

From kitchen to corridor of power: Yoruba women breaking through patriarchal politics in south-western Nigeria

Aderemi Suleiman Ajala¹

Department of Archaeology and Anthropology
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria
asajala@yahoo.co.uk

Olarinmoye Adeyinka Wulemat

Department of Sociology
Lagos State University, Ojoo, Lagos, Nigeria
arotoge@yahoo.com

Abstract

Since the 1990s, a number of socio-cultural agencies have played a significant role in the rise of Yoruba women in civil politics. Amongst these are the increasing value of monogamy and women's greater access to Western education; the culture of first ladies in government; and female socio-economic empowerment through paid labour. Despite their increasing participation, women are still marginalised in elective politics. Using the ethnographic methods of key informant interviews, observation and focus group discussions and a theoretical analysis of patriarchy, this article examines gender relations in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement in south-western Nigeria. The rise of Yoruba women in politics in south-western Nigeria is discussed, along with the factors influencing women's participation in civil politics. The study concludes that patriarchal politics still exists in the Yoruba political system. Factors inhibiting the total collapse of patriarchal politics in south-western Nigeria include the nature of Yoruba politics; women being pitted against women in politics; gender stereotypes and household labour. Thus, to make Yoruba politics friendlier to all, it would be desirable to create more political openings for women.

Keywords: civil politics, patriarchy, political power, south-western Nigeria, women

Introduction

In many African states, women's participation in civil politics is said to have relatively increased within the last two decades, due to the re-emergence of democratic governance (Seebens 2007). The increase has also been linked to the success of multiple efforts, focused on both the national and the international spheres, at breaking through the barrier of gendered political inequity. The late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen Yoruba women negotiating for greater inclusion in civil politics, which has hitherto been patriarchal/male dominated in nature. While the current Yoruba civil politics in south-western Nigeria has, of late, become more gender sensitive, women's political participation is still limited to peripheral politics.

The discourse on women in politics started to receive more attention from the late 1980s, partly due to the low level of commitment on the part of male politicians to development – especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, the discourse mostly focuses on women's tender nature as assurance for their creditable performance in politics (Arifalo 2003). The discourse is largely supported and has translated to policy statements both at national and international levels. Women's political empowerment has been boosted by the implementation of affirmative action, which stipulates a 30 per cent inclusion of women in both elected and appointed positions in every member state which is a signatory of the United Nations (UN) policy statement (CCPR 1989; Sowell 2004). The affirmative action stipulation was later increased to 34 per cent in 1995 and presently stands at 40 per cent. In some quota systems women are pushing against that ten per cent disparity, and have campaigned for a 50 per cent share in both elected and appointed political posts. After 1989 most of the signatory states began to ratify the affirmative action stipulation, yet globally it is yet to translate into an optimum increase in women's political participation (Badmus 2006). By 2010, none of the signatory states had met the target for either elected or appointed political positions. In many states the claimed increase in women's political participation is restricted to the grassroots level of mobilising voters on behalf of political parties and male politicians. Women have thus far not been successful in elective politics, and so tend to be under-represented at the level of political decision-making. In countries such as Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Liberia and Senegal, as regards local legislative politics, on average fewer than ten per cent of positions requiring elections are filled by women (Blackden and Bhanu 1999; MDG 2009; Seebens 2007). In Muslim-dominated countries of Africa (mainly in northern Africa), the proportion of women in elective office (both parliamentary and executive) averages a mere five per cent (UNDP 2008). The data suggest a new dimension to the gender gap in politics, indicating that substantial gender inequity is still prevalent in world politics.

The gendered political gap is a global phenomenon. Even in the few cases where women have greater political representation the women:men ratio is still low, in terms of elective posts. By November 2010, only 11 countries in the world had women heading national governments as either prime ministers or presidents. In 2007, as the continent with the highest rate of female political representation in parliament, 22 per cent of parliamentary elective posts in Latin America and the Caribbean were held by women (Seebens 2007), with Cuba at 43 per cent (MDG 2009) (the majority of Cuba's parliamentary elective posts were still held by men). Sub-Saharan Africa continues to make strides, with Rwanda out in front. The country made history in September 2008 when its lower parliamentary chamber elected a majority (56%) of women members (MDG 2009), yet elective posts to the executive arm of government recorded a lower success rate. In western Asia, four women were elected to Kuwait's parliament for the first time in May 2009, after gaining the right to stand for election in 2005. This is regarded as a major step forward for Kuwaiti women. In terms of the variety of political leadership positions (MDG 2009; UNDP 2008), as of January 2009, women reached the highest parliamentary position – presiding officer – in about 31 parliamentary chambers worldwide. Yet, the remaining 145 countries, said to embody democratic governance, saw a predominance of male political leaders.

In Nigeria, female political participation only expanded following successful demonstrations against the male-dominant military regimes that had been in control of the government for an extended period.² Under these military regimes, the interests of women at a political and a governmental level were not only marginalised, but the ability of women to govern was also suppressed. Between 1983 and 1999 (the second military regime) there were no female state military governors in Nigeria, as it was unthinkable for women to show an interest in such a political position. This is partly due to the restricted profile of women in the Nigerian military.

Since 1999, democracy has seemingly given women greater freedom in Nigerian politics, while projecting society as one of 'inclusive gender politics'. Some political groups, aspiring politicians, political office-bearers (especially the offices of first lady, at all levels of governance)³ have attracted greater participation on the part of women, and established women ubiquitously within Nigeria's public and political spheres. By 2010, women's political participation had increased to 51 per cent. Despite Nigeria's 30 per cent affirmative action, only nine per cent of political positions were held by women, while the majority of women in politics were employed as political party supporters and for election mobilisation (AM Express 2010). The increase in women's participation raised questions about the redefinition of the gendered political spectrum, and about a wide range of political, economic, social and moral concerns related to community development outside of women's traditional role in the kitchen. Yoruba society is central to Nigerian politics, because of the people's cultural tendency to adapt quickly to political change. In terms of political participation, between 1999 and 2009, Yoruba politics recorded increased participation on the part of women, which created a number of challenges. It also raised fresh ideas relating to gender discourse as a contemporary development issue. While Yoruba women's participation increased in terms of political appointments, they still had to contend with factors limiting their participation in elective politics. This suggests that in Yoruba society it is still not *uhuru* for women in patriarchal politics. This is because Yoruba women in elective posts are few, compared to the number of women appointed or participating in local party politics.

Considering women's low success rate in electoral politics in Yoruba society, this article provides an overview of gendered political relations by arguing that female participation not only empowers women, but also reinforces complementary gender relations in the political (public) sphere. Drawing on a long local history of Yoruba politics, the authors argue that women's participation in politics is influenced by time and interest, as well as the political nature of the Nigerian state.

The authors substantiate their argument within the context of ethnographic data collected in south-western Nigeria, which draws heavily on qualitative data collected from Osun and Ekiti states. Inferences were also drawn from earlier ethnography conducted on politics and nationalism in numerous Yoruba towns. The authors assume gender relations to be symbolic and social constructions that benefit both men and women. They contextualise Yoruba women in politics within a historical context and within the radical postcolonial feminist idea of patriarchy, shaped by modernisation, globalisation, democratic process, urbanisation and a capitalist economy. They trace the history of women's participation in Yoruba politics and the nationalist movement, specifically analysing how such participation draws on the traditional practice of Yoruba women's resistance against political injustices and the political traditions of women in anti-colonial anti-military

movements, as well as recently formed nationalist groups in the Yoruba region. Historically, women's political participation is associated with a low representation of women's interests in the various military governments of Nigeria and in the dawn of democracy. However, the authors will illustrate which factors influence female participation in civil politics and locally-based nationalist movements, and the challenges hampering women's equitable participation in Yoruba politics and the nationalist movement. They conclude that the new political dispensation empowers women in a limited yet very important way, as their political participation in Yoruba communities is not yet conceived of on the basis of gender equity. While Yoruba women are yet to record optimum success in elective politics, Yoruba politics strongly reflects the fact that the life experiences of the majority of its women differ sharply from those of men. Such differences are mostly defined through patriarchy, which forms the basis of Yoruba gendered political relations and development. As this is against the democratic rule, a return to civil rule in Yoruba society (as in other parts of Nigeria) should characterise all gender political spaces and positions.

Patriarchal politics: African patriarchy, Yoruba politics and gender relations

The theoretical view of how Yoruba women break through patriarchal politics in south-western Nigeria rests on the conceptual analysis of patriarchy. Patriarchy defines women in terms of the domestic sphere, and simultaneously draws an artificial line between men and women as regards the domestic (private) and the public spheres, thus ascribing different roles to men and women. The public sphere presents men as the locus of socially valued organs of activities such as politics and business (Tamale 2004), while the private represents domestic activities centred around the family and household, and makes women its dominant organ. Patriarchy thus provides an understanding of social relations between men and women. The public sphere represents a larger spectrum of the community and/or society, while the private purely represents the domestic and the household arena. Women are confined (rather, trapped) to the domestic arena – a space where men still ideally rule as heads of the family – and men spend most of their time in the public realm without female interference. Men rationalise that women's reproductive roles (the crux of the domestic sphere) make them biologically and 'naturally' predisposed to providing sexual pleasure, carrying a child, raising children and taking care of the domestic sphere. Thus, biology instead of gender (Rendel 1981) is used to explain the social differences between men and women in many societies. In short, gender differences are reduced to and justified by biological difference – a practice that is more prevalent in sub-Saharan African societies.

In these societies, gender separation between the public and the private spheres preceded colonialism. Gender practice was consolidated and reinforced by colonial policies and practices, as well as by the authoritarian regimes of many African postcolonial states. Among the Lugbara of Uganda, the Ashanti of Ghana, the Igbo and Yoruba of Nigeria, and the Luo of Kenya, precolonial male–female relations were demarcated into public and private spheres. Colonial structures and policies delineated a clear gender distinction, guided by an ideology that further perceived men as public actors and women as private performers (Aina 1992; Conquerry-Vindrovitch 1997;

Tamale 2004). As specifically noted in precolonial Yoruba society, gender structures reflected that women engaged in domestic work while men dealt with public roles in family and household settings. The colonial notion of gender relationships introduced a new domestic arena outside of the traditional notion of gendered production systems. For instance, in Yoruba society, land was communally owned in the precolonial system of land tenure, while the colonial land tenure system allowed men absolute control and individual ownership of land. At the same time politics and power were formalised and institutionalised with males as the major public actors. Such patriarchal delimitations in African colonial societies gave rise to patriarchal politics, which sees the allocation of and access to political power based on 'biological' nature. In patriarchal politics women are considered inferior by virtue of their biology, therefore they are deprived of equitable participation in (especially) elective posts.

Western capitalism and political ideology based on neoliberal economic and democratic practices that were introduced to the African people focused on the individual, replacing traditional African politics and economics that valued equitable representation between men and women (Geisler 1995; Matory 1994; Ruth 1997). These changes had a profound impact on African women's access to and control over political resources. Significantly, the changes caused inequitable political participation between men and women (Olurode 2003). However, patriarchy and neo-liberalism are colliding forces, with patriarchy still forcing itself into (and reinventing itself within) the new democratic system. In these circumstances men in many African societies still consider childbearing and rearing, cooking, certain aspects of subsistence farming, scrubbing and cleaning of the house, along with other household chores, to be women's inescapable destiny. As a threat to women's political autonomy, for fear of breaking with patriarchal politics, these duties were (and still are) performed gratuitously mainly by women, without formal recognition or remuneration. Propelled by the patriarchal nature of these societies, African women engage in the drudgery of domestic work for longer hours (on average 17 hours a day) (Tamale 2004), leaving them almost no time to actively participate in the public sphere. The fact that their domestic roles remain unacknowledged and 'invisible' in traditional economics and GDP statistics confirms the denigration of women in neoliberal economies. In addition, the ideology of domesticity is so efficient that the majority of African women have internalised it, allowing it to inform the construction of a self-identity, which is the basis of their political relationship (Rendel 1981). Given the self-identity constructed for and by women, partisan politics disturbs women's domesticity so that they need not become involved. Patriarchal politics, indeed!

This constructed patriarchal politics is redeployed in many African societies to systematically disenfranchise women from accessing and controlling political resources. Indeed, the gendered public/private spheres carved out of and reaffirmed by the ideology of domesticity have overarching consequences for both men and women. The most important way in which patriarchy has restricted women's access to and control over political resources is in its reconstruction of public spheres as exclusive political resources, occupied by and relating only to men. During the colonial and postcolonial eras, the gendered male 'public' sphere is reconstructed as the key to power, enshrined with enormous political privileges, opportunities and wealth, and beyond women's reach. Patriarchal politics similarly restricts women to marginal domestic 'private' spheres and grants men not only

free access to it, but also allows them to take charge of these spheres. Women's access to the public sphere, on the other hand, is extremely limited and utterly controlled by men.

African patriarchy thus uses several tools, including ideological conceptions, and economic and religious forces, to safeguard the public sphere as a domain of men's political hegemony. It resists any attempt by women to make the transition to the public sphere. Thus, patriarchal politics sets male values and interests as the norms in the public sphere, and allows men to easily maintain this status. Any woman who wishes to enter this sphere is forced to meet male/masculine standards. Such restrictive measures in Yoruba civil politics include (but are not limited to) the use of money in political bargaining, political violence, and voting requirements which are not women-friendly. Therefore it is much more difficult for women to participate in civil politics. Tamale (2004) notes that the constructed masculine standards of patriarchal politics operate as a 'glass ceiling' that stops many women from entering the public sphere. In the political domain (the main component of the public sphere) women therefore become the 'other' who are constantly confronted with obstacles impeding their access to and control of political resources. This therefore limits women in terms of both the physical and metaphorical sphere of politics. As this portends marginalisation, women's political and social status remains subordinated to that of men (Ruth 1997). Their mobility and erudition in a political career are also significantly curtailed, as is their potential for success – especially in Yoruba civil politics.

While political participation is an essential component of accessing, allocating and controlling political resources, patriarchal politics hampers women as follows: First, women are generally excluded from what is conventionally regarded as politics and they miss out in the negotiation of this vital resource. Second, what women do in the domestic domain is not regarded as political; state support for what women do is limited, hence women's appropriation from this vital resource is also significantly limited. This suggests that patriarchy limits women's participation in politics, even if the public sphere becomes democratised. In Yoruba land, even the democratic public sphere still refuses women equitable access to and optimal participation in electoral politics. As Yoruba politics still feature certain elements of patriarchal politics, it remains hostile to a more significant input from women and dictates a policy of non-interference by women in the public sphere. Therefore, a moral decadence pervades Yoruba politics, in contrast to the precolonial era when the vital presence of women in palace politics dispelled political and moral panic.

The above theoretical discussion suggests that patriarchal politics is a pervasive socio-cultural practice constructed from patriarchy in many African societies. It represents one of the most formidable constraints implemented by men as a social system that creates a gendered political relationship. This discussion suggests that patriarchy is not based on biological differences between males and females, but rather that it is a cultural and social construction which perpetually relegates women to the background and disempowers them in terms of political decision-making. Patriarchy therefore imposes a number of customary restrictions, such as denying women access to the means of production (land), disinheritance, humiliating widowhood rites, taboos against women's acquisition of property, beliefs in supernatural forces, and exclusion from political decision-making (mostly at community level) (Aina 1993; Badmus 2006).

The changing face of patriarchy and implications for patriarchal politics in Yoruba land

In postcolonial Yoruba society, gender relations are still structured around a patriarchy which continues to mutate based on time, the nature of power relations and the understanding of public space. Patriarchy can be traditional, transitional or postmodern, and each phase has different effects on female–male political relations among the Yoruba. Traditional patriarchy is based on a sharp division of labour between males and females within the household. Males are exclusively in control of works outside the confines of domestic roles (mostly tasks that impact physical exertion), while females are vested with domestic roles (requiring less physical exertion). Traditional patriarchy is commonly found in rural communities, though instances have been noted in urban communities. Specific forms of traditional patriarchy include women’s loss of access to the basic means of production (capital and land) and their total dependence on men. In such cases, most of these women’s needs are subjected to their husbands’ approval (Oluwabamide 2009), and revolt may cause the marriage to collapse. Subjected to religious indoctrination and a host of other cultural prejudices, in traditional patriarchy some women still reject the notion of gender equity and shun political participation which is deemed for men only, because masculinity conforms to the ‘dirty’ nature of politics. Transitional patriarchy evolved with women’s increasing access to education, profitable careers and urban migration. It breaks the cycle of women’s economic dependence on men on a large scale, allowing women greater control over their economic activities. A women’s working class has emerged through female professionals earning a similar economic status to that of their male counterparts. As the means of production is owned by the state and by private individuals who do not engage in gender restriction when recruiting labour, more women are exposed to the periphery of the public space. However, rather than also having absolute control of political decision making, transitional patriarchy still subjects women to a certain degree of approval-seeking from their men, thus their political participation is restricted.

Postmodern patriarchy reflects elements of radical feminism, where Yoruba women appropriate the gains of a global agenda, fighting for equality with men in all spheres (social and political) and in their access to education. Of significance in the construction of a postmodern patriarchy is democratic politics which not only guarantees voting rights for all adults, but also accommodates a rule of law that is not gender restrictive. Underlying the perspectives of postmodern patriarchy is the growth of women’s interest in civil politics. As more women favourably and successfully contest and win elections in south-western Nigeria, the division of space into public/private has proven to be a subjective patriarchal feature which cannot be explained solely by female biological characteristics.

Yet postmodern patriarchy also constrains women’s political participation: Many Yoruba men consider it abominable to be under a woman’s political (civil) leadership, thus many Yoruba political elites engage in political behaviours that make politics a hostile environment for women. As in many sub-Saharan African societies,⁴ in postcolonial Yoruba politics many male politicians resort to political thuggery, eliminate political opponents, incite ethnic and sectarian violence, and are not above vote-rigging, intimidation, buying votes or holding clandestine meetings that

are so typical of Nigerian prebendal politics (Badmus 2006; Joseph 1981). All these actions are aimed at preventing women's political participation. These factors coalesce to legitimise Yoruba men's political control and perpetuate the re-election of the same class of male politicians. In postcolonial Yoruba society, which is still subjected to certain patriarchal norms, women's political expression is mostly limited to entertainment at political rallies, voter mobilisation and voting for their husbands' preferred candidate. Furthermore, postcolonial Yoruba civil politics seemed to hamper women's participation, as many of the political parties subscribed to obnoxious policies against female aspirants.⁵ Of note is the fact that the political parties determine who may contest a seat, and the party apparatus is deployed to enhance the ambition of selected candidates (Badmus 2006) – usually men. Since the majority of the political parties' executives are men, their decisions invariably favour men.

The above constitutes some of the elements of patriarchal politics that can be explained through feminine constructs, which Barnard (2000) refers to as post-structural feminism. Underlying this theoretical basis is the fact that Yoruba political behaviours are sharply shaped by gender differences in which women are 'muted' (Jaggar 1985; Smith 2004) as profane and as objects of marital exchange among men. Women are not regarded as prime players in economic and political actions which are central to building influence and power and enhancing social life. Thus, as a muted group they are passive and silent in political activities. Nonetheless, postmodern patriarchy provides an understanding that all patriarchal politics is man-made. As postmodern patriarchy is enhanced by globalisation and the spread of democratic norms, as well as increasing rates of literacy among women, so Yoruba women have gradually begun to break through patriarchal politics. Within the last ten years, Yoruba women have become increasingly visible in nationalist movements and civil politics.

Historical marginalisation and the rise of women in Yoruba politics

In precolonial Yoruba society, women's and men's spheres of activity were complementary. Although this does not necessarily imply equality between the sexes, the extent of that inequality depended on the family structure and social class of each woman (Aina 1993). Nonetheless, as evidenced in the traditional Yoruba social system, with the practice of polygyny and the patriarchal nature of society, the male sphere of activity was traditionally accorded greater value and prestige. Traditionally, a woman derived her social status from her two major roles: reproduction and production. A perfect combination of the two afforded her greater recognition, as well as political and social status. Such women were often regarded as *Obinrin bi okunrin* [a woman who is like a man] and were recommended for a chieftaincy title, through granting them a political role in the community. The title underscores the fact that women remained subjected to men's perceived superiority. Thus men still dominated the socio-political resources associated with the public space, they controlled wealth, and had influence and authority. Nonetheless, Yoruba women played active roles in traditional politics. Awe (1992) notes that the *lyalode* [female chieftainship] was the channel through which Yoruba women participated in political activities during precolonial times, despite prohibitions imposed by polygyny and patriarchy.

Women's participation in the decision-making of precolonial Yoruba communities therefore existed parallel to male hierarchies. Apart from holding specifically female chieftaincy titles such as the *lyalode* (representing the interests of women) (Denzer 1998), they held other ritual positions reserved for women in ancestral masquerade societies or Ogboni associations, which advised the rulers of towns and were generally concerned with maintaining social order and communal wellbeing (Denzer 1994; Nolte 2008). In addition, the importance of women's roles in palace affairs as *olori* and *iya-oba* remains significant in Yoruba traditional palace politics. The desire to reinvent the *olori* in representative government, with executive governors as leaders, may have informed the creation of the current office of first ladies. While *oloris*, as the Kings' wives, are afforded great political influence in the traditional political system, many first ladies who were the wives of state governors in the modern political system held political power and influence that was greater than that of deputy governors, and received statutory and constitutional recognition. In some Yoruba communities women access titles that were typically male, such as that of ruler of a town/kingdom, as with the regency in Akure (until 2009), and in many other Ekiti and Ondo communities. Denzer (1994, p. 8) similarly points out that prior to the 19th century three women were installed as rulers of the Ijebu-Ode.

The nature of colonial rule in south-western Nigeria excluded many Yoruba women from the colonial administration. One major constraint was that little preference was given to women's access to Western education among the Yoruba people during the early days of colonialism. With recruitment based on Western literacy, Yoruba women were excluded from colonial politics. Yet, as part of their contributions to the Yoruba nationalist movement, Yoruba women featured in many nationalist and political associations during colonial times. Examples include *Egba Women's Congress* (EWC) in Abeokuta (Mba 1982), *Binukonu* and *Majiyagbe* in Ibadan (Labinjo 1991), and professional associations such as market women's associations across Yoruba towns and cities. As this confirmed Yoruba reliance on shared male and female leadership in the nationalist movement during the colonial era, it also shows that colonial civil politics relied on separate gendered political hierarchies, mostly favourable to men.

The non-inclusion of women in the colonial administration meant they became part of civil society groups acting as anti-colonial movements. Their voice therefore emerged from marginalisation through recognition and participation in the Yoruba nationalist movement in the late colonial and early postcolonial periods of the 1950s and 1960s. Yoruba women, who were involved in a number of protests against British colonialism, were recognised especially in the grassroots mobilisation of support for the Yoruba nationalist movement. Despite their success, which can be attributed to associational networks, the number of women nominated into elective politics or appointed to higher political office was still low in the western region government (1954–1966) (Denzer 1994, p. 33).

The collapse of the first Nigerian Republic and the political experience in the western region where fears of political violence prevailed, made Yoruba politics even more of a hostile environment to women. Coupled with the prolonged Nigerian military rule (1966–1979 and 1983–1999), women's tenuous foothold in the Yoruba postcolonial nationalist movement and in politics sharply declined. During these two lengthy periods of military rule, women were almost

completely excluded from active political participation in south-western Nigeria. Already affected by the low and negative growth of the economy – which was heightened by the introduction of structural adjustment programmes from the 1980s onwards, and which further limited their access to state resources – women were thus denied participation in Yoruba civil politics and in the nationalist movement. According to Howard (1985), the majority of Yoruba women engage in some form of informal trade, and they therefore felt the impact of a struggling economy more heavily. Moreover, the over-centralisation of state politics and the militarisation of power between 1983 and 1999 further contributed to a militarisation of the entire society. These circumstances affected all sectors of society, but specifically schools, businesses, politics and general perceptions about the legitimacy of violence. These factors made it more difficult for women to organise and speak for themselves (Abdullah 1993; Shettima 1995). Between 1993 and 1998, when the Nigerian leadership engendered dictatorship and fascism, women's political interests in south-western Nigeria were further endangered, and many Yoruba women were driven further away from civil politics and the nationalist movement.

As in the colonial period, Yoruba women joined their male counterparts in a number of protests staged against the continued military rule in Nigeria. Women were actively involved in protests from 1993 onwards, in response to the annulment of the Nigerian general elections on 12 June 1993.⁶ Examples include the Campaign for Democracy (CD), O'odua Defence Assembly (ODA) and O'odua People's Congress (OPC). In many anti-June 12 protests, Yoruba women participated. Notably, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, whose husband (Chief Moshood Abiola) claimed to have won the annulled election, evoked sympathy from many Yoruba women's organisations that cut across religion and class. Significantly, many Yoruba women supported the revalidation of the annulled election. Between 1993 and 1998, in what seemed to be an unending protest, some Yoruba women activists were murdered in state-linked political assassinations.⁷ Amongst the victims were Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, murdered in 1995 in Ikeja, Lagos; and Alhaja Suliyat Adedeji, murdered in 1997. The latter had been an Ibadan-based businesswoman, not aligned to the Yoruba nationalist movement and politics prior to the annulment of the June 12 election, but she rose to political fame in Ibadan by supporting the revalidation of the annulled election. The murder of the two women garnered support for the Yoruba nationalist movement and politics in such a way that the part Yoruba women later played in calls for democracy in Nigeria, could not be ignored.

In subsequent struggles for the revalidation of the June 12 election and a return to democratic rule, many Yoruba women joined the Yoruba nationalist movements and pro-democracy rallies. Among them are Funmilayo Olaseinde and Nike Omowore from Osun state, as well as Kofoworola Bucknor from Lagos State – all strong members of pro-democracy groups such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO). During this period, many grassroots women pledged their support to the OPC, a Yoruba militant association and the most popular socio-cultural group (founded in 1994). Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 opened many opportunities for Yoruba women to become integrated in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement. Therefore, many women who had participated in pro-democracy campaigns and political campaigns for the 1999 elections were offered political positions in several Yoruba states.

While the process did not yield a woman governor in any of the Yoruba states in 1999, there was a woman deputy governor in Lagos state, two women members of the Federal House of Representatives who represented Osun and Ogun states, and 12 women cabinet commissioners in all south-western Nigerian states (1999–2003). There were also significant numbers of women in the states' houses of assemblies, while a small number of local governments were headed by female chairpersons. As the offices of first ladies in south-western Nigeria became extra-political offices (often stronger than many government ministries and parastatals in terms of political influence and workforce), many Yoruba women were drawn to civil politics through the offices of first ladies, headed by the wives of state governors. Between 2003 and 2009 there was an increase in the number of women in Yoruba civil politics. Four states (Lagos, Osun, Ekiti and Ogun) out of the six in south-western Nigeria had women deputy governors. Five Yoruba women from Lagos, Ogun and Osun states were voted into the Federal House of Representatives, and two into the Senate (2007). As of 2009, like their male counterparts most women voted into the Federal House of Representatives have retained their political positions, with more women across all Yoruba states being elected and appointed to political positions at the local and state levels. Since 1999, Yoruba women have become more visible in political activities as they form the largest electorate and constitute the largest proportion of political party supporters active at the grassroots level.

The above raises two important cultural issues related to gender and women's participation in Yoruba politics. The first is that it seems obvious that marginalisation tends to raise women's awareness of political freedom, especially in a democratic setting. Thus, as with many forms of nationalism which tend to grow in democratic settings following socio-political marginalisation and repression (Gellner 1983), Yoruba women also view the new democracy as an opportunity to rise against their marginalisation in politics. The second postulation (directly related to the first), is that democracy tends to open up networks and agencies for women's inclusion in politics and in the nationalist movement. This is particularly because democracy does not respect any form of inequity in terms of political participation. The abovementioned cultural issues account for the greater inclusion of women in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement since 1999. The situation is also typical of the Akans and Ashanti experiences in Ghana since 1995; the Kru of Liberia since 2000; and the Buganda of Uganda since 2000 (Olurode 2003; Tripp 2001). However, many specific factors contributed to the success of Yoruba women in this regard.

Socio-cultural agencies and female participation in civil politics

Cultural development rests on certain agencies upon which new ideas and constructs are introduced. In the case of Yoruba women, certain social and cultural agencies have acted as drivers for their participation in civil politics. The first is the increasing influence of other religions (Islam and Yoruba traditional religions) on Yoruba nationalism and politics since the 1990s. Predominantly Christianity dominated Yoruba nationalism until the late 19th century (Peel 1989). As Yoruba nationalism became more inclusive of other religions, it sparked their political participation. This spurred other categories of Yoruba people (across religion and gender) to become politically active, alongside Yoruba Christians who had dominated the political scene. As soon as the Yoruba nationalist movement became all-inclusive of religions it also became gender inclusive, thus

opening up women's active involvement. In 21st-century Yoruba politics, women's participation has become vitally important, given their complementary roles in political mobilisation and in the election process.

A major religious influence that heightened women's participation in Yoruba civil politics and the locally-conceived nationalist movement was the openness of Islam and traditional religion, after the 1990s. As for Islam, the success of Moshood Kasimowo Abiola in the general elections had the effect of mobilising many Yoruba Muslims to support the Yoruba nationalist movement and politics (De Farias 1989; Doortmond 1989; Reichmuth 1996). Abiola was seen not just as one of them, but as a strong, pivotal and philanthropic Muslim who contributed financially to the building of new mosques and Islamic institutions. Abiola became a model among Yoruba Muslim politicians in the south-west. In supporting the completion of abandoned mosques in south-western Nigeria, Abiola drew large numbers of Muslims into Yoruba politics, including women. Sympathy for Abiola grew during his 1994 treason trial and subsequent detention (following the 1993 annulment of his election victory and his self-declaration as Nigerian president in 1994). During the struggle for his release and for the revalidation of his electoral victory, his wife, Kudrat Abiola, was killed by assailants linked to the state. This garnered even more support for Yoruba nationalism not only among Muslims, but also among Christians and traditional religious worshippers. Abiola was a member of the Ansar Ud Deen (AUD) Muslim group – an association supported by and popular among a large number of influential and wealthy Yoruba Muslims. Many of its members⁸ (male and female) had benefitted from Abiola's philanthropy, and following his disputed victory, many sympathisers began to support the Yoruba nationalist movement and civil politics in Yoruba land. Like Yoruba men, women viewed what happened to Abiola as the highest degree of political marginalisation and repression against the Yoruba. This heightened the suspicion which characterises Nigerian ethnic relations. In the interviews, many Muslim women identified the Yoruba nationalist movement as a serious issue which all Yoruba people should support. One respondent linked the locally-conceived nationalist movement with an injunction from the Holy Quran:

It is in the teaching of the Prophet Mohammed that we should defend our people and help to secure their rights and privileges.⁹

The emergence of the National Congress of Muslim Youths Organisation (NACOMYO), the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) and the Nasiru-llahi Fatir Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) raises women's awareness regarding their political participation. These organisations are elite groups that support the professional and career development of their members. While NASFAT, which began as a prayer group, was founded in Lagos in 1995 at the height of the Yoruba's political oppression and marginalisation, it cannot be said that it was intended to further Yoruba nationalist objectives. As the group grew, other objectives were integrated. Of course those objectives did not focus directly on the Yoruba nationalist movement and civil politics, but since the organisation seeks to protect the welfare of its members, their political interests became a concern. NASFAT's broad-based membership became a rallying platform for political mobilisation and its role in spurring many Muslims (men and women) into Yoruba civil politics

was quite astounding. While some women drew political inspiration from NASFAT's support, others who were already in politics before they became members came to count on the organisation to boost their political careers.¹⁰ While NASFAT does not consider gender in its indirect support for Yoruba nationalist movement and civil politics, as an exclusive Muslim women's organisation FOMWAN is gender-restrictive and more directly supports its members to become active in politics. Believing that women can be empowered and can contribute to community development by engaging in community politics,¹¹ FOMWAN supports members who are politicians in political campaigns and elections.¹² The Pentecostal Christian organisations, by contrast, did not directly support the Yoruba nationalist movement and civil politics in south-western Nigeria. Many other Christian denominations did, however, show support for women in Yoruba politics. A number of female Anglicans, Baptists, Apostolics and Methodists are currently prominent Yoruba politicians. Such support for women in Yoruba politics therefore transcends a specific religious bond, but is connected with Yoruba women's ability to break the barriers of patriarchy, which hitherto has limited their roles in religion and politics. In the 21st century, due to numerous factors, many Yoruba women understand that they need to be engaged in the public sphere, and religious organisations serve as a means of building a political network.

The 1995 founding of a militant socio-cultural and nationalist group, the OPC, had a dual effect on women's participation in Yoruba nationalism and civil politics. The OPC is disposed to the use of Yoruba traditional magical instruments in pursuit of its nationalist programmes. Involved in the largest grassroots mobilisation between 1995 and 2003, it draws on the support of Muslim women.

Many nominal Muslim and Christian Yoruba politicians (men and women) support the OPC agenda, despite spiritual constraints. As noted by Nolte (2008), besides the OPC's strong grassroots mobilisation, it acts on behalf of women. Many Yoruba women who broke out of strict patriarchal contexts (e.g., absolute conformity to their husbands' rule, hostility to women in public roles) were drawn to the OPC which offered them an opportunity to get involved in local Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement.

Since the early 1990s, many other socio-cultural-cum-civil society organisations (both non-governmental and governmental agencies) have been involved in awareness programmes which redirect women's attention to political participation in Nigerian civil politics. While the impact of these efforts could not be directly measured until 1999, when Nigeria successfully returned to civil politics, it was obvious that both religious and cultural agencies have some (albeit negligible) impact on increasing female political participation. Founded in 1982, Women In Nigeria (WIN) represents the voices of oppressed women, and sponsors women's research and education initiatives. WIN refutes the notion of women as subordinates, thus emphasising that 'gender is a social, not a biological, category' (Okeke 2000). This notion thus aims to neutralise the categorisation of women as the weaker sex.

In 1987/1988, WIN was appointed by Babangida's regime (at the start of the failed Third Republic) to represent women's perspectives on the Nigerian transition to democratic rule (Okeke 2000). To properly represent all women, WIN divided the country into seven regions and founded 97 affiliate women's organisations. Thus, it not only provided grassroots support for women, but also allowed women's various political interests to be articulated in their local media, in as many

as five different languages. Other indigenous languages were employed to communicate with local women, and this strengthened the grassroots network. In early 1999, WIN held a conference to mark the return to democracy, demanding rights that would secure women's increased political participation. The demands included

the right to form political parties without property qualifications, the reservation of 50 percent of all seats in legislative and executive bodies for women, the right of workers to seek leave of absence to contest for elections, ... the right for women to control their bodies, ... and the removal of prejudices against women in employment and parity of treatment in work places.¹³

In 1987, the Babangida regime created the Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW) organisation. Directed by the then first lady, Maryam Babangida, it aimed to 1) mobilise women to work towards concrete results and seek leadership roles; (2) bring women together in order to better understand their problems; and (3) create awareness among women of their social, political and economic rights and responsibilities.¹⁴ A similar programme was implemented in 1994 by the then first lady, Mrs. Abacha, called the Family Support Program (FSP).

In addition to government efforts, women's organisations such as WIN and the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) have been raising awareness on women's political rights and have been educating women politically. The NCWS, founded in 1958 as a federation of non-partisan women's organisations, encourages women to participate in politics. Its objectives are

to promote the welfare, economic and social progress of women, with special emphasis on education and training; to awaken and encourage in women the realization of their responsibilities to the community; to ensure by every legal means that women are given opportunities to act as full responsible members of the community; to encourage the affiliation of all non-political women's organizations in Nigeria; and to foster cooperation with other national and international bodies with similar aims, and assisting women in towns and villages in their roles as homemakers and nation builders.¹⁵

The NCWS encourages its members to organise their own awareness programmes at local and national levels. Activities include providing channels through which women's options and ideas can be made known. It is also actively involved in developing leadership among women.

During the aborted Third Republic, in 1991, the NCWS created the National Task Force Committee on Political Transition Program (TFCPTP), whose purpose was to 'raise political awareness of the Nigerian women in such a way that they will become interested in the promise of a new social and democratic order that was expected to start from 1992 and to become impartial moderators at the great debate' (Chizea and Njoku 1991). Although the NCWS also worked with women in rural areas, its target was female leaders. The TFCPTP organised a four-day workshop from 18 to 21 September 1989, to train female leaders on the 'role of women in the political transition program' (Chizea and Njoku 1991). The idea was that training female leaders would be more productive and effective in raising women's awareness of their rights, responsibilities and duties in the new republic. Dr Dora Chizea, chairman of NCWS, informed Nigerian women that they have the right to make a choice in terms of political decisions, and need to play an active role in politics, so that the colonial legacy would not be an everlasting obstacle for women. In effect,

women were encouraged to make their own choices, to vote for officials they believed would best represent their interests, and not to elect officials who bribed them with food, or those their husbands chose for them.

With the ripples of globalisation, specifically in the context of rendering politics and bureaucracy more gender-sensitive, the above agencies are reflections of the 1995 Beijing declarations on gender equity. The declarations connected Yoruba women's ideas with those of other women, thus reinforcing the former's stoic position on universal ideals related to gender-friendly politics. Raising gender issues as human rights concerns,¹⁶ Nigerian women (and in particular Yoruba women) argued that increasing female participation in civil politics has to do with the protection of female dignity. Specifically, international summits in Nigeria led to the establishment of ministries for women's affairs in all tiers of government in the country.¹⁷

Access to education has also raised women's awareness of their role in civil politics. A Western education builds confidence and improves women's academic credentials when it comes to political posts. It also reduces the attachment to polygyny, a predominant traditional Yoruba marriage system that sustains patriarchy and its political tendencies: the more educated a woman is, the less chance she has of experiencing polygyny. In essence, women's education increases recognition of the values of monogamy, which in turn gives women greater power in terms of political decisions on a domestic level, as well as on the broader level of the community and society at large.

The capitalist economy, which accommodates a neoliberal economic agenda in which women are no longer barred from economic pursuits (Aina 1993), has provided opportunities for women to freely develop their informal economic interests beyond household consumption. Through the new economic mode, and in conjunction with their increased capacity in terms of literacy, many Yoruba women now live mostly in cities that provide them with more opportunities to participate in an expanded economy and in civil politics. From the 1980s onwards the Nigerian oil economy began to grow, and although Yoruba women did not directly benefit, the ripple effects were nonetheless felt. Through rapid urbanisation and a host of economic opportunities provided by oil incomes in many Nigerian cities between the 1980s and the late 1990s, many urban women established a broader network of social and economic relations. As argued by Jaggar (1985) and Harding (2004), neoliberal economic pursuits tend to open up women's economic vistas, especially in low-industrialised economies that mostly rely on an informal economic system.

Between 1999 and 2009, Nigerian politics conceded more political power to women through the offices of the first ladies. As these offices tend to be stronger than many other government ministries – especially in south-western Nigeria – they accrue a great deal of political influence, fortified by a level of fiscal power through which they mobilise political support. As these offices are headed by the wives of the executive heads of government in all three tiers of government, they recruit more women into the government – women who develop an interest in civil politics.

While it is expected that all the above agencies would have tremendously impacted on women's political participation across the spectrum of Yoruba civil politics, the available data merely suggest an increase in Yoruba women's political party membership and participation in the nationalist movement. Women's participation in elective politics remains abysmally low and marginal. This suggests that while Yoruba women have recognised that their role is not limited to the kitchen,

and that they have to play a more significant role within the public spheres, the core of the public sphere is still very difficult for them to penetrate. This position is confirmed by a female politician (and key informant):

In those days, women did not know that they were to participate in civil politics, but in the recent times due to democratic openings and awareness level, they are aware of their importance in politics.¹⁸

Constraints against women's equitable participation in elective politics in Yoruba land

While female participation in the Yoruba nationalist movement has increased tremendously, their participation in civil politics is still limited to being part of the electorate and being supporters of political parties. Yoruba women's chances in elective politics remain limited, judging from the number who won elective posts in south-western Nigeria between 1999 and 2007 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Yoruba women in elective posts in south-western Nigeria (1999–2007)

Positions	No. of available seats	No. of women elected and percentage of total in 1999	No. of women elected and percentage of total in 2003	No. of women elected and percentage of total in 2007
FEDERAL ELECTIONS				
Presidency	1	-(0%)	- (0%)	-(0%)
Senate	18	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)
House of Representatives	71	1 (2%)	2 (2.8%)	3 (4.2%)
Total	88	1(1.1%)	2(2.2%)	5 (5.6%)
STATE ELECTIONS				
Governorship	6	0 (0%)	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
State Houses of Assembly	143	10 (7%)	9 (6)%	4 (3%)
Total	149	10(7%)	9 (6%)	4 (3%)
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS				
Local Government Chairmen	147	12 (8%)	10 (7%)	15 (10%)
Local Government Councillors	1617	28 (2%)	42 (3%)	37 (2%)
Total	1764	40 (2%)	52(3%)	52 (3%)

Source: National Independent Electoral Commission, Abuja, Nigeria, 2008.

Table 1 presents an interesting analysis of Yoruba women's participation in elective politics. While there was an increase from 1.1 to 5.6 per cent in participation in federal elections between 1999 and 2007, there was a decrease at the state elections, from seven per cent in 1999 to three per cent in 2007. Participation at local level also recorded a marginal increase from two per cent in 1999 to three per cent in 2007. An explanation for the declining trend at the state level, which was supported by some of the informants, is the political violence that characterised Yoruba politics at the state level, more than at any other level of government, between 2003 and 2007. Again, one informant noted that election to state political office requires more money than election to any other tier of government. A female politician who was to contest the State House of Assembly (Osun State) during the 2007 election, noted that in some areas elections were more difficult as they required a lot of money and involved tough campaigns, *'so I had to withdraw from the competition for a male rival in the same party with me, because I could not get enough money to pay for the party nomination'*.²⁰

Merging the table with some responses from oral interviews reveals a discrepancy in terms of female political participation in south-western Nigeria: more women have demonstrated their interest in civil politics through their increased engagement with the ethno-nationalist movement, which is rooted in political sensitivity and awareness among Yoruba women. Nonetheless, as is evident in the table, there is an unimpressive rate of female participation in elective politics.

While women were not adequately represented in elective politics, there was a slight increase in the number of women appointed to political positions during the same period. In 1999, since the party that won the presidency was not popular enough in south-western Nigeria, the political appointments allocated to that region were minimal and the positions assigned to women were insignificant. Again, the political party in control of state government between 1999 and 2003 did not sufficiently recognise women's political ability. This was previously the case with the political parties controlling south-western Nigeria between 1951 and 1964, and between 1979 and 1983, when similar sentiments against women's political participation prevailed (Nolte 2008).²¹ In contrast to the civilian era, in 1999 only one state in south-western Nigeria appointed a woman as deputy governor, but she was impeached and removed from office at the end of her second year. The popular political views that accounted for her impeachment were that she had been scheming to contest a governorship position in the next election (2003). The male governor under whom she served felt threatened by her popularity among the female electorate. The official complaint was, however, based on a flimsy allegation of official insubordination and being too strong to control, which were pure elements of patriarchal politics.

The volcanic nature of political change in south-western Nigeria saw the emergence of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), which took control of the federal government, winning around 70 per cent of the governorship and House of Assembly elections during 2003 (Ukeje and Adebaniwi 2008).²² The PDP claims to be friendlier to women, and employed this strategy to draw grassroots support in Osun, Ekiti and Ogun States during the 2003 elections. The party also claimed that the incumbent party – the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was too autocratic, gerontocratic and unfriendly to women. Relatively speaking, the PDP increased women's participation in both

elective politics and political appointments, since 50 per cent of its deputy governors in the region were women, as at 2009. The Yoruba thereby became the first ethnic group in Nigeria to have three women deputy governors, followed by the Igbo with one. A woman was also appointed as a deputy governor in northern Nigeria. The PDP further created more welcoming conditions to enable women to participate in both elective politics and to hold political office (Badmus 2006), especially from 2003 to 2007.

The above increase is insignificant in terms of the equal gender representation campaigned for by the WIN in 2000, but despite this marginal increase, it is a clear sign that Yoruba women are gradually breaking through patriarchal political structures. Relying on a multiplicity of forces, Yoruba women have begun to view patriarchy as a social construction, rather than biological. Translating this into politics, Yoruba women can now appropriate their changing conception of patriarchy to be more inclusive in civil politics. The early 21st century has seen progress in terms of women's political participation in Yoruba land. Compared to their prior political participation, this progress is indeed significant. Between 1979 and 1983, very few women (such as Regina Agbakoba, Janet Akinrinade, Bimbo Akintola, Ebun Oyagbola and Bola Ogunbo) were prominent political players in Yoruba civil politics (Arifalo 2003). However, since 1999, more Yoruba women have shown an interest in civil politics, and are now breaking down traditional patriarchal stereotypes, challenging the harsh nature of gender-based power distribution within the present postmodern patriarchy (which many have started to embrace). However, as a result of political and cultural obstacles, many women are still restricted to seeking political appointments, rather than being active players in elective politics.

As in the previous elections in Nigeria (1964, 1979, 1983 and 1993), where equally low levels of women's participation in elective politics were recorded, many scholars have blamed British colonialism for the situation. Scholars such as Alen (1972), Mba (1982) and Chisea *et al.* (1991) hold the view that colonialism played a significant role in female political marginalisation in many sub-Saharan African states. In the case of the Yoruba, given that the Yoruba precolonial political system was more inclusive of women, they sustained their colonial-centric argument by maintaining that British colonialism destroyed or weakened most of the already existing institutions that accommodated women in local politics (Adeleye-Fayemi 1997; Arifalo 2003; Falola 1995). British colonialism misconceived the Yoruba political and administrative system which was in operation, as it did with the Igbo society in eastern Nigeria (Mba 1982). In this misconception Yoruba women were perceived more or less as 'slaves' since their positions were mostly limited to domestic life (i.e., the kitchen). Patriarchy was therefore reinforced by denying Yoruba women access to most of the facilities that could empower them politically – including access to the vote.²³

One crucial facility that enhances political participation and influences involvement in elective politics among the Yoruba, is access to formal education (Peel 1989). During British colonial rule, however, Yoruba women were denied formal education – an institution largely introduced by British colonialism. The curricula emphasised more lucrative professions for boys than for girls. In rare cases of women being enrolled at school they were forced to take domestic science (Okeke 2000). Therefore, the patriarchal doctrine of men as superior and more deserving of an education than women largely excluded the latter from academic institutions. As at 2009, more

Yoruba women have been educated, yet the shadow of the past, which made women subservient to men, still persists. Many women still believe female education is not as important as male education (the practice of only educating men is prevalent in northern Nigeria). While female politicians who recognise that Western education empowers women and boosts their ability to participate in civil politics have a better chance of success in Yoruba politics, those who do not, form the bulk of ordinary female party supporters. According to an informant in Ilobu, Western education (especially higher education) has a significant influence on women's social status, as it places them in positions where they can obtain better and quicker access to male authorities. In her view, '*Western education is very essential in the process of integrating a higher number of women into electoral politics. But only very few women in Yoruba society used their educational status to establish a career in elective politics*'.²⁴

Other cultural constraints affect the number of women in politics. Yoruba women's self-perception as sisters, mothers and wives, restricts them to a domestic role rather than the public role of community decision-maker. Yoruba women are still perceived as child-bearers and housekeepers whose responsibilities are limited, more or less, to household affairs. Thus, their role in civil politics is considered to be limited to mobilising voters in support of the men who are involved in taking decisions in the public sphere. According to many women interviewed in Ekiti and Osun States, despite being active party supporters, they rejected the idea of contesting elective political posts due to the notion that civil politics would affect their roles as mothers and wives.²⁵

Lack of support from other women, among female office-bearers, also contributes to the low rate of women's participation in elective politics. It is common for women in political power (for example, first ladies) to forget about other women as soon as they rise to power. Those who are not in power seldom support women in positions of authority, and give almost no support to aspiring female politicians. It was hoped that with greater female participation in Yoruba nationalism and in voter mobilisation, Yoruba women would have the advantage of a larger demographic and greater electoral strength than men. However, due to a lack of support from other women, they have not been able to capitalise on this. Such attitudes present a psychological barrier against women's optimal participation in Yoruba politics.

In addition, religion plays a significant role in marginalising women politically, as many strict Muslims and born-again Christians are constrained by religious limitations against women's presence in the public sphere. They perceive other women who are involved in politics as irresponsible and tend to stereotype them. A female leader of a Pentecostal church in Ado-Ekiti opined that any '*woman involved in politics is an immoral and useless woman who do not have respect for the roles which God has fixed for her*'.²⁶

Furthermore, the nature of civil politics in Yoruba land also discourages female participation in elective politics. Civil politics is mostly characterised by political violence and fraud, as election-rigging and stuffing of ballot boxes. Such conditions require 'manly' efforts to succeed. As many women are not biologically prone to engage in political violence, they tend to abandon elective politics to men, who exist within the moral devaluation and political panic that presently pervade south-western Nigeria. Also, as participation in elective politics is determined by individual party members' contributions to the party's success during elections, and since women do not tend to

engage in election fraud to ensure their party's success, they tend not to be nominated to contest elections. Other vices associated with Yoruba politics, that make elective politics hostile to women, include the use of political thuggery, the elimination of political opponents through assassination and kidnapping, an incitement to ethnic and sectarian violence, intimidation during elections, vote-buying and unnecessary clandestine meetings. Such practices make political participation patriarchal, and further exclude women from politics. During the general elections in 2007, some political parties had unwritten policies against female aspirants, as was the case in the 2003 elections in south-western Nigeria (Badmus 2006). Such policies include limiting the number of executive posts which women could contest in political party offices. Some parties also did not nominate women to their central working committees. Since these agencies are vital in deciding nominations for elective office, they tend to support male politicians. The effect is that the parties determine who contests which post, while the party apparatus is used to enhance the ambition of selected candidates (mostly male politicians).

Yoruba civil politics now requires enormous financial resources to ensure success in elective politics. At various levels, varying degrees of financial contributions are required, ranging from building political alliances to establishing and sustaining political party membership. Traditionally, women are restricted by socio-cultural prescriptions to poorly remunerated subsistence and informal business activities, meaning they do not have much in the line of assets, if they want to secure a loan. Many hold low-level administrative positions or are involved primarily in domestic labour centered around procreation/motherhood. Thus, their prospects of mobilising the required funds are greatly reduced, and as a result Yoruba women are often excluded from elective politics.

Conclusion

Many political systems are undergoing radical reforms aimed at addressing growing challenges, such as public apathy, questions of credibility, and relevance to people's concerns. Women's political participation is therefore critical to these advancements. In the Yoruba society of south-western Nigeria, while there is an increase in the role of women as voters, party leaders, supporters, activists and (a small number of) candidates for elective office, there are still numerous obstacles hampering their participation in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement. Despite the fact that Yoruba politics was rooted in democracy from 1999 to 2009, political equity between men and women in terms of political participation continues to be a distant goal. Because cultural perceptions forbid female leadership, women still remain largely excluded from political decision-making, and face a number of cultural prohibitions that deny them the right to stand for election. While women constitute almost half of the population, and are far more active in party politics in terms of grassroots mobilisation and party support, fewer than ten per cent of female politicians in south-western Nigeria can access elective politics.

Given the marginal increase in women's participation in Yoruba politics since 1999, it would appear that they are gradually breaking through patriarchal politics in Yoruba land, despite the many cultural barriers imposed by patriarchy. For democracy to fulfill its tenets and to allow development for all human beings, optimum female participation in Yoruba politics and in the nationalist movement needs to be guaranteed. It is only through gender-friendly elective politics that

the new Nigerian democracy can appropriate the gains of democracy for community development in Yoruba land.

Acknowledgement

The author appreciates the kindness of Dr. Insa Nolte and her family who provided him with full support, especially with regard to accommodation for two weeks in July 2009, during the library research at the Centre of West African Studies (CWAS), University of Birmingham, UK. He is also grateful to Prof. Karin Barber, Nozomi Sawada and CWAS. The first version of this article was read as a paper at the APHRC Conference in August 2009, in Nairobi, Kenya. The author thanks the APHRC for the invitation and the subsequent comments.

Notes

- 1 The first author was a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Scholarship at the University of Mainz, Germany (October 2008–October 2009), when the first draft of this article was written.
- 2 In Nigeria, military governments were in power in two segmented periods from 1966–1979 and 1983–1999.
- 3 There are three tiers of government in Nigerian federalism, viz: local, state and federal governments. All have offices of first ladies, headed by the wives of the heads of the executive arm of the government.
- 4 Tripp (2001) notes a similar situation among the Buganda of Uganda, where civil politics is influenced by gender differentiation.
- 5 Only the PDP in Yoruba land made nomination free for women politicians in 2003 and 2007. The AD and the Action Congress (AC) charged nomination fees (see Badmus 2006).
- 6 To end ten years of military government in Nigeria (1983–1993), a democratic presidential election was held on 12 June 1993. The election was contested by Moshood K. Abiola (a Yoruba) Bashir Tofa (a Hausa-Fulani). The result favoured Abiola, as he fulfilled all the electoral requirements, yet the military government, in an attempt to hold onto power, annulled the election. This action led to violence in many parts of Nigeria (mostly in south-western Nigeria) between 1993 and 1998.
- 7 Some assassinations are still under judicial trial in Nigeria. Although not yet confirmed as state-linked assassinations, popular opinion in Nigeria implicates the state.
- 8 The late Alhaja Suliyat Adedeji, an Ibadan-based hardcore supporter of Moshood Abiola, and murdered in 1996, was said to have an Ansar Ud Deen link with Abiola. She was the Iya Adini of the Ansar Ud Deen Society of Nigeria, while Abiola was its grand patron.
- 9 *Alhaja* Sikirat Adeoti, in Osogbo in 2006. She is a female Muslim leader of the Ansar Ud Deen group at Sabo.
- 10 Inferences drawn from an interview with Adijat Bakare in Ilobu in 2007. She was an active member of NASFAT, and of the PDP, the ruling political party in Nigeria.
- 11 This opinion was based on an interview with Alhaja Munirat Adepoju in Ilobu. A strong member of FOMWAN, she was a key informant interviewee in 2007.
- 12 Opinion of Sister Ganiyat Adubi, member of the Executive Council of FOMWAN in Osun State, interviewed in Osogbo in 2007.

- 13 2000 WIN Conference Proceeding, Women Research and Documentation, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- 14 See MAMSER 1996.
- 15 National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS): <http://www.wiserearth.org/organization/view/a3ca728d8b96f47651904e55c1020e7a>
- 16 See Article 8 of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing Declaration, UN Beijing Declaration.
- 17 Apart from the Beijing conference of 1995, other international conferences sensitive to female marginalisation include United Nations conferences and summits on: Women (Nairobi 1985), Children (New York 1990), Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992), Human Rights (Vienna 1993), Population and Development (Cairo 1994) and Social Development (Copenhagen 1995).
- 18 Response from Mary Akinwumi from Ado Ekiti. A retired headmistress, she is now a local politician. She was interviewed in 2008.
- 19 There were no regular elections at local government level, but the data presented were that of the composition of the local government as at the time of the research.
- 20 Response from Adija Bakare, interviewed in Ilobu in 2007.
- 21 In the following political parties: Action Group (1954–1964), Unity Party of Nigeria (1979–1983) and Alliance for Democracy (AD) (1999–2003). While all these parties had women's branches and a few women were offered political appointments, most women were either directly or indirectly related to the male party leaders, all of whom shared similar political ideologies of strict patriarchal politics that not only made men dominate, but even Yoruba youths were not properly integrated into party political participation.
- 22 The political change in south-western Nigeria was volcanic as it was unprecedented and mired in controversy, of which the details are not pertinent to the present discourse of gender relations in Yoruba politics. For details, see Ukeje and Adebaniwi (2008).
- 23 Until 1954, universal adult suffrage was not provided by British colonialism in south-western Nigeria. It was either male adult suffrage between 1922 and 1946, or quantified adult suffrage based on property and taxation up until 1954. So, the practice excluded women from elective politics during the colonial period. The situation was similar in many African British colonial states such as the Gold Coast and Kenya.
- 24 Interview with Mrs. Remi in Ilobu in 2007. She was appointed as Commissioner for Finance in Osun State between 2003 and 2006. She holds a Master's degree in Education/English from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- 25 The majority of the women interviewed stated that they could not contest an election because there would be nobody to take care of their household.
- 26 The female respondent is a pastor of a new generation church in Ado Ekiti. She was interviewed in 2007.

References

- Abdullah, H., 1993. Transition politics and the challenge of gender in Nigeria. *Review of African Political Economy*, 20(56), 27–41.
- Adeyeye-Fayemi, B., 1997. Either one or the other: Images of women in Nigerian television. In: K. Barber, ed. *African popular culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 125–131.

- Aina, O.I., 1993. Mobilizing Nigerian women for national development: The role of the female elites. *African Economic History*, 21, 1–20.
- Allen, V.J., 1972. ‘Sitting on a man’: Colonialism and the lost political institutions of Igbo women. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 6(2), 165–181.
- Arifalo S.O., 2003. The evolution of Nigerian women in politics. In: S.O. Arifalo and O. Ogen, eds. *Essays in contemporary Nigerian history*. Akungba: Department of History and International Studies, Adekunle Ajasin University, 99–121.
- A.M. Express, 2010. *Nigerian women in politics*. Abuja, NTA 11 June.
- Awe, B., 1992. *Nigerian women in historical perspective*. Lagos: Sankore Publishers.
- Badmus, I.A., 2006. Political parties and women’s political leadership in Nigeria: The case of the PDP, the ANPP and the AD. *Ufahamu*, 32(3), 55–91.
- Barnard, A., 2000. *History and theory in anthropology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Blackden, M. and Bhanu, C., 1999. Gender, growth and poverty reduction. *World Bank Technical Papers 428, Special Programme of Assistance for Africa, 1988 Status Report on Poverty*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Chinzea, D.O. and Njoku, J., 1991. *Nigerian women and the challenges of our time*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.
- Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., 1997. *African women: A modern history*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- De Moraes, F.P., 1989. ‘Yoruba origins’ revisited by Muslims: An interview with the Arokin of Oyo and a reading of the Asl Qaba’il Yoruba of Al-Hajj Adam Al Iluri. In: F.P. de Moraes and K. Barber, eds. *Self-assertion and brokerage: Early cultural nationalism in West Africa*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 109–147.
- Denzer, L., 1994. Yoruba women: A historiographical study. *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27(1), 1–39.
- Denzer, L., 1998. *The Iyalode in Ibadan politics and society, c. 1850–1997*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman.
- Doortmont, M.R., 1989. The invention of the Yorubas: Regional and pan-nationalism versus ethnic provincialism. In: F.P. de Moraes and K. Barber, eds. *Self-assertion and brokerage: Early nationalism in West Africa*. Birmingham: CWAS, 101–108.
- Falola, T., 1995. Gender, business, and space control: Yoruba market women and power. In: B. House-Midamba and F.K. Ekechi, eds. *African market women and economic power: The role of women in African economic development*. Los Angeles, CA: Greenwood Press, 28.
- Geisler, G., 1995. Troubled sisterhood: Women and politics in southern Africa – case studies from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. *African Affairs*, 94(3), 545–578.
- Gellner, E., 1983. *Nations and nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Harding, S.A., 2004. Introduction: Standpoint theory as a site of political, philosophic and scientific debate. In: S.A. Harding, ed. *Feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. London: Routledge, 1–16.
- Howard, R., 1985. Women and the crisis in Commonwealth Africa. *International Political Science Review*, 6(3), 287–296.
- International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), 1989. United Nations Committee on Human Rights. *General Comment 18 on Non-discrimination, No. 18, Paragraph 10*. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- Jaggar, A.N., 1985. Feminist politics and epistemology: The standpoint of women. In: A. Oakley, ed. *Critique of political economy*. London: Routledge, 55–66.

- Joseph, R.A., 1981. *Democracy and prebendal politics in Nigeria: The rise and fall of the Second Republic*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Labinjoh, J., 1991. *Modernity and tradition in the politics of Ibadan, 1900–1975*. Ibadan: Fountain Publications.
- MAMSER, 1996. *Better life for rural women: A new agenda for Nigerian women in the 21st century*. Lagos: MAMSER.
- Matory, J.L., 1994. *Sex and the empire that is no more: Gender and the politics of metaphor in Oyo Yoruba religion*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mba, N.E., 1982. *Nigerian women mobilized: Women's political activity in southern Nigeria, 1900–1965*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- MDG, 2009. *Millennium development reports, 2009*. New York: United Nations.
- Nolte, I., 2007. Ethnic vigilantes and the state: The O'odua People's Congress in South-West Nigeria. *International Relations*, 21(1), 217–235.
- Nolte, I., 2008. 'Without women, nothing can succeed': Yoruba women in the O'odua People's Congress (OPC), Nigeria. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 78(1), 84–106.
- Okeke, P.E., 2000. Reconfiguring tradition: Women's rights and social status in contemporary Nigeria. *Africa Today*, 47(1), 49–63.
- Olurode, L., 2003. Gender, globalization and marginalization in Africa. *African Development*, XXVIII (3 & 4), 67–88.
- Oluwabamide, A.J., 2009. Cultural perspectives of women's health in Africa. In: A.S. Ajala, ed. *Dying from womb: Women and children's health in south-western Nigeria*. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 12–25.
- Peel, J.D.Y., 1989. The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis. In: T.M. Elizabeth, M. Macdonald and M. Chapman, eds. *History and ethnicity*. London: Routledge, 198–215.
- Reichmuth, S., 1996. Education and the growth of religious associations among Yoruba Muslims: The Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26(4), 365–405.
- Rendel, M., 1981. Introduction: Women, power and political systems. In: M. Rendel, ed. *Women, power and political systems*. London: Routledge, 15–49.
- Ruth, L., 1997. *Citizenship: Feminist perspectives*. London: Macmillan.
- Seebens, H., 2007. *The economics of gender and the household in developing countries*. Frankfurt Am Main: Peter Lang.
- Shettima, K.A., 1995. Engendering Nigeria's Third Republic. *African Studies Review*, 38(3), 61–98.
- Smith, D.E., 2004. Women's perspective as a radical critique in sociology. In: S.A. Harding, ed. *Feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. London: Routledge, 21–34.
- Sowell, T., 2004. *Affirmative action around the world: An empirical study*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Tamale, S., 2004. Gender trauma in Africa: Enhancing women's links to resources. Paper presented at the CODESRIA Conference in Dakar, November, 2004.
- Tripp, A.M., 2001. The politics of autonomy and cooptation in Africa: The case of the Ugandan Women's Movement. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 39(1), 101–128.
- Ukeje, C. and Adebaniwi, W., 2008. Ethno-nationalist claims in southern Nigeria: Insights from Yoruba and Ijaw nationalisms since the 1990s. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31(3), 563–591.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2008. *Annual development index*. Washington, DC: UNDP.