

REVIEW ARTICLE

Aisha Binani, the First Elected Female Governor in Nigeria that Never Was- UN Affirmative Action, Gender and the Leadership Question in Nigeria

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Abstract

In February 2023, the Nigerian political sphere found itself at the threshold of history when Aishah Binani was announced by the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) of Adamawa State as the duly elected governor of the state. The announcement, which was later annulled, was celebrated across the nation not only because Aishah would have become the first elected female executive governor in contemporary Nigerian history, but also as a trailblazer in the extremely traditional/patriarchal setting of northern Nigeria. In exploring the intrigues, the gender politics, and the high octane politics that surrounded the cancellation of that result, this paper investigates the roles played by women's groups, the pro-gender elements within the ruling party (the All Progressive Congress), the contradictions in the application of the Electoral law that first led to her announcement as the duly elected governor and the eventual cancellation of the result. The paper discusses the implications of the above incident in relation to the UN's Affirmative Action as well as leadership practices in Nigeria. The paper deploys the descriptive method and sources its theoretical scales from available literatures in the field. Exactly what lessons are there to be learnt by women in general from the experience of Aishah Binani in their quest to reinvent leadership practices in Nigeria? What else can women do in order to effect positive change in the leadership structure in Africa as a whole?

Keywords: Gender, Leadership, UN Affirmative Action, Nigeria.

“There cannot be true democracy unless women's voices are heard. There cannot be true democracy unless women are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own lives. There cannot be true democracy unless all citizens are able to participate fully in the lives of their country.” **Hillary Clinton**

“All my life I've believed that men and women have equal capacities and talents...consequently there should be equality in life's chances.” **Julia Gillard**

“Girls can do anything. We do anything and we expect to be treated as equals.” **Helen Clark**

1. Introduction

The Nigerian political landscape is still largely the preserve of men. This has continued to be the case for a long time given the scanty records of women's

involvements either at the elective or appointive level throughout the federation. Only in the recent times have women started to canvass and advocate for the full participation. However, the steps taken by

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Aisha Binani to challenge the existing stereotype of male domination in the Nigerian political landscape during the 2023 general elections was a giant stride. It shows to a larger extent that women, if given the opportunity can exert their potentials in the business of politicking regardless of whom or what power they are contending with. Unwavering with the challenges of her environment, Binani weathered the storm and featured in the limelight of Nigeria's political history. Carefully contemplated, she must have been motivated by many factors- the pro-gender elements within the northern political sphere, the support from various women groups, the familial support and above all the economic power that characterizes the Nigerian politics. If all these were true, it is arguable to say that the future of women's involvement in politics is bright and vibrant. This is true due to the fact that Binani's exploration will not only serve as a reference point for other women to venture into politics, but will continue to impact the socio-cultural and political landscape in predominant Muslim north of the country.

Thus, when carefully contemplated, it would be discovered that while scholarly inquiry into the points of understanding the gender norms among various agencies in Nigeria have much to offer in deepening our knowledge of gender relations in the northern part of the country, this has, been largely explored by scholars but the aspect of women's involvements in politics has been largely neglected. This research therefore attempts to fill this gap. It explores the nature of Nigerian political climate which finds expression in monetary power, godfatherism, religious intolerance as well as votes buying among others. It examines the established patriarchy in the polity and situates same to how the UN's Affirmative Action of 35% participation of women in politics has largely been neglected despite its potential to increase women's visibility in the political sphere. The paper probes into how Binani emerged as a political figure of repute in a patriarchal setting like northern Nigeria and broke the shackles of glass-ceiling of the female gender in politics despite strong opposition from all quarters particularly the religious sphere. This is situated alongside her announcement as the duly elected governor of Adamawa state by the state REC, her acceptance speech, the eventual nullification of the announcement and the implications of all these for the future of women's participation in politics in Nigeria. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for women to learn positive lessons from the audacity of Binani to have been able to challenge the

status quo to the level of becoming the duly elected governor that never was.

2. The Nigerian Politics and Poly-tricks

Unyielding to the new trend in the West African sub-continent where military rule is almost the order of the day, Nigeria is one of those countries that continually celebrate Democracy through her electoral law although, the extent to which Nigeria embodies democratic ideals may be lacking in substance. For instance, electoral processes in Nigeria are known to be characterized by unhealthy competitions and violence (Oniye, Olatinwo & Damola, 2023:146). Issues of over voting and vote buying remain a cankerworm during elections. Human rights are grossly violated and sometimes lead to extra-judicial killings. Corruption and embezzlement still remain the bane in many political elites. Despite these deficiencies, Nigeria still continues its practice of democracy and the Nigerian atmosphere has developed a unique political landscape where factors like religion, ethnicity, gender, cross carpeting, godfatherism, voter inducement, amongst others are very influential dynamics.

Starting with religion, while there are no constitutional provisions that mandate political parties to consider religious orientation of their aspirants in their choice of candidates, it has become a norm that political parties must be religiously sensitive and this is usually distributed between the two major religions in the country; Islam and Christianity. This is why often times, political parties would ensure party flag bearers do not share the same religion with their running mates. It is often a Muslim-Christian ticket (Muslim flag bearer with a Christian running mate) or a Christian-Muslim ticket (Christian flag bearer with a Muslim running mate). However, this is not always the case as parties may sometimes present Muslim-Muslim or Christian-Christian ticket, when they realize that same-faith factor collides with another significant factor like ethnicity. This was what happened in 2023 presidential elections where All Progressives Congress (APC) presented a Muslim-Muslim ticket and still won the presidential seat.

Unlike the religious factor, ethnicity commands similar potency in the Nigerian political landscape with constitutional authority. The principle of federal character as entrenched in Section 14(3) of the Nigerian Constitution mandates political parties to avoid potential predominance of an ethnic group in the composition of the government. As provided verbatim infra:

14(3): The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.

As a result of this provision, it is mandatory for political parties to distribute their federal candidates across the three major ethnics in the country; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. It could be a Hausa-Yoruba ticket, Yoruba-Hausa ticket, Hausa-Igbo ticket, Igbo-Hausa ticket, Yoruba-Igbo ticket or Igbo-Yoruba ticket. As already established by the constitution, this is to avoid over concentration of power in the hands of one ethnic group which is feared may lead to marginalization of other ethnic groups. But constitutional provisions nonetheless, political parties would have been forced to consider ethnic balancing in their choice of candidacy in order to have a good run at the polls. This is because each of these major ethnic groups has regional concentrations and can impede a political party that polled more votes from winning an election if the votes did not spread through the regions adequately.

Cross carpeting is another chromosome of the Nigeria's political cells. Party members are often deflecting from one party to another due to conflict of interests. These interests are not necessarily ideological as political ideology is not yet a strong element in the Nigeria's political space. Party members often switch amongst the major political parties where they feel their chances are higher. In the 2023 general elections for instance, one of the three main contenders for the presidential position deflected from Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) to Labour Party (LP). It is therefore commonplace for party members to cross carpet from one party to another in the Nigeria's political landscape.

Godfatherism is also another important factor in Nigeria's politics (Osimen, 2018:35-36). The support of party statesmen and stakeholders is crucial to the success of candidates in primary and main elections. Regardless of the amount of community service efforts made by a candidate, if the candidate could not secure the support of party statesmen, it would be hard for the candidate to scale through even primary elections. This is because these statesmen have their loyalists who accord absolute allegiance to their leaders without

any critical assessment of their leaders' choices and decisions. These statesmen are those Justice and Eze (2023:124) call political elites—"powerful few who perform all political functions, monopolize power and enjoy the advantage inherent in the control of power and the distribution of scarce resources".

Voter inducement is also another element that drives the Nigeria's political landscape. Political aspirants are fond of buying the conscience of voters when elections draw near and during elections through stomach infrastructure. This is by providing food and cash for people whom the politicians know can easily be bought through inducement by money or food items. This is seriously speaking to the poverty that constantly ravage the Nigerian landscape where majority cannot afford three square meals hence, are prone to accept anything politicians offers in form of inducement regardless of the worthiness of the candidacy of a particular politician.

3. The Nigerian Politics and Patriarchy

Asides the earlier factors, Nigerian political landscape operates a male dominated topography (Raheem & Garuba, 2017:156; Makama, 2013:122; Anigwe, 2014: 35; Osimen, et al, 2018: 22; Anzizi & Hassan, 2023: 79). It is "dictated, dominated, and classified on a masculine basis" and arguably what Ojogbede tags 'male democracy' (Ojogbede, 2021: 27). Chances of women contesting for and winning elections are very slim, even starting from the intra-party levels (Pogason, 2012). In the first three republics and since the inception of the fourth republic in 1999 till now, there has not been a female President or Vice President. While there have been few female Deputy Governors, there has been no elected female Executive Governor. The only accidental female Governor was the former Governor of Anambra State, Dame Virginia Ngozi Etiaba, who attained the position from the seat of Deputy Governor when her principal, Peter Obi was impeached by the State legislature. She only served for a period of four months (from November 2006 to February 2007) before the previous Governor retrieved his mandate through an appellate court.

Though the Nigerian society, just like most traditional societies are patriarchal from multifarious spheres (Agbalajobi, 2010: 78), the deep diffusion of patriarchy with Nigerian political architecture was largely due to the configurations of the colonialists (Jacob, et al.,: 793; Ojogbede, 2021: 32). It is this system that the male political elites sustained in the post-independent Nigeria. While female exclusion from politics

manifests across all the regions, Northern Nigeria stands at the top due to the conservative ideas of most northerners. Bawa (2017: 152) establishes this reality, arguing it is as a result of rigid interpretations of Islam and powerful cultural traditions” that are entrenched in the region. This is corroborated by Anigwe (2014: 47), who argues that Christian and Muslim laws to which most Nigerians subscribe make gender equality to be difficult for women. It is as a result of this reality that despite the fact that South-western women started voting since 1959, the northern women could not vote until 1976, which constitute about 27 years after (Ojogbede, 2021: 32).

However, despite the conservativeness, the political configurations of the North, when it comes to female inclusion are getting better now. There are many women that have established their political relevance in the region by challenging and toppling male dominance. The like of Aisha Binani is a typical example. This is why Okafor (2023) reports that it may be mere stereotype to still regard the north as the most conservative region that does not embrace women’s involvement in politics. She reported in part as follows:

Although Nigeria’s North is widely seen as a conservative region that limits women’s rights including political participation, facts negate such stereotypes. In Adamawa State, women have been repeatedly elected to the National Assembly. Folashade Bent, Binta Garba, and Ms Dahiru have been federal lawmakers and the current deputy governor of North-western Kaduna State is Hadiza Balarabe a woman. (Okafor, 2023)

Okafor reported further that Northern Nigeria has been doing well as obvious in Ms Garba Binta’s case, who was first elected to the House of Representatives from Kaduna State and later elected to represent Adamawa North in the Senate after switching her constituency to Adamawa. This was a rare feat for even male politicians, let alone a woman. Political stakeholders from the north also give women the opportunity to increase their participation in politics and decision-making. President Buhari for instance, a president from the north was said to have had more women in his government than each of the previous regimes (Jacob, et al., 2023: 795). But regardless of this paradigm shift, the Nigeria’s political landscape still remains a largely male dominated landscape and this continuously allows patriarchy to thrive.

This uninspiring underrepresentation of women and continuous permeation of patriarchy owe to a collage

of factors. One is the low female involvement in political participation. Due to the indices of violence that have evolved out of political events in Nigeria, political participation is seen as a male preserve by many Nigerians and responsible women would not involve themselves in such volatility. Two is the cultural dispositions of most ethnic groups which detach women from public space. In most cultures, women are expected to exhibit traits of reticence and restraint in their public appearances. There is perceived religious condemnation of female leadership and unparalleled mental capacity with their male counterparts. Some faith leaders believe women have no business with political positions because their primary responsibility is to fulfil domestic duties in their households, hence, getting involved and participating in political processes shall be deemed efforts in futility (Mbah, 2015: 13).

4. UN Affirmative Action (AA) and National Gender Policy (NGP)

Given the gender in-balance in the distribution of power at the spheres of human interactions the world over, and in a bid to bridge the gap between the privileged and the marginalized members within the political, economic, social, educational and all sphere of engagements as well as to foster equality and classless societies in the world, the United Nations (UN) instigated and approved an Affirmative Action, hereafter refers to as AA in order to facilitate equal rights for vulnerable classes of people with the few privileged others across different spheres of societies (Dietrich, 2013: 3). The AA is all about leverage of 35% representation of women in all spheres of engagements particularly the political representation. In other words, the political interest of women should be made possible through creation of enabling and conducive political spaces in any given sovereign countries of the world. The AA was adopted at the 37th meeting of the United Nations (UN) of August 28, 1997. This was reported by the UN’s Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (available at: <https://www.digitallibrary.un.org>).

The AA according to Ikpeze (2011:161) refers “to policies that take race, ethnicity or gender into consideration in an attempt to promote equal opportunity in employment, education, public contracting and health programmes. The formulation of the AA owes its origin to the Executive Order that was issued by former US President, John F. Kennedy

in 1964 that there should be equal employment opportunities for all regardless of gender, race and/or social status (Ikpeze:162). While it is obvious that most countries of the world particularly Africa, are still struggling to fulfil the all-inclusiveness that the Action recommends from different windows, it can be argued that Nigeria is very distant from achieving this goal as far as AA is concerned in terms of women's involvement and participation in politics and governance. In order to mitigate this challenge, former President Obasanjo formulated National Policy on Women in 2000. This policy was later improved in 2006 (Ikpeze: 171; Raheem & Garuba, 2017:155) and metamorphosed into National Gender Policy, with the aim to promote gender equality. The NGP specifically set a target of pursuing 35% minimum threshold of women in elective and appointive political offices at all levels by 2015 (NGP, Objective 5).

However, despite the adoption of the UN Affirmative Action and National Gender Policy, the impact is yet to be felt. Women have not been able to contest for the presidential seat in Nigeria. There are many "unsaid or muted" stories to this; perhaps women are intimidated out of their ambitions through financial power or that party politics creates fear in the hearts of women to give way to their men counterparts within the same party. This is true of what happened during the 2019 and 2023 general elections. In 2019, the four women that wanted to contest for presidency withdrew to support President Muhammadu Buhari and in 2023, the only female aspirant, Mrs Uju Ojanenye also stepped down to support President Bola Tinubu all at the primary party elections level. This goes for governorship positions too as there has not been elected female governor in any of the Nigerian states. Other elective offices where women are represented are very insignificant. The number of women in both elective and appointive positions is ridiculously low compared to AA and NGP recommendations. As a matter of fact according to Jacob, et- al (2023: 795), between 1960 and 1999, there have only been 3.1% of women in elective political offices and 5% in appointive positions. This situation is evident in the attitudes of some governors who do not consider the involvement of women in their cabinet as important. Example of such could be found in the former Governor of Enugu State who decided not to include a single woman in his cabinet at the inception of the fourth republic until women protested and took him to court. Given the constant agitations by women for the entrenchment of the AA in the Nigeria polity, it is noteworthy that the visibility of women in the political

scene has improved to some extent between 1999 and 2023, though the number is still relatively low.

Deriving from the above, the reality of women's involvement in politics has also necessitated for a call by some political stakeholders to advocate for women's only party system based elections to facilitate more female inclusion if actually 35% AA would be achievable. As opined by Yafugborhi (2023), women need free zone to contest amongst themselves without the involvement of men in order to be able to entrench the policy of AA. In furtherance to this, Funmilayo Adesanya Davies, the Country President, UN Positive Livelihood Awareness Centre (POLAC), reiterates that; "We don't have money like them, don't have the stamina like them, we don't have the energy to fight in campaigns rigorously like them, but we can do that among ourselves." In other words, economic, physical, and political wherewithal are the major criteria for any successful election in Nigeria which women are still grappling to have within the hegemony of men who prefer not to yield fair and free atmosphere for women to fly.

5. Aisha Binani as a Minority Major

Despite male dominance in Nigeria's politics, few female figures have risen up to challenge the status quo to carve a niche for themselves in the political space. One of such figures is Aishatu Dahiru Ahmed, popularly called Binani. Binani was born in 1971 and had her elementary and secondary education in Yola, Adamawa (Jalal, 2023). Not entrapped by gender inequalities surrounding girl-child education in her region, she obtained her Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) in Electrical and Electronics Engineering, a specialization that rarely attracts the female gender. She also had a certificate in Rural Radio Systems from the University of Southampton in the UK and a certificate in Data Processing from Nasarawa State University in Keffi, Nigeria (Jalal, 2023), to say the least; Binani is well read as far as educational attainment is concerned. Perhaps, her educational achievement is one of the incentives that propelled her to be able to challenge the existing stereotypes of male political dominations in predominantly male society such as northern Nigeria.

Binani gained national prominence when she was elected into the seventh National Assembly (Onigbanjo, 2023). She was elected under the platform of People's Democratic Party (PDP) to represent Yola North, Yola South and Girei Constituency of Adamawa State

in the House of Representatives from 2011 to 2015 (Jalal, 2023). Her gender notwithstanding, she was nominated on the floor of the House as the Chairman, House committee on Constituency Outreach and member of some other committees. Binani was able to play the political game just like her male counterparts in the political scene by consolidating her influence on Adamawa people with outreach programmes outside her legislative responsibilities. She was reported to have facilitated programs that would improve the welfare of pupils in both primary and secondary levels of education, improved healthcare services, agricultural aids, employment opportunities, and infrastructural growth in her constituency in Adamawa State (Onigbanjo, 2023).

Unperturbed by the male hegemony, Binani against all odds wanted to improve on the constituency development decided to move a step forward by contesting for her Senatorial district under PDP but lost to the candidate of the rival party, All Progressive Congress, (APC) Abdulaziz Nyako in 2015 (INEC, 2015). Binani, having well understood the Nigerian political game that cross-carpeting sometimes pays out, she cross-carpeted to the rival party (APC) in order to leverage on the party's structure in Adamawa State ahead of 2019 elections (Onigbanjo, 2023; Adetayo, 2023). With her achievements, she won both the primary election against her party members and the general election against her opponent in landslides. That election was significant in Binani's life and the North generally because she was the only female senator in the 9th National Assembly from northern Nigeria. During her tenure, she was the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Jalal, 2023). Binani was thus a significant political figure in the Nigerian political structure and a model for women and that expertise in politics is not by implication the preserve of men.

6. 2023 Adamawa Gubernatorial Elections and Binani's Candidacy

The 2023 Adamawa gubernatorial elections was yet another manifestation of Binani's prowess in Nigeria's politics. This is because, starting from the primary election, she contested with the male bigwigs of her party and Nigeria's politics such as Muhammadu Jibrila Bindow (a former Governor of Adamawa State), Nuhu Ribadu (pioneer Executive Chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)) and Abdurazaq Namdas (an influential member in

the House of Representative and Chairman of the House Committee on Army Affairs). Despite all odds, Binani emerged the winner of the primary election having polled 430 votes against Nuhu Ribadu, the first runner-up who polled 288 votes (Jalal, 2023). However, Nuhu Ribadu challenged Binani's victory by requesting for the nullification of the primary election and successfully disqualified Binani in October 2022 in a Federal High Court based on the allegation of vote buying, over voting and delegates' inducement. Since Binani was no longer a novice in the parlance of politics, she challenged the nullification at an Appellate Court and successfully retrieved her mandate to be able to go to poll in 2023 gubernatorial election. Consequently, she was declared the APC flag bearer (Igbinadolor, 2023).

The victory at the primary elections at the party level was the beginning of another struggle for Binani as she was going to contest against Ahmadu Fintiri, the incumbent Executive Governor of Adamawa and flag bearer of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Besides the power of incumbency that influences election processes in Nigeria, Binani's gender was a significant factor to be considered by the people of Adamawa state. It was reported in one of the news media about the criticisms she had to face from the conservatives as some Muslim clerics clearly warned their followers to refrain from voting for a woman leader (Okafor 2023). This nonetheless, Binani contested for the gubernatorial elections and had a good run, albeit, without victory.

7. The Theatrics in the Adamawa Election Results and Litigations

The 2023 Nigerian general elections, including Adamawa gubernatorial elections were held on 18 March, 2023. After collation of results, the Adamawa gubernatorial election was declared inconclusive because the number of potential votes at the cancelled polling units exceeded the gap between the winner and the runner up. Fintiri had polled 421,524 votes while Binani polled 390,275 votes, creating a margin of 31,249 votes, whereas, the total number of potential voters in 69 polling units where elections were cancelled was 37,016 votes (Igbinadolor, 2023). This means there had to be a supplementary election and was fixed by INEC (Independent National Electoral Commission) to hold by April 15, 2023.

When the supplementary election was still in progress, the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) for the State, Hudu Yunusa-Ari, made illegal

declaration by announcing Binani as the winner of the election (Igbinador, 2023). This declaration was said to be illegal under electoral law because no REC is invested with such power during elections. It is the prerogative of the Returning Officer/Collation Officer to announce the results of any election in Nigeria (INEC: 5). Consequently, Binani did not mind the illegality of the declaration and went public to read her acceptance speech. The declaration and the speech had already sensationalized the Nigerian populace as many Nigerians celebrated the headway that Binani supposedly created in the exclusively male gubernatorial architecture in the Nigeria's political landscape.

The public sensations notwithstanding, the appropriate collation process continued, and the incumbent Governor, Ahmadu Fintiri was announced the winner of the elections, having polled 430,788 votes over Binani that polled 398,788 votes (Okafor 2023). Owing to disgruntlement from many quarters and the oblivions surrounding the elections, President Muhammad Buhari ordered investigation into the matter. The victory of Ahmadu Fintiri was upheld but Binani did not accept the results. She insisted INEC should review the results of some Local Government Areas arguing that the PDP manipulated the election and that there was absence of INEC adhoc staff in some polling centres.

Aisha Binani later took the issue to Election Petition Tribunal but it was dismissed on 28 October, 2023 with the presiding Judge, Justice Obi Uloho releasing a 176-page judgment to dismiss the petition for lack of merit. Binani later took the matter to Court of Appeal and it was unanimously dismissed again with the panel saying the record of proceedings transmitted to the court and the briefs of the appellants were incomplete (Oyeyemi 2023). A fine of one million naira (₦1000,000.00) was also charged against the petitioner to be paid to the winner and his party. Quoting the Presiding Judge, Justice Tobi, "On the whole, this appeal lacks merit and is accordingly dismissed, the decision of the lower Tribunal is hereby affirmed". Despite all the judgements, Aisha Binani was resolute in pursuing the matter to a logical conclusion by exploring all possibilities to reverse Fintiri's victory. She took the matter to the Supreme Court and on 30 January, 2024, the apex court reserved the judgement by the earlier proceedings (Ejike, 2024). Having explored all possibilities, Binani could not contest the victory of Ahmadu Fintiri again in any court of law in Nigeria but refused to accept defeat by any standard.

8. Nigerian Women and Political Legacies

While the achievements of female figures like Binani within the Nigerian political landscape projects hope for women's growth in terms of space, it is however, saddening to witness in the recent times how women have moved away from their natural callings of enlivening, nurturing, preserving as well as softening every difficult situation. Few privileged Nigerian women in politics have also imbibed the culture of corruption and are even worse for it. The aftermath of the gubernatorial election in Adamawa state is a recent example of corrupt practices. The drama that followed the election was described and reported in negative ways in many media houses in Nigeria depicting Binani as a political thief. Some news agencies were not modest enough in their reportage of the whole saga, hence, tagging Binani as broad day light thief that "attempted to brazenly steal people's mandate" (Igbinador, 2023). It was also reported according to the Department of State Services (DSS), that Binani created an enabling environment for corruption by giving up to two billion naira (₦2bn) to the Resident Electoral Commissioner that announced her victory as bribe (Igbinador, 2023). Though, this allegation of bribery was later denied by Binani calling it 'bizarre'. The question is what was the motivating factor for her acceptance speech in the first place given her awareness of the Nigerian electoral structure and election declaration system?

The public interpretations of the action of Binani speak to how the few women who are opportune to feature in the political scene have literarily mismanaged their different political offices. For instance, out of the forty-seven ministers that were appointed by president Bola Ahmed Tinubu, only seven are women. From this few number, one of them by name Betta Edu was the first to be indicted for corruption. Betta Edu was Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation and was alleged for misappropriating five hundred and eighty five million naira (₦585m) (Abubakar & Chibelushi, 2024). This was also the case for Sa'adiyah Umar Farouk who was appointed by the former president Muhammadu Buhari as the pioneer Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management from 2019 to 2023, she was indicted for thirty-seven plus billion naira (N37.1bn) money laundering (Sanusi, 2024). Stellah Oduah who represented Anambra North Senatorial District from 2015 to 2019 was also found wanting for 7.9 billion naira fraud (Nnochiri, 2022). Diezani Alison Madueke who was Minister of Transportation

in 2007, Minister of Mines and Steel Development in 2008, Minister of Petroleum Resources in 2010 and first female President of Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was also indicted for uncountable charges of corruption, money laundering etc. (Opejobi, 2023). Sarah Ochekepe, former Minister of Water Resources was jailed because of four hundred and fifty million naira money laundering (Ajijah, 2018).

The corrupt practices by women within the political landscape call for concern. The trend of corruption in women in governance is growing in an alarming way. For instance, in line with Akintunde (2024), it is unimaginable that out of seventeen Ministers that were sacked since 1999, six of them were women, representing 35.3%. The questions of importance therefore are; what type of political legacies do contemporary women in Nigeria want to be known for? Is it that integrity has eluded the women folk in Nigeria? What are the incentives for corrupt practices by women in politics? Answers to these questions are not far-fetched; they are as a result of lack of political will on the part of the political elites who have turned politics to the survival of the fittest. In other words, within the political landscape in Nigeria, money plays the most important role among other factors. This perhaps is the reason people as soon as they find themselves in either elective or appointive positions; they immediately turn to corrupt elements- wanting to recover whatever they have expended during the electioneering campaigns. It is no doubt that the desperate tendencies of Nigerian political elites to win elections by crook or hook threatens effective and efficacious democracy and in fact militates against the impact of Electoral Acts in the electoral process (Sulaiman, 2023:20-21). This is why Ila and Othman (2023:8), argued that the political culture in Nigeria is embellished in corruption through the negative influence of money, rigging and thuggery. But it is sad that women despite their small number in governance are becoming better experts in manipulating the system in this regard.

9. Women's Inclusion in Nigeria's Politics and its Implications

While Nigeria's political landscape is still evolving to accommodate women's inclusion through the entrenchment of the Affirmative Action, the courage and agility of the likes of Aisha Binani express the limitless tendencies and prospects for Nigerian women in politics. That Binani could achieve such

political feats prior to the 2023 elections, defeated the male bigwigs of her political party in the 2023 primary election and went very close to the eventual winner of the gubernatorial elections of Adamawa State manifests a paradigmatic shift from patriarchal characteristics of Nigeria's political space. Binani must have created a kind of fear in the hearts of men in her party in particular and the state in general. The idea of underrating the extent to which a woman can go as far as politics is concerned may no longer thrive in Adamawa and all other states in Nigeria.

Although, women have come a long way in terms of visibility but there is still a long way to go in having a breakthrough (Oladosu-Uthman, 2012: 10). This is as a result of the outcome of 2023 general elections wherein in line with Okafor (2023) out of ninety two women that contested for Senatorial seats in February 25th Elections, only three won the race, while out of the two hundred and eighty six women that contested for seats in the House of Representatives, only fifteen have been declared winners as at April 5, 2024. Nonetheless, female inclusion in Nigeria's politics has grown a bit with some women vying for gubernatorial seats. If Binani had won the gubernatorial election, she would have set precedence and broken the glass-ceiling. According to Ms Shonibare (as reported by Okafor, 2023), if Binani had won the Adamawa election, she would have typified the US Kamala Harris and be an indication that women at top elective positions in Nigeria is inevitable.

Undoubtedly, some conservative Nigerians have not accepted women's ability in leadership. Example of such can be found in the Adamawa clerics that reportedly preached against voting a woman leader for the state during Binani face off with Fintiri. But the handwriting on the wall is a promising one for female inclusion. It is also noteworthy that Binani was not the first woman to get close to becoming an elected Executive Governor of a state in Nigeria. Aisha Alhassan popularly known as Mama Taraba had even gone closer to the position than Binani. The Taraba's gubernatorial election in 2015 just like Adamawa was declared inconclusive. After the supplementary election, the PDP candidate, Darius Ishaku was declared winner. Mama Taraba successfully challenged the results at an Election Tribunal as the Tribunal nullified Ishaku's victory and proclaimed Mama Taraba as the duly-elected Governor (Nwabufo, 2015). The case was contested up to the Supreme Court and the Court upturned Tribunal's ruling and upheld the initial Ishaku's proclamation

(Ugwuanyi, 2016). This establishes the prospects of having elected female Governors in the future, and by implications more women in governance. Perhaps Nigeria can become like Rwanda which has female majority (63%) in her lower house of parliament (Jacob, et al.:799).

10. Conclusion

This paper examines the Nigeria's political climate and how it has remained the preserve of men over the years despite the constant advocacies from different agencies for the entrenchment of the UN's Affirmative Action of 35% representation of women in all spheres of human engagement including the political. Aisha Binani however, against all odds, emerged as a trailblazer who did not only challenge the existing stereotype but remain resolute on making a difference as far as women's participation in politics in Nigeria is concerned. Though, she lost her mandate to her opponent yet, an atmosphere of freedom has been created to some extent within the political landscape in Nigeria particularly the seemingly patriarchal north of the country. It is discovered that so far, few among the women that have found themselves in the corridor of power have misappropriated the position through corrupt practices ranging from money laundering, bribery, vote buying and voters' inducement among others. This notwithstanding can be argued that women have come a long way as far as participation in Nigeria's politics is concerned; they still have a very long way to go if the Affirmative Action would be achieved. The conclusion then become axiomatic that many lessons are there for women to learn from the experience of Aisha Binani in her attempt to pitch the tent of women agency within the male dominated political terrain not only in Nigeria but in the whole of Africa.

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