State, Women and Democratisation in Africa: The Nigerian Experience (1987-1993)

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Preliminaries

FOR SOME PEOPLE, it is presumptuous or, to be mildly put, too ambitious for one study to attempt to examine the position of African women in the on-going democratisation processes in the continent. To some extent, one could agree with the above observation given the vastness of the continent. But in terms of the actual recording of events, one would not be taking on too much once the general pattern of 'non-event' within the continent with regard to women's empowerment has been established. Hence, one dares say without any fear of contradiction, that having observed the chain of events unfold in one state, one could claim to have seen it all and therefore, one could safely employ the data used to discuss a few states to discuss the rest of the states in Africa.

From findings, African women have been playing the role they have always played from time in memorial, whether it was in the case of countries like Ghana and Nigeria which got 'flag' independence on a platter of gold, or those like Algeria and Kenya which won theirs through sweat and blood, they are the producers and reproducers of the society. The out-come for women remains the same (Amfred 1988; Urdang 1984; Rudebeck 1988). In times of dire need such as in independence, women are allowed to participate in public matters. However, as soon as the objectives have been achieved, women were discarded like a bad penny.

Three decades after the scenario described above, the position of women has not changed conspicuously and yet, African States would like to claim that they are democratising. The noticeable thing is that that ideological bent of the states is irrelevant in the consistent manner in which women are marginalised. Anyway, with *Perestoika* and *Glasnost*, all pretence at radicalism ended,

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although Nzouankeu (1991:374) among others, would have us believe that democracy has been embarked upon prior to the events in Eastern Europe. That argument is neither here nor there as the so-called progressive development has not been reflected in the position of women of Africa. Thus the wall of patriarchy and masculine hegemony remains as thick as ever. Even while some women may bemoan the fate that they have lost out, a close scrutiny of the multiple events in the terrain of democratisation show clearly that women are not only the losers but that democracy itself is yet to make the required impact in Africa and so not every one is yet to benefit from its impact and least of all, women. Sorensen (1993) shows clearly that incumbent political actors are too busy trying to ride with the waves of democratic change instead of being swept aside by time (1993). The terrain within which democratisation is supposed to be taking place is as hostile as ever. Everything is up for grabs under the privatisation scheme as a result of the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), internally or externally imposed. As the shouts for democratisation gained momentum, the economies of the various African States continue to take nose dives. Some non-governmental or voluntary organisations (also perceived as part of the 'civil society') make some weak protests but to no avail. The situation has not changed overly as old dictators find ways of retaining their seats either by allowing multi-parties systems to be instituted, or camouflaging their influence by replacing themselves with their protégés. Meanwhile the West waiting in the sidelines applauds the sham and speaks glibly of the successful democratisation processes going on in Africa. Concomitantly meanwhile, the economies of state which should guarantee-'real' democracy remain in shambles and have invariably become instruments of oppression of the masses.

The African State which has been variously described as weak, soft, decayed, over-swollen, prebendalistic, etc., is still the only viable existing institution. It is in debt and tele-guided, yet the state in Africa remains largely unchallenged in the absence of independent organisations outside the control of the state or external institutions. One wonders if there are such bodies, whether in terms of existing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or human rights organisations? Given the state of the economy in Africa, none of these bodies are really self-sufficient. Hence from our findings, we note the absence of a viable civil society in Africa. Nonetheless one scholar, Shaheen Mozaffar, believes that all hope is not lost as he opines that Africa has a better chance of evolving a viable civil society.

If indeed in Africa, there are abstractly these two component parts: state and the civil society, where one is weak or/and the other almost non existent, what would be a meaningful role for women in this depressing situation? It is a

fore-gone conclusion that there cannot be any miraculous event that would change the position of women overnight as it were. The idea of democratisation should include the empowerment of women or the promotion of a sufficient number among them into the political class. If their empowerment is impossible presently, given their poor performances at the various elections held so far, what are the chances that women's consciousness will deliberately be awakened as a form of policy in order to improve their standard of living, education, better economic status, and the obliteration of the general impression that women are less than full citizens of their states?

The study begins with a brief conceptualisation of three terms, namely: state/civil society, democratisation, and women; it states the thesis of the study; objectives; framework of analysis and the methodology. The thesis is that African States cannot behave in a manner different from the general characteristics of their society steeped in patriarchy and in a patrilineal stance despite the noises they make about democratising their societies. African states have not yet opened up the public sphere because it remains under the domain of the male members of the society. Meanwhile, African states give the impression that they are democratising the society while the men continue to control the political spaces into which women cannot always venture. For as long as this contradiction remains, so long would democracy remain an illusion in Africa or anywhere else where this deceit is practiced and/or perpetuated. The objectives of the study are:

1) To critically examine extant theoretical perspectives and expose their inadequacies in the light of recent trends in the position of women universally and Nigeria in particular;

2) Using Nigeria as a case study, to compare the position of women in African states in relation to the current theories and indicate the useful lessons gathered therefrom;

3) To examine the position of women in the democratisation process in African states and account for their inability to be favourably affected;

4) To project the possible outcomes if women are allowed to be democratically elected into the decision-making sectors;

5) To note other areas where women can serve other than the public decision-making areas i.e. non political sphere.

Framework of Analysis

The study is situated within the feminist political economy approach because women's economic status must be such that would give them the clout which would allow them venture into the arena of governance in the first place, or at least give them a satisfactory say in or influence on government. According to Stamp (1989:15-18), the feminist political economy approach is an improvement on the previous approaches, namely: liberal feminism, radical feminism, traditional marxism, and socialist feminism. Each of these approaches will be briefly explained.

Liberal Feminism is rooted in the 16th and 17th centuries social contract theories 'with their ideals of liberty and equality based on man's rationality and on the premise of a sharp demarcation between public and private spheres' (Stamp 1989:15). This approach, however, failed to question the inequalities of wealth and power embedded in the society. It did not address the various structures of oppression which then created 'sexist ideologies and inegalitarian laws and practices'. Primarily of course, the main object of liberalism is the individual and groups are only collectives of individuals and therefore, 'the notion of contradiction within a wider societal structure is usually absent' (Stamp 1989:15). Liberal Feminism, nonetheless, remained popular even to this day because among other things, it serves as a strong force for legal reform and women's political participation. Its reformist vision influenced the struggles of many developing countries feminist politicians, jurists, and academics. However, 'because it did not challenge underlying assumptions regarding the structural causes of gender relations, it has proved an acceptable basis for reform in many Third World countries' (Stamp 1989:15). A fall out from this is the United Nations' document titled: *Forward-Looking Strategies* which calls upon governments to improve the conditions/position of women in their societies.

Radical feminism was established as a reaction 'against the sexism of the 1960s radical movements'. Fundamentally ideological in its thrust, this approach has no coherent theory. It is eclectic as it borrows concepts and language from several traditions. As illustration, radical feminism employs Marxist language analogically in relations to women's oppression. For Stamp (1989:16), this is confusing: 'a theory explaining women as an 'oppressed class' appears Marxist but, in a rigorous sense, it is not Marxist'. Also, she observes that it allows for an 'a-historical approach to women's oppression' and specifically submits that

> the premise that patriarchy is universal, preceding and superseding all other forms of oppression, obscures the cultural diversity and historical specificity of human societies... like conservatism, radical feminism reduces gender relations to natural division based on biology. Yet the notion of global patriarchy has a powerful

appeal to feminists and continues to compete for scholarly allegiance. As such, it impedes feminist progress in understanding and acting upon the oppression of women, particularly in Third World (Stamp 1989:16).

It is because of this standpoint that Western feminism have been accused of ethnocentrism. For instance in 1980 at the Copenhagen mid-decade conference, African women staged a walk-out because Western feminists presumed to lecture them on clitoridectomy as a 'barbaric patriarchal custom' (Stamp 1989:16). In terms of the Western society, and by extension other societies, radical feminism has made valuable contribution by employing its ideological standpoint to criticise sexual violence and pornography vented on women and their bodies by men. Significantly also, radical feminism made the point that 'the personal is political', thus building the political space 'within which gender relations could become a legitimate subject of analysis' (Stamp 1989:16).

Traditional Marxism rejected the idea of a biological basis to gender differences. Scholars interested in social revolution and not in Western liberal struggles, argued that women's oppression is a function of class oppression which according to them supersedes all other forms of oppression (Urdang 1984). For Stamp, this approach flaws fatally in reductionalism, for gender relations are reduced to relations of production. Other critics came up with the submission that Marxist theory is 'sex blind' and therefore, is not capable of theorising 'the autonomy of gender relations in human society'. Nonetheless, the contribution of this approach is its persistence that there be a deviation from the concentration on the individual to the structures of oppression, namely: state, family, and class. Incidentally, traditional Marxism provides the framework of the next approach.

Socialist Feminism for Stamp, is the most theoretically fruitful of the feminist frameworks. Its worth is its synthesising method. Socialist Feminism according to Stamp (1989:17), 'combines the rigorous, historical, materialist method of Marx and Engels with the radical feminists insights that "the personal is political" and that gender oppression cuts across class lines'. Through synthesis, Marxist concepts are expanded to take account of the specificity of gender relations, and the biological reductionism of radical feminism is transcended. Also for Stamp, it is the most theoretical fruitful approach that views the problem of women's oppression differently. A contemporary individual's life experience is shaped by her sex and gender assignment from birth to death. It is also shaped by her class, race, and nationality. The problem for the protagonists of this is that there is need to develop a theory that would take into cognisance all these oppressions and their relationships so that a solution could be found that would ensure their eradication.

To achieve this objective, socialist feminism searches the underlying causes for women's subordination in human praxis, and in the way that people in each society organise to produce and distribute the basic needs of life. Thus like marxists, socialist feminists argue that politics cannot be separated from economics. Hence the objective is to construct a political economy of women's subordination (Jagger 1983:134, cited in Stamp 1989:17). The framework however, refused to commit itself to either the position of the traditional marxists or to the radical feminists. Thus it does not submit to the position that economic oppression is more basic than gender oppression or give priority to gender oppression. The approach 'draws widely from cross-cultural and historical studies, which provide the empirical raw material for a rigorous theorisation of gender relations' (Stamp 1989:17).

However, this typology of Jaggar in the opinion of Stamp, still cannot explain the oppression of women in non-western societies. This is because of the difference in political context. The developing countries as a whole suffer from the oppression of international economy and political forces. Thus using approaches such as liberalism, which is blind to the inequalities of wealth and power within the developing countries, would not address the problem. Stamp (1989:18) opines that many studies of scholars from the developing areas go beyond these limitations 'because the subject matter demands a more critical stance'. These scholars identified and challenged the structures of oppression and inequity more than Western liberal feminist scholars. These non-Western scholars did not employ sophisticated theories grounded in historical materialism but conducted their studies

> on the basis of their subtle and detailed empirical knowledge of the Third World gender oppression and their understanding that this oppression is rooted in wider exploitative structures and practices...the 'evidence of their own eyes' demands that they challenge liberal assumptions... [and] does not devalue the political importance of their assertions.

Reviewing all these studies which fall into no camp as it were, Stamp submits that they were not satisfied with the simplistic universal explanations which put all problems at the door of 'patriarchy'. She gathers that there is a 'complexity of gender relations and of women's positions' which contradicts 'the simplistic sex-class division of radical feminism. Hence she suggests that the concept of liberal feminism be refined. A distinction has to be made between critical liberal analyses and the uncritical ones of Western liberal thinking. Hence, she designs her own framework that encompasses both socialist feminist writing and critical liberal scholarship and calls it 'feminist political economy'.

Feminist political economy 'specifies the pluralistic framework within which rigorous attempt at theorising African gender relations have been made' (Stamp 1989:19). The approach attempts to show that the centrality of gender relations to relations of production in both pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. It includes also those rigorously analysed studies of non-Western societies which have corrected some of the biases and limitations of Western feminist thinking whether it is either socialist feminist or traditional Marxism. According to Stamp (1989:19), the analyses which note the intricate inter-working of economic, political, and ideological features of society rather than merely perceiving economic features as sole determinant of all cases, may be more pertinent for the study of women in Africa. For instance, the ideology of kinship and the practice of kin relations in precolonial Africa are central to the shaping of production relations rather than being merely the superstructure of production. 'Hence, economic work and fulfilment of kin obligations were inseparable both conceptually and in practice'.

There are a number of conceptual problems in the theories of Western feminists with regard to their approach to the study of women in Africa. First, there is the belief in a dichotomy between public and private realms. Both feminist and non feminist approaches accept this division as basic. This is an impression whereby, men occupy public sphere while women are secluded to the private sphere which is seen as being close to nature. According to Stamp (1989:19-20) there are 'gender-sensitive' studies which have debunked the theory of dichotomy within African societies whether in the past or present (Oyewunmi 1993). Secondly, there is the erroneous belief that the words: 'family' and 'household,' convey the same meaning they carry in Western societies. Rather than the undifferentiated 'household' unit without internal contradictions or struggles typical of the Western form within the African household, there are different, competing interests in relation to family and community resources. Hence, because of an improper conceptualisation of words, Western feminist writers attributed African women's problems solely to 'male domination' and this Stamp (1989:20) calls 'a vague a-historical notion without much explanatory power'.

Stamp (1989:20) observes that through this analysis, 'a valuable contribution to the elucidation of African women's organisation for collective production' and she was also able to show 'how traditional practices are an important means by which women combat both gender oppression and economic exploitation in the present' (Cutrufelli 1983; Urdang 1984; Amfred 1988).

Thus by introducing this approach, Stamp (1989:22) wishes 'to identify a field of inquiry' which gives 'the opportunity for the development of a coherent

framework, both in terms of the necessary empirical basis for developing those points'. Feminist Political economy according to its protagonist, rescues history as well as has implications for action. If the centrality and the relative autonomy of African women in most precolonial and precapitalist societies can be demonstrated, then 'the negative image that has been given to many African women' would be removed and it could 'engender optimism for the future' (Stamp 1989:23).

In summary then, though the patriarchal explanation of the African societies cannot be completely dismissed, the feminist political economy approach seeks to establish the kernel of gender relations to relations of production in both precolonial/precapitalist and capitalist/postcolonial societies which most African states are heading toward, what — with the various external prodding and the present democratisation drive. Other good points of the approach are that it provides grounds for understanding 'the centrality of women's organisations to African community life and the gender ideology that empowered women politically can be understood in their historical complexity' (Stamp-1989:74).

Methodology

The data for the study were mainly library derived since the study is theoretically based. The two months spent in the Summer Institute gave me the opportunity to revise my views on the extant literature/theories on women and their position in societies. Also the various conferences and seminars on women and gender which I was fortunate to attend in Nigeria, Acapulco in Mexico, and the US have enabled me not only to interact with other scholars and compare notes but to also have first hand information of the real position of women in the various democratisation efforts taking place in the various African states. The intention of the study is to strengthen the theoretical base of the study of women's involvement in not just only the democratisation process which in itself is dicey but also in their public or political participation generally. The democratisation process is seen thus because all principles of building institutions and culture have not been obeyed. For instance, take Nigeria, the political actors have embarked on elaborate democratisation exercise without ensuring that 'contestation', 'participation', and 'Political Liberties' are in place.

Aspects of the Literature

Since 1989, there has been an overtly determined drive towards democratisation in Africa. One would not be guilty of over emphasising the point if one says that virtually every state in Africa has been affected by this fervour of 'democratic' changes and processes (Caron et. al., 1992; CODESRIA 7th General Assembly 1992). In tandem partly with the world-wide resurgence of democratisation and

democratic push resulting from the policies of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* in the former Soviet Union and their effects on the erstwhile socialist states, and the West with its financial institutions insisting on democratisation drives, African states almost without exception, have indeed moved into the path of democratisation. With varying degree of successes, some have already accomplished the formal ritual of the democratic processes, while others are still bogged down by the pangs of democratisation (Caron *et. al.* 1992). For instance, there are the following cases: Soglo's Benin, Eyadema's Togo, Chilembwe's Zambia, Moi's Kenya multipartism and Mobutu's Zaire 'democratic' charades, etc. Whether it is those who pride themselves as having achieved their 'democratic ambition', or those who are still in the throes of full democratisation, or even those who are undecided on whether or not to join the democratisation band-wagon but who are relentlessly plagued with demands for democratisation the irreducible fact is that Africa is experiencing a 'refreshing' run of the push for democracy.

Yet, studies abound which are skeptical of the possibility of instituting democracy — liberal or popular — in the states in Africa given the perennial authoritarianism, militarism and repressions rampant on the continent (Beckman 1989; Pittin 1984; ROAPE 1984, 1989; Mamdani 1992; Anyang' Nyong'o 1992). Nonetheless, the states in Africa have been democratising. What is democracy? Is it as Beckman observes, just the capturing of state power for democracy to survive? Does it mean multipartism? Does popular democracy include women? Are women being democratised in a manner concomitant with their population.

The term democracy, which in the Greek city states meant the right of the citizens to participate directly in the act of government, has long been out-dated. Even then, women were not included in the 'people' who directly decided their fate in the Greek societies. Could we then accept Rousseau's pessimism that 'there never has been a real democracy and never will be? 'It is against the natural order for the many to govern and the few to be governed...' (Rodee *et al.* 1983:44). The view of Rousseau that people should participate directly in governance has been criticised as irrelevant in a modern state. Nonetheless, he has made some disciples. C.B. Macpherson and Carole Pateman argue that Rousseau's ideas are compatible with the modern state. Representative government can be and should be combined with elements of direct participation if real democracy is to be achieved (cited in Sorensen 1993:8). Joseph Schumpeter (1972:260) limits his understanding of democracy to a political method. Thus he says:

> The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.

This definition in the opinion of Sorensen is narrow in perspective and so we shall look at Held's (1987:271) definition which takes into consideration both the liberal and radical view-points on democracy which support a basic principle of autonomy:

> Individuals should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives; that is, they should enjoy equal rights (and, accordingly, equal obligations) in the specification of the framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them, so long as they do not deploy this framework to negate the rights of others.

For the enactment of Held's democratic autonomy, 'there is the necessity for a high degree of accountability of the state and a democratic reordering of the civil society'. Also, there must be a meaningful and direct participation of the people from the grassroots level and this should not stop at the mere casting of votes at periodical elections. Social and economic rights alongside other rights as indicated in the Bill of Rights, must be in existence for there to be adequate resources for democratic autonomy. In between these two extreme views are many more of what should constitute democracy. Democracy really then, is a dynamic term which does not lend itself to easy conceptualisation. Nonetheless, conditions in many developing countries have made it imperative to interpret democracy along the viewpoints of Held. The absence of basic economic rights, equal opportunities for participation and extreme poverty in these states make democracy difficult to achieve if not impossible in the Held's way. In spite of the limitations of Schumpeter's definition it approximates to what occurs in African states.

The current democratisation moves in Africa, apart from springing out of the world-wide democratic resurgence alluded to earlier, are considered strong positive plank for grappling with the enormous developmental and structural problems confronting most African countries (Anyang' Nyong'o 1987:14-25). African countries are daily faced with acute economic, political and social problems requiring fresh strategies and tactics of combat if the countries are not to disintegrate in the face of these problems. For instance, it has been asserted that 'we are witnessing in Africa a self-perpetuating cycle of change in which weak states engender anaemic economies which poor performance in turn further undermines the capacity of the states apparatus' (Bratton 1989:409). In this context, the acute condition of African economies is accompanied by the existence of what Ayoade (1988:100-101) calls a 'Bed-ridden' if not 'expired'

state structures, that are not in a position to embark on a rejuvenation mission. Hence, there is a paradox.

A strong state structure is essential to combating the problem of the economy and mobilising the people for developmental tasks and a good economy is imperative to redressing the declining fortunes of the state. Left in this quandary, the atmosphere of democratic change in the world provides a unique opportunity for African states to attempt to get out of the vicious cycle as democratisation can be employed both negatively and positively; to empower the civil society by bringing it to be reckoned with in state matters. Simultaneously employing democratisation can mobilise the masses as well as exploit them under this effort to address economic problems. In spite of this possibility addressing the democracy question provides one concrete avenue for grappling with the complex problems facing African state.

The attempt to address the democracy question brings into focus the marginalisation of the civil society and its domination by the state. It also provides the opportunity to redress other cases of marginalisation which exist within society. Put more clearly, the attempt to empower the civil society should also lead to the empowerment of hitherto marginalised segments of the civil society if it is to be genuine. It is only then, that democratisation would be complete and real and not mere half measures designed to benefit only a few. One cannot speak of real democratisation when marginalisation and domination persist within the realms of the state and the civil society. Hence, a marginalised group such as women (O'Neill 1990), ought to be de-marginalised through the democratisation process as they significantly constitute a large percentage of the civil society for which attention is being sought for empowerment.

Undoubtedly democratisation should indeed address the 'woman question' within the context of the 'democracy question' if it is to be meaningful. It is to the extent that the 'woman question' is addressed within this context that it can be claimed that a concrete grappling with the 'democracy question' is occurring. In reviewing the current democratisation process, the study explores and theoretically situates the yawning gap between the state and the civil society in Africa and the way and manner the process is attempting to redress not only the general non-empowerment of civil society but also the particular marginalised position of women. The right of women is discussed powerfully by Howard (1986:184-212), however the full right granted to women in Africa remains very much in the realm of rhetoric. Howard traces the subordination of women to the indigenous social structures which rendered women unequal in family, lineage, and state matters. The colonialists and the postcolonial leaders only further elaborated on these by building on more concretely the legal, social, and material

inequalities between men and women through economic competition and social stratification. Thus African women do need real democracy to have their problems clearly addressed.

State and Civil Society in Africa

The state, to paraphrase Keane (1988:85), is a sphere of compulsory, hierarchical institution necessary for the efficient and effective servicing and coordination of the civil society. Similarly for Ken Post, the term state is problematic because it is not an homogeneous entity. It also involves a series of features that cannot be easily differentiated and sometimes, it is anthromorphized so that it is related to as if it is a person that is directly relating to the society. Hence the state is spoken of as a sovereign entity engaged in international relations and which, as Keane alluded to earlier, creates the boundaries of the civil society. Also, for those with a Marxist bend, the state is the constellation of apparatuses that regulate and direct the affairs of the society, perhaps in favour of certain classes or groups. In addition, the institutions of the state serve as an avenue where praxis occur between the various interests and apparatuses in order to secure dominant influence. Lastly, for Post (1991:36-37), the state 'represents a concentration of resources (material and ideological) and hence of power for those who can control the apparatuses.

Apart from the well known adjectives formerly employed by radical scholars but now, similarly utilised by all and sundry to describe the African states, two more have been added to my repertoire of expressions with regard to the state in Africa. These are the 'irrationality' of the state in Africa, and the 'theatricality' of the state in Africa. Though the state is variously defined (Williams 1989), it is seen in this study as 'the organ of public coercive force that organises the political domination of the ruling class and disarticulates the unity of subordinate classes' (Poulantzas cited in Fatton 1993:2).

The state in Africa originated in the context of domination constructed by the colonial presence in the continent. In its colonial origin, the state evolved as a recognition of the need to have administrative and organisational control over territories that had been brought under the exploitation and control of colonialism. This meant that the state was established with domination of the society over which it superintended as its *raison d'être* (Onimode 1988). The situation in which the state perceives its underlying society as one to be conquered and dominated was the most important characteristic distinguishing the colonial state from the state in the West (the metropole or the former colonial hegemonic entity), which at that time had become fully institutionalised with its 'modern structural and behavioural characteristics' (Mozaffar 1987:5). Whereas the colonial state did not evolve organically from its underlying society,

the state in Europe derived the impetus for its emergence and existence from its society such that 'state-limiting doctrines of constitutionalism, civil liberties, and liberalism which... curbed the arbitrary exercise of state power in Europe. These state-limiting doctrines, logically and evidently, could not be made part of the state in Africa since the colonial state had a mission which differed from that of working in collaboration with the society as the state in Europe. Thus, the state in Africa was presented as a *force majeure*, relying on force and violence to get any wish and act accomplished in utter disregard of the wishes and dispositions of the underlying society.

This situation portends a given contradiction between the state and civil society as their relationship was characterised by antagonism as rapprochement and mutual disrespect because the state exists as a dominating force over society. Instead of a mutually accommodating and satisfying relationship, state-society relationship was characterised more by mutual antagonism and a predatory instinct as the two relate only in terms of antagonism and mutual exploitation. Concomitantly, the civil society internalised the need to respond to the predatory disposition of the state. Fatton (1993:3) puts across clearly the domineering position of the state *vis-à-vis* other groups within the polity:

> While the state serves the interests of the ruling class, it claims to embody the general interest, expressing particular corporate concerns as if they represent universal ones... the state is firmly grounded in society and reflect necessarily society's class relationships.

Peter Ekeh (1975) perceives this antagonism in terms of two public realms within the African state context — the primordial public governed by the morality of the society and the civic public governed by *amorality* as the society did not relate to the state in terms of its (the society) moral code. The contradiction between the state and the civil society is not one restricted to the colonial period as the decolonisation process, in spite of its grand promises, has not succeeded in changing the illegitimate nature of the state. While the nationalist leaders campaigned for independence on the basis of the need to make the state more relevant to the welfare and other needs of the people, the leaders who emerged at independence were those 'whose structural roots were embedded not in the underlying socio-economic foundation of African societies but in the relations of political power centred around the bureaucratic procedures of the ... state' (Mozaffar 1987:18). These leaders therefore lacked the requisite economic basis and saw the inheritance of the enormous authoritarian structures of the colonial state as an important and useful instrument in appropriating economic gains to offset their economic deficiencies. Inevitably then, the resources of the state were committed to personal aggrandisement of the leaders instead of welfare concern of the mass of the people. Consequently, there is

persistence of the contradiction between the state and the society. Hence Bratton ·
submits (1989:410):

> ... since the leaders of the postcolonial state claimed their right to rule on the basis
> of promises of improved material welfare, a loss of distributive capacity (by the
> state) is, predictably, met with a reduction to popular legitimacy. In many African
> countries, ordinary people are ceasing to regard the state their own and are
> refusing to comply with official injunctions.

The state in Africa has thus remained its old illegitimate self relating to the
society only in terms of domination and control. The state in Africa is depicted
in this context as an 'overdeveloped state' (Alavi 1979), relating in a
domineering sense to the underlying society. Hence Bratton observes
(1989:410-411):

> The African state is weak by any conventional measure of institutional capacity,
> yet it remains the most prominent landmark on the African institutional
> landscape.... In Africa, the state projects upwards from its surrounding like a
> veritable Kilimanjaro, in large part because the open plains of domestic society
> appear to be thinly populated with alternative institutions. At first glance, African
> societies seem to possess few intermediate organisations to occupy political space
> between the family... and the state. Those civic structures that do exist are usually
> small in scale and local in orientation. In this lilliputian environment, even a weak
> state can seem to be strong.

A state in this mould evidently cannot lay claim to any domestic process.
Indeed, as contended by Kunle Amuwo (1992), a state like this is decidedly
autocratic since it relies on force and violence in relating to the society. It means
then that a good measure of a change from this autocratic trend to democracy is
best measured in terms of the democratic nature of the state's relationship to the
society. But what is the civil society itself? Civil society 'is the private sphere of
material, cultural, and political activities resisting the incursions of the state'
(Gramsci in Fatton 1993:5). In the most abstract sense, Keane (1988:14)
conceives civil society

> as an aggregate of institutions whose members are engaged in a complex of
> non-state activities — economic and cultural production, household life and
> voluntary associations — and who in this way preserve and transform their
> identity by exercising all sorts of pressures or controls upon state institutions.

However, Keane observes that civil society can 'only be synonymous with a
non-state, legally guaranteed sphere dominated by capitalist corporation and
patriarchal families'. It is in this sense that civil society is real, particularly in the
West. But contrary to neo-conservative thinking, civil society has no natural
innocence and no single or eternally fixed form. Keane (1988:14) makes this
distinction when he describes the civil society as a non-state sphere which

comprise a plurality of public spheres — productive units, households, voluntary organisations and community — based services which are legally guaranteed and self-organising (1988:14).

The view of Keane expressed above have been criticised by Ken Post as untenable particularly his definition of the civil society because it applies to the Western capitalist societies and therefore, restrictive. Besides, the term 'social activities' is vague and tautologous. For civil society to equal to social activities — 'What other kind could it represent?' He asks. Therefore, Post (1991:38) suggests his own explanation:

> ... civil society is basically an organisational concept and includes the whole web of organisations, defined as coordination of actions with common end that can be reproduced over time and thus including both 'formal' and 'informal' instances. Basically, therefore, we are talking about kinship structures, economic, cultural, and ideological organisations (including religious ones), and political organisations seen as interest aggregations for the purpose of gaining access to the state apparatuses.

The above debate illustrates the polemics which surround the term civil society. It is like the proverbial elephant described by the blind men, each man giving his own perception of the elephant. Meanwhile, Chazan (1989:123) dichotomizes the state and society when she submits that they are 'two intersecting and potentially independent variables with political process as the dependent variable'. The civil society should not be idealised, Keane (1988:14-15) warns since it is now customary to see it as the great antagonist of the state, the demon:

> Without the protective, redistributive and conflict-mediating function of the state, struggles to transform civil society will become ghettoised, divided and stagnant, or will spawn their own, new forms of inequality and unfreedom.

A democratic change within the context of the existence of the state in Africa should necessarily entail a positive change in the autocratic relationship of the state to the society (Post 1991:44-45). Attempting to draw a relationship between the state, civil society, and democracy in Africa, Post submits that civil society will become more evident and vibrant if the organisations are not completely dependent on the state. In a democratic setting, civil society in Africa should constitute the backbone of governance, determining the limits of state action and ensuring that actions are carried out within specified procedures and regulations. This submission is similar to Mozaffar's (1992) hopes for the vibrancy of civil society in the future.

Ultimately then, the need for democratisation in Africa is really about the need for more involvement of the civil society in state affairs. This submission is pit against the present superordination/subordination relationship existing between them in such a way that the state and society are seen really working as

partners and not as entities existing in an equation where the state dominates and controls the society.

However, Imam (1991) argued that it is not enough to demand a democratic context for the state in its relationship to the civil society without also inquiring into the democratic nature of the civil society itself. This is mainly because the sustenance of a democratic state structure ultimately rests on a democratic society. This argument, long recognised by Sabine (1973), assumes that behind a democratic government is a democratic society. It is logical as well as understandable to say as Imam (1989:6) does that the survival of democracy in any state depends on the extent to which the democratic norms permeates 'the minutiae of daily life' in the civil society. It is within this context, as earlier indicated, that it becomes absolutely necessary to place in clear perspective the situation and place of women, as a group, in the society and what condition their placement within the structure of the state. We have alluded to the universal acknowledgement that women are marginalised within the processes of both the state and society because of, among other things, the patriarchal nature of the world communities (Mazrui 1991). In terms of sheer number, women, even though demographically seen generally as constituting more than half the population of the world, are under-represented at the top echelon of the political and economic structure as against the massive presence of men in this regard. This is not as a result of any inherent deficiency on the part of women but largely due to the way the society is structured. At the perception level, within the patriarchal setting of the society, the woman is perceived as emotional, passive and inactive as against the rational, strong, and active mould of the man, (Carter 1988), and hence seen as unfit for leadership position in the society (Olaitan 1993).

Because of the pervasiveness of this perception and its internalisation through socialisation most women generally found it difficult to aspire to decision making positions. They usually tailor their aspirations in line with societal expectations and are therefore found perpetually at the bottom of the societal ladder. While the perceptual marginalisation of women is almost universal, the African woman, because of the context of poverty, illiteracy and ignorance in which she finds herself, bears more burden than many of her peers in other parts of the world. Whereas the liberating influence of education is seeing to a positive change even in the existing perceptual marginalisation of women in other lands and climes, the pervasive illiteracy in Africa reinforces this marginalisation and adds more debilitating blocks on the path of the women.

As an illustration, the fact that the African continent is still largely illiterate makes education a highly-demanded factor and a commodity requiring family

financial commitments in order to attain a status in society. This high demand for literacy coupled with the legendary poverty of the average African family is such that it is impossible, most times, for all siblings to have equal educational opportunities. More often than not therefore, the family has to make a decision as to who should benefit from this family sacrifice among competing siblings. This decision is usually made to the disadvantage of girls. When girls were lucky to be given the opportunity to be educated, they were restricted in the kind of professions they should pursue (Mazrui 1991). This restriction in the choice of profession invariably consigned most women to the informal sector where they either farm or trade or both. Because of the socialisation process, it was assumed that women have 'natural' disposition to carry the burden of catering for the family by over working and over stretching themselves. The females, women and girls, constantly work either on the farms or in the markets in order to pay for the education of the boys or/and for the up keep of their family. In the end, the males who have the advantage of education get to the top on the societal ladder while the females are left to cope with the drudgery of their narrow world.

Obviously, the fact that many men are in the top hierarchy of the society and state given their relative well-placement in a patriarchal order would mean that the men would work for the perpetuation of this inequitable order. It does not then come as a surprise that in most of the African countries, women are legally treated as second-class citizens. For instance, it is widely held in Nigeria that women(this has no legal justification), because they have no worthwhile possessions, since in the perception of the average policeman, they are themselves possessions of men, they cannot bail offenders out of police or court custody. This is a task that is strictly reserved for the more rational beings— the men of the society — who are unlikely to misuse such opportunity since they have credibility and not given to emotions (Kuye 1992:71)!!

The reality of the marginalisation of women in Africa is definitely beyond contention as in all facets of social life this is manifested. The question which follows are: What can be said for the democratic nature and essence of a society that treats the majority of its population as second-class citizens? What implication does this situation have for the current democratisation process in Africa? Is it possible to have concrete democratisation without a redress of the marginalisation of women? Is the de-marginalisation of women not a positive proof of the concreteness or otherwise of the democratisation process? How far has the current democratisation process in Africa tackled and addressed the woman question within its context? These and other questions relating to the place of women within any genuine democratic setting are worthy of note if we

are to place the current democratisation process in Africa in a proper perspective.

Categorisation of Women

In discussing women and the woman's question researchers fail in many cases to explain that the term 'woman' can be omnibus. This study wishes to correct that anomaly. Women should not be perceived as a homogeneous entity and should therefore not be referred to or related to from such perception. Kazembe (1986:378) makes the point that women, whatever their status, 'do not enjoy the same privileges as the men in the same class, they are discriminated against'. African women are of several categories: the elite or the petty bourgeois; the rural elite and the urban elite; the peasant and proletarian; there are the conservative women who can be found both in the urban and rural areas; progressive women, both rural and urban; there are also literate women and non-literate ones. All these receive and wield influence in the society, as the case may be. Invariably, these women have formed or found themselves in organisations which reflect their way of perceiving issues. Thus there are women's organisations which are elitist and/or professional e.g. the various women's organisations which emerged with Independence; there are women's organisations which attempt to address the ills of the society but from a western perspective, e.g. *Zonta International*, there were the various market women's and peasant groups who supported many of the nationalist movements in Africa (Feierman 1990:220). Some of these groups became integrated into the ruling parties thereby wielding some clout in the political system.

But then, their power fizzled out as these parties went into oblivion. Some women groups did not fuse into the existing political parties and so continued to wield some powers on the side lines as in the case of the various market women associations in Nigeria demonstrated and so were able to put pressure on the political actors now and again.

Interestingly, in the democratisation process, while some political actors sought the assistance of women by forming women's organisations although not with expressed desire to boost their chances e.g. Ghana's 31st December Women's Movement, (Tsikata 1989:84-87). Women organisations in Nigeria have been banned from being involved in politics outside the two government created parties. Even though various women's organisations attempt to educate them with regards to their power as voters or candidates, women make their political decisions on individual basis. Thus, there is no threat of collective bargaining over the heads of successful candidates.

Women in the Context of State and Society in Nigeria:
A Case Study

In a study of this nature, it is important to highlight some of the extant literature which would help to bring to the fore more vividly the yawning gap of the place of women in the current democratisation efforts in Africa. Undoubtedly, women studies are growing phenomena in scholarship. Hitherto, women studies were a by-product of materialist, class, or political analysis (Baran 1968; Amin 1972). Hutchful (1991:4) strongly criticised this lack of interest in women's issue by African radicals and marxists. As far as they are concerned it is 'the latest diversionary approach'. But with increased women activism in the 1960s and 1970s, coupled with the ideological impetus provided by the civil rights, anti-war movements and liberation struggles, there were more investigations into women's oppression.

Thus two groups emerged: One, there were women activists who contributed the first spate of feminist writings which 'were popular, enthusiastic and from the guts; some of them were wildly radical' (Stamp 1989:11); and two, there was the emergence of academics who devoted their studies to preliminary investigation on women. The United Nations Organisation's (UNO) declarations of 1975, the International year of Women in 1976, and a decade (1976-1985), as the Decade for women, respectively, were additional impetuses as they brought the two groups of activists and academics together. Generally, extant literature shows that women though considered to be in the majority population wise, are very much invisible in terms of their evident participation in public life. Women, without belabouring the issue, are the underdogs of the society. Yet, they inevitably are necessary. Women ensure that the society survives and continues through reproduction and by virtue of working their hands to the bones in subsistence existence. To underscore the lowly position of women, Pateman cites as illustration the situation in Welfare States where women are the majority of recipients of many welfare benefits. A major reason for this is that women are, more likely than men, to be poor.

In Nigeria, market women rallied round the standards of Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Aminu Kano that one can safely submit that without the contribution of women and their leaders, many of the parties led by these men could not have been successful. Similarly, there were women who were politically conscious enough to stir other women to be aware of their rights in their environments. There were women such as Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and her sister, Mrs. Eniola Soyinka. Both of them led Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) against the payment of poll tax in 1948, protested the sole Native Authority (NA) system of colonial rule in the Western Provinces as

represented by the paramount ruler, Alake of Abeokuta and demanded the participation of women in the colonial administration (Mba 1982). Between the late 1920s and 1930s, Igbo and Ibibio women of Eastern Nigeria protested against their taxation and the mechanisation of the palm products. This was the environment within which Mrs. Margaret Ekpo made her contributions. In Northern Nigeria, there was Hajia Gambo Sawaba who was imprisoned nineteen times for her radicalism and political views.

Women and the Nigerian State/Society: Democratisation in the Babangida Years

Since it is impossible, given the time and materials at my disposal, to do a detailed study on every African state, I have decided to focus on a closer study of the 'Woman Question' in Nigeria with the hope that the lessons gained could be applicable to the other African countries. This section therefore has two parts. The first part deals with the position of women before 1985 when major changes began to occur in the favour of women. The second part focuses on the position of women since the Babangida government began to take more interest in women's affairs.

The point of departure for the first part is the colonial period and its legacy on the woman question in Nigeria. The argument here is that British hegemony deliberately weakened the position of women in the Nigerian society through their introduction and administration of the modern state. Taking a practice favourable in one segment of the country, they applied it to the whole country. The seclusion of muslim women in the purdah was seen as the natural exclusion of women from the public sector and the total reliance of women on men. This was a wrong conception of the position of all women in Nigeria. First of all because seclusion is not a general practice, and also because the Hausa/Fulani women still participate actively in economic matter. Secondly, it was only wealthy muslim men who could afford to put their women in seclusion. Mack and Schidkrout show the differences between the easy life of the royal woman and the poor woman who survived by engaging in *talla* (street hawking) (in Romero 1988). In spite of the easy life of a 'queen', Hajiya Ma'daki was involved in several public engagements. Thirdly, there were millions of non-muslim women (e.g. the Maguzawa) who went about their economic, religious, and social duties unrestricted.

Undoubtedly, women were excluded from some traditional matters which might necessitate some rituals/discussion from such secret societies/cults as the *Oro* or *Ogboni* in Yorubaland. But then, to arrive at the final decision and implementation, women cannot be excluded or, whatever decision solely made by men would fail (Afonja 1986). However, the colonialists not knowing the

political culture prevalent in the Yoruba society excluded women from all public affairs and invested totally in the men all vestiges of rulership. In a way it should be understandable, since they themselves came from a culture steeped in patriarchy and Victorian norms which did not allow women to participate in public affairs. In retrospect, the British colonisers did not interfere with any of the cultural restrictions traditionally placed on women. As a matter of fact the introduction of the British common laws could be seen as additional constraints on women.

Because of the ambiguity which the Christian/Islamic and common laws imposed on the people generally women became less than full citizens. Women were treated as things to be acquired and disposed of at will. Hitherto, they could have redress under traditional law depending on the hat she was wearing: mother or wife. As a wife all the injustices can be heaped on her. But as a mother, Kuye (1992:73) explains, 'she is not considered as inferior, she is worshipped in all African cultures. A wife is a property of a man and his extended family. She does all the chores of the household as well as bears and rears children. As the property of the man she has no earnings without the expressed permission of the husband. As the property of the man, more 'properties' can be acquired without the consent of, or notification to the first wife. Women as properties can be beaten, maimed, killed, discarded and/or inherited.

Since Independence, Nigerian laws have been deliberately misinterpreted and manipulated to suit the male ego. Over the years certain myths have been perpetuated on the limitations of the female in legal matters. Perceived and treated as minors, the Nigerian woman whatever her status cannot bail people out of court or police custody. Married women cannot obtain Nigerian passports on their own recognition without a written permission from their husbands. Women cannot insert the names of their children in their passports without the expressed consent of the father of the children. There were differentials in the benefits women enjoyed in the public service with regard to men's, even if they occupied similar positions. If a husband died intestate, his property which includes the wife will be inherited by the family.

However since 1985, the Babangida administration had made some overtures to women by removing some of the discriminatory policies. For instance, women enjoy the same benefits as men if they occupy similar positions. Recently, no man can enjoy tax rebate on wife and children. Women can now bail people. The former constraints have been pronounced illegal. There was also a convention that in every state cabinet, one commissioner or more must be a woman. In the dying days of the Babangida administration, two women were

appointed junior Secretaries (the equivalence of junior Ministers). That democratisation process also produced a female senator, two Deputy Governors, two Secretaries to the government at the state level; a few female members in the House of Representatives, State Assemblies and Local Government Councils and few Local Government Chairpersons.

In order to embark on the democratisation process, the following institutions were set up namely: The Political Bureau; The Directorate of Mass Mobilisation for Self-Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER); The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI); Better Life Program (BLP) for rural and urban women (BLP); The People's Bank; and the National Women's Commission (NWC). Although tangentially, each of these institutions touched on the woman issue. For instance women have their representatives on the bodies, but beyond this, they ran merely people oriented programs and therefore were not often positive, toward women's issues. However, the BLP, the People's Bank and NWC were directly established for women's benefits.

The BLP was established by the wife of the President, Mrs Maryam Babangida in September 1987 because DFFRI could not meet the needs of the rural women (Williams 1992:86). The BLP aimed to improve the living conditions of women and uplift their socio-economic status. It was said that to a large extent it had been able to achieve this. Women farmers and other women in various economic ventures were trained at the federal and state multi-purpose centres in their relevant fields in order to become self-sufficient. Also, BLP had a huge network which linked the various levels of government from the national level down to the village level so that women at various levels were in contact with themselves and help to solve their problems.

One of the problems also attacked successfully was health problems of women and their children. For instance, Expanded Program on Immunisation (EPI) and Oral Rehydration Therapy (OTR) and Family Planning were quite popular. BLP also attempted to enlighten women on the danger of early marriages and Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), a disease rampant where child marriages are common. Finally, traditional midwives and birth attendants were trained while more women had become exposed to the knowledge of nutrition and hygiene.

BLP intensified adult literacy programs and encouraged the establishment of cooperatives in order to ease the financial burden of women. Through these cooperatives, BLP ensured greater access to women credit facilities. Lastly, the BLP was an avenue to mobilise women on voting behaviours. More women than men came out to register as party members of the two political parties in Nigeria

and to vote at the various elections. It was ironical that in spite of all this, many women did not emerge winners at the various elections. However, a major achievement of the BLP was the establishment of the NCW by the Federal Government of Decree 30 of 1989. As part of the structures of this new body, the BLP became an arm of it.

Perhaps as a sign of the commitment of the government, the NCW was situated in the Presidency. Its objectives are eight: To promote the welfare of women; to promote the full utilisation of women; to promote responsible motherhood and maternal health of women; to stimulate actions to improve women's civic, political, cultural, social, and economic education; to support the work of non-governmental organisations and coordinate government and women's organisations; to encourage the sense and essence of cooperative societies; to formulate and propagate moral values within the family units; and to work towards the total elimination of all social and cultural practices which discriminate against and dehumanise womanhood (*African Notes* 1990:61). Its functions were along the lines of the stated objectives. Organisationally, the NCW was governed by a Board appointed by the President. It was made up of the Chairperson, and then members whose appointment was part-time. There was an Executive Secretary who ran the commission with the help of a Secretariat. NCW had three departments: Planning, Research and Statistics; Better Life Program; and Personnel Management, Finance and Supplies.

However, NCW lived in the shadows of its creator and was not very visible in spite of its being situated in the Presidency. Hence, there was a reorganisation which made the wife of the President the chairperson of the Advisory Board of the NCW. This for a while alleviated the rivalry between the First Lady as the head of the BLP and the Chairperson of the NCW. But then it had a negative result of cooling down the tempo of the activities of the NCW. From inception, the NCW was starved of funds and handicapped by excessive officialdom. The creation of the Advisory Board further constrained the growth of NCW as the activities of the BLP took precedence over it as the First Lady assumed direct control over both.

Part of the efforts of the Federal Government to bring access to banking and financial services to the masses was the creation of the People's Bank on October 3, 1989. If one realises that when speaking of the poor, women are in the majority, then the establishment of the People's Bank was another overture to women by the government. The argument advanced was that if the poor were provided with credit, they would be able to generate production and engage in self-employment with no external assistance. With the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), many poorer people living at the subsistence level were created.

The People's Bank was established to cushion the effects of SAP. Therefore, the clientele of the bank are the urban and rural poor whose total assets: movable and unmovable, remain below the poverty level. Briefly, the aims and objectives of the bank *inter alia* are to extend credit facilities to the less privileged members of the society who cannot benefit from the services of conventional banks; to provide opportunities for self employment for the vast utilised and under utilised manpower resources; to inculcate banking habits at the grassroots level and to cushion the painful effects of SAP on the poor.

The People's Bank was supposed to have been established in every ward. Thus in sense, it has gone to the doorsteps of the people. The loan which initially ranged between 200 and 2000 Naira was payable within twelve months. As should be expected, the bank's greatest customers were women. They utilised the loan obtained to run established petty trading, *bukataria* (a kind of eating place), sewing centres, hair dressing salons, farming and other agro allied processing, nursery and day care centres and secretarial institutes, etc.

From the foregoing, it would seem as if woman's question has become a household word. Definitely, women have become evident.— they were perpetually seen on Nigerian television screens, and heard consistently on radio. Thus women might prematurely attribute success to these cosmetic changes.

Attempts have been made here to show that the Babangida administration has consciously endeavoured to woo Nigerian women. But to what end? The reality is a different matter. Whatever the motivation given by the democratisation process of the Babangida administration, and the move by women to meet the expectations of the UN Decade for Women, the investment did not translate into women occupying worthwhile political posts in the number that would give credence to their population in Nigeria.

Nonetheless, Nigerian women have become aware of their potentials even if this has not been reflected in their position in the political arena. Available statistics show that more women had ventured into politics in this period than ever before. According to Williams (1992) a very significant thing was that more women contested for political posts than ever before and they were indifferent to their failures at the polls. A woman who repeatedly contested for the post of the president was Sarah Jubril. But why can women not translate their number into the winning of political posts?

Nigeria has many women organisations. They are either elite or non-elite, urban or rural; professional or associational; christian or muslim or of African traditional religion. The point is that there were as many organisations/groups as there were women which reflected certain interests. But the government neither permitted any women wing within the two official political parties, nor allowed

the formation of any new political parties apart from these. Furthermore, the existence of so many women organisations were themselves obstacles. If the NCW was created at the time BLP was created perhaps it would probably had been able to mobilise the women better. From the time of its creation in 1989, the NCW remained a toothless bull dog because it was financially starved and bureaucratically crippled. Government attention was on BLP which was not initially equipped to mobilise women politically. Thus, NCW could not coordinate other women organisations which were divided mostly along class and religious lines. A brief mention of some of them would serve as illustrations.

The National Council of Women Society (NCWS) was founded in 1958. It was created in order that women could have a united front and speak with one voice either to the government or at international fora. It has 39 members at the national level and branches in almost all local government areas. A run down of the activities of the NCWS will further show why women performed so poorly at the polls. The NCWS conducts celebrations of International Women's Day and Family Day; trains women in civic responsibility; conducts leadership training courses; runs health and adult educational and vocational programs with emphasis on hygiene and sanitation in markets and homes; awards scholarships, gives welfare services in hospitals and prisons; initiates improvement in social services; exchanges visits with other women in other countries; establishes day nurseries and centres for the disabled; promotes women's handicrafts on economic scale and community rural development; promotes and administers cooperatives; creates an awareness on the causes, consequences and treatment of Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) and provides VVF Theatres Rehabilitation Centres for the patients.

According to its former President, Mrs Emily Aig-Imoukhuede (1992:4), the NCWS maintains a non-partisan profile but 'has co-operated in efforts to mobilise women to perform their civic rights as citizens of the country', i.e.— the voting rights. As far as she was concerned, women had done very well under the Babangida administration and praised the establishment of the NCW with its 30 Director-Generals and 99 Directors. It was also a personal achievement for Mrs Babangida whom she described as a 'one-woman catalyst squad' (Aig-Imoukhuede 1992:6). Perhaps it is also noteworthy that Mrs Aig-Imoukhuede was later one of the female Secretaries in the Ernest Shonekan government between 1993 and 1994.

Women in Nigeria (WIN) (1992) is an organisation ideologically different from NCWS. It was founded in 1982 after the First Annual Women In Nigeria Conference. Its founders were a group of women and men from all over Nigeria who were committed 'to the task of establishing an organisation which would

work ceaselessly for an improvement in the condition of Nigerian women'. WIN believes that 'the liberation of women cannot be fully achieved outside the context of the liberation of the oppressed and the poor majority of the people of Nigeria... these are aspects of women's oppression' which must be alleviated (1992). Therefore, WIN urges women to fight for all their rights: in the family, in the place of work, everywhere, in the Nigerian society.

Since its formation, WIN has taken concrete steps to enlighten women and other members of the society about their rights. WIN constantly reminds oppressed men and women that they must ally to fight injustice and oppression. Men must also overcome the tendency of their age old prejudices. They must recognise in full the equal rights of all human beings regardless of gender. Thus on the specific political position of women, WIN demands that 50 per cent of all places in the legislature and the executive bodies be reserved for women who constitute half of the Nigerian population. Women should have the right to confer privileges, rights and duties on their spouses and children just as men do. Finally, that all disabilities which prevent women from having access to the ownership of land should be removed (WIN 1992). WIN has had limited successes, however, partly because of its radicalism and partly because of its socio-economic problems.

These two organisations discussed are elitist and they, as well as others like them (the University Women Association, Armed Forces and Officers' Wives Association) do not necessarily meet the needs of the women who are not in their class. It is therefore necessary to state that there are Women's associations which cater for the needs of these non elite women. Very popular are the market women associations which can be found wherever a market exists although they are not coordinated. In Yorubaland historically, *Iyalaje* and *Iyalode* are market women leaders who represent women in the chief's court. In contemporary period, however, these women have become political power wielders and they give their support and that of their associations to whom they please. These women were not usually Western educated, yet, in the politics of the First and Second Republics they were actively involved and in return they too benefited from the spoils of office. For instance, Alhaja Humani Alaga had a street named after her in an exclusive area. This could be in recognition of her role in the Action Group, a ruling party in the West during the First Republic. Similarly Alhaja Aminat won the contract to supply food items to all prisons in Nigeria. Aminat was a faithful National Party of Nigeria stalwart. Similarly Alhaja Humani Alaga as *Iyalaje* held her own in the politics of Oyo State. Thus, during partisan politics, women's groups as informal as they were, were penetrated by the various political parties. Alongside the informal penetration of these women associations, the Babangida government first backed strongly the BLP and then

established the NCW. But then it did not bargain for the independent posture of
the NCW Board headed at that time by Professor Bolanle Awe. That obstacle
was however removed with the creation of the Advisory Board to the NCW and
the wife of the President becoming its chairperson.

Before the formation of the modern women bodies such as NCWS, BLP and
NCW which have itemised as some of their achievements the formation of
cooperatives, Nigerian women have always had their own cooperatives. In some
parts of Igboland, there are the *Itili-Abali* groups and the *Ohuba* women
association. In Agbor, Delta State, there is the *Otu Umundiomu* group
comprising married women who share among themselves the needs of their
members thereby bringing relief to those in need. These women also have a
'people's bank' of their own thus their operation of the *Ajo* or *Esusu* (in Yoruba)
(WIN 1992:40). Given the attractions of the People's Bank and the BLP,
women's associations however remote have become influenced by government.
To benefit from them the women associations in need of financial help must
submit to the bank or BLP the membership list.

In terms of organisation of either the BLP or the NCW the federal
government was actively involved. The President appointed the board at the
federal level while the governor or the local government chairman did likewise
at other levels. Thus it was politicised. For non-governmental women
associations overtly they chose their officers according to stipulated rules or
norms. But then, he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Thus, it was not
uncommon to hear some women praise the First Lady and the BLP. In fact in
their perception it was more meaningful than any other women's group. Women
therefore tended to be philosophical about the poor performance of women at the
polls. While some of them believed that it was too soon to expect dramatic
changes whereby women could occupy important political posts, others believed
that women had no business in the public sector. It was sufficient that their
economic status had been enhanced by the activities of BLP/NCW.

The Phenomenon of First Lady In Nigeria

More than any period before, the First Lady syndrome has become pronounced
during the Babangida administration. Right from the inception of this
administration, Mrs Maryam Babangida refused to be obscured. This is a novelty
in the history of First Ladies in Nigeria and there were seven before her. They
were 'all ... respected mostly in absentia' (*Gentle Strokes* n.d:6). Some were
seen presiding over tea parties while others were never heard of. Maryam
insisted that her place is beside her husband, Nigeria's military President. As
president of the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA), she was
quite assertive and galvanised the association into embarking on self-help

programmes. When she became Nigeria's first lady, she transformed an erstwhile mainly ceremonial position into a movement for the improvement of women both at rural and urban areas. Mrs. Babangida was said to have 'an implicit philosophy that informs every activity, every involvement and every programme for women in development' (*Gentle Strokes* n.d.:4). She distinguished between elite women groups and masses groups and perceived that the latter was the less privileged of the two and therefore her primary task was to create a useful setting for their 'self-development and self-esteem'. Using her position as the First Lady, she advocated along side Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), that the Nigerian rural women be integrated into specific development programmes than being lumped with the disabled.

Today in Nigeria, the 'Office of the First Lady' is officially recognised. Since Maryam was not a feminist or a 'women libber', she ensured that her office was complementary to that of the President's and its programmes for the improvement of the lot of Nigerians. Nonetheless, she was the leader of the pressure group for women's progress. Thus, in this period of democratisation, Mrs. Babangida was able to cut a niche for herself in the public arena and laid 'a precedence difficult to find in any of the developed or developing countries' (*Gentle Strokes* n.d:8). We have noted her efforts to improve the lot of women socially, morally and economically through the establishment of the BLP and NCW she also popularised and made more glamorous the office of the first lady. From all over Africa, other First Ladies made 'pilgrimages' to Lagos and later Abuja, as it were, to learn the secret of making the position of the first lady less ceremonious and more meaningful (*Gentle Strokes* n.d:19). Probably taking a cue from her, the First Ladies of some African countries have become more vivid in their respective countries. The ladies which come easily to mind are Mrs. Diouf of Senegal, Mrs. Nana Rawlings of Ghana, and late Mrs. Sally Mugabe of Zimbabwe. These ladies have been mobilising women in their countries along the lines of BLP. These efforts have been very rewarding as their various incumbent husbands have been able to retain their governments with the votes of women.

The State, Women and Democratisation in Africa: What future?

In this section, a brief overview will be attempted. Specifically, the focus is: why women have failed to impact more on the political sphere. Democracy for the African women has not gone beyond Schumpeter's definition and therefore, democratising women means getting them to come out *en masse* to vote for the men put forward by the various political parties. The outcome of the various elections so far gives credence to Ama Biney's fear that if care is not taken by African women that marginalisation will be given a 'democratic veneer' (*African*

Woman 1991:29). Citing Thomas Sankara the late Head of State of Burkina Faso, Biney observes that:

> genuine emancipation of women is that which entrusts responsibilities to them and involves them in productive activity and in the different struggles that the people face. Women's genuine emancipation is one that exacts men's respect and consideration. Emancipation, like freedom, is not granted but conquered. It is for women themselves to put forward their demands and mobilise to win them (*Sankara Speaks*, Oct. 2 1983 cited in 'Perspectives', *African Woman* 1991).

Democratisation processes are on in African countries. Even though that is recognised, the type of democracy envisaged is liberal and does not definitely leave room for women's participation without a struggle. Thus the democracy debated is male dominated. The effects of SAP fall heavily on women and this has the attendant effect from keeping them from political aspirations. For instance in Nigeria, colossal sums were needed to contest the various elections. Thus very few women could participate. The situation was such that as the stakes became bigger, the fatter the amount needed to fight the elections. The presidential elections were attempted three times. Each time, billions of Naira was spent. Certainly in such situation, only very few women could contest alongside men. Even the appeal by the First Lady that concessions be given women made no impression on the political actors who were bent on out-spending their opponents.

This thus brings into sharp focus the real purpose of the women leaders and their organisations. Take the BLP for instance, the idea was very good and it brought to its support some women with progressive ideas. However in terms of implementation it was not very successful because it failed to bring relief to the suffering of the less privileged women whether urban or rural. The way it was operated, it perpetuated the oppression of women but now sadly by women. Certainly, the First Lady and other first ladies at the other levels became better known as their faces appeared ever so often on television and at political rallies. But in terms of delivering the goods, there were a lot left undone. Therefore without the fear of contradiction, one can easily say that the life of poor women specifically became worse than it was prior the establishment of BLP in 1987. Indeed farm produce attracted more money but the difference ended up in the pockets of the middle-people. Thus one agrees with Ama Biney that in spite of heralded activities of African First Ladies,

> these women have used such organisations as smokescreens to empower themselves and their class of women with further privileges at the expense of poor women (*African Woman* 1991: see also the views of Fola Ignodalo in Williams 1992; Pittin 1991:38-53).

The other constraints on women are patriarchal and cultural. While men are not ready to shift so that women could also come into the political limelight, women themselves feel inadequate to occupy such posts. Closely related to this is the religious factor. Both Christianity and Islam have their reservations about women occupying political posts, particularly the 'born-again' christians and muslim 'fundamentalists'. Patriarchy, culture, religion, economic situations all combined when a decision such as: which gender gets good education in a family. Of course, the advantage of a good education is indisputable. It is an important determinant on who occupies decision-making position in the public sphere later in life. The hurried dissemination of education to women at an advanced age under the auspices of BLP, or NCW, for instance cannot certainly be a march for those who benefited from proper education from childhood. From such exposure, they might become aware of their rights but they will still need the articulation of the better educated ones in order to redress injustices of the society to women. This is where the various women's organisations genuinely interested in the plight of less privileged women would have been of great assistance.

The civil society which would and should be a great asset to this type of development is in itself still evolving. Women should not allow their own organisations to be relegated to the background. The tendency for financially starved associations is to look for assistance from solvent bodies such as government but the danger is that they can then no longer be critical of the government/the state. The state takes control completely in such a situation. A strong civil society must be somewhat independent of the state for it to earn some respect from the state. Women and their organisations have not been able to muster such clout in spite of the democratisation processes. Right now the big and popular women organisations have been seized and controlled by political actors and their spouses while others have to follow suit or else fizzle out. This situation has made imperative the need to focus on the legal/constitutional provision for women in Africa. It should be observed here that women are not regarded as full citizens even in law. They are treated as minors or as second class people. Usually, there is a big disparity between the position of men and that of the women in the society and there are variations in terms of their severity among the different African societies. These variations I have attempted to highlight in this section.

First, it is argued that constitutional provision for women is dependent on the political culture of the country and its colonial history. Thus, there is certainly a disparity between the Francophone states and the Anglophone states. Also, there is disparity between these states and the Lusophone states. Further disparity exist

between states who got their independence through negotiations and those who fought their way to the negotiation table.

Second, it is noted that virtually all independent states in Africa have included in their various constitutions a section on Fundamental Human Rights which elaborately listed the rights of their citizens. But since women are less than full citizens these rights are discriminately applied to them. Cultural, societal, and religious norms and tenets have a way of ensuring that women do not benefit fully from the stipulated constitutional rights. For instance, Article 18 of the African Charter specifies both that 'the family shall be the natural unit and basis of society' and that 'the State shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women'. Similarly, Article 17(3) says: 'the promotion and protection of morals and traditional values recognised by the community shall be the duty of the State'. Commenting on this provision Howard (1986) observes that:

> while the rights of women are thus specifically protected, their inclusion with the protection of the family could result in ambiguities when the individual woman comes into conflict with family norms or with her husband's wishes (cf. Kazembe 1986:379-386).

Third, the gendered tone of virtually all the constitutions of the states in Africa is hereby noted. The masculine terms of 'he', 'man' are employed in the constitutions. Usually these terms are said to refer to both men and women. But in terms of benefits, men get them first before women. Because of this, 'many rights for women have been specifically codified in international and African human rights instruments', but as Howard (1986:184) rightly observed, very few have been implemented in Africa.

When compared with women in other places, African women became enfranchised much more easily than their counterparts in Europe and the United States of America. Usually, this comes with the granting of Independence except in the case of Northern Nigeria where women were not enfranchised at independence along with their southern counterparts. This disparity was largely as a result of Islam. The muslim political leaders employed the *Sharia* (muslim law) to regulate the involvement of women in politics. The women's acquiescence could be due to mass illiteracy and their wish to comply with religious and customary norms. But even where women could claim that they had the vote as was the case in Southern Nigeria, it can be said that that was all there was to it. As we have indicated earlier, women were not given the attendant rights nor were their interests considered national issues. The UNO's Women's Year and the Decade for Women have helped to enlighten Africans and their leaders but it is only minimally. Patriarchy and the patrilineal order of things have helped to slow down such progressive moves. Below we shall

highlight further, areas of discrimination in spite of the existing national and international rights for women.

Women suffer a number of discriminations. One such discrimination is the right to confer nationality on their spouse. For instance the 1979 Ghanaian Constitution confers Ghanaian nationality on a woman upon her marriage to a Ghanaian man but she loses it should she divorce but this is not so for men particularly, if the marriage lasted five years. In Nigeria, a woman cannot confer through marriage citizenship on her husband, no matter the length of the marriage. Similarly, women can be discriminated against even in the case of inter-ethnic marriages as events in Nigeria show at the creation of more states in 1991. Thus, 'discrimination with regard to citizenship can adversely affect women, insofar as it affects their right to either become and remain citizens of the countries of which their husbands are' (Howard 1986:186). It is from such a right that other rights as citizens subsequently flow. Even though, women as we indicated earlier, were variously and differently enfranchised, whereupon they wielded political rights, those rights were usually exercised at the behest of the male. The indigenous tendency of the male occupying formal. political office coupled with the colonial reinforcement of this cultural practice had consequently generated few female politicians even in the contemporary period.

In essence then, one agrees with Howard (1986:186) that though women have acquired more rights over time, they are not necessarily better than they could have been had there been no colonial interlude. Oyeronke Oyewumi demonstrates that Yoruba women occupied specific and important political, economic, social, and religious spaces (1993). In Igboland, where some kind of egalitarian system exists, women wielded political power based on solidarity of women which was expressed through their own political institutions known as *mikiri* or *mitiri*; market networks, kinship groups, strikes, boycotts, and force. Elsewhere in Africa, women founded and headed city states and received tributes from other chiefs. Some of the well known names were Queen Amina of Katsina, Queen Yamacouba of Sherbo, Sierra Leone, and royal women of the Wolof state of Waalo (Senegal); while, Mampoing, Wenchi and Juaben in Ghana were founded by women (Howard 1986:185; Hoffer 1972:154; Mickell and Skinner 1989:1; van Allen 1972:171). Thus, in the precolonial period, though the position of women in the kinship system might not be superior to the men's, it was not inferior to that of the men in all cases (see Kazembe (1986) for the discussion of some of these exceptions in the case of the Shona and Ndebele women of Zimbabwe). Nonetheless, the fact that women were not inferior to men was ignored during the colonial period. Hence Howard's submission that 'as a result of the contact with the West, its ideology, and adoption of its method of nation-state, African women have been deprived of the political influence

which they held in the various societies'. The current legislated rights have not addressed the situation adequately.

However, here and there on the continent of Africa there are flashes of 'democratic generosity' from political actors. A case in point was the government of Sekou Toure who was derided for his overtures to women in the 1960s. Among his peers, he was the first to appoint women as cabinet ministers. He had five of them in his government. He outlawed polygamy in 1968 and between 1968 and 1978, Sekou Toure declared the period a decade for women's education. It is said that the Guinean Universities had equal enrolment of both men and women. All these suffered reversion after Sekou Toure's death in 1984, even though today the Mayor of Conakry, is a woman. In the opinion of Professor Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui a Guinean who now resides in the US, women fared badly after the death of Sekou Toure because they depended wholly on the President and the ruling party (May 27, 1993). Some Guinean women recently have become vocal when the government of President Lansana Conte continued to drag its feet on effecting democratisation in Guinea. About 200 women of the National Democratic Forum (NDF) held a rally and called for 'transparent elections' before May 1993. They called on Guinean women to unite for democracy and freedom (FB 15 -AFR-93- 045, March 10, 1993).

It is noteworthy that Zimbabwe since Independence has tried to remove some of the dehumanising laws against women so that they become less of a minor; but then it needs proper socialisation process in order to get the parties involved and the laws implemented. Few Zimbabweans are prepared for the changes and so they act as stumbling block to their implementation. Thus on paper, Zimbabwean have accepted equality with women constitutionally. Women can vote and be voted for and the few women who occupy public posts have equal pay for doing the same job with men. Pieces of legislation: such as the Age of Majority Act and laws governing marriage and property, have in a way, given women equal status with men. Thus, there are women ministers and women pilots and engineers, etc. (Maseko 1989:27). Recently, under the guise of democracy and multipartyism, a woman, Isabel Kasauki has formed her own political party: The Zimbabwe People's Democratic Party (Daily Report, Feb. 19, 1993:5).

Ghanaian women's position in the society has become assertive with the development of cash crop in the twentieth century. Women were gainfully employed albeit in the traditional areas of the economy namely, farming, forestry, fishing, as well as petty trading. With Christianity came Western education and so emerged teachers, nurses, administrative personnel, lawyers, doctors as well as business women. There was no discrimination between the

sexes since the Nkrumah's government came into power in 1951. Accra market women supported the Convention People's Party (CPP). To keep up the tempo, the National Council of Ghanaian Women (NCGW) became a part of the CPP. Through the NCGW, many went into active politics. For instance, twelve women entered the Parliament through special enactment while a woman was appointed minister. Since the advent of military rule and subsequently, women have not had it so good. Although the formation of Women's organisations continued, this was not to the advantage of the ordinary women. For instance, the 31st December Women's Movement 'has not shown concern about the deteriorating conditions of working class peasant and petty-trader women' (Tsikata 1989: 89,81-90). President Rawlings has also appointed two women as Cabinet Ministers in his government while two more were in the Parliament of 200 (Greenstreet, 1972; 351-354; *Daily Report*, Jan. 28, 1993).

In Uganda the National Resistance Movement (NRM), allowed the election of one woman in each district by its counsellors which ironically, were predominantly male. But as Mamdani (1990:370) rightly observed, since this is a gift from the powers that be, one cannot expect them to be representatives of women but that of the power that allowed their election into office.

Women, therefore, are emerging politically, but not in a manner that would ensure any dramatic change in their favour. Why is this still the case? Without belabouring the issue, it will be foolhardiness to suggest that women situation has improved dramatically because of the democratisation process going on in African states. The reality is that their situation has not changed significantly. This has been highlighted above. But for emphasis, there is an erroneous expectation on the part of feminists that since African states have been pressurised to democratising then *ipso facto* that means throwing open the political arena to women. Apart from the fact that politics is a struggle, democracy is conflictual and antagonistic and the civil society is weak and ineffective. Yet in its weakness it is very much strong and hostile to a segment of it — women. Thus to have a worthwhile impact on women of the democratisation process, certain definite and positive steps must be taken on the Woman's Question:

A democratising state must articulate the position/role of women both within itself and the civil society. Thus both the laws and norms of the land and society must be geared towards the elimination of the subordinate status of the female;

Hence, women recognised as full citizens of the land can live a full life, make legitimate demands on both the state and society without a feeling of subordinate/superordinate and be assured of equitable response from both these two overarching bodies;

A democratic government and society must be able and willing to identify the contributions of both sexes to the development of the society and equitably and adequately reward them.

If for a start the steps above are effected, the pervading injustices presently evident in African societies will be eliminated. Presently also, there is the overwhelming ideology which perceives women as mere producers and reproducers: of subsistence living and nurturer of human beings. Yet these duties are not adequately quantified and rewarded. Clearly then, in spite of the decade devoted to women's development, the development programs embarked upon by African states were cosmetic. There are therefore huge gaps which are impediments to women's progress. To have progress, there must be gender equality in theory and practice.

Conclusion

Attempts were made in this study to examine the impact of the current democratisation exercise on women and their organisations in Nigeria in particular and in Africa in general. Without any doubt democratisation is going on although with varying successes. From extant literature, women have been used for political gains by unscrupulous political actors all over Africa except in very few cases. Democratisation is on again and women as usual have jumped onto the band-wagon without again stopping to ask: what is there for them. Democratisation for some women given their number, still meant easy dislodgement of men from their high and mighty positions in the state while at the societal level, women remain subordinate to the men. Yet, in reality, both in the state and civil society, women could hardly dislodge their oppressors. Besides, the backers of the present democratisation drive have no history of their own culture which allow women access into the public sector without a struggle. Thus, it is not too much of smart thinking on the part of the women, to believe that democratisation process would automatically include them in the public sector in the number that they considered meaningful without a struggle. Women might still have to make do with 'tokenism' in the public sector for a long time to come. To change that projection, women have to struggle.

The struggle for success here cannot be magically achieved. It is a struggle which needs a long time planning and doggedness which only women can impose on themselves. Democracy is a battle which is fought every inch of the way. As Ama Biney says, it is the responsibility of progressive forces (women and men) to find the method of 'seizing political initiative' in order to gain the support of ordinary people so that a just and egalitarian society will develop. A first step is education.

Progressive women's organisation must insist on the education of women because it is only then that women can take cognisance of their subordination in the society and thereby take concrete steps to remove this. As it is now, the BLP and the 31st December Women's Movement for instance, have got some women so enamoured with their organisations that they cannot think that the world can be better than what it is presently. Hence for the advocated expansion of the democratic space to be meaningful to women they have to participate fully in the democratic processes opening up. The cultural and religious constraints have to be done away with. This can only be done if women are enlightened and they can work and compete without any feeling of inferiority.

Women are not a voice, they are many voices. These voices must be given a chance to express the diversity of opinions. African women worked very hard all their lives but this is not reflected in their economic status particularly in the private sector. In the public sector most African states have equalised the remuneration of both women and men unlike in the West. But apart from this, not enough women are occupying all the choice economic positions in the state, thus discrimination remains in this sector, and this is where power is wielded. True, individual women do surface now and then, but these are flashes in the pan. That does not make it the rule. Hence, majority of women remain and do feel put down socially, culturally and economically. The inheritance and land issues are cases in point which demonstrate the suppression and oppression of women. The key to the eventual removal of such entrenched discriminations is the training given to both girls and boys from childhood. This is in the purview of women and they should take advantage of that. Women must learn to be strong — self sufficient persons who should not allow themselves to be constrained within the spaces so indicated by the patriarchal setting.

The improvement of women does not mean suppression of men. It is important to stress that both women and men must be empowered. It is then that democratic rights will be ensured. Rights should not be left in the hands of those Biney calls 'sexist political machines'. Democracy, she insists 'cannot be the monopoly of political leaders and their patriarchal machines' (Africa Woman 1991:30). The current democratisation is just the beginning of a long journey. Women should note that they cannot achieve democracy without economic buoyancy, educational soundness and religious and cultural emancipation.

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