Nigeria, Ilorin not an exception. Thus, the Presidential election of June 12, 1993 was cancelled. Later, Babangida had to step aside. This gave General Sanni Abacha another unique opportunity to rule this country. He ruled the nation for five years. Thereafter. General Abdulsalam Abubakar came in and managed the affairs of the nation with his transition programmes which resulted positively to the handover on May 29, to Olusegun Obasanjo who was sworn in as the Head of State of Nigeria (Pepple 12).

Politically in Ilorin, there were three political parties during that period. They were: All Peoples Party (APP). Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Alliance for Democracy (AD), but the most popular of these in Ilorin was All Peoples Party. Thus, under the political system, there were women participants who played vital roles through meetings and campaigns. It is important to mention but just a few of them. For instance, ObalowuMuinat, Nana Okele and Nimota Ibarahim. Others were Fatima Tanbaya Olowo, Sariyu Iya Ibeji, Iyaboi Sanusi, Abebi Balogun and a host of others. Their participation in politics yielded good dividends so much so that some of them have climbed various ladders of honour and authority among womenfolk. For instance, Fatima Tanbaya Olowo contested for women councillorship seat under the platform of All Peoples Party (APP) and she won. She was a woman councilor in Ilorin. Iyabo Sanusi was a women leader in the Ilorin-

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East, Abebi Balogun women leader Ilorin-South, while in Ilorin West, we had Sariyu Iya Ibeji as a women leader. (Fatima 2001).

When another administration came in under the dynamic leadership of Governor Muhammed Alabi Lawal in 1999, Nimata Ibrahim, a political activist, was appointed as a Commissioner for Education in the State, although she was dropped later. She became Secretary of All People Party (APP – Saraki's faction) in the State. Furthermore, Khairat Razzaq won a senatorial chair under the People Democratic Party (PDP). As a matter of fact, Gbemisola Fafowora Saraki was also a honourable member at the House of Representative, Abuja. She contested for the seat and she won under the platform of All Peoples Party (APP).

Specific Contributions of Abubakar Olusola Saraki to Women in Politics in Ilorin

Before the coming of Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki, politics for many years was a game in which the womenfolk were partially involved. This was as a result of the erroneous impression that women were to bear children and clean houses. This belief led to a large number of men in politics, but women were onlookers. Better still, there were very few women personalities such as Onikepe, Gambo Laila that were key women actors in politics in the 1950s. In addition, there was general belief that, if women were given the mandate to participate in politics, this might result into home breaking or divorce. There was also the saying that women were to be seen not to be heard.

This was the situation until the coming of Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki into the main stream of politics in Ilorin. His participation in politics clearly gave impetus to women and consequently participated into politics. Dr. Saraki used his might, power and his popularity to influence women into politics. It would be mentioned that the re-appearance of Dr. AbubakarOlusolaSaraki in 1976 into politics was to pull women along. He gave them the grassroots encouragement and franchise so as to be actively involved in politics. (Nuhu 325).

This initiative of Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki culminated into strong initiative under the leadership of Dr. Abubakar Bukola Saraki (2003 – 2007). Governor Abubakar Bukola Saraki eventually appointed largely women into politics of Kwara State. This was in line with the guideline and philosophy of 1995 Beijing Declaration endorsed in China. In this declaration, women were

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to be given 25% representation in public offices right from the grassroots to the top of political offices.

It must be stated that in line with the rule of Beijing Declaration in 1995, and in consonance with the top responsibilities and position occupied by women at the Local, State and Federal levels, women have been adequately indemnified and they seemed to have benefitted from the dividends of democracy and politics.

Dr. Abubakar Bukola Saraki and Appointment of Women into Key Position, 2003 – 2007

Abubakar Bukola Saraki qualified as a Medical Doctor, he was also a former special adviser on budget and Economic Matters in the Presidency, Abuja. More importantly, he was a two-term Executive Governor of Kwara State. He made some remarkable achievements through the appointment of women into various positions during his administration. Hajia Aminat Ndalolo was appointed a former Honourable Minister of State for Health, she represented Kwara State in the Federal Executive Council, Abuja. Hajia Halimat Yusuf, was appointed a commissioner for Education, Kwara State. Hajia Architect Halimat Tayo Alao was became Honourable Minister of State for Health and Minister of Environment and Urban Development respectively. Senator Gbemisola Saraki represented Kwara State in the National Assembly. Dr. (Mrs.) Nimota Nihinlola Akanbi was appointed Ambassador in the Royal Kingdom of Netherlands. Sulaiman Nimota Oba (Mrs.) and Maimunat U. Adaji were Honourable members of the House of Representatives (Nuhu 327).

Hajia Nimota Ibrahim was also appointed a Commissioner in Kwara State Ministry of Education. In addition, Hajia Banke Badmus was a Commissioner for Health, also Hajia Ayinke Saka for Health. There were also Mrs. Ramota Adesina Abaya, Mrs. Cecilia B. Ore and Mrs. Raliat A. Adifa appointed as Honourable Members of House of Assembly, Kwara State. Dr. Mrs. Ojeleye was a Commissioner, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Hajia Tawakalitu Abdulkadir was Chairperson, Ilorin West Local Government Area. Hajia Nimota N. Alabi, Chairperson Ifelodun Local Government Area.

Hajia (Dr.) Z.F. Ambali became Permanent Secretary Ministry of Environment and Tourism. Others were, Hajia R.A Yinusa, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Industry and Solid Menerals, Mrs Cecilia Adebayo, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Information and Home Affairs, Dr. Mrs. F.

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Odekunle, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Social Development and Mrs. Bosede T. Orunmuyi Permanent Secretary Ministry of Women Affairs Kwara State respectively.

Conclusion

We have discussed in this work the origin of politics in Ilorin led by the Ilorin Talaka Parapo (1954 – 1959). Men took the lead in the political arena which women joined later. But the political presence of women in Ilorin politics in the later years raise some problems until 1960 when the aura of hope at independence dawned on them. Consequently, a few of the women had the courage to participate in politics. Thus, one of the major problems then was lack of adequate knowledge. The second reason was as a result of the fact that perhaps Islam has not specified the major role women could play in politics. In other words, the tradition of Islam seemed not to support women leadership role at that time.

By 1960 – 1979, we have recorded active involvement of women in politics in Ilorin in their various wards. Such wards were, *Aare* Ward, *Agbaji* Ward, *Zango*Ward and *Alore* Ward. During the second republic, 1979 -1983, Dr. Abubakar Olusola Saraki belonged to the National Part of Nigeria. In the same year, we must mention the role of the military particularly, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. He established National Commission for Women Decree of 1989 was promulgated. Perhaps, this marked the beginning of women popularity in Nigeria political scene. Another leadership came in 1999 under then Governor Muhammed Alabi Lawal to assist women.

Thus, the year 2003 – 2007 witnessed a remarkable transformation of women involvement in Ilorin politics. Dr. Abubakar Bukola Saraki promoted women progress through appointment of women into various positions. This in away, left a lasting legacy for womenfolk. However, there is still much to be done to give women liberation through politics. The summary of the central theme and recommendation is that women must be given their twenty five (25%) representation to carry out their various political activities.

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