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## Feminist Leadership Role: Moremi Ajasoro in the Lens of the Camera

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### **Abstract:**

*This article concern itself with feminist leadership role, using Moremi Ajasoro as a case study. The methodology adopted in writing this article is an analytical method. The paper did a distilled analysis of potentials a good leader should posses. It also recommends that transparent, committed and transformational leadership is what is highly required in our nation. The leadership quality of Moremi Ajasoro has to do with the ability and capability to guide and protect her people from Ugbo people who raided and terrorized the people of Ile-Ife. This article examines certain sterling qualities which good leader must possess in order to achieve desired objectives. These qualities include fear of God, honesty, faithfulness, patriotism and exemplary living. Having learnt these good leadership qualities, we would then be in a better position to choose or vote for the right people who would become the leaders of various states, parastatals and the country at large.*

**Keywords:** Feminist, leadership role, corruption, Africa, problem, country

### **1. Introduction**

There are many, sometimes conflicting definitions of leadership. It has been described as: a skill; an action or behaviour: a responsibility and experience; an influencing relationship; a position of authority; a trait or characteristics; a style.... and many more. But, there is one similarity across the majority of definitions – they focus on the process of influencing the activities of others.

Leadership is different from management, but not for the reasons that most people think. It is not the province of a chosen few, nor is leadership necessary better than management or a replacement for it. In business, the substantive difference between leadership and management is the focus.

Management means setting objectives and focusing on consistently producing key result through planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, and controlling problem-solving. Leadership focuses on potential-creating and supporting change to vitalize the organization by establishing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring them (Ake, 1987:12)<sup>1</sup>.

The benefit of management is handling complexity and ensuring efficiency, allowing the organization to meet its short-term targets. This does not mean that management is never associated with change; in tandem with effective leadership, it can help produce a more orderly change process. Nor does this mean that leadership is never associated with order; in tandem with effective management, an effective leadership process, the benefit of which is the vision to anticipate the big changes, can help produce the changes necessary to bring a chaotic situation under control. They are not mutually exclusive – both are necessary in today's increasingly complex and turbulent environment like Nigeria. The success of government in any organized political system is determined by the quality of leadership in government. Also, the socio-economic and political development of any country depends largely on the ability of its leadership to facilitate, entrench and sustain good governance. Importantly, good governance is a manifestation of committed, patriotic and disciplined leadership. Nigeria, a nation endowed with natural and human resources after fifty –three years of independence still battles with insecurity as a result of bad leadership and governance problems. Fifty three years of nationhood, the most critical challenge confronting the "Giant of Africa" – Nigeria, appears to be credible leadership. The Nigeria society is in a very serious state of moral, social, political, economic, legal and educational decay because of bad leadership.

Nigeria as a nation in Africa is looked up as not only the giant of Africa in terms of population and economy, it is also looked up for exemplary behavior but people get disappointed because of inferiors attitude put up by our leaders.

Corruption is here and there in all hooks and crannies of the nation and majority of these vices are caused by men folk who are in one position or the other. Nigeria is a capitalist society where people especially men are so pre-occupied with material possession that an average Nigeria (men) would want to own as many houses or buildings, cars, jet and plots of land as he can (Olusoga, 1981:22)<sup>2</sup>.

The origins of the Nigerian ruling class shaped its overall development strategies and the nature of class formation shaped the class character of the Nigerian state (Uba 1983:8)<sup>3</sup>. The Nigerian ruling class arose not in the sphere of production, but in the sphere of

circulation and in the service sector given reason for the present state of decadence among the ruling class and under development in Nigeria.

This paper therefore looks at feminist leadership qualities, and examines the ability of our women folk in all aspect educationally, politically, socially, economically and the like. It recommend how best they can lead this country from her present ugly situation to the promise land if given the opportunity to rule as the president, governors or to occupy key political post in this country.

## 2. The Significance and the Courage of Moremi Ajasoro

True test of love they say is sacrifice and in times of war, sacrifice is an important rudiment of victory. This is well established in the life of a 'legend, Moremi Ajasoro' in the ancient kingdom of Ile-ife, this article narrates the brave sacrifice of a young woman's undying love for her husband and his people. Originally from Offa, Moremi's heart easily warmed to the people of Ile-ife.

After she discovered the secrets of the ugbo people who raided and terrorized the people of Ile – ife. The revelation of their secret weaponry by Moremi led to their defeat. Though warned by her beloved husband, Oranmiyan not to carry out her espionage plans, Moremi sought the help of the gods with a promise to make a costly sacrifice if victorious. She allowed herself to be captured by the ugbo warriors during one of their raids and would later be the wife of the king of Igbo. After the people of Ile-ife conquered their longtime enemies, Moremi returned to the Esinmirin shrine to fulfill her promise to the gods. It never occurred to her that the gods would demand for her only son Ela.

In the words of Makanjuola oladayo (2012:1)<sup>4</sup>, Edi festival is celebrated in Ile-ife as hopeful wish that Ela, the son of Moremi would return someday to reap the fruit of her labour.

Moremi –Ajasoro was a good leader with bundle of attributes including knowledge, vision, courage, imagination, love for her people, determination, transparency, patriotism, nationalism and so on. A leader is the one whose responsibility is to champion the attainment and achievement of his or her followers' goals. This attribute was evident in the life of Moremi who led her people out from the snare of their enemies, poverty, and economy set back e.t.c.

The poor management of the national economy cannot be excluded in Nigeria. Corruption hampers economic growth. The poverty level is very high. Most Nigerian families cannot afford three square meals in a day. Our youths are not sure of their future, what a disaster? The country has not been able to breakthrough with any significant step that would improve the living conditions of its mostly impoverished population due to the high level of corruption in the system.

## 3. Nigeria a Living Example of Leadership Curse

A number of factors are responsible for the ever-increasing cases of corruption in our government circle today. These ranges from: quest for elegant or flambouyant life, societal influence, cost of living and poor wages and so on.

Amujiri (2001:1) rightly noted that one of the fundamental problems facing Nigeria today is corruption. "Corruption has weakened the opportunities for organized crime, discourage the habit of handwork, dedication and discipline.

Nigeria provides a more current example of leadership curse on Africa. Nigeria gained independence in 1960; thanks to the efforts of the nationalists and patriots like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Alhaji Tafawa Balewa. The country is blessed with petroleum, tin, columbine, iron ore, coal, limestone, lead, zinc, natural gas, etc, and enormous wealth creating power as the fifth largest supplier of oil in the world and the 6th largest supplier of natural liquefied gas on earth.

The country's history has been marked by economic stagnation, declining welfare, and social instability. Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Brazil, among others, with which was at par in development terms a few decades ago, either have attained the status of developed nations or have long been recognized as truly emerging economies of the world, but Nigeria, the largest black nation on earth; remains a typical third world: buffeted by mass hunger, poverty, crime, corruption, environmental degradation, massive unemployment, disease, primitive state of basic infrastructure, etc. Oliver (1999:4)<sup>5</sup>. Argued that with vast amount of arable land is regrettably unable to feed it and has been involved in importation of food for the past 40years. The prevailing conditions have result to brain drawn and mass voluntary economic slavery into Europe, USA and Asia of a new generation of Nigeria citizens and professionals. At best, some may describe themselves as economic and intellectual refugees.

History is repeating itself before every eye. As is the case today, the slave trading of our ancestors in the 1400s and beyond was driven largely by African rulers and a military aristocracy who all grew wealthy from the sufferings and humiliation of their fellow citizen. "European slave traders saw the advantages of helping African kings and chiefs realize their desire to acquire western culture, if not for themselves then for their children. They were obsessed with the variety of goods available through the trade. Locally produced equivalents of some merchandise, like cloth and jewellery, existed but greater satisfaction and prestige was got from having imported varieties. The man with a warehouse full with goods from abroad was a powerful figure in the community, able to buy favours and influence with his ill-gotten wealth.

"In some respects Africans are now more vulnerable to theories of black inferiority than they were during colonialism. Under colonialism they could dream that with liberation would come the opportunity to prove their worth. But actions of the African leaders have made the theory of African dependency persistent" Sappor (1999:27)<sup>6</sup>.

Poor leadership is the source that encourages corruption in Nigeria. There is poor conceptualization of leadership in Nigeria. Leadership in Nigeria has largely been hypocritical. Right from 1960 when Nigerian gained independence, the political elites be it civilian or military pursue selfish interest at the expense of the public; they have demonstrated that the struggle and scramble for power among them are for sharing the spoils of political office. Since then, every political office has been subjected to abuse. They loot public treasury with impunity. As the public observes the brazen pervasion of normative values by their leaders and their agents,

they do not find any justification or motivation to cherish such values. Hence the tendency for the masses to imitate their leaders. This explains why the messenger who receives unjust wages will declare your file missing until you bribe him; it also explains why policemen extort money from the public without having any sense of guilt.

Achebe (1986:10)<sup>8</sup>. Minced no words in his categorical assertion that “Nigerians are what they are only because their leaders are not what they should be.”

#### 4. Characteristics of Successful Leadership

Research based on studies of men and women who shaped history over time identifies characteristics of successful leadership as follows.

**Adaptability** - Ability to adapt and incorporate new information and new challenges. **Charisma** – This lies in the personality of a leader and is the “energy, vision and charm of a person which when communicated to others inspires loyalty, enthusiasm and a willingness to go that extra mile. **Communicator** – Ability to communicate with a variety of organizations, groups and individuals, hold their attention and get them to act on what is communicated clearly and unambiguously. **Embraces responsibility** – a leader must demonstrate full understanding of the weight of their duties and willingness to take responsibility for success and failure. No room for transfer of blame for failure. **Altruistic** – a leader puts the needs of others ahead of his, leads by example and is perceived to be fair and even handed in all actions and decisions. **Enthusiastic** – shows excitement for the job or responsibilities and because enthusiasm is contagious people will follow. **Knowledge** – possess sound working and up – to – date knowledge of all of the organization and responsibilities for their purpose of providing guidance and advice and understanding the challenges the organization and staff face. Great leaders don’t have to be technicians but know how to get the best out of specialist working for them. When Henry ford set out to manufacture an automobile, he was asked during a press conference in his office why he thought he could be successful in making cars. After all, someone said, “you are not an engineer.” His reply was, “no I am not an engineer, but if I pressed this button under my desk, some of the best engineers in the world will walk through that door”. **Organized** – leadership often comes with enormous amount of information to collect, interpret and utilize. A leader must therefore be highly be organized and structured in the way his/her responsibilities are carried out. **Consistent** – “A good leader is a solid and stable rock which staff can revolve around and refer to while working towards goals”. A leader must therefore be consistent in their approach to responsibilities favouritism, mood swings and open dislike are avoided. **Diplomacy** – leadership is not a popularity contest, but about carrying out what needs to be done – pleasant or otherwise. Diplomacy and tact are crucial in developing and sustaining supportive relationships and developing team members. Often leadership has to do with “balancing the needs of one group against the needs of another and keeping both groups happy. **Role model** – A leader must be a role model for followers or subordinates. They must uphold the highest personal and professional standards if they expect respect and support from the followers or staff. **Emotional intelligence** – Daniel Goleman highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence associated with leadership are crucial, they are insufficient. He identified emotional intelligence as highly relevant and includes the following elements: self – awareness, self – regulation, motivation, empathy and social awareness. **Social intelligence** – according to Ambassador Joseph, this refers to the ability to recognize and protect the dignity of difference. He argues that leaders with social intelligence “are the ones who are most convincing in persuading others that diversity need not divide; that pluralism rightly understood and rightly practiced is a benefit not a burden; that the fear of difference is a fear of the future”. **Spiritual intelligence** – This refers to “the ability to cope with the unexplored, the unexamined and the unknown; the capacity to transcend the reality we see and to imagine alternative possibilities; and the ability to step back, renew oneself and to find meaning and purpose in our existence (Ambassador Joseph). Spiritual intelligence reminds a leader and would be leaders that they have a role to play as agents of reconciliation and forgiveness. Among the greatest strengths of President Mandela was his ability to “alloy his strong beliefs with patience, charm, self-discipline and an ability to forgive”. He learned the language and history of his oppressors (Afrikaans) in order to understand their culture and concerns. **Purveyor of hope**- In the modern world full of challenges ranging from economic meltdown to terrorism, famine, disease and wars, every country needs leaders who can project hope; leaders who can look beyond what they see and imagine alternative possibilities. Hope is the ability to look beyond that evidence and to see something deeper and different”. **Recognition of others’ contributions** – A leader looks for and acknowledges the best in his political opponents and enemies. It enriches a leader’s wisdom and places a leader on higher moral ground. It is on record that President Mandela saw in Botha (the architect of apartheid in South Africa) a reflection of qualities he wished to see in himself. Botha was a tough leader, a man clear in his principles, honest.

The struggles for gender equality and affirmative action by women have been on the front burner for ages and women are not losing steam yet the struggle has always been for equal rights such as equal education, opportunity, professional employment, political, marital rights, and right to own properties and so on. Virtually all these rights have been won by women in the western and civilized world, but for women in Africa and rest of the third world, the struggle continues.

In Africa, since the Beijing declaration, significant progress seems to have been made and the public are more conscious about gender issues. Also, the increased stability in democratic culture among countries within the continent has helped. Not even the most optimistic delegate at the Beijing Conference in 1995 would have said that by 2012, the continent would have two female Presidents. The election of Helen Johnson Sirleaf as the first female president in Africa was the license women needed and we see the effect: more women have followed and are occupying high positions on the continent. From Rwanda, Africa’s most successful story where women account for 50 per cent of the legislature to Senegal, where recent elections have seen more women elected into the parliament; in South Africa also, progress has been made over the years and women are rising to key positions and for the first time, a woman, Nkosana Zuma, is the chairperson of the commission of African Union.

Here in Nigeria, in 2007, the national gender policy was signed to support gender mainstreaming in politics and governance. Kudos should be given to different women umbrella bodies in the country for their resilience and steadfastness over the years. Perhaps, in a long time, we have a first Lady who has not paid lip service to the struggle but is committed to the cause and we have seen the result in recent time. About 35 per cent of the cabinet members are women and for the first time, a female, Hon. Justice Mukhtar Aloma is Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN). More women are having access and occupying decision making positions both in the public and private sectors in the country.

While I acknowledge that we are in a predominantly male dominated society and it will not be easy for women to break this circle, it is also important to say that, over the years, most women who have occupied public office in Nigeria have exhibited a high level of enthusiasm and commitment to their jobs and their performance has never been in doubt. For me, it is not a question of what women can do. The question is if we will give them the chance? Today, there is hardly anything a man can do that a woman cannot do and in some cases, better, female footballers, doctors, broadcasters, engineers, entrepreneurs, academics and so on have all excelled in their positions alongside their male colleagues with many notable examples.

Gbemisola (2012:3)<sup>9</sup>. submit that Nigerian women should take a leading role in politics, economy, culture and other areas of society to realize world peace in Abuja penultimate week during her welcome address in commemoration of the United Nations International Women's Day. President Ellen Johnson – Sirleaf made history by becoming the first female president of Liberia but successive government in Nigeria have not yielded to the clamour for at least 35 per cent quota for women, despite international organizations' calls in this regard. According to Mayelebe, the WFWP was founded in 1992 by Dr. Hak Ja Haan Moon to empower women with knowledge, skill, and supporting communities to discover their unique value and bring lasting peace; encourage service projects that enable women to live for the sake of others as well as to promote peace and reconciliation activities in the community. Mayelebe added that the WFWP seeks to bring peace on the principle that women should work together, take initiative and empower one another across traditional line of race, culture and religion to create healthy families as the cornerstone of the culture of peace.

##### **5. Nigerian Women and Challenges of Leadership**

In Africa at large, specifically in Nigeria progress has been made and women are gradually breaking the stereotypical image about them in our societies, this progress though is slow. Access to education for the girls remains a veritable tool in breaking the gap between the two sexes. Education offers empowerment and a leverage, and hence, efforts must be intensified to allow more females have access to education not only at the primary and post-primary levels but at the tertiary level. Not until the early 20th century did women begin to receive some forms of recognition in some parts of human societies. Before then, women were traditionally seen as good only to perform domestic chores, as objects of slavery, as symbols of wealth and property. In early Greek societies, women who lacked ability to perform domestic chores were often given as gifts to the losers in the society's annual wrestling contests. Not until after much clamour, demonstrations and riots did women begin to receive some form of recognition and given partial integration into the society. In Britain, for example, women were admitted into the university after much clamour but they were not allowed to sit for the qualifying examinations so they could not graduate. Even when there was a form of liberation in terms of professional practice, they were restricted to professions such as sewing, nursing and play-acting. In most Western countries, women did not have the chance to vote till the 1920's.

To promote democracy in the African continent, we should advocate for equal participation of women to the political and Socio-Economic Development of African States, African women should go beyond asking for 35 per cent participation. When confronted with the perceived mistrust of Nigerians towards women in governance after the exit of the controversial former Aviation Minister, Stella Oduah from President Goodluck Joanthan's cabinet, Ojeleme said "women cannot be discriminated on the basis of allegations. She insisted that women have more to give the nation in governance. She was of the view that the only way women participation can be felt in governance is to promote gender-awareness campaigns to develop understanding between women and men that women's participation is a key component of good governance".

Speaking a similar vein, Senator Gbemisola Saraki was of the view that "women are looked down on because of their gender. Drawing from her political experience in Kwara state and the National Assembly, the Kwara-born senator said political powers are unfair to women by brandishing them bad before the voting public. She stressed that as a woman in politics, her advocacy is not for herself but for the generality of women in Nigeria. According to her, politics is expensive and has shut out many women from attaining key governance positions in Nigeria. Stressing that, the women congressional caucus in the U.S. Congress advocated 30 per cent allocation for women in all businesses in the country. That is to encourage women to get into businesses alternative to government contracts so that they are not discouraged and the same goes in politics".

She posited that when it comes to her own state in 2011, it was just a simple issue of the fact that she was a woman and anything that was possible that can be used against her was used. She says in Nigeria, when two men are vying for the same position in politics, the tactics used is that the men may fight by calling themselves names like 'thief' but when it comes to a woman she will be called a 'prostitute'. The Nigerian National Assembly after the 2011 elections had about 20 legislators of whom 8 are Senators and 12 members of the House of Representatives. Nkoyo Toyo, a member of the House of Representatives from Cross River State was of the view that women have done well in governance.



## 6. Conclusion

According to some scholars, women are every bit as capable of being good political leaders as men. The same can be said of their ability to dominate the corporate boardroom. According to a new Pew Research Center survey on women and leadership, most Americans find women indistinguishable from men on key leadership traits such as intelligence and capacity for innovation, with many saying they're stronger than men in terms of being compassionate and organized leaders. So why, then, are women in short supply at the top of government in Africa, and mostly in Nigeria. Not that Nigerian women lack toughness, management or proper skill sets.

This work therefore calls on the federal government to allow our women folk to participate fully in politics and they should be given chance to become president of our nation if they win the election. The importance leadership has since the origin of man being recognized. The scripture dating back more than 2000 years states without good leadership a nation falls and people suffered. Our leaders should learn good lesson from Moremi Ajasoro who showed true love and patriotism to her fatherland.

## 7. Recommendations

Moremi Ajasoro displayed courage in ancient Ife land at a time when women were considered second class citizens. She put aside male prejudice and acted successfully as military leader. Thus, Moremi Ajasoro by her courage succeeded in making a significant contribution towards Yoruba development in social and political fields during her time.

Based on the above observation, the federal Government should enact gender equality that would support gender mainstreaming in politics and governance.

There must be seminar, symposium and re-orientation on women leadership role in all tiers of government in predominantly male dominated society of Nigeria.

For Nigeria to move forward in all facets, we must first of all tell ourselves the truth, our men folk should allow our women that are educated and as well have the fear of God to take a leading role in politics, economics, culture and other areas of the society.

Our leaders have to be selfless and patriotic; they should be prepared to pay the price of a new Nigeria where nobody will be above the law, where there is no gender disparity, where leaders imbibe such moral values as good name, self-discipline, high sense of responsibility, and where public life is not fraught with hypocrisy.

Nigeria government should emulate Liberia government who voted for Ellen Johnson – Sir Leaf as their president. President Ellen Johnson Sir Leaf made history by becoming the first female president of Liberia.

Looking around every facet of Nigerian government, there are traces of indiscipline and corrupt practices among our men leaders. It is therefore not out of place to say that one of the greatest problems facing the Nigerian society today is corruption and corrupt practices in both high and low places caused by men.

Therefore, there is urgent need for Nigerians to reflect back on the vision values and aspirations of Nigerian's founding fathers, particularly on the areas of good governance, formulation and implementation of people – oriented policies and programs through good leadership.

It is reasonable that those vying for any position should be carefully and strictly screened.

Transparent, committed and transformational leadership is highly required for good governance in Nigeria.

## 8. End Notes

1. B. dadepo. 2007. Edi Festival in Il-Ife. In the guardian newspaper of Saturday February 10, 2007. Dadepo opined that Moremi Ajasoro, a legend woman in the ancient kingdom of Ile-Ife, showed her true test of love to save her community from problem caused by the Igbo people.
2. W. Sappor. 1986. The effect of Corruption in a Developing Nation. Says African is richly blessed with both human and natural resources. He further notes that leaders in Africa are corrupt.
3. O. Ayodele. 2007. Governance and leadership in Nigeria. Ibadan: Hope publication limited. He compared the role of women from pre-colonial times to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Women in the pre-colonial period played a major rule in social and economic activities in this country. Olusoga. 1981. Corruption and political development. Ibadan: University Press. He argued that Nigeria, the largest black nation on earth; remain a typical third world buffeted by mass hunger, poverty, crime, corruption, disease and environmental degradation.
4. Olusoga. 1981
5. O. Obadina. 2008. Africa and leadership. He observed that Africa has suffered greatly from lack of effective leadership. If there is anything like a curse of Africa certainly leader rank top.
6. O. Obadina, 2008.
7. T. Fatola. 2012. African women and politics. She opined that in politics, women were not as docile as powerless as contemporary literature tends to portray them.
8. T. Fatola. 2012.
9. B. Amujiri 2001. Bureaucratic Corruption in Enugu State Civil Service and Development of the State. He rightly noted that one of the fundamental problems facing Nigeria today is leadership and corruption.

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