
LEGISLATIVE IDEOLOGY AS A FEMINIST TROPE IN HOMERIC AND NIGERIA SOCIETIES

Bosede Adefiola ADEBOWALE
*Department of Classics,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria*

Abstract

Politics is an important aspect of every society, and often times, men have been the major players on the political landscape. It is also an indisputable fact that women constitute over half of the population of the world. The question then arises: why are there so few women elected as public officials? Over the years, bigotry has made people believe that women are not suitable for politics or decision-making positions and, they have nothing to offer to the overall development of society. Nigeria is not an exception with regard to this kind of thinking. Though the significant part of the national population is constituted of women, yet the numerical strength of women does not correspond to women representation in Nigeria's public life. This is due to the fact that Nigeria is a patriarchal society characterised by intense discrimination against women. Like contemporary Nigeria, the ancient Homeric society epitomises a misogynistic society, a world where men ruled supreme, and women, the objects. Despite this, Homer's *Odyssey* presents the character of a unique woman in Penelope who survived a male dominated world by her personal strength and

protected her home and family from predators and enemies. This paper reviews the character of Penelope in *Odyssey* of Homer and analyses how female power and worth were measured in the Homeric world. It also explores the role of women in Nigerian politics and the factors debarring them from active political participation in comparison to the Homeric world.

Keywords: Decision-making, discrimination, women, Penelope, Nigeria

Introduction

The question of the status of women and equality between men and women is a subject relevant to every culture and society at large. Hence, in recent times, issues and situations relating to the subjection of women have become the focus of scholarly discourse with divergent opinions on the causes, suggestions and recommendations for controlling male domination over their female counterparts. Ekpe et al (2014:16) attribute male domination over females to “persisting stereotype, abuse of religious and traditional practices, patriarchal societal structures” that allow economic, political and social power to be dominated by men. The perception that women are inferior to their male counterparts is found virtually in all cultures.

In ancient times, the Homeric society is a representation of a misogynistic world. Generally, in the ancient Greek world, women did not have an independent life, from cradle to death; the Greek women depended on the guardianship of a male relative, father, husband, male next of kin or even a son, as the case may be. In the Homeric world, men ruled supreme while women were regarded as objects (Blundell, 1995:177-178).

In the contemporary period, Nigeria, like every other African society, is sated with several cultural practices that promote directly or indirectly the domination of women by their male colleagues. For example, in the political realm, the number of women actively participating in politics does not commensurate

with the population of women in the country. Olurode, as quoted by Ekpe et al (2014:16), assert:

Nigerian women have about the worst representation of 5.9% in the national legislature when compared to other African countries, example: Uganda (34.6%), South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%), Cameroon (20%), Niger (12.3%), and DR Congo (8.0%).

The salient questions at this juncture are:

what are the factors debarring women in participating in politics? what would be the effects of women participation in Nigerian politics? what enabling factors can facilitate increased women political participation? what enabled Penelope to succeed in the Homeric chauvinistic world? how can Nigerian women, today, apply the spirit of Penelope to succeed in public life?

With these questions, this paper examines the challenges and prospects of women taking active part in Nigerian politics and decision making.

General Perception of Women in Ancient Greece

Women in the ancient Greek had limited rights which varied from city-state to city-state. For instance, women in Sparta and Athens experienced profound different roles in their family, social and political lives. With exception to a few nobility and women of Sparta, women in ancient Greek city-states generally had limited access to education and any social engagement that could interfere with their domestic or childbearing responsibilities. The fact that women in had little or no social life supports the aged notion that the place of a woman is the home where she is occupied with running the household, weaving and childrearing. Engrossed with the activities in her home, the ancient Greek woman had no time to get involved in the political activities of her community. Apart from this, the ancient Greek woman was not allowed to own or dispose property as she chose, she could not engage in buying and selling goods or services and since only property owners were allowed to participate in politics, women were unable to participate in politics (O'Pry, 2012:8).

The ancient Greek city of Athens was the origin of democracy and many aspects of Western Civilisation. The same city of Athens was the cradle of philosophy where anyone could become a great scholar, poet, politician or historian. However, not everyone in Athens had equal opportunity to participate fully in government, commerce or religious ceremonies. This was due to gender inequality and discrimination, and citizenship status. Being a woman in ancient Athens, according to O'Pry (2012:8), "to say the least, was not a lot of fun nor was it in any way an equal society." Ancient Athens was indeed a society totally dominated by men, only freeborn men could exercise political rights. This is evident in the work of Aristotle, a fifth century famous philosopher, as cited in O'Pry Aristotle believes that a good wife should not pay attention to public affairs, to Aristotle, "women brought disorder, evil, and were utterly useless and caused more confusion than the enemy" (O'Pry, 2012:8). With Aristotle's viewpoint, it is evident that men believed women to be incapable of understanding the skills needed for decision-making in politics. And as suggested by Cantarella (1987:39), "the difference in gender is what prevented free women from being part of the polis." Therefore, political rights were based not on ability but gender; men were given the right to vote but women were not, men participated in public affairs while women remained in isolation in their homes saddled with the responsibility of household chores and childbearing.

Athenian women were not only deprived of political rights, they were also kept in isolation from the rest of the society. Pomeroy (1975:80) argues that women lived in *gynaikonitis*, women's quarters, where they could supervise the running of their home. Preoccupied with household activities, women had little contact with the male world. As a result of this, women were rarely seen outside their home, they rarely interacted with women or men other than their own family members, and slaves, if they could afford one. The upper class women were always accompanied by a chaperon or a male member of her family if she had duty outside her home, such as shopping at the market. It is noteworthy at this point that Athenian women were not really considered citizens of Athens. A citizen of Athens must be a male born of parents who were both in Athens. Women, foreigners and slaves were not considered as Athenian citizens.

Athenian women did not receive formal education in school like their male counterparts, they were expected to be tutored at home by their mothers or a tutor at home, they were given some basic education required to oversee the household and its finances, spin, weave, sew and cook. These were considered as the most important skills a woman should possess along with the ability to rear children. However, some women in the chauvinistic Athenian society had freedom of movement; these were the concubines, prostitutes, and mistresses, especially the *hetaera* who were permanent mistresses of some citizens. The *Hetaera*, unlike the other Athenian women, received better education; they were taught poetry and music and could take part in the political debate in the society (Pomeroy, 1975:80). Thus, the idea of isolating Athenian women was to protect the lineage of their children and to ensure the legitimacy of the child born to an Athenian woman. Hence, the major role of Athenian woman in the society was a reproductive and childrearing role.

Spartan women, on the other hand, enjoyed more freedom compared to those in other Greek city-states. Right from birth, families treated female children same as male children. According to Fantham et al. (1994:56), it was only in the Greek city of Sparta that a "woman was treated almost on equality with man". Spartan females were educated in the same way as their male counterparts and were encouraged to participate in sports. Explaining why Spartan women were given much education as the men, O'Pry (2012:10) asserts that Spartan women were expected to take care of the interest of their husbands when the men were away at war which was a regular occurrence in Spartan life.

Spartan society did not allow the younger girls to marry as soon as they reached puberty; they allowed them to attain physical maturity. The main concern here, unlike in Athens, was to ensure the production of healthy male children who would later serve in Spartan military as well as healthy female children for production. The role of a Spartan woman, here, was one of maternity while Spartan man played the role of serving in the army. Both however served the interest of the polis (Fantham et al, 1994:57). Like their Athenian female counterparts, Spartan women also produced children for the state.

Spartan women were also allowed to own and dispose property as they desired; they could inherit equal shares from their father's property. Spartan women had more legal rights with regards to ownership of property and inheritance. There is, however, a limitation to the freedom enjoyed by Spartan women. Like Athenian women, Spartan women could not take active part in Spartan politics; they were forbade to speak in public assemblies and were also separated from the men. In spite of this, they were able to influence the community and make their views known through their husbands. Aristotle, as cited in O'Pry (2012:11), is of the opinion that in the days of Spartan's greatness, many things were managed by Spartan women.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced from Athens and Sparta that women in ancient Greek society were not allowed to have an active part in politics and decision-making of their times. Many writings about ancient Greek women indicate their passive roles. Despite this, Homer's *Odyssey* presents the character of a unique woman in Penelope who survived a male dominated world by her personal strength and protected her home and family from predators and enemies. Homer presents women as being capable of participating in politics and decision-making, showing that women possess certain qualities required in decision-making processes.

In the *Odyssey*, Penelope is the dutiful wife of Odysseus, the main character of the epic and the king of Ithaca. She has a son named Telemachus. The son was born just before Odysseus is invited to fight in the Trojan War. She waits for twenty years for the return of her husband (ten years was spent in the war and it took Odysseus another ten years to return). During her period of waiting for her husband's homecoming; many suitors come to ask for her hand in marriage, but she devises various plans to delay marrying one of her suitors. One of the strategies she employs is pretending to be weaving a burial shroud for Odysseus' aged father, Laertes, claiming that she would choose one of the suitors when she has finished. Her ploy is discovered and exposed to the suitors by one of her maids after three years. Finally, Odysseus returns disguised as a beggar and participates in the bow contest organised by Penelope, he wins and kills all the suitors. He later reveals himself to Penelope. In the absence

to rule Ithaca in his absence to her even though his father and son are alive and have equal right to the throne (*Odyssey* 18, 256-270). Penelope is to rule Ithaca either until the return of Odysseus or until Telemachus becomes of age to take his rightful position as the king of Ithaca. Pending this time, Penelope has to skilfully protect her household and the throne of Ithaca. In doing this, Penelope exhibits profound qualities that make her stand out among all the women of her time that Homer sings her praise toward the end of Odysseus' epic thus:

Happy son of Laertes, widely resourceful Odysseus,
blessed with the marvellous, upright woman you married,
what goodness of mind in faultless Penelopeia!
Ikarios's daughter truly remembered Odysseus,
the man she'd married: so now her name and her
goodness
will never die. The deathless Gods will fashion a joyful
song for men on the earth about thoughtful Penelopeia.

Here, Homer shows that the character of Penelope surpasses other mortal women both in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These qualities she displays do not only reflect her authority and power but also manifest her worth as a woman of her fame.

At the beginning of *Odyssey*, Telemachus has grown up and should be over twenty-year old. Telemachus was born before Odysseus went to war and by the time Odysseus returned from war to his home in Ithaca, Odysseus himself confirmed that he had gone for twenty years (*Odyssey*, 19. 480-484). When Odysseus was departing, he instructed his wife, Penelope, to give the kingdom to their son at the first sign of beard on the cheek of their son. If Penelope had strictly abided by the instruction given by her husband, she would have given the throne of the kingdom to their son. However, Penelope refrains from giving the kingdom to her son, she is still the one in charge and her son is without authority in his home. Generally, one would have thought that Penelope had become intoxicated with power, but *Odyssey* Book (1. 345-444) shows that by his actions and the comments of other people, which included his mother and the goddess Athena about him, Telemachus appears too weak to take his rightful position as the king of Ithaca; he lacks the respect and quality attributed to a king or a man. When he

tries to claim authority and respect among his mother's suitors, he does not really succeed. The suitors do not only reproach, ridicule and deride him; they also plan to murder him,

Penelope does not recognize her son, Telemachus, as man a ready to take over the authority of the throne until after he had returned from his voyage to gather information about his father, Odysseus (*Odyssey*, 19. 158-161). Pending that time, without an appropriate male successor to take over the leadership of Ithaca, Penelope is left with the responsibility of ruling Ithaca. Despite facing many obstacles and her authority being challenged not only by her suitors but also by her son, Telemachus, Penelope displays the qualities of shrewdness, wisdom, loyalty, faithfulness and intelligence. These are qualities required to be a successful leader to keep the throne intact for her son or husband.

Her faithfulness and loyalty is exceptional. According to Morgan (1991), Penelope effectively emphasises her commitment to marriage and chastity, contrasting her actions with those of Helen of Troy. She displays the qualities of shrewdness; wisdom and intelligence in an incomparable manner which enabled her secure her home and the throne of her husband. The Greek word translated shrewdness and wisdom is *metis* (*μητις*), a word which found its origin in the Greek goddess, Metis, one of the wives of Zeus, the head of the Greek Pantheon. Metis, according to the Greek myth, was full of cunning and seemed to have the power of metamorphosis which enabled her to transform her appearance. Like Metis, Penelope displays the qualities of shrewdness and courage in various ways which enabled her trap her enemies and survive the harsh fate allotted her. She was able to protect her household as well as proving her worth as a woman, wife, mother and ruler.

In the ancient Greek society, weaving was an important domestic chore for women. Textiles such as bedding, bags and clothes with many artful patterns were made from the weaving to equip the household. Many at times, some of the weavings were sold so as to provide extra income for the family (Pantelia, 1993:493,497). Weaving was a source of pride to women because it reflected their skills which in turn reflected the prosperity of their household. In the Homeric world, the word, "weave", had an ambiguous meaning. On one hand, weaving can refer to the physical action of doing household chore. On the other, it can

mean weaving a web of lies and deceit. Just as Metis gave the art of cunningness, the art of weaving was also given to women by Athena (Lowenstam, 2000:335). Penelope uses what was at her disposal to protect the welfare of her household; she uses both shrewdness and weaving to her own advantage to deceive the suitors. During the day, she engages herself in weaving only to unravel the weaving by night. She uses her words to calm the suitors assuring them that she would marry one of them after she finishes weaving a shroud to her father-in-law which is her womanly responsibility. With this, she is able to trick and keep the suitors away for three whole years until her plans are exposed by one of her treacherous maids (*Odyssey*, 2:90-110). Though her suitors are angry because of her deceitful scheme, they praise her for her intelligence which in turn makes her more desirable to the suitors (Lowenstam, 2000:335).

Penelope, with determination to ensure the safety of her household in the absence of her husband, devises another intelligent plan. She proposes a bow contest with her husband's bow which would, as she explains to the beggar she suspects to be her husband, prove whoever wins the contest worthy of her. She explains her dream and bow contest plan to the disguised Odysseus thus:

"Twenty geese in my house have come from the water to eat my grain. I'm warm and glad to be watching. But then a large, hook-beaked eagle flies from the mountain and breaks each one of their necks. They lie where he he killed them, piled in the great hall. The eagle soars to the bright sky. I scream myself. I cry although I am dreaming, women in lovely Akhaian braids are around me mourning sadly - my geese were killed by an eagle. The bird flew back then. He perched high on a jutting roof-beam and spoke with a man's voice to console me: 'Take heart, widely renowned Ikarios's daughter. No idle dream, your splendid vision will end well. The geese were your suitors. I was an eagle before but now I'm back in this form as your husband who'll bring a revolting doom on all of the suitors'" (*Odyssey*, 19. 535-550).

Odysseus (who disguised as a stranger), explains to her that the vision is sent to her by her husband and encourages her to follow

the guidance of the dream. He encourages her not to delay in organising the contest

The plan is successful and helps Penelope to return the kingdom intact to Odysseus at his return. Penelope is a woman of valour who proves that it is possible for a woman to gain power and earn fame, though she shares power with her husband both in his presence and absence. Being a woman, it could have been easier for the enemy to take the throne away from her, but no one dared it. Also, Penelope does not have the status of a king but she had been compared to a king, she was considered an equal to Odysseus in intelligence as well as a perfect soul mate for Odysseus. She outwitted her suitors in various ways and showed them that she was the ruler of Ithaca.

Men in the Homeric society could earn fame in many ways, especially through physical labour. Fame for women could only be achieved through female attributes and good deeds. It was possible for them to receive fame for their beauty and domestic skills. Penelope is not only praised because of her beauty and domestic skills, but also because of her intelligence and devotion to her husband. She stood out among the women of her epoch.

Women and Decision-making Policy in Nigeria

Over the years, Nigerian decision-making processes, like the one in the ancient Greek, has been characterised as chauvinistic and patriarchal. According to Heywood, as cited by Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014: 105), this “generally connotes the ‘rule by men.’” However, studies have revealed copious evidence that African women in general have for long been playing vital roles in the politics and decision-making processes of their different countries. Research has also shown that many women of the past years had greatly aided the development of African politics. According to Mohamed (2000:22), these women played important roles in redeeming and elevating their countries. Nigeria, despite being a patriarchal society has abundant historical references of women who broke through the grip of chauvinism and patriarchy to full participate in decision-making activities of their time. For instance, Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014:105) affirm that in the pre-colonial period, women actively participated in politics and were “relatively less exclusive in decision-making process in many pre-colonial societies.” They further explain that the

advent of colonialism “with its anti-women policies gradually transformed a hitherto politically gender-unbiased to a predominantly male dominated political scene.” With this it is evident that women made their mark in the political development of the country to what it is today. Considering the political structure of Nigeria, women participation in politics and decision-making can be classified into different phases. The first stage comes under pre-colonial era; the next is the colonial and the last is the post-colonial period.

Pre-Colonial Period

The position of women during the pre-colonial era differed according to the cultural orientation of an ethnic group or region. In the African traditional setting, like in ancient Greek society, women had various responsibilities as mothers and caregivers. But Nigerian pre-colonial history is sated with the achievements of women of substance such as Queen Amina of Zazau, Moremi of Ife, Princess Inikpi of Igala, Emotan of Benin, Omu Okwel of Ossomari, and Efunsetan Aniwura- the Iyalode of Ibadan. These women contributed immensely to the development of their communities that Awe (1992:35) refers to them as “the saviour of their societies”. For instance, the modern northern city known as Zaria was founded by a woman named Bakwa Turuku who was later succeeded by her daughter, Amina, as a queen (Kolawole et al, 2012:4). Queen Amina has been described by Oloyede Oluyemi, in a paper she presented to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), as a great and powerful warrior who did everything to protect the city from invaders; she built a high wall around Zaria and extended the boundaries of her territory beyond Bauchi. Due to her enormous achievements, the people of Kano and Kastina paid tributes to her. With her sense of duty and resourcefulness, Queen Amina turned Zaria into a very prominent commercial centre. Today, her evergreen memory represents the spirit and strength of womanhood.

Not to be ignored are the important roles played by Moremi of Ife, who, according to oral tradition, allowed herself to be captured by enemies in order to learn their secrets that will help Ife warriors defeat their enemies. Moremi of Ife, together with other women mentioned previously, displayed tremendous bravery and strength in the politics of their respective

communities. The women contributed greatly in creating the peaceful atmosphere needed for the development and growth of their kingdoms. However, there are other various traditional political positions occupied by women in the pre-colonial era, the table below shows some women traditional rulers during this period and the territories they ruled.

Table 1: Some women traditional rulers in pre-colonial Nigeria

S/N	Name	Town/Village	Local Government Area	State	Type of Rule	Date
1.	Luwo Gbadiaya	Ife	Ife Central L.G.	Osun	Ooni of Ife	Pre-colonial days
2.	Iyayun	Oyo	Oyo L.G.	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-Colonial days
3.	Orompoto	Oyo	Oyo L.G.	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
4.	Jomijomi	Oyo	Oyo L.G.	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
5.	Jepojepo	Oyo	Oyo L.G.	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
6.	Queen Amina	Zauzau		Kaduna	Emir	Pre-colonial days
7.	Daura	Daura	Daura Emirate	Kastina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
8.	Kofono	Daura	Daura Emirate	Kastina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
9.	Eye-moi	Akure	Akure	Ondo	Regent Monarch	Pre-colonial days 1705-1735
10.	Ayo-Ero	Akure	Akure	Ondo	Regent Monarch	Pre-colonial days 1850-51AD
11.	Gulfano	Daura	Daura Emirate	Kastina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
12.	Yawano	Daura	Daura Emirate	Kastina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
13.	Yakania	Daura	Daura Emirate	Kastina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
14.	Walsam	Daura	Daura Emirate	Kastina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
15.	Çadar	Daura	Daura Emirate	Kastina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
16.	Agagri	Daura	Daura Emirate	Kastina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
17.	Queen Kanbasa	Bony	Bony L.G.	Rivers	Queen	Pre-colonial days

Source: Kolawole et al. (2012)

One may wonder how these women were able to attain these lofty positions in lieu of what is obtainable in Nigerian society today. For one, during the pre-colonial days, in the customary laws, if not in all parts of the country but in most parts, women were not viewed as children needing monitoring like their Homeric counterparts. They were regarded as adults though certain limitations were imposed which somehow subjected them to the authority of the male. This notwithstanding, women had free access to income. Land, at this time was usually owned by the community and whoever worked on the land derived the benefits, whether male or female. In addition to this was the functional system of education operated at this period which enabled women to obtain a skill in order to earn a living. As observed by Ogunsheye and cited in Kolawole et al (2012:3), "a woman who was without a craft or trade, or who was totally dependent on her husband was not only rare, but also regarded with contempt." Thus, these women were able to transform their economy power into political hegemony, thus, participating in the decision-making process in their communities.

Colonial Period

This is also referred to as the era of inactivity, because during this period, Nigerian women were adversely affected by the colonial administration policies and statutes which were evidently chauvinistic and discriminatory. During this period, women were denied franchise until in the 1950s when women in Southern Nigeria were given franchise. Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014:105) explain two major colonial policies that helped in promoting patriarchy in Nigerian politics back then and that still foster gender discrimination in political participation. The first policy was the one that supposed that only men could be active in public life and suitable to earn a living to support their families. This became more evident in the educational system provided by the colonial administration whereby only males enjoyed scholarship and were later engaged by the colonial civil service. Women were only allowed to enrol for subjects like domestic science as against skill enhancing courses. The second factors had to do with the restructuring of traditional economies that linked them with the international capitalist economic system dominated by men because women were deprived of access to

loans that could boost their enterprise. With these and other unfavourable policies of the colonial administration, women were incapacitated of free participation in Nigerian politics until the 1950s. Men gained an 'upper hand' against their female counterparts and this marked the beginning of female under-representation in the public sphere.

Despite this situation, some women asserted themselves and expressed their political views. Some even organized revolts to fight for the right of women. For instance, Mrs Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti organized the women's revolt in Abeokuta to protest against taxation and other colonial policies that did not favour women in Abeokuta. She also supported another revolt led by Mrs Margaret Ekpo of Calabar who was also fighting against unfavourable colonial policies in the eastern part of the country. This was the beginning of a revolution that later transcended the other part of the country bringing to the fore the recognizable position of women in the Nigerian society. At the summit for independence in Western and Eastern Nigeria, some women were appointed into the House of Chiefs. They included Chief (Mrs) Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo and Janet Moku. Other women who raised their voices politically included Hajiya Sawaba Gambo of the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) among others (Omodia et al., 2013:98). Though women, to some extent, were given the deserved recognition and enjoyed higher level of authority, especially in the Southern Nigeria, but in the exact words of Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014:105):

men having tasted political power and found it appealing had continued to consolidate its position by fencing out their female counterparts from the mainstream political activities where the real power lies. At best, women were strategically, through several means including cultural exclusion, reduced to the second fiddle offices of 'deputy' and 'vice'.

From all this, it is evident that colonialism played a colossal role in the relegation of women in the political field. The colonial period marked the development of a system of government where the old tradition of mutual respect between male and female has been jettisoned and male egotism was being promoted. The legal

system inherited from the colonial administration did not give women the motivation for self advancement and participation in natural development. Many at times, women had to obtain their husbands written permission before engaging in certain activities such as obtaining an international passport. The colonial policies and statutes were clearly sexist and biased against women, thus, this era set the trend of political state of Nigeria today.

The postcolonial period

It is evident that during the colonial era, men started playing a dominant role in the Nigerian political structure while the women, feeling inadequate and inferior to their male counterparts, assume the sedentary role. However, the post-colonial period has marked a new dawn for women. From this period onward, women have started playing active roles in the political organization of the country. By 1960, the year Nigeria got her independence; women also gained the franchise which enabled them to give a massive support to various political parties individually and collectively through different women organizations such as market women movement. Women began contesting for political post and winning elections. For example, in 1960, Mrs. Wuraola, from the Western part of Nigeria, became the first female member of the Federal Parliament and in 1961; Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpos, Mrs. Janet N. Mokelu and Miss Ekpo A. Young contested elections and become members of the Eastern House of Assembly.

Women continue to make progress in the political domain and in other spheres dominated by men. During the second Republic which started in 1979, Nigerian women started contesting and winning elections into the national House of Representative under different political parties. Women like Mrs. J.C. Eze and Mrs. V.O. Nnaji, under the Nigerian People's Party (NPN), represented UzoUnami and Isu constituencies in former Anambra State respectively and Mrs. Abiola Babatope of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) who represented Mushin Central II of Lagos State. During this period, two women were appointed federal ministers: Chief (Mrs.) Janet Akinrinade as Minister for Internal Affairs and Mrs. Adenike Egun Oyagbola as Minister for National Development. Mrs. Francesca Yetunde Emmanuel became the only female Permanent Secretary, while a good number of women

were appointed commissioners in the states. Mrs. Franca Afegbua became the only female to be elected into the Senate and a small number of women contested and won elections into local government councils.

After this period came the military regime in 1983. During this time, the President Buhari administration instructed that at least a woman must be appointed a member of the Executive Council in every state of the federation. All the states complied with this directive even some states appointed two or three female members. In the 1990s, women began to be appointed as deputy governors and chairpersons of some public corporations.

With the advent of the Third Republic, more women started having active parts in the politics of the country. Women started emerging as councillors of the local government councils and a woman Chief (Mrs.) Titilayo Ajanaku, emerged as the Chairperson of a local government council. Though there was no female governor in any of the states, two women became deputy governors. In 1992, during the senatorial elections, only Mrs. Kofo Bucknor Akerele won a seat in the senate. Few women like Chief (Mrs) Florence Ita Giwa also won an election into the House of Representatives. Two women were appointed as members of the Transitional Council appointed by President Ibrahim Babangida in 1993; they were Mrs. Emily and Mrs. Laraba Dagash.

During the Interim National Government of Chief Sonekan in 1993, two women were appointed as cabinet ministers. The regime of General Sani Abacha had a number of female ministers at various times in his cabinet. Also, two women: Chief (Mrs) Onikepo Akande and Dr. Laraba Gambo, were appointed as parts of the Federal Executive Council (FEC) during the regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar.

May 1999 marked the beginning of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria and it witnessed an increase number of women participating in political activities and appointments. Though at this time, like others, there was still no female Governor in any state of the Federation, but many women became councillors of the Local Governments and a female Deputy Governor was produced in Lagos State, Senator Bucknor Akerele. The National Assembly had only three women in the Senate, while House of Representatives had twelve women. The different states of the Federation produced few female members in the State Houses, in

some states, there was virtually no female legislators. Some women who were appointed as commissioners automatically qualified as members of the Executive Councils in all states. During President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime, a number of women were appointed into the Federal Executive Council.

Table 2: Comparison of Women Representation in 1999-2015 Nigerian Elections

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat available	Women	Seat 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(6.4)
House of Rep.	360	12(3.3)	360	21(5.8)	360	23(6.4)	360	26(7.2)	109	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	
House of Assembly	990	12(1.2)	990	38(3.8)	990	52(5.3)	990	62(6.3)		
SHA Committees Chairperson	829	18(2.2)	881	32(3.6)	887	52(5.9)	887			
L.G.A. 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			

Oloyede Oluayemi, National Bureau of Statistics, Abuja

The table above shows that women are underrepresented in leadership roles, not only in public services but also in the political sector, from the inception of democracy in Nigeria. Even during the pre-colonial days, the population of women taking active part in the national decision making process does not commensurate with the population of women in the country. The question one can ask at this point is: why are women not taking active part in Nigerian politics?

One of the many reasons why fewer women participate in Nigerian politics is the social-cultural/traditional belief system. Nigerian societies, like many other patriarchal societies, use gender role ideology as a tool to place women within the private domain of the house as mothers and wives while men engage in the public sphere. Traditionally, it is considered an abomination for a woman to claim equal right with a man "especially in decision-making programme such as politics or wanting to head a man under any circumstance" (Ekpe et al., 2014:17). Ordinarily, in the African tradition, a woman does not take an independent decision aside her husband. Most chauvinistic men, even the

educated ones, oppose women's participation in politics since it has to do with decision making processes. According to Agbalajobi (2010:78), the attitude of sponsors or 'godfathers' of politicians who prefer male candidates over female ones believing that they (men) have better chances of success compared to women make the situation worse. Also, the 'godfathers' perceive that male candidates will be more than willing to return their unlimited favours when the seat of power is eventually secured.

Other reasons are political factors; lack of financial backing and lack of effective affirmative action quotas. The nature of politics serves as an important factor hindering women's active participation in politics. Politics, especially the way it is played in Nigeria, is considered a dirty game with the "capacity of defiling any spiritual individual who is conscious of eternity" (Erunke et al., 2013:100). The insecurity of lives and properties associated with politics makes it a no-go-area for women. Politics is equally conceived as being for people who have no regards for human right and are ready to compromise virtuousness for indecent gains. With this, the political arena is considered unfit for virtuous women and any female political aspirant who embarks on a political life is viewed as promiscuous.

Nigerian daily news is replete with tales of fraudulent and scandalous practices of some politicians. In recent times, money laundering has become the order of the day. With this, some women perceive politics as an unscrupulous organization reserved for people of questionable integrity, people with little or no regard for the rule of law. Women, by nature, are law abiding, sympathetic and caring; they think largely in terms of building and not tearing down. In order to avoid the stigma associated with politics, some women, though having financial capability, prefer to stay out of politics. Women also dread politics because of political thuggery and general violence connected with it. More so, according to Ekpe et al (2014:18), some women have paid the ultimate price for venturing into politics. For example, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, Alhaja Suliat Adedeji and a host of others had become helpless victims of the "sanguinary predilection" of Nigerian politics.

Female politicians are not considered as decent people by the society. Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013:40) summarises the ordeal and dilemma of Nigerian female politicians thus:

It is very difficult for a married woman to participate in politics without people casting aspersions on her person as promiscuous. A husband's consent must be obtained and his relatives consulted before a woman enters into politics. An unmarried woman venturing into politics is simply inviting public scrutiny to her private and personal life. Political opponents will accuse (her) of sleeping with all the party stalwarts to win. In addition, the nocturnal hours politicians keep in strategizing and mapping out campaigns deter women from effectively following the electioneering process. Most times, meetings are called for in unholy hours when they are expected to take care of their children and homes. The ones that brave it to the venues are booed and taunted by opponents as shameless women. Majority of the people in Nigeria believe that no decent woman can play politics without compromising their virtue; all the women that go into it are seen as women of easy virtue even when they are married. Women themselves see the name calling and odd hours fixed for meetings as schemes hatched by the men to remove them from happenings in the political circle.

This societal attitude generates a sense of indifference in women which makes them more comfortable as voters and supporters of the male politicians rather than being participants.

Women in the Homeric and Nigerian societies

From the foregoing, it is evident that both Homeric and Nigerian societies are patriarchal and chauvinistic. However, women in the two societies enjoyed different rights. For instance, women in the Homeric world had little or no right, they lived a dependent life. Nigerian women on the other hand, enjoy some measure of freedom; they were not regarded as properties like their ancient Greek counterparts. Also, the Homeric women had no representation in public life whereas, during the pre-colonial and postcolonial periods, women occupied public offices and were

part of decision-making processes. Even during colonial era in Nigeria, some women were part of decision-making process.

From this study, it is established that women possess some vital qualities needed for good leadership such as: dedication, tolerance, endurance, hard work, honesty, transparency, integrity, creativity, loyalty, intelligence, commitment, persuasiveness, intuition and persistence among others. These qualities, according to Tashi, as cited by Ngara and Ayabam (2013:55), are great assets in public relations and public acceptance. These qualities enabled Penelope to succeed in keeping the throne safe from predators in the absence of her husband. She was able to make wise decisions that ordinarily could have been left to men to make. Nigerian women who have had a part in decision-making processes in Nigeria like Chief Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Chief Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu just to mention a few have equally displayed such qualities as displayed by Penelope. Considering the crisis of leadership that have bedevilled the Nigerian society since independence, there is the need to translate into action the key role of women in the society as it was during the pre-colonial era.

Conclusion

Politics and decision making involve the administration of the state and should therefore be the affair of all the politically mature citizens of the state irrespective of gender differences. The dominance of the political realm by men in a country with more women is one that deserves a scholarly outcry. This study therefore discusses how the contemporary Nigerian women can become politically vibrant, drawing insights from the personality of Penelope in *Odyssey*. As a momentum for the argument proposed in this study, the research traces the place of women in the Nigerian political sphere across different eras ranging from the pre-colonial to the colonial and the post-colonial periods. The historical survey reveals that Nigerian women in the pre-colonial era were both commercially and politically active as confirmed by the different roles played by female leaders like Queen Aminat of Zaria, Moremi of Ife, Efunsetan of Ibadan and many others. The turn of the clock which relegated women politically was ushered in by the colonial era when women were disenfranchised for many years. Unfortunately, this colonial

legacy was subtly carried into the post-colonial Nigerian state where women, up till this time, are found to have been passivized in the political space.

This paper extensively reports the participatory level of women in Nigerian politics by surveying the number of women that have been elected into both the executive and legislative offices since the inception of independence. The survey evidently confirms the marginalization of women in a country where women are in the majority. This study therefore analyses the very many reasons for the marginalisation which range from the universal to the Nigerian socio-cultural realities. The research also discusses the reasons for the inevitability of women in politics and the essential roles women will play if given a level playing ground with their male counterparts.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

References

- Agbalajobi, D.T. (2010). Women's Participation and the Political Process in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol.4 (2), pp 075-082.
- Awe, B. (1992). "Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective". Lagos: Bookcraft.
- Awofeso, O. & Odeyemi, T.I. (2014). Gender and Political Participation in Nigeria: a Cultural Perspective. *Journal Research in Peace, Gender and Development (JRPGD)*, Vol.4 (6) Pp 104-110.
- Ayabam, A.T. (2013). "Women in Politics and Decision-Making in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects", *European J. Bus. Social Sci.* 2(8): 47-58.
- Blundell, S. (1995). *Women in Ancient Greece*. London: British Museum Press.
- Cantarella, E. (1987). *Pandora's Daughters*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Ekpe, D.E., Alobo, E.E. & Egbe, I.J. (2014). Women, Gender Equality in Nigeria: a Critical Analysis of Socio-Economic and Political (Gender Issues). *Journal Research in Peace, Gender and Development (JRPGD)*, Vol.4 (1) pp 15-20.
- Erunke, C.E. & Shuaibu, U.A. (2013). The Role of Women in Nigerian politics: Interrogating the Gender Question for an Enhanced Political Representation in the Fourth Republic. *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.4, No. 4.2 Quarter II.
- Fantham, E., Foley H. P. Kampen, N.B. and Pomeroy, S.B. (1994). *Women in the Classical World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Homer. (2005). *The Odyssey*. (Trans. Edward McCrorie) with an introduction and notes by Richard P. Martin Johns Hopkins University Press: London.
- Kolawole, T.O., Abubakar, M.B. & Owonibi E. (2012). Gender and Party Politics in Africa with reference to Nigeria. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*. Vol.3 No. 3.4 Quarter IV, pp 1-26.
- Lefkowitz, M. R. (2007). *Women in Greek Myth*. 2nd edition. London: Ducksworth.
- Lowenstam, S. (2000). "The Shroud of Laertes Penelope's Guile", *The Classical Journal* 95.4 333-348.
- Mohamed, A. W. (2000). Assessment of potential women leaders in Somaliland". Somalil and women's research and action group. Presented to the *2nd Post-War Reconstruction Strategies Conference, the Institute for Practical Research and Training, Hargeisa*, pp19-24.
- Morgan, K. (1991). "Odyssey 23: 218-24: Adultery, Shame and Marriage" in *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol.112, No.1.

- Ngara, C.O. & Ayabam, A.T. (2013). Women in Politics and Decision-Making in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, Vol.2, No. 8, pp 47-58.
- Okoronkwo-Chukwu, U. (2013). "Female Representation in Nigeria: The Case of the 2011 General Elections and the Fallacy of 35% Affirmative Action", *Res. Humanities and Social Sci.* 3(2), 39-47.
- Omodia, S.M., Erunke, C.E. & Shuaibu, U. A. (2013). The Role of Women in Nigerian Politics: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues for an Enhanced Political Participation in the Fourth Republic. *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*, Vol.5, pp 88-105.
- O'Pry, K. (2012). Social and Political Roles of Women in Athens and Sparta. *Saber and Scroll*, Vol.1 (2). pp 7-14.
- Pantelia, M.C. (1993). "Spinning and Weaving: Ideas of Domestic Order in Homer", *The American Journal of Philology*. 114.4, 493-501.
- Pomeroy, S. (1975). *Goddess, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York: Schocken Books.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY