Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria and The Gender Discontents

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies democratic consolidation in Nigeria and its component of gender discontents. The central research question of the contribution borders on the possibilities of democratic consolidation under gender inequities. The paper establishes a position of presumed democratic consolidation in the West African country. But the gender-harmony component of this consolidation is dubious. The work considers contradictory the scenario of democracy, devoid of gender amity in the Nigerian state, as this position highlights issues of deficient representation in democracies. Democracy is therefore currently characterized by gender discontents in Nigeria. The female citizen is marginalized in political representation. Issues of gender unevenness continue to reecho in the polity as democracy is putatively consolidated. In the Nigerian state and in the other comparable polities, this presentation recommends the specific intervention of donor agencies, in reconciling the issues of gender discontents in democratic consolidation. This is recommended to be achieved through massive and more specific donor-agency contributions.

Keywords: Democracy, democratic consolidation, gender inequity, gender-harmony, gender discontent, political representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Democratic consolidation is a major issue in Nigeria. But gender discontents in the Nigerian democracy are largely neglected questions. Gender discrimination has indeed become a preponderant phenomenon all over the world and with particular reference to Nigeria as a nation (Ayeni & Ajibogun, 2013, p.117). The West African country (Nigeria) gained independence from Great Britain in October 1960. But the immediate postcolonial government only existed momentarily. In January 1966, some young military officers led an unsuccessful putsch against the government of the newly independent state, in which prominent leaders of the country were assassinated. Attendant to the ensuing crises, the affairs of the state were handed over to the senior military officers of the country, and a military government was inaugurated. The January coup was interpreted as part of an ethnic agenda of the Igbos (one of the three major ethnic groups in the country), as the coup was led by Igbo soldiers, and the head of the new military government who assumed the position because he was the most senior military officer at the time also turned out to be an Igbo.

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Members of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group (another of the three major ethnic groups in the country), their military and civilian members, ensured that the newly installed military government was bloodily toppled, with the Head of State and others also assassinated.

The Igbos became the targets of murderous attacks in the country as the Hausa-Fulani group and the Yoruba (the third of the three major ethnic groups) and all others saw the Igbos as their national enemies. Very many interwoven issues led to a civil war in the country (the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970). Under the aegis of the Republic of Biafra, made up principally of Igbos, the Eastern Region of the country attempted to break away from the Nigerian postcolonial state. But their secessionist attempt was finally crushed in January 1970 by the federal military side. The military remained in power till October 1979 while within this period, engaged in intra-military coups and counter coups, replacing each other as leaders of the nation, in some bloody, and others non-bloody takeovers. In 1983, the military came again and toppled the elected government they temporarily allowed in October 1979 and then continued with their coups and counter coups, even after permitting a pseudo civilian arrangement in 1993. It was only in 1999 that the soldiers seemed to have retreated to their barracks and a democratically elected government enthroned for the country. From 1999 to 2019 therefore, democratic consolidation has seemingly become an achievement of subsequent administrations in the country.

But is it plausible to celebrate democratic consolidation in such circumstances under conditions of gender inequities? Framed differently, the research problem of this paper centers on if there is democratic consolidation in Nigeria, against the background of gender disparities in the nation's democratic institutions? The paper attempts to establish the meaning of democratic consolidation. It theorizes on gender, while aiming at conceptual elucidations. It subsequently illustrates discontents while giving instances of gender unevenness in the Nigerian democracy, between 1999 and 2019. Invariably, the Nigerian case is indicative of the continuing issues of gender disparities on a global scale. The recommendations of the paper covers the way forward even for gender insensitive democracies in other locations. But what is democratic consolidation?

2. DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: A CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The literature on this area of social science scholarship principally refers to democratic consolidation. It is not certain why the theory is not about "democracy" consolidation. Following conceptual orthodoxy therefore, and deemphasizing semantics, this paper researches democratic consolidation. Even at that, explicating democratic consolidation fundamentally demands a definition of democracy. The traditional definition of democracy was given by Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address – government of the people, by the people, for the people (Peters, 2001). While the Lincoln-construct remains classic, the global course of democracy has necessitated variations, modifications and expansions of this typical position. Ober (2007) for instance demonstrates that the original meaning of "democracy" was: Capacity to do things, not majority rule. According to Ober (2007, p.2):

> Democracy is a word that has come to mean very different things to different people. In origin it is, of course, Greek, a composite of demos and kratos. Since demos can be translated as "the people" (qua "native adult male residents of a polis"), and kratos as "power," democracy has a root meaning of "the power of the people." But power, in what sense? In modernity, democracy is often construed as being concerned, in the first instance, with a voting rule for determining the will of the majority. The power of the people is thus the authority to decide matters by majority rule. This reductive definition leaves democracy vulnerable to well-known social choice dilemmas…

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Under such scenarios of social choice dilemma, the will of the putative majority reigns supreme. Or representation becomes the democratic stopgap. But political / democratic representation theory has its own shortcomings. There is what Urbinati & Warren (2008, p.394) highlight as the representative exclusion of marginalized groups - particularly those based on gender, ethnicity, and race - from the centers of political power. These questions border on injustices in the form of exclusion, and go to the very heart of not only the meaning of representation, but also its mechanisms and functions (Urbinati & Warren, 2008). Democracy is ultimately an inclusive system of government. But what is democratic consolidation?

Schedler (1998, p.91) argues that originally, the term "democratic consolidation" was meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual "reverse waves." To this original mission of rendering democracy "the only game in town," countless other tasks have been added. As a result, the list of "problems of democratic consolidation" (as well as the corresponding list of "conditions of democratic consolidation") has expanded beyond all recognition. It has come to include such divergent items as popular legitimation, the diffusion of democratic values, and the neutralization of antisystem actors, civilian supremacy over the military, etc., (Schedler, 1998, p.91). The other divergent conditions supposedly indicating democratic consolidation include the elimination of authoritarian enclaves, party building, the organization of functional interests, the stabilization of electoral rules, the routinization of politics, the decentralization of state power, the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, the alleviation of poverty, and economic stabilization (Schedler, 1998, p.92).

We can only order and comprehend the multiple usages and meanings of "democratic consolidation" therefore, by looking at the concrete realities as well as the practical tasks the term is meant to address (Schedler, 1998, p.92). Hence, in the viewpoints of Diamond (1999: 62) democratic consolidation refers to the process of achieving broad (and) deep legitimization such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass level believe that the democratic system is better for the society than any other alternative they can imagine. Democratic consolidation is accordingly the process by which a new democracy matures, such that it is unlikely to revert to authoritarianism (Ebirim, 2014, p.51). It is important to point out that democratic consolidation is essentially a process; it is not an event (Idike, 2014A, p.93). To what extent then do the concrete realities the democratic consolidation process should address, accommodate gender sensitivities in Nigeria?

3. DISAMBIGUATING GENDER

Typical of social science concepts, the concept of gender is prone to ambiguities. To properly align the gender variable of this paper with its democratic consolidation counterpart thus necessitates a disambiguation. Nnamdi-Chukwu & Ojinuka (2019, p.186) suggest that gender can be seen as synonymous with sex but viewed rather from the social and cultural perspective and not from the biological. They argue that gender in its narrowest sense means socially constructed sex, be it female or male. Citing OCHA Gender Toolkit (2012) and the World Health Organization (WHO), Nnamdi-Chukwu & Ojinuka emphasize that gender may be defined as the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female or the socially constructed characteristics of women and men such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. Differently framed therefore, gender is the social construction of men's and women's roles in a given culture or location and gender roles are distinguished from sex roles, which are biologically determined (UN Women & IPS Africa, n.d).

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Hornby (2005) in Ayeni & Ajibogun (2013, p.11) defines gender in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as the fact of being male or female. Then Ayeni & Ajibogun on their part suggest that:

> Gender may be referred to a system of roles and relationships between women and men that are determined not only by biological traits but by the social, political and economic context. Gender can equally be seen as the process by which individuals, who are born into biological categories of male and female, become the social categories of men and women through the acquisition of locally defined attribute of masculinity and feminity. This is the fact of being male and female (Ayeni & Ajibogun, 2013, p.118).

But these positions still seem indistinct and fuzzy, validating the need for clarity. In this paper therefore, gender refers to the socially constructed roles and positions of women and men as different from the biologically determinable roles. But truth be told, gender discussions usually dovetail into women marginalization and empowerment questions.

4. GENDER DISCONTENTS IN DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA (1999-2019)

Democratic consolidation is not a one-off event. It is an ongoing process under which democracy may attain the status of maturity in emergent political systems. The process of democratic consolidation is seemingly on course in the Nigerian state, since the exit of the Military in 1999. To the extent that the Military have not once again seized governance structures in Nigeria, it can be argued that democratic consolidation is on course in the Nigerian State (Idike, 2014A, p.93). How has the gender component of the process fared? We shall in this section examine the issue of gender representation in the legislative and executive arms of government at the federal level, to illustrate the gender positions in the country. As the analyses progress, reference will be made (beginning 1999) to the different regimes that have controlled the affairs of the Nigerian state: the Olusegun Obasanjo regime (1999-2007), the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua administration (2007-2010), the Goodluck Jonathan presidency (2010-2015) and the Muhammadu Buhari regime (2015-Date). Ekpenyong, Ibiam & Agha (2015, p.2) thus highlight that:

> Between 1999 and 2007, President Olusegun Obasanjo appointed a number of women into the Federal Executive Council. They included Dr. (Mrs.) Kema Chikwe (Minister of Transport), Mrs. Dupe Adelaja (Minister of State Defence), Dr. (Mrs.) Bekky Ketebu-Igwe (Minister of State, Ministry of Solid Minerals), Dr. (Mrs.) Amina Ndalolo (Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Health), Mrs. Pauline Tallen (Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology), Hajia Aishatu Ismaila (Minister of Women Affairs), and Chief (Mrs.) Titilayo Ajanaku (Special Adviser to the President on Women Affairs). Also, President Musa Yar'Adua, in his short-lived administration, included such women as Saudatu Bungudu, Salamatu Hussaini Suleiman, Diezani Alison-Madueke, Dora Akunyili and Grace Epkiwhre in his cabinet. In 2011, President Jonathan appointed 33% of women into political offices. They included Zainab Maina (Women Affairs), Prof. Ruqayyatu Rufai (Education), Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Finance), Zainab Ibrahim Kuchi (Niger Delta Affairs, State), Diezani Alison-Madueke (Petroleum), Omobolaji Johnson (Communication Technology), and Viola Onwuliri (Foreign Affairs, State), among others. However, it is not yet uhuru for Nigerian women, as they still struggle to close the wide political gap existing between them and men.

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Since the return to democratic rule in 1999 therefore, more women have been elected and appointed into decision-making positions in Nigeria. Despite this, the country has been identified as the nation with the lowest number of female representation at both national (6.4%) and sub-regional (11.4%) parliamentary levels in the Economic Community of West African States (Sarumi, Faluyi & Okeke-Uzodike, 2018). A further breakdown of Nigeria's national parliament shows that women occupy 6% of legislative seats in the National Assembly, 7.3% at the Senate and 5.3% in the House of Representatives. As a result, Nigeria was ranked 181 out of 183 countries and 133rd in the world, for female political representation. Though there is an increase in the number of women in politics in Nigeria the positions they occupy have been mostly appointive as opposed to elective (Sarumi, Faluyi & Okeke-Uzodike, 2018).

Statistical reports showed that females constituted 49.5% of 198 million people in Nigeria in 2018, preparatory to the 2019 general elections (Sarumi, Faluyi & Okeke-Uzodike, 2018). While women made up 47 per cent of registered voters for the 2019 elections in the country, only eight per cent were cleared to vie for electoral positions in the presidential election (Nwankwor & Nkereuwem, 2019). All the women even later withdrew from the race although their names remained on the ballot box. At the National Assembly level of the elections, women's candidature was only 12 per cent of the total seats available. A total of 763 women vied for seats for the Senate and House of Representatives out of 6,563 places available. At eight and 12 per cent candidature for the Presidential and National Assembly elections, respectively, therefore the prospects for gender parity in Nigeria remained a distant dream (Nwankwor & Nkereuwem, 2019). The 2019 elections were the sixth consecutive general elections since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999 and marked what was undoubtedly a measure of democratic progress in the country, if only for conducting periodic elections since the return to civil rule. What remains deeply doubtful however is how inclusive this progress has been, and particularly to what extent gender fairness has been accommodated in the entire processes (Nwankwor & Nkereuwem, 2019). What remains deeply doubtful is the degree of gender tolerance in the implied democratic consolidation.

With regards to non-legislative positions, the Jonathan administration (2011-2015) was pace-setting in gender sensitivity. From 1999 to date, it remains the regime that has made the most efforts in attempting to conform to international best practices in gender tolerance (Ayeni & Ajibogun, 2013; Idike, 2013; Iheuwa, 2013; Ajah, 2014; Bamgboye, 2014; Calebs, 2014; Idike, 2014B). By fulfilling his campaign-promise of reserving a 35% quota of appointive positions to women in the Federal cabinet, President Jonathan attempted to remedy the effects of the discontents occasioned by the very low number of women elected to the Nigerian National Assembly (Ayeni & Ajibogun, 2013). The Jonathan presidency was actually an offshoot of the Yar'Adua administration (2007-2010). It was when President Yar'Adua died in 2010 that Vice President Jonathan was sworn in as President. He completed the tenure of Musa Yar'Adua, contested in the 2011 presidential election and emerged victorious. Therefore some of the notable female members of the Jonathan team were initially appointed under President Yar'Adua. They included Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke, originally Minister of Transport under Yar'Adua, subsequently served as Petroleum Minister under President Jonathan, and Professor Dora Akunyili, originally appointed Minister of Information and Communication under President Yar'Adua, retained in the same ministry by Jonathan.

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From the Obasanjo regime to the Jonathan period, the appointments have not vitiated the reality of a low level of gender tolerance in elective positions. The Inter-Parliamentary Union **(IPU) in Orji, Orji & Agbanyim (2018, p.3) asserts that the achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society, in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences. The IPU is certainly referring to elective positions. In the Nigerian case of assumed democracy, IPU (2019) in the table below validates the position of inequality and non-complementarity in the conduct of the affairs of society.**

Table 1: National Parliament Of Nigeria

Item Description	House of Representatives	Senate
Statutory number of members	360	109
Current number of members	355	107
Men	343	100
Women	12	7
Percentage of women	3.38%	6.54%

Source: https://data.ipu.org

Democratic consolidation is accordingly defective when gender equality and complementarity are deficient in national parliaments. Democracy is about fair representation of all interest groups in the society and the low representation of women is a violation of the principle of democracy (Oluyemi, 2015, p.7). Under the Muhammadu Buhari regime (2015-Date) how has appointment into positions of influence in the polity been used to bridge the gender gaps in the country? Chitra Nagarajan, an activist who works to protect human rights, including those of women in Nigeria, complains that under President Buhari in 2015, only six out of 37 ministers were women (a measly 16%). Despite the fact that while campaigning for election, President Buhari promised to implement the national gender policy, which commits to affirmative action and requires that women fill 35% of appointed positions. The nature of leadership in Nigeria therefore remains depressingly the same (Nagarajan, 2015).

Onyeji (2019) reports that only seven women made the list of 43 ministers appointed by President Buhari in 2019, as this was no different from the six women out of 42, appointed by him in 2015. Some advocates of women in politics described the development as a new height of misrepresentation when compared with the 49.4 per cent of Nigeria's population formed by women. Of the 84 million registered voters in the 2019 election, women accounted for almost 40 million (47. 14 per cent). Women have once again been marginalized (Onyeji, 2019). The female gender discontents have actually become worsened by the outcome of the 2019 elections, and the gender lopsided appointments of the Buhari administration, into the federal cabinet. In further illustrations of discontents from the report of Onyeji, Nigerian women activists, lament that the highest people that vote are women. But when it comes to sharing positions, they take the back seat. They suggested a minimum of 15 females in the new ministerial list, as President Buhari had promised in his campaigns to implement the 35 per cent national gender policy in his appointments; therefore 16.3 per cent representation to them was abysmal. To the women therefore, the Buhari government has no regards for them, against the background of an abundance of qualified women, and the activists were advocating for fair treatment throughout the process of selecting ministers. Their conclusion is that the disrespect of tossing women's request like it doesn't matter is traumatic (Onyeji, 2019).

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5. CONCLUSION

Democratic consolidation is not tantamount to the non-interference of the military in a nation's democratic cycles and processes. The degree of gender amity in the political system is integral to the consolidation tenets. Democratic consolidation is accordingly, certainly diminished by gender inequities. The paper established a position of presumed democratic consolidation in the West African country of Nigeria. The gender-harmony component of this consolidation is dubious. The contradictory scenario of democracy, devoid of gender amity in the Nigerian state highlights issues of deficient representation in democracies. Democracy is therefore currently characterized by gender discontents in Nigeria. The female citizen is still marginalized in political representation. Invariably, the Nigerian case is indicative of the continuing issues of gender disparities on a global scale. In the Nigerian state and in the other comparable polities, this paper recommends the specific intervention of donor agencies, in reconciling the issues of gender discontents in democratic consolidation, under massive and more specific donor-agency contributions. Such agencies are urged not to relent in their current efforts.

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