

**THE IMPACT OF PROMINENT AFRICAN WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS: OBIAGELI KATRYN EZEKWESILI AS A CASES STUDY**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **SUCCESS DOMINIC ACHOLOH** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

PROF. E. A. IFIDON
PROJECT SUPERVISORS

DR. FRANK IKPONMWOSA
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

DATE

DATE

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the Almighty God for his guidance, care and unending love throughout my stay in the University of Benin.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Title Page..... | i |
| Certification..... | ii |
| Dedication..... | iii |
| Acknowledgements..... | iv |
| Table of Contents..... | vii |
| Chapter One | |
| BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY..... | 1 |
| Chapter Two | |
| AFRICAN WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS..... | 10 |
| Chapter Three | |
| BIOGRAPHY AND EARLY LIFE OF OBIAGELI KATHRYN EZEKWESILI..... | 26 |
| Chapter Four | |
| INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF OBIAGELI KATRYN EZEKWESILI | 36 |
| Chapter Five | |
| ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF OBIAGELI EZEKWESILI..... | 52 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 59 |

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The study of the place of women in the socio-political and economic life of the society from the early period to the present has aroused a wide range of interests amongst scholars and writers in recent times. Over the last few decades, the contribution of African women to international relations and socio-economic development has been increasingly recognized in both academia and policy circles.¹ This growing recognition reflects the active participation of women in various aspects of international organizational, both through formal and informal production in recent years. Women represent half the population of Africa, and although they are considered internationally as one of the main pillars of economic development, they have suffered from an unjust social heritage in addition to discriminatory practices both in terms of gender equality and in the market.² This reflected on their social, educational and cultural situation. Although some progress has been made in an attempt to address women in Africa and their role in social and economic life, there are still social and economic challenges that prevent the African Women from being enabled.³

This study examines the impact of prominent African women in international relations using Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili as a case study. Obiageli “Oby” Katryn Ezekwesili an Economic Policy Expert is Senior Economic Adviser of the Africa Economic Development Policy Initiative and one of co-founders and pioneer directors of

Transparency International-TI, the Berlin-based global anti-corruption organization.⁴ Ezekwesili is currently also the Founder-CEO of Human Capital Africa working in the education sector across Africa. Ezekwesili is the Founder-Chairperson of the Board of SPPG- School of Politics Policy and Governance in Abuja, Nigeria. She was a candidate for office of the President of Nigeria in the 2019 election and became the Founder-Chairperson of #FixPolitics Initiative a research-based citizens-led initiative. #FixPolitics envisions “A country where politics is inclusive, the needs of citizens are prioritized, democratic principles are respected, such that good governance is the norm”. Ezekwesili was a Vice President of World Bank-Africa Region in Washington DC between 2007 and 2012.⁵ She served in the Government of Nigeria between 2000 and 2007. She was the Minister of Minerals and later of Education. She was a presidential aide and headed the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit which later became the Bureau for Public Procurement- BPP. She was concurrently the pioneer Chairperson of the Nigerian Extractive Industry and Transparency Initiative- NEITI in which capacity she successfully designed and implemented the global principles for Nigeria. Ezekwesili also worked as the Director of the Harvard-Nigeria Economic Strategy Project at the Center for International Development at the Kennedy School of Government, Massachusetts.⁶

This research stands as an exposition of the manifestations of Africa women in international relations, with a main focus on Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili in international relations. It is meant to enlighten the people about the various socio-political and economic impact of Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili in contemporary times. In time past, the

significant role of Africa women in international relations has not been brought to light and following this realization, this study fully intends to undertake further exposition of all the activities of Africa women in international relations. The study, however, is focused on impact of prominent African women in international relations using Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili as a case study. The study will be a viable source of information for future researchers on this subject and its likes.

Statement of the Problem

The historically low representation of women in International relations is frequently due to social marginalization rather than a lack of desire or motivation. In Nigeria, women make up to 50% of the population and approximately 51% of the electorate, yet they are not afforded the same rights as men, who control the political landscape and occupy the great majority of the nation's decision-making position. In time past, the significant role of African women in international relations has not been brought to light and following this realization, this study fully intends to undertake further exposition of all the activities of the Africa women in the International Relations. This study, however, is focused on African women and their significant roles in the International relations using Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili as a case study.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study will examine women and their impact in international relations with reference to Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili. The study will also examine the

autobiography of Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili and the challenges and prospect of Africa Nigerian women in international relations.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of prominent African women in international relations using Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili as a case study. The objectives are to:

1. examine the history of women in international relations;
2. observe prominent Africa women participation in international relations;
3. survey the life, activities and impact of Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili participation in international relations; and
4. examine impact and challenges faced by women in international relations with reference to Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili.

Literature Review

Not much research has been written on the impact of Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili in international relations. This however cannot be said of Africa women where there are numbers of works which deal with on the impact of Africa women participation in international relations. There is however certain literature that deals on relevant aspect of Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili impact in international relations, Some of the literatures include:

Mosunmola Ogunmolaji and Oyinade Adekunle's article titled "Madam Due Process': The Public Life of Obiageli Ezekwesili,"⁷ analyses the public life of Obiageli

Ezekwesili with a bid to provide insights into the lifestyle of the exemplary woman and analyse the major forces that spurred her interest in politics the authors takes a different approach by identifying and analysing the work life of a contemporary woman. The authors provide a biography rich enough to inspire Nigerian women to aspire for political positions and become change agents. They also present an overview of the early life, educational background, and career of the subject, highlighting the key forces that shaped and ensured her active participation in Nigerian politics. They later identify, evaluate and review, through the lens of Ezekwesili's life, the achievements and obstacles women face in the political sphere in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.⁸

Obiageli 'Oby' work titled "Ezekwesili Unlocking Africa's Potential,"⁹ posts how Africa's pre-colonial economy was agrarian with an abundance of land. She identifies that even if there was negligible irrigation of purely rain-fed agriculture, there was an abundance of land. At that time Africa was trading with the rest of the world with a diversity of trade routes and networks that linked key empires on the continent with one another as well as to distant lands. Trade with the Arab world was well established through the Sahara route and history does show that diverse goods travelled from Africa into Europe, Arabia, India and as far as China; that's why the Chinese are visibly angry when people say they discovered relationship with Africa. They say, "No. We were trading with Africa way back!"¹⁰

Temitope B. Oriola's, article titled "Framing and Movement Outcomes: the #BringBackOurGirls Movement,"¹¹ The author was concerned with two questions: What

are the master frames of the #BringBackOurGirls (#BBOG) movement? Why did the #BBOG attract significant global attention but achieve only moderate success in its goal – the release of all the school girls kidnapped by Boko Haram in Chibok in April 2014? The author argues that the international attention generated by #BBOG framing had historically specific resonance with local contestations for political power. He further asserts that the reverberation of the framing led to the alienation of key political actors in Nigeria who could have helped achieve the movement's objective and that the involvement of elite women in the movement played a major role in its global popularity but their political activities and loyalties before and during movement activities influenced local perceptions of the movement.¹²

Liesel Lues, book titled *The History of Professional African Women: A South African Perspective*,¹³ The author reviews the perspectives on the rights, roles and endeavours of women in the South African work environment. In an attempt to achieve this objective, the author commences with a holistic approach on the evolution of women's rights and roles. The remainder gives perspectives on the South African labour force and finally outlines the importance of South African legislation on the advancement of women. The situation of African women is, in particular referred to, as it was evident during 1995 and earlier that African females were considerably under-represented in various sectors of the workforce. African women were, for example, introduced into the management environment as recently as the 1980s, while supportive legislation only came into place in the 1990s.¹⁴

Jane L. Parpar, work *Women and the State Inafrica*,¹⁵ posits how African women have had a different relationship to the state than have men. While women in certain classes and ethnic groups may have had greater access to the state, in general women have been underrepresented in African state affairs. In pre-colonial Africa, a few societies awarded women some power, although even this tended to be informal rather than authoritative. But during the colonial period, western gender stereotypes combined with patriarchal traditions to reduce female power and autonomy. Despite women's active and important role in the nationalist struggles, decolonization has been primarily a transfer of power from one group of men to another. Many women have reacted to this inequity by withdrawing from the state. Other s have sought solutions such as working through influential men, joining organization, and gaining better education and employment.¹⁶

Emmanuel Akyeampong,'s work "The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development in the Pre-colonial and Colonial Periods: Historical Perspectives and Policy Implications,"¹⁷ the author presents a historical and processual understanding of women's economic marginalization in Sub-Saharan Africa from the pre-colonial period to the end of colonial rule. It is not that women have not been economically active or productive; it is rather that they have often not been able to claim the proceeds of their labor or have it formally accounted for. The author focuses on the pre-colonial and colonial periods and outlines three major arguments. First, it discusses the historical processes through which the labor of women was increasingly appropriated even in kinship structures in pre-colonial Africa, utilizing the concepts of "rights in

persons” and “wealth in people.” Secondly, he discusses how colonial policies from the late 19th century reinforced the “capture” of female labor and the codification of patriarchy through the nature and operation of the colonial economy and the instrumentality of customary law.¹⁸ All the books and articles reviewed have been able to cover only some parts of my research. Therefore, this proves to a reasonable extent that a proper study has not been carried out on the impact of prominent African women in international relations using Obiageli Katrun Ezekwesili as a case study. This research seeks to fill that vacuum that has been created for a long while by various scholars.

Methodology

In the course of the research for this study, relevant data and information were obtained from one main source; Secondary sources include Textbooks, Articles in Learned journals, Newspapers magazine, television interview and internet materials. Information obtained from these sources would help to guide and write a comprehensive work. This would help to provide data for a historical analysis on the impact of African women in international relations: a case study of Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili.

Significance of the Study

From the study women will be able to identify their place in the international arena by paying more attention in building their political carrier. The study will be a viable source of information for future researchers on this subject and its likes.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER TWO

AFRICAN WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Throughout history, African women have had a different relationship to the state than the men. While women in certain classes and ethnic groups may have had greater access to the state, but in general women have been underrepresented in African state affairs. In pre-colonial Africa, a few societies awarded women some power, although even this tended to be informal rather than authoritative.¹ But during the colonial period, western gender stereotypes combined with patriarchal traditions tend to reduce female power and autonomy. Despite women's active and important role in the nationalist struggles, decolonization has been primarily a transfer of power from one group of men to another. Many women have reacted to this inequity by withdrawing from the state.² This chapter examines the historical antecedes of Africa women in international relations.

Women and the State in Pre-Colonial Africa

In pre-colonial Africa, women experienced a wide range of relations to the state. In some societies, patriarchal, authority severely limited women's political and economic power. Women were protected as long as they paid obeisance to patriarchal power. Among the Tswana, for example, women remained legal minors all their lives. Access to land depended on the goodwill of a husband's family.³ Women were barred from the ward or chiefly court and, thus, rendered politically powerless. Severe beatings by fathers and husbands received no social censure. Although nominally projected by a web of obligations and dependencies, women lived in fear of abandonment and poverty if they

opposed male dominance.⁴ Shona women also lacked legal rights, being essentially the wards of whatever male they lived with. "Good" women were deferential and obedient to men. Islamic societies, though guaranteeing certain inheritance rights for women, constrained female economic and political activities through purdah, or ritual seclusion. Women had to manage property through men. In pre-colonial Mombasa, for example, women rarely held public positions of authority, and were prohibited from religious offices.⁵

In many pre-colonial societies, however, women had considerable influence and even authority. In these societies, women usually controlled some economic tasks. In hunting and gathering societies, although men had more authority, women controlled certain important economic tasks and exerted considerable influence over group decisions.⁶ In agricultural societies where women controlled certain productive areas such as farming, marketing, or trading, their power and authority seems to have been largely based on this. In matrilineal societies, women often had considerable security of land tenure. Among the Tonga in Southern Zambia, for example, although a woman's wealth was often in her brothers' custody, women had their own fields and granaries, control over grain production, and security of land tenure. This control over land enabled women to command the labor and allegiance of sons and sons-in-law and facilitated access to political power. Some women even became village headwomen.⁷

Societies that permitted women to accumulate wealth often had political institutions which protected women and enabled them to act as political pressure groups.

These groups gave women a sense of solidarity and self-worth and the capacity to protect female interests in the community. Some societies even developed dual-sex systems which gave women a formal role in the political process.⁸ In Yorubaland, for example, the Iyalode had jurisdiction over all women and represented women's concerns on the king's council an institution otherwise dominated by men. Among the Ewe of Ghana, an elected Queen Mother had a council of elderly women as advisers and a spokesperson to speak for her exactly as the male chief. Thus, although women could only speak to the council of male elders through the Queen Mother and the males kept decisions and initiatives on their hands, women did have a representative who could seek to influence male councils.⁹

Some women held high political office, either through heredity or election. These women almost never equaled the authority of male officials, but they wielded considerable power and some authority. The Queen Mother has often been an important position -- witness her role among the Asante, Baganda, and the Zulu, to cite a few examples. These women not only influenced male-dominated councils, they often had important ritual roles, especially those concerned with fertility and social survival. Women chiefs were rare, but did exist. Among the Mende and Serbro of Sierra Leone, women held chiefships on the same basis as men. As we have seen, influential Tonga, women set themselves up as village headwomen.¹⁰ Able women acquired power in a number of African societies. Queen Amina of Hausaland, for example, was a famous

ruler and warrior in the 15th or 16th century, and Nzinga of Angola led one of the earliest and most effective resistances against the Portuguese.¹¹

Women also exerted power through religious roles. Some women were ritual specialists in women's affairs, especially concerning fertility. The omu among the Igbo of Nigeria, for example, used medicines and rituals to ensure the safety and success of the marketplace where women traded. Women were often in charge of puberty rites, marriage ceremonies and other aspects of the life cycle.¹² They acted as mediums and members of spirit possession cults. Some led resistance movements against the early European intruders. Nehanda, a Shona priestess, was hanged for her role in the 1896 uprising in Southern Rhodesia. In Kongo, a priestess of the cult of Marinda, Dona Beatrice, established her own version of Christianity. She led a rebellion that mobilized discontent against the pro-Portuguese Kongo leadership so effectively that the Kongo king had her and her infant son burned to death.¹³ Thus, while some societies severely constrained women's political and economic power, many pre-colonial African societies awarded women clearly defined and accepted political roles which permitted them to wield power despite fairly minimal authority. And in most cases, societies that awarded women political power also permitted them some control over the economy.¹⁴

Women and the Colonial State

For most African women (with the exception of some urban women), the colonial period was characterized by significant losses in both power and authority. Colonial officials propagated Western gender stereotypes which assigned women to the domestic

domain, leaving economic and political matters to men. As a result, although many African men suffered under colonialism, new opportunities eventually appeared for them while women's economic and political rights diminished.¹⁵ Colonial officials ignored female candidates when looking for possible appointments to chiefships, scholarships, or other benefits. Many female institutions were destroyed, often more out of ignorance than malice. In Igboland, for example, the male Obi became a salaried official while his female counterpart received nothing. Similar reductions in female political power occurred all over Africa during the colonial period.¹⁶

This loss of political power was frequently associated with diminished access to land and labor power. Colonial development policies focussed on men, who were, in the eyes of colonies officials, the farmers and producers of Africa. When land rights were reorganized, "legitimate" heads of households, namely men, usually received the land titles. Marcia Wright carefully documents how women in Mazabuka, Zambia, lost both economic and political power during the colonial period.¹⁷ Similarly, in Western Kenya new property laws reduced women's rights to land. Ester Boserup cites cases in Zimbabwe and South Africa where colonial "reform" resulted in the transfer of women's land to men. Colonial authorities assisted male farmers while dismissing female farmers as mere subsistence food producers. When colonial officials wanted to encourage African cash crop production, they offered male farmers technical training and assistance while ignoring women farmers. As a result, male farmers were more able to accumulate surplus, and thus increasingly dominated the rural areas.¹⁸

Women continued to work on the land, but their control over the products of their labor declined. They often produced cash crops without reaping the profits, while, of course, continuing to grow food and perform domestic duties for the family. Marjorie Mbilinyi reports that in Tanzania "rich peasant wives, often lived like poor women, not sharing in the wealth they created. In Zambia, Shimwaayi Muntemba discovered that men "uniformly and consistently returned only a small proportion of agricultural income to their wives, in amounts varying between one-tenth and one-quarter of the total income. In Southern Zambia, prosperous farmers gained labor power through polygamy, but wives were often treated "less as partners than as farmhands." Wives still clung to marriage because divorce entailed abandoning all marital property.¹⁹

Thus, while traditional structures protected most women from absolute starvation, rural life was increasingly onerous for women during the colonial period. Pushed by patriarchal authoritarianism and rural drudgery and pulled by rumored economic and social opportunities in the towns, many enterprising women voted with their feet and moved to the urban areas. Despite opposition from government officials and chiefs, many women managed to get to town and, once there, to support themselves. Of course, some found men to support them, but this was always uncertain divorce and desertion were rampant. Most women recognized the need for some economic autonomy. Educational barriers limited opportunities for white-collar jobs, teaching and nursing being the exceptions.²⁰ All but the most unskilled and irregular wage labor remained a male preserve. Consequently, women were shunted into the informal sector, where they sold

goods and services, including their bodies. Some became wealthy, especially the market women in West Africa, but the majority worked long hours just to survive.²¹

The few success stories should not lead us to underestimate the problems faced by African women in colonial towns, but at the same time, we must acknowledge the degree to which women successfully challenged both African and colonial authority in the towns. A Ga woman dominated the expanding Ghanaian trading system during the colonial period. The Lagos Market Women's Association (LMWA) was established in the 1920s, and it remained an important political and economic force in Nigeria until its leaders shifted their focus to nationalist politics in the late 1940s. Prostitution provided another avenue of accumulation. Nairobi prostitutes earned enough money during World War I to purchase urban property.²² In 1943, women (mostly prostitutes) owned 41% of the houses in the Nairobi suburb of Pumwani. In Mombasa, village women accumulated savings from prostitution which they used to buy property both in Mombasa and their natal villages. Similar patterns existed in Northern Nigeria.²³

As colonial penetration of African economies intensified in the late 1930s, however, and the "second colonial occupation" increased the need for a stable disciplined and trained labor force, colonial authorities in the urban areas became more determined to control both the reproduction and production of labor. In collusion with patriarchal African leaders, colonial laws were tightened to increase control over women in both rural and urban areas. Independent African women posed a threat to both African and European men. The regulation of these women was carried out on two fronts.²⁴ First, laws

were set in place which made it more difficult for women to exist independently in the urban areas. Houses owned by prostitutes in Nairobi were condemned and razed. Beer production, usually controlled by women, was taken over by the state. Hostile legislation constrained market women's economic opportunities. In Zambia, African leaders supported colonial reinterpretation of customary law which made adultery a criminal offense and enforced harsh fines to stop it, thus limiting women's freedom to change partners. The Urban African Courts, established in 1938, gave rural judges the power to strengthen customary control over urban marriages and, consequently, to regulate "proud and cheeky" urban women. In Tanzania, women in polygamous marriages were denied legal married status and consequently the rights accorded a wife, especially those concerned with divorce and inheritance. Yet customary law permitted men to marry multiple wives. Similar cases can be cited from other parts of Africa.²⁵

Second, colonial officials constrained female advancement by limiting access to education and wage employment. Ga women, for example, lost ground as men gained the education necessary for wage employment and capital accumulation. Throughout the colonial period, African women consistently lagged behind in education and, thus, failed to acquire the skills needed to participate in the modern economy. If they received training, it usually emphasized domestic skills and preparation for being "better wives and mothers." Few women became qualified for wage labor and even fewer for professional positions. Employed women usually performed low paying, unskilled jobs

connected to the domestic area. As these regulations took force, the status and potential prosperity of men and women increasingly diverged.²⁶

Women struck back against this attack on their economic and political prerogatives, but rarely effected long-term change. It is worth noticing, however, that most of the more dramatic female opposition to colonial authority was carried out by women from societies where men's and women's status differentials were not so great that it was unthinkable for women to challenge male authority. Indeed, women often used traditional female methods and organizations to oppose colonial authorities, both black and white. In 1929-1930, for example, the Igbo women used the institution of 'sitting on a man' (public humiliation of men by a group of women) to protest taxes. In the famous "Igbo Riots", women burned buildings, broke into jails and released prisoners. Officials called in the military, but the fighting continued, eventually leaving 50 women dead and another wounded.²⁷ Pare women in Tanzania rioted to protest the levying of a graduated income tax in the 1940s. The women organized a 25 mile march to district headquarters ana, once there, stoned colonial officials, demanded settlement of the matter, and created so much trouble that a compromise had to be reached. Kikuyu women, who came from a relatively egalitarian society, were instrumental in the 1922 Harry Thuku disturbances.²⁸

Women with an independent economic base were the most successful opponents of colonial sexism. In Western Nigeria, the Lagos Market Women's Association (LMWA) organized the first mass-based women's interest group in the area. Led by the dynamic Madam Alimotu Pelewura, the LMWA controlled the marketing system and carefully

monitored both chiefly and colonial policies in order to protect market women's interests. From 1940-1944, the Association openly opposed government price controls, leading eventually to their removal. The Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) is another example of an influential women's organization. Incorporating a broad spectrum of Abeokuta's female population, from market women to elite members of the Ladies' Club, the AWU could command the support of between 80,000 to 100,000 women.²⁹ The union set about trying to recoup the steady erosion of female power that had occurred during the colonial period. Indirect rule had raised men to new heights. In 1946, the AWU launched an attack on indirect rule and that British lackey, the Alake of Abeokuta. The AWU organized sit-ins, mass protests, nonpayment of taxes, and even sent its leader, Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti, to London to present her case. By 1948, these efforts had succeeded. The Alake resigned, female taxation was suspended, and women were given representation in the interim council set up to replace the government. These cases prove that some women successfully mobilized themselves, both in new ways and around traditional institutions, and used their prosperity and influence to counter the colonial threat to their social status.³⁰

Women and the Nationalist Struggles

African women were given the opportunity to prove their mettle as political activists during the nationalist struggles. They responded to the challenge with commitment, enthusiasm, and effective collective action. Women played a prominent role in the early nationalist struggles in West, East and Central Africa. In, Zambia, for

example, women's branches of the nationalist parties [first the African National Congress (ANC) and later the United National Independence Party (UNIP)] organized rural and urban protests. The UNIP Women's Brigade participated in literacy drives to aid voter registration, and helped organize town funerals, mass demonstrations, rallies and boycotts to prove UNIP's power.³¹ In Cameroon, women used a traditional practice, Anlu, revamped into a well organized association, to render the paramount chieftain and his executive council impotent, to unseat the ruling party, the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) in the 1959 election and to help get the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) into power. ⁴⁰ In Nigeria, market women's support or rejection of political candidates became a key factor in political life. Oyinkan Morenike Abayomi, leader of women's organizations from the 1920s, established the Nigerian Women's Party (NWP) in 1944 to protect women from being cheated by Nigerian men and the government.³² She believed women, even wealthy women, suffered from lack of representation in government circles, and set about to rectify that. Ultimately the party foundered from competition with the more militant Abeokuta Women's Union and the more radical nationalist movements. But Nigerian women continued to be important members of the new nationalist parties. In Guinea, women helped Sekou Toure gain power by giving money to the nationalist struggle, providing communication links among the leaders, and participating in policy decisions. Guinean women, like many West African women, supported the nationalist struggle with their economic resources and contacts. Women also participated in more violent liberation struggles. In the Portuguese colonies, women

fought alongside men while continuing to perform domestic duties.³³ They bore a double burden in order to bring down colonial rule. Zimbabwean women also carried arms, and women guerillas had high status during the liberation struggle. By the end of the war, as much as one quarter of the 30,000 Patriotic Front guerillas were women. Leaders from the different factions declared women's liberation an explicit and integral part of the overall revolution. In South Africa, women of all races have resisted, and continue to resist, apartheid and racial injustice. The Bantu Women's League of the African National Congress (ANC) led the fight against racial injustice in the 1950s. Despite frequent hostility from men both within and without the ANC, women such as Charlotte Maxeke provided remarkable leadership on women's and black peoples' issues. Today, Winnie Mandela provides similar leadership.³⁴

Women and the State in Independent Africa

During the liberation struggles, women's participation was welcomed, and women were promised (and expected) economic and political benefits from independence. These promises have, for the most part, not been fulfilled. Some African women are prominent in political affairs, but rarely at the highest levels. Women occupy the lowest rungs of the political ladder; very few determine planning and policy-making.³⁴ In 1978 a UN questionnaire discovered that the mean rate of political participation by women was 12% at the local level and 6% at the national level. In nonsocialist countries, about 5% or less of available political positions are filled by women.³⁵ In Malawi, for example, there are no women in the three central planning agencies or in any of the ministerial planning

units. Women are, thus, effectively excluded from the planning and planning-related machinery, although a few women have some input from their positions in traditionally female dominated areas such as home economics, adult literacy, social welfare and health. Representation on lower levels is not much better. Of the 625 wards in Malawi, only 4.8% are filled by women, and although some women are active in village affairs, men dominate decision-making there as well. In Zambia, the Women's Brigade organizers in UNIP have, for the most part, been backstage supporters for male politicians. The few women in high level politics have clustered in traditional female areas such as welfare and health. Ghanaian women, despite active involvement in trade and considerable wealth, have shared only minimally in the independent Ghanaian state.³⁶

This chapter has shown that by and large African women have a different relationship to the state than men, and that despite ethnic, regional, and class differences, women have been consistently underrepresented in African state affairs. This is not to say that women have been treated equally. Ethnic and class differences affect women's access to the state. In pre-colonial Africa, those societies which gave women more opportunity to control land and labor generally awarded women more power, although even this tended to be informal rather than authoritative. During the colonial period, however, western gender stereotypes combined with patriarchal traditions to facilitate the reduction of female power and autonomy. Although women fought back, and gained economic autonomy in some instances, in general women lost political power during the colonial period.³⁷ It is no wonder then that despite women's active and important role in the

nationalist struggles, decolonization was essentially a transfer of power from one group of men to another. Consequently, African women have been underrepresented in the state, and have reaped few of the benefits which the state provides.³⁸ Many women have reacted to this inequity by pulling away from the state, concentrating on economic survival instead. For the most part, these women see the state as an obstacle to be avoided rather than as a benefactor to be milked. To that end they have employed a wide variety of strategies to ensure their survival in the face of a hostile male-dominated state.

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CHAPTER THREE

BIOGRAPHY AND EARLY LIFE OF OBIAGELI KATHRYN EZEKWESILI

Obiageli ‘Oby’ Kathryn Ezekwesili, an economic policy expert, served as a Jackson Senior Fellow during the 2021-2022 academic year. She was Senior Economic Adviser of the Africa Economic Development Policy Initiative and one of the co-founders and pioneer directors of Transparency International-TI, the Berlin-based global anti-corruption organization. Ezekwesili is currently also the Founder-CEO of Human Capital África working in the education sector across Africa.¹

Early Life of Obiageli Kathryn Ezekwesili

Though popularly known as Oby Ezekwesili, her full name is Obiageli Kathryn Ezekwesili, born on April 28, 1963, in Lagos State, Nigeria. She is the first of six children, born to Benjamin Ujubuonu who died in 1988 and her mother Cecilia Nwayiaka Ujubuonu. When Oby Ezekwesili, she asked her dad why she could see so much poverty around her but on the television, other countries looked nice, compared to her own country.² The father then told her that those countries had good governance and were being led better and that Nigeria didn’t have good governance. So, at an early age, she asked why Nigeria didn’t have good governance and she made up her mind to provide good governance when she grew up. Her father doted on her so much as a kid and she was a well-loved daughter.³ So, when she told him that, her father proudly threw up in the air and she shrieked with laughter. She was excited that her father agreed with her dreams to provide good governance when she grew up. She went on from that with her father always being her teacher and she got excited about issues of public policies. Her

father enabled her have a strong voice and he validated her so much that nobody can ever invalidate her. she always say to her male siblings and friends that the father figure is very important in the life of a girl child. When a father validates his daughter, no one can invalidate her.⁴ She comes out very determined and strong, knowing that the most important man in her life till she gets married, her father, believes in her. Oby Ezekwesili always point out that fathers should not dismiss their responsibilities to their daughters.⁵ It makes all the difference that her father believed very strongly in her that she could do anything she set her heart to. Her father usually boasted about her to his colleagues and it made her so conscious about not failing him. Her father taught her to stand firmly on her views but be willing to negotiate them when someone offers a stronger opinion or brings out facts that contradict her views. However, she must never negotiate her values. As a child, she had the fortune of having a great father who was also her best teacher. she did well in her classes in Mathematics and English in particular because he taught her ahead of the class.⁶ In fact, her school teachers became friends with her father because they saw how well she did in their classes. Because of the strong father figure she had, she was able to flap her wings and have her voice. Her father harped a lot on knowledge; so, she grew with an avidity to learn.⁷

Obiageli Ezekwesili had an exceptional relationship with her mother. Her mother was the disciplinarian in her life. Her mother always told her father that he was spoiling her. Her mother was always trying to balance things out. Her mother was an amazing woman and Her mother have never seen a more sacrificial woman. That's the aspect of

her life she modelled after her mother sacrifice.⁸ Her mother lived her life entirely for Obiageli and her siblings. Her father was able to do the things that he did and stand his ground as a public servant because he had a wife (her mother) that complemented him. Her mother was a businesswoman who would give her entire self to earning income so that Obiageli and her siblings could get the quality of education that they needed. Obiageli love her mother so much and sometimes,⁹ when she think of her, she cry because of the kind of sacrifice she has made. By the time she was widowed at a relatively young age of 44, her mother just adapted her life to being there for Obiageli and her siblings. Her mother occupied the space her father left and ensured that his death did not ruin anything that was on the path of their destiny. In fact, the bond her children have with her is deep because when she is not there, her mother is there.¹⁰ Obiageli was from a very modest home. Her mother used to go to Tejuosho Market, Yaba, Lagos, to buy grade one okrika (second-hand clothes) and she would launder the clothes. By the time the laundry was done and Obiageli wore the clothes, she would look so good that my mates, who went on summer vacations, often asked me where she got them from. Obiageli and her siblings were taught that material things shouldn't be their focus.¹¹

Obiageli Ezekwesili was a young woman and had just got married when her father died. When her father died 35 years ago (counting from 2024) but there is no time she was asked this kind of question that his father death doesn't seem as if it happened yesterday. She did not think her father could die; *how could he? How could the one, who made me aspire, die?*¹² she wondered how her father could be willing to leave her. Her

mother actually cried for her when her father died. She was worried about how she would cope with her dealing with the loss. It was quite tough and her wanted to abandon the things she had discussed with her father that she would do because she thought that it would not be the same doing it without him. But it was amazing how God arranges things in life.¹³ A few days after her father funeral, she and family came back to Lagos and her husband could see that she was very devastated and withdrawn. She was shaken so badly because everything she thought she knew had suddenly faded away. So, her husband said to her one day that since her father was gone, he would like to fill the empty space. That really changed their relationship because he is been more than a husband to her. Her husband felt she did not realise how much he and her father had prepared his transition.¹⁴ When her dad was ill, she think he figured that he may not come out from the sickness. So, on his way to LUTH, he decided to detour to her home where he stayed for one week. She did not realised that her father and her husband were spending much time together every day after her husband got back from work. There is no word to describe her husband.¹⁵ He was awesome.

In one interview she had with Punch newspaper, Oby Ezekwesili identities how she love cooking. According to her cooking is a therapy for her; so she love it. Sadly, she don't always get the opportunity to do so anymore and that it used to be so much fun doing that back in the day when they were all growing, with her husband and the kids. Her husband cooks and so do her sons. It's basically the kind of skill needed for functional living as an individual.¹⁶ According to her,

If I cook stew for you, you won't taste another person's stew again. Actually, I cook a variety of dishes. Domestic chores go beyond cooking; it's really about how you keep the home. I hate filth and I love really clean and tidy environments.¹⁷

Oby Ezekwesili Husband happened to be a pastor and she feel happy married to pastor. It reinforces her very strong spiritual values but her husband is her husband who happens to be a pastor. It's not like she married a pastor; she married a great man, who is her significant other and completes her in many ways.¹⁸ Growing up in Lagos, Oby Ezekwesili attended African One Primary School, Ajegunle, and then United Christian College, Apapa for her secondary education. She had her Bachelor's degree from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and then went on to bag a Master degree in International Law and Diplomacy from the University of Lagos. Moving further, Oby Ezekwesili advanced in her studies abroad and obtained a Master of Public Administration degree from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.¹⁹

She really wanted to be a lawyer and her mum said, "*My daughter is not going to be a lawyer*". It's interesting how influential mothers are. Her mother managed to cajole her father to dissuade her from studying law. She wanted to study international law because she had an idea of how nations interact and how law underpins it. Law naturally would have been her focus of study. Oby Ezekwesili is a chartered accountant but she moved out of that as she focused more on economic policies. The training and mentorship she got from her boss, Prof Jeffrey Sachs, repositioned her skills and emphases. What she focused much on in the field of public policy is how things intersect in order to create the basis for economic growth.²⁰

Oby Ezekwesili had been going abroad before but she lived outside Nigeria in circumstances when there was political instability in Nigeria. As a co-founder of Transparency International, she had been a very strong voice against the level of corruption that was going on under the military. There was nothing significant about living in another country that made her love it more than living in Nigeria. She was always say that Nigerians have to build their country, which is part of what reflects the utter passion with which she did the things she did in government.²¹

Dr. Ezekwesili began her career with Deloitte and Touché Akintola Williams. She was one of the cofounders of Transparency International and was one of the pioneer directors of its Global Board in Berlin from 1994-1999. She served as Special Assistant and Senior Special Assistant to the President of Nigeria on Budget Monitoring, and the Price Intelligence Unit and spear-headed institutional reforms of the country's Public Procurement system through the establishment of due process mechanisms and strategies. Dr. Ezekwesili then served as Minister of Solid Minerals Development; reforming Nigeria's mining sector to internationally recognized standards. She also served as the Chairperson for the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative from 2004 - 2007 and pioneered the voluntary signon of Nigeria to the EITI Principles, as well as the first ever audit of the oil and gas sector.²²

In June 2006, Dr. Ezekwesili became Minister of Education and led a comprehensive reform program within the education sector including Restructuring and refocusing the ministry for the attainment of Education for All (EfA) targets and

Millennium Development Goals. Following the abduction of nearly 300 girls from Chibok in 2014, Dr Ezekwesili co-convened the viral ‘#BringBackOurGirls’ campaign on social media, which trended internationally and has world-wide support, including from international personalities including the former First Lady, Michelle Obama. Dr Oby is a Honorary Member, Committee of the Crans Montana African Women’s Forum; Member of Board of Director of the Economic Policy Think Tank, AfriHeritage Institute; Member of The Global Board of Governors, NCMG International; Member of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)’s Advisory Group on Gender, Forced Displacement and Protection; member of the Advisory Board of the Atlantic Dialogues; Member of The Global Advisory Board for Facebook's Community Leadership Program; Member of the Board for Almajari Project; member of the Global Ocean Commission at Somerville College, Oxford, jointly chaired by former Costa Rican President José María Figueres, the former Minister in the South African Presidency Trevor Manuel, and former UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband. She is also on the board of three public policy schools, namely, the Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy at Tel Aviv University in Israel; the School of Public Policy of Central European University, Budapest- Hungary, the Global Leadership Institute at Tufts University, and several other institutional and corporate board memberships.²³

Dr. Ezekwesili holds a Master’s degree in International Law and Diplomacy from the University of Lagos, and a Masters in Public Policy and Administration from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. The University of Agriculture in

Abeokuta awarded her an honorary Doctor of Science degree in 2012. In 2016 the University of Essex Business School also awarded her an honorary Doctorate Degree in Business in recognition of her role in promoting economic and social justice in African countries.²⁴

Endnotes

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CHAPTER FOUR

INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF OBIAGELI KATRYN EZEKWESILI

Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili and her National Impact

Often times, the idea of the ultimate career is formed by the experiences and people around. On the one hand, her father-Benjamin Ujubuonu desired to have her as a chartered accountant; on the other however, her passion for the public sphere eventually took over. It can be summed up that her education as an accountant gave her the platform that eventually launched her into politics.¹ After the completion of her second degree, she started her professional career by joining Deloitte & Touché, while learning the practical aspect of becoming a chartered accountant. In that capacity, she worked as an auditor and financial services consultant.²

Following the completion of her degree at Harvard University in 2000, she worked as Director of the Harvard-Nigeria Economic Strategy Programme under the tutelage of Professor Jeffrey Sachs at the Centre for International Development.³ The programme was geared towards facilitating technical engagement of Harvard University with the newly elected government of President Olusegun Obasanjo. This was primarily aimed at debt sustainability analysis for advocacy with the White House for debt cancellation and reduction which in turn led to the establishment of Nigeria's Debt Management Office. This position prepared her for advancement in her career which became intertwined with politics as she received her first appointment as an aide to former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2002. She was subsequently (in October 2003) designated Senior Special Adviser on Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligent Unit (BMPIU) also known as Due Process Unit. Her major goal in this capacity built her portfolio for further political involvement and furtherance of her career.⁴

Originally established in 2001, the vision of BMPIU was to “help move Nigeria to a level where public procurement is governed by the principles of integrity, transparency, competence and competitiveness as national ethos”. Under the leadership of Ezekwesili, the process of contract invitation, contract award and project implementation was handled with integrity which earned her the sobriquet - “Madam Due Process”. Sequentially, the Federal Inspectorate Service was restructured as an improved quality assurance mechanism and transparency and accountability mechanisms were introduced for better governance of the budget. Malam Nasir el-Rufai quoted someone to have said, “It is only a mad man who would make the mistake of saying anything related to bribery to Madam Due Process. It is not even something you would think of”.⁵

Under the same presidency, she was appointed as Cabinet Minister of Solid Minerals (Mines and Steel) from July 2005 to June 2006. Despite the fact that her tenure lasted a year, she successfully attracted international patronage making Nigeria a global destination for credible mining investments. This involved overseeing the passage of the Minerals and Mining Act, the establishment of the Nigerian Mining Cadastre Office, and the deliberate opening of the sector to private participation.⁶ Similarly, she served as Minister of Education between June 2006 and April 2007. Salihu Mohammed ascribed the reform conceived during the period as “the most radical of the restructuring and reforms prescription reports”.¹⁶ The packages of reforms included development of entrepreneurship alongside schooling, ensuring all communities are reached with one programme or the other, partnership with stake holders and private sector to revamp

school structures (for example, the Nigerian Stock Exchange launched the ‘Adopt-a-Public School Initiative’ in 2007). These helped in attaining the Millennium Development Goals (now Sustainable Development Goals). Adamawa, Yobe and Borno served as pilot states to promote the girl child education since they were identified as being the weakest in terms of girl-child education in the country.⁷

Obiageli Katryn Ezekwesili and Her Impact in International Relations

In 2007, she was appointed Vice President of the World Bank (Africa Region) by the then President of the World Bank - Paul Wolfowitz. In that capacity, she was in charge of economic and sectoral works in about 47 Sub-Saharan African countries. She worked hand in hand with more than 1500 staff in different capacities.⁸ It is of equal importance to mention that her contributions were not just leaning towards economic development of Africa but also towards health. According to WHO, “malaria burden was still expanding as the biggest obstacle to development in a large number of countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa” during the period. During her tenure, there were investments in malaria control essentially geared towards implementation of policies that would have returns both in terms of lives saved and well beyond the health sector. Those investments were based on the evidence that malaria control contributes to health and development in Africa. Ezekwesili’s ideology expressed the World Bank’s commitment to strengthening bodies and institutes as it deploys innovative approaches to end deaths from malaria.⁹

Understanding the plight of African women and the role women play in economic development, Ezekwesili sought for the empowerment of women. Studies have shown that investment in women's human capital has become important for growth in industrialized economies. The identification of gender inequality in education and access to formal sector employment as a significant constraint in Sub-Saharan Africa was evident as a highlight of her tenure through advocacy. This was aptly captured during her opening remarks at the World Bank conference in Japan.¹⁰

In Africa we see women carrying products from the farm on their head. Now imagine the acceleration of productivity if they did not have to carry these heavy loads on their heads, if they had the necessary infrastructure with which to make agriculture truly work for African society. Every time we see women incapacitated by the unavailability of infrastructure, they are foregoing very important activities that they should otherwise be applying themselves to, like going to school or engaging in income-earning activities that would improve their lives and those of their families.¹¹

As a champion for private sector dominance, Ezekwesili partnered with African countries to pursue ease of doing business and competitiveness reforms that helped improve their business environments. Countries like Rwanda, Mauritius, Cape Verde, Seychelles, Senegal, Liberia and Botswana responded positively with ambitious programmes of reforms and featured at one time or another on the Annual Top Ten Most Reforming Countries List.¹² Ezekwesili prioritized World Bank support to Africa's Technology sector with particular focus on ICT. She spearheaded and championed revolutionary reforms in Technology with waves of Telecom and ICT liberalization, deregulation and divestment programmes in over thirty countries. This helped raised the efficiency of

telecom services across the continent, reduced leakages of public resources previously spent on failing state telecom monopolies, increased the contribution of ICT and technology more broadly to growth. African economies of SSA benefited considerably from the growth of the mobile sector following what Ezekwesili designed and pursued vigorously as “The Transformative Power of ICT in Africa”.¹³

She raised the priority and profile of World Bank portfolio in education and health in order to grow Africa’s human development and higher stock of Human Capital. While ensuring the expansion of universal access to Basic Education, in her time, World Bank lending to governments for the establishment of tertiary institutions across the continent increased. She led the World Bank team to focus on supporting the emergence of Centres or Academic Excellence in different parts of the continent.¹⁴ Her complementary focus on building massive and relevant skills to address the unemployability supply-side issues in education earned her applause across the Bank’s partner countries. Until the end of her widely celebrated and successful five-year leadership in 2012 at the World Bank, she promoted Africa’s economic interests. For instance, she ensured an increase in the overall lending in Africa to \$40 billion. Worth of note is her engagement with African and world leadership and regional institutions such as the United Nations, African Union and ECOWAS, which was effective in building a strong economic legacy.¹⁵ This in turn gave birth to an extensive economic growth which allowed the World Bank to cater for the financial interest of Africans. From 2012 till date,

she has made conscious efforts to build her career which in the most recent time is focused on the political limelight.

Obiageli Ezekwesili and the ‘Bring Back Our Girls’ Movement

The phrase “Bring Back Our Girls” became a worldwide hash tag due to Oby Ezekwesili’s non-relentless tweeting on a social media platform (Twitter) attracting the attention of world leaders and influencers. This was as a result of the kidnapping of 276 secondary school girls (between ages 15 and 18) from their school in Chibok located in Borno State, Nigeria, by an Islamist extremist terrorist organisation known as Boko Haram on April 14, 2014. Boko Haram had gained popularity for their widespread insurgent activities and killing spree; however, the incident was its first record of mass kidnap of students or minors. After six weeks, the number of girls kidnapped and perpetrators was verified by a Presidential Committee on Missing Chibok girls led by Retired Brigadier General Ibrahim Sabo.¹⁶ The emergence of the Bring Back Our Girls Movement was precipitated by a result of series of events in which Oby Ezekwesili played a pivotal role. After receiving the news through a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) tweet, Oby Ezekwesili on the 23rd of April, at a live-streaming of a UNESCO event urged the audience to stand and chant “Bring Back Our Daughters” in solidarity of the missing Chibok girls.¹⁷ Simultaneously, an avid follower of Ezekwesili tweeted ‘Bring back our daughters, bring back our girls’ as a way of showing support and birthed the formal adoption of ‘Bring Back Our Girls’ as a global hash tag. Recognizing her political strength and popularity, she aided the focus of the lens on this

predicament by founding, in collaboration with three other women, a citizen movement known as the Bring Back Our Girls Movement and opened the “BBOG_Nigeria” twitter account to underscore the activities of the movement. She sped into action due to continuous attacks on school children in North Eastern Nigeria such as the indiscriminate attack on school boys who were mutilated and burnt at the Federal Government College, Buni Yadi in Yobe State on February 24, 2014 and decided it was time to voice out and ensure such an act was put to an abrupt end.¹⁸

While holding the incumbent government responsible for the polarized outcome along political, ethnic and religious lines as a result of subservient handling of the crisis, she reprimanded the opposition who were more concerned with seizing the opportunity as political leverage. The first solidarity march with the chant ‘Bring Back Our Girls now and alive’ took place on the 30th of April, 2014 to signal a uniform sense of purpose void of political affiliation or rancor. The acronym ‘HUMANITEED’ which connotes Hope, Unity, Motivation, Affability, Nationalism Integrity, Equity, Empathy and Discipline signalled the core values of the movement that has Oby Ezekwesili as its default leader.¹⁹ She has been described as a ‘superhero’ by the hapless families of the victims and noted that the extent of bureaucracy and red tapism in the Nigerian political system serves as an ostensible hindrance. The Chibok girls’ saga served as a poster-child for numerous Nigerians who had been maligned by the incessant terrorist attacks in Northern Nigeria and should not be forgotten while governmental administration continues to revolve. Customarily, her decision to portray the Bring Back Our Girls movement as a citizens’

movement rather than a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) meant that financial donations could not be solicited, rather members of the movement had to pump in personal funds to cover incurred expenses.²⁰

This agitation did not phase out numerous personal threats, maligned and gendered political discord by individuals and government agencies without leaving out trolling hate speech and target misalignment of her speeches and messages. This was exemplified in an attempt by security operatives to prevent her from boarding a flight to London for a scheduled BBC interview. Also, she was arrested alongside some members of the movement during a protest at the Unity Fountain, Abuja, on January 23, 2018 with records of tear gas attacks, push backs, and arrests against the movement. A south-eastern Nigeria woman championing the empathy-based movement showed non conformity to ethnic bias or segregation but rather uniformity of purpose. She has often been criticized by fellow south-easterners who posit the need for her involvement in disparities within her ethnic group rather than those of the Northern Nigeria.²¹

However, through the movement, the BBOG movement embarked on numerous campaigns, protests, sits outs, press releases advocating for the release of the missing Chibok girls as well as attracting similar setups within and outside Nigeria. Notable among these were the constant sleepovers in front of the Nigerian Embassy in the United States. In April 2014, the BBC reported that the #BringBackOurGirls trended on Twitter with over 3.3 million tweets, 27 percent of the tweets came from Nigeria, 26 percent from the United States and 11 percent from the United Kingdom.²² This set the tone for the

clamour for effective security to ensure adequate protection of lives and properties. As a result, it spilled over to her campaign promise during the presidential campaign as well as admonishing oppositions and political administrations to regulate the various security agencies to ensure effective and efficient discharge of duties.

The protests had amassed national activists and campaign groups seeking resolution of this unfortunate development. On June 2, 2014, despite the peaceful tone of the protests, such protests were banned in Abuja some weeks after the establishment of the blistering movement. Ezekwesili considered this an illegal move and challenged the government in court particularly due to the violence-free posture of the protest. Consequently, she secured a judgement against the government on June 4, 2014. These actions resulted in massive backlash particularly from oppositions and distrusting Nigerians who perceived her actions as a calculated political move and partisan political tool to attain or attract political appointment. Such claims have continued to be vehemently refuted.²³

On the 6th of May 2016, 82 Chibok girls gained freedom after lengthy negotiations with the Islamist sect. This gave Ezekwesili a sense of affirmation and indescribable joy in seeing these girls and their families having a happy ending to a sour tale. More than 50 girls have been recorded to have escaped as well as the release of 21 other girls in October 2016 due to negotiations carried out by international governments and groups such as the government of Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Her response to the government was a tell-tale of commendation and

retribution as a result of the delay experienced in gaining a positive outcome. In recent times, due to lack of swift movements and ineffective security measures 112 of the 276 school girls are still declared missing with 13 presumed dead.²⁴

In February 2019, a mass kidnapping of 110 girls (11-19 years) was reported in Dapchi, North-eastern Yobe State. Ezekwesili termed this a consequence of nonchalant attitude and lack of efficient tact by the government while stressing that such mishaps are bound to reoccur if not nibbed in the bud. She has continued to organise lectures, live broadcasts and discussions and seminars to maintain awareness and consciousness on the Bring Back our girls' issue. Invariably, the annual Chibok Girls Lecture has been institutionalised to keep the issue on the front burner of (inter)national discourse.²⁵ On April 14, 2020, to mark the 6th year anniversary of the mass kidnapping of the Chibok girls, she held an online live session in which she delivered a lecture titled "Empathy Deficit: The Missing Link in The Making of a Nigerian Nation" in which she outlined the causes, instances and effects of empathy gap on governmental and individual levels whilst using the Chibok girls as a case study.²⁶ The movement's chant "When shall we stop? Not until our girls are back and alive" serves as a premise that the movement did not fizzle out any time until its mandate was duly upheld.

Obiageli Ezekwesili and Her Political Exploits

Obiageli Ezekwesili's quest into political space took shape from an early beginning of activism in the 1990s when Nigeria was still under military rule. She became the first and only woman to lead a group of professionals. The Concerned

Professionals who campaigned against the continuation of military rule and demanded for the restoration of MKO Abiola's mandate in 1993, championing the cause of democracy. In October 2018, on the platform of the Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), using the #Hope2019 as a campaign slogan, she declared her intention to contest as the only female candidate for the highest political office in Nigeria, that is, the presidential seat in the 2019 national elections. Her intense desire to ensure due process in all political strata in Nigeria was often demonstrated in her conversations which describe her distaste for what she has labelled 'bad governance'. In her rise in the public sector, she has made it known to all who cares to listen that she was not a politician but rather a technocrat who understands the political context of Nigeria. "I am a candidate of the people, not a candidate of the political class. I am not running to make a statement. I am running to win".²⁷

During her campaigns and presidential debates, terming her campaign as a 'rescue mission', she accentuated her mandate of tackling poverty and rejuvenating the education and service sectors. This meant lifting 80 million Nigerians out of poverty if elected as president. If achieved, it will improve standard of living as well as eliminate the country from the shameful list of countries experiencing extreme poverty. Most emphatically, the education of the girl-child seen as 'smart-economics' from which the entire society was bound to benefit and added that in an attempt to rejuvenate the economy, fuel subsidy should be scrapped. Also, she describes tackling corruption as her primary aim of seeking the presidential seat. In November 2018, she stepped down as the leader of the Red Card

Movement (RCM), an apolitical movement established in January 2018 which has as its primary objective the need to put an end to the cynical problem of poor leadership and bad governance in Nigeria with “My PVC, My Red Card’ forming part of its logo. This was to avoid conflict of interest seeing that she was actively contesting in the presidential race. However, things took a different turn on January 24, 2019, few weeks to the scheduled elections when she officially stepped down as a presidential candidate.²⁸ Many Nigerians cited foul play such as cases of bullying or blackmail by the opposition while others were of the opinion that she was not a worthy opponent to take on the two principal candidates - President Muhammadu Buhari (Action Congress of Nigeria) and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar (People’s Democratic Party) representing the two parties known for rationing control of the presidential seats. Another impediment could perhaps be attributed to skirmishes between her and the leadership of her political party platform (ACPN) when she confirmed by stating that “I had mistakenly assumed that the ACPN was aligned with me to offer, until it proved otherwise”. This translated to a colossal range of accusations between Ezekwesili and Alhaji Abdul-Ganiyu Galadima, the National Chairman of ACPN. On one side, she was accused of lackadaisical attitude towards efforts geared at attaining the presidential seat as well as hoarding of campaign donations to which Oby responded by stating that the party was engaging in political transactions that negated all she stood for and intended to convey as the country’s first citizen.²⁹ However, in the spirit of transparency, she promised to convene a World Press Conference to publish a full report of her three-month presidential campaign which she

did eventually. The swift endorsement of President Muhammadu Buhari by the party (ACPN) barely hours after Ezekwesili stepped down raised eyebrows amongst Nigerian citizens who had paid close attention to the unfolding drama of the election season.³⁰

Despite the above development, Obiageli Ezekwesili resorted to take steps aimed at improving her chances of attaining the presidential seat even if it meant stepping aside while gearing up for the 2023 elections to ensure a more favourable outcome. In recent time, she has been channeling her energy to ensure a change in the political leadership of the country through the formation of coalition called National Consultative Front (NCF) alongside Kingsley Moghalu, Donald Duke and other capable intellectuals with impressive portfolios towards providing a favourable and more effective alternative to the two existing giant political parties.³¹ The NCF, also known as the ‘July 1st Movement’ has been described as a new Pan Nigerian coalition of intellectuals and professionals who are determined to chart a new political course for the country. In the press conference they called on “those presently in charge of Federal Government, military and security apparatus to immediately wake up and do everything to stop the ongoing senseless pogrom against the masses” as a means to leading its voice to the security lapses experienced in Nigeria. Their agenda was to achieve laid-out aims and objectives through inclusion of change agents such as women, youths and artisans who share the same drive to engender a New Nigeria that is all-inclusive. Within this movement, Oby Ezekwesili has being placed in charge of anchoring Fix Politics Initiative, a platform of NCF. This has been considered a worthy political alternative for the masses that willfully make the

grievances against the ruling party (APC) known, have scars and neither forgotten the record of unequivocal leadership displayed by the previous ruling party (PDP). This was a follow-up to her dream for Nigeria which is a Nigeria that works for all. In her own words, “this coalition for a viable alternative has now more than ever before become an urgent mission for and on behalf of the citizenry”.³²

Using the power of social media, Ezekwesili has used the keypad as a tool for agitating numerous political and social issues in a blizzard of tweets on the 280-character social medium, Twitter. Notable among them is the indefinite suspension of African Independent Television (AIT) and Ray power both subsidiaries of DAAR Communications on June 7, 2019 over a critique of President Muhammadu Buhari which she called a trample on of press freedom and an impediment to democracy. She also used this social media platform to stand up against slut-shaming her and other women alike in an attempt to navigate a deeply patriarchal society. Moving forward, there is utmost concentration on the concept of ‘office of the citizen’.³³ She describes citizens’ wellbeing as the spectrum of political leadership and the highest office of the land to ensure the needs of the citizens is seen as paramount. Her quest to contest for the highest political position in Nigeria has vividly given Nigerian women the voice to be divergent and ask for more.³⁴ Although women have continued to face numerous challenges in this bid, the aspiration of one woman (in this case Dr. Ezekwesili) will continue to strengthen women to speak against a system that excludes them from national building.³³

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CHAPTER FIVE

ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF OBIAGELI EZEKWESILI

Dr. Ezekwesili's political and career portfolio offers enough proof of her tremendous growth as a woman and impact on lives and the society (locally and internationally). This shows that women can and do negotiate a variety of more or less effective solutions to carve out a space for themselves in the political domain.¹ In her capacity as a voice for the people, she has successfully served as a thorn in the flesh of various administrations in a bid to hold them accountable for their actions especially as regards corruption. Invariably, admonishing citizens' groups, the media and parliaments to follow suit. She opines that corruption is the major hindrance to Nigeria's growth and can be tackled simply by preventing opportunities for corruption.² According to her, "Nigeria has lost more than \$400 billion to large-scale corruption since independence in 1960."³ Shedding light on her achievements without mentioning her quest for anti-corruption would be somewhat impossible. Her stance against corruption has always been visible. As a member of President Obasanjo's economic team, Ezekwesili was responsible for developing the government's overall comprehensive anti-corruption, transparency and good governance strategy. She negotiated the partnership between Nigeria and the G8.⁴ This was known as the "Compact to Promote Transparency and Combat Corruption" which was signed by President George Bush and President Obasanjo at the 30th G8 summit held in the United States in June, 2004. This was regarded by the United States as part of Nigeria's progressive actions that made it merit debt cancellation.⁵

Similarly, her meticulous work in the public sector earned her the name “Madam Due Process” in her strive towards attaining accountability. This appellation is a constant reminder of, perhaps, one of her most remarkable achievements. Ensuring an overhaul of the *modus operandi* for public procurement system through the Due Process Initiative helped in correcting the decadence of extreme embezzlement by public office holders hitherto prevalent. Some of the achievements of BMPIU under Ezekwesili were: the promotion of fair play and competition resulting in huge savings through reduction in contracts sum to the tune of NGN 77.50 billion or USD 500 million.⁶ Furthermore, unlike in the past when contracts were awarded at more than 200 percent of the true cost and to influential people in society, BMPIU recognized only competent contractors who went through the due process. As a result of the transparency involved in the due process, BMPIU was able to save additional NGN 125 billion or USD 806.45 million for the nation in two and a half years. Dr Ezekwesili’s brilliant performance in Nigeria’s public sector management eventually made it possible for her to be appointed the Vice-President for the World Bank’s African Region in 2007.⁷

As continuous agitation for transparency cuts across her leadership in the mining sector, her position as the Minister and Chairperson of the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), she spearheaded the first ever audit of the nation’s oil and gas sector and invariably orchestrated the NEITI legislation and the new Minerals and Mining legislation. She successfully exposed numerous financial misappropriation

scandals that generated a lot of fanfare in the press. This helped to keep those in the political office on their toes for fear of being ousted by ‘Madam Due Process’.⁸

A major achievement under her leadership as Minister of Education was that the increasing statistics of ‘Out-Of-School-Children’ (OOSC) dropped. As Minister of education for 10 months, June 2006–April 2007 Ezekwesili designed and began implementing comprehensive reforms that cut across all levels and spheres in the sector. The menace of Out-Of-School-Children was already evident in the over seven million children affected. Ezekwesili effectively deployed the Federal Government intervention fund to incentivize states to increase enrolment, transition, and completion of OOSC. The initiative also focused on bridging the disparity between the disproportionate population of girls in school compared to boys especially in Northern Nigeria. The intense focus by the Minister and use of effective incentives and policy measures that included adopting global best practices from other countries helped ensure that for the next academic enrolment period, more students were actively attending and participating in schools.⁹ Also emphasising the non-compromising feature of quality teaching capacity, she ensured the boosting of the minimum qualification required to teach at primary and secondary levels. This led her to propose a “House All Teachers” scheme meant to serve as incentives for teachers to be adopted by all tiers of government.¹⁰

In terms of advocacy, the establishment of a formidable social movement (the Bring Back Our Girls Movement) safeguarded a high degree of awareness and consciousness geared towards the epileptic security in Nigeria that have affected the

citizens particularly children in many ways. It is aghast to see that the extent of insecurity has led to kidnapping, rape, mutilation, death amongst other atrocious crimes against children in Nigeria. In the last six years, it is note-worthy that this movement has resulted in the return of some of the abducted girls by the Boko Haram terrorist group due to constant help given to families in seeking justice. This in turn generated international outcry and constant presence and reminder of various administrations in a bid to successfully reunite the victims with their families.¹¹

With a record of low representation of women in active politicking, Ezekwesili has dived into unfamiliar waters. Despite stepping down as a presidential candidate, she has served as a beacon of hope to other Nigerian women who aspire for political positions. There is nationwide clamour for more and better representation of women in the political space in general. She is known as one of the most accessible and socially engaging public figures in Nigeria.¹² Her strong media presence particularly on Twitter platform actively serves as a voice for conveying messages and attracting attention (nationally and internationally) to the parasitic activities of government as well as championing the social contract between the governed and the government. The hashtag #BringBackOurGirls clearly shows she wields of social media power in creating awareness and igniting global outrage.¹³ Commentaries, interactions and debates between her and her followers is a record of her impact on Nigerian youths who have directly or indirectly benefitted from her problem-solving tactics.

She has received numerous accolades, awards and recognition for her activities in various sectors. In 2006, she was awarded the National award of Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic (CFR). As well as an Achievement Award from the Whitaker Group for her laudable work during her tenure at the World Bank in March 28, 2012.¹⁴ Others include BBC's 100 Women in 2014; in 2015, she was one of the World's 100 Most Influential People by Time Magazine, Time 100 Most Influential People 2015, Albert Einstein's Foundation's Genius: 100 visions of the future in 2018, Vanguard Award for 2019 by Howard University Washington DC. In 2018, she joined the league of Nobel Peace Prize as a worthy nominee. In the course of the nomination, the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) described her as 'an international champion in the fight against corruption'.¹⁵ It is no small feat being nominated in recognition for her influence and work on transparency. In March 26 2019, Ezekwesili emerged Forbes Woman African Social Influencer at the prestigious Forbes Woman Africa Awards in Durban, South Africa in recognition of her blizzard tweets regarding copious societal issues ranging from gender, economic, social to political issues especially the viral #BringBackOurGirls. Campaign and also selected as a 2020 Global Leadership Awards Nominee. Recently, in March 2020, she made it to the list of Africa's 50 Most Powerful Women, a list that included nine other Nigerian women changing stereotypes across diverse sectors.¹⁶

In the same vein, she has served on numerous boards such as Bharti Airtel, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the School of Public Policy of Central European University, The

Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy, Non-African Magazine, and the Centre for Global Leadership at Tufts University while concurrently developing a graduate school of public policy in Abuja, Nigeria. An elder technocrat, who has amassed public goodwill, Oby Ezekwesili has proven that consistency is indeed the hallmark of integrity. As a formidable trailblazer, she remains unapologetic about her bold vision for Nigeria as she believes in putting in the work to attain desired results.¹⁷ An overview of Oby Ezekwesili's political and career span shows that she is an intellectual with pragmatic understanding of the yearnings of Nigerians through deliberate identification of the problem, acquisition of necessary problem-solving tools, and swift movement to tackle such problem whether or not she steps on toes in the process. Her pedigree and admirable track record with a catalytic effect of top-notch national and international following has continued to pave the way for more opportunities to serve the people, and in her own way improve the general well-being of Nigerians whom she described as 'the country's most valuable asset'. In all, she defies the stereotypical limits of an average Nigerian woman, giving inspiration to future leaders.

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