Women in Purgatory: The Case of Nigerian Women in the Boardrooms.

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ABSTRACT

Women all over the world (Nigeria inclusive) are often relegated to certain professions, which the society has tagged as ‘women’s jobs’. These jobs include nursing, teaching, secretary, and administration while jobs like company chairman, directors of organisations, senior managers, engineers, medical doctors, and piloting of airplanes are reserved for or are dominated by men. Since the declaration of the International Women’s Year by the United Nations in 1975 the gender discourse has gained increased recognition and attention in Nigeria. The general consensus is that women have always been treated as the weaker sex; they are therefore marginalized, alienated and unable to leave the ‘purgatory’ which ceiled them off from the top. Traditionally in Africa (Nigeria inclusive), women have no role in the society aside from raising children and household chores, they are relegated to the background as they are ignorant of their legal rights or unable to claim those rights even when they are aware of them. Until recently the Nigerian corporate board has been solely a ‘male club’. This study relying on the case study methodology and employing the qualitative research methods examines the extent to which Nigerian women have been able to break free from the ‘purgatory’ syndrome.

Keywords: corporate board, female directors, women on the board, and Nigeria, purgatory

INTRODUCTION

Women in Nigeria for generations have fought many barriers to progress to visibility and add their voices to any form of authority, like Directors of big business organisations, CEOs of multinational organisations as well as top political appointments (Awe, 1996; Obi, 2001; Omotola, 2007). The general consensus that runs through these studies is that women have always been treated as the weaker sex, marginalised, oppressed and alienated which...
manifests in various forms, including in the political, economic and socio-cultural arena. Politically, it has been argued that women are not only underrepresented, but also victims of repressive public policies and political violence. Economically, women are said to have been discriminated against, particularly in terms of employment in the economic sectors due to the occupational structure of employed persons, access to land, credit facilities and other financial resources they are therefore victims of poverty (Omotola 2007; Mathur-Helm, 2005).

These barriers mirror the society, and vary from the traditional roles into which women are socialised, prohibiting women from ‘male-only clubs’, prejudice and the glass ceiling which affect women, making it impossible for women to attain the prominent positions of Managers, Directors and CEO’s (Fenn, 1976; Gerson & Horowitz, 2002; Giddens, 2004; Jones & George, 2003).

Several studies including that of Mba, (1982); Olurode, (1990); Obi, (2001) and Omotola, (2007) have uncovered the hurdles women go through in getting to top positions in an organisation. The reasons is not farfetched, it is the way women are viewed by the organisations which mirror the society (Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007; Wilson, 2005; Wood, 2006), unsupportive working environment, organisational culture, national cultural barrier, poor career planning and difficulty in balancing career & family (Morrison, 1992; Adair, 1994). It is perceived more or less as an aberration for women to participate in public affairs; women who ventured into careers that are assigned to men are labeled as ‘prostitutes’ or ‘wayward women’ (Olojede, 2009: 11).

As a result of these negative attitudes towards women’s participation outside their homes, many potentially qualified women shy away completely from any visible position (Olojede, 2009). Some earlier researches in Nigeria (Olurode, 1990; Olojede, 1996) assert that in practice, women’s rights as citizens are more of denial than realization; the scholars also asserted that women’s experience of citizenship is treated as a devalued status in relations to men’s citizenship and not feasible in the policy process.

The Nigerian government realizing the presence of glass ceiling, formulated specific policies in trying to resolve problems facing women in gaining entry into the Nigerian public sphere, a notable government action was taken through the 1999 constitution to guarantee women’s equality with men. Section 17 (1) of the 1999 Constitution states ‘that the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be based on the principles of freedom, equality and social justice’. The State is enjoined to direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens are not discriminated against on any ground whatsoever, and should have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunities to secure suitable employment (Section 14:3). In addition, discrimination on grounds of ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion is prohibited.

The underlying principle deducible from the Constitutional provisions is that of equality of men and women before the law. This implies equality of reward for works done which are of the same kind performed by both men and women alike. Similarly enshrined is the right to work without discrimination on grounds of gender. Legally, women have a right to equal place with men in decision-making bodies such as boardroom, parliament and executive councils. However, in practice, the situation is not that simple, there is a wide gap between what is written in the Constitution and what is practiced. The Nigerian Government has been scaling up its effort towards meeting the goal of gender equality with the introduction of a National Gender Policy in 2006 and the Strategic Implementation Framework for the policy in 2008.

The National Gender Policy has among several objectives ‘to achieve minimum threshold of representation for women in order to promote equal opportunity in all areas of political, social, economic life of the country for women, as well as for men’ (NGP: 20). The policy recommends adopting special measures, quotas and mechanisms for achieving the threshold of pursuing 35% affirmative action in favour of women to bridge gender gaps in
political representation in both elective and appointive posts at all levels. (NGP: 20); ILO, (1993).

This is because the Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitutions before the 1999 was silent on women’s plight which worked against women attaining to board positions; but the passing of the 1999 constitution brought about a new lease of life for career women (Taylor & Conradie, 1997).

Nigeria Labour Acts of 1974 also tend to show prejudice against women, in an attempt to give them protection. For example, the Part III of the Labour Act (Cap.198 of 1974) extending from [Cap.91, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1958] as stated in the following sections corroborated the above assertion. Section 54: Maternity protection (1) A woman - (a) shall have the right to leave her work if she produces a medical certificate given by a registered medical practitioner stating that her confinement will probably take place within six weeks, (b) shall not be permitted to work during the six weeks following her confinement; (c) if she is absent from her work in pursuance of paragraph (a) or (b) of this subsection and had been continuously employed by her then employer for a period of six months or more immediately prior to her absence, shall be paid not less than fifty per cent of the wages she would have earned if she had not been absent; and (d) shall in any case, if she is nursing her child, be allowed half an hour twice a day during her working hours for that purpose.

(2) Where a woman - (a) is absent from her work in pursuance of subsection (1) (a) or (b) of this section; or (b) remains absent from her work for a longer period as a result of illness certified by a registered medical practitioner to arise out of her pregnancy or confinement and to render her unfit for work, then, until her absence has exceeded such a period (if any) as may be prescribed, no employer shall give her notice of dismissal during her absence or notice of dismissal expiring during her absence. Section 55(f): ‘subject to this section, no woman shall be employed on night work in a public or private organization or any agricultural undertaking or any branch thereby’ . . . and Section 56(f): ‘subject to subsection (2) of this section, no woman shall be employed in underground work in any mine’.

The aim of the above Constitutional provisions is to shield women from apparent difficult employment. However, this may impart negatively on the choice of specialization by the female gender, especially in the higher institutions. No one (Men & Women) would like to study a course, which job prospect is restricted due to gender factor. The cultural and institutional provisions, which assign roles to gender, have their implications on women’s choice of vocation and educational career Adeyemi & Akpotu (2004). This is to say that women traditionally are expected to be having children because the Act did not address her under representation. The progression of women into senior management positions which were traditionally thought of as male only positions has meant that they have had to balance their private and professional lives so as to be able to advance in a male dominated business world (Giddens, 2004; Mathur-Helm, 2005; Geddes, 2009).

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is globally accepted that only 1-5% of top executive are women hold few corporate board seats (Adair, 1994; Adams, 2008). Women around the world are faced with several hurdles that hindered them from attaining management positions (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002; Mathur-Helm, 2005; Wilson, 2005; Myerson & Tompkins, 2007;). Studies have shown that advancing to the top rungs for women is like a camel passing through the eye of a needle (Wilson, 2005; Wood, 2006; Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007). This is mostly so because there is a great deal of gender inequality in the workplace (Wilson, 2005; Wood, 2006; Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007). Several studies including Mba, (1982); Olurode, (1990); Olojede, (1998); Awe, (1996); Obi, (2001) indicate that to date the situation in Nigeria remains unchanged as women are still seen as inferior to their male counterparts no matter her qualification.

The National Gender policy recommends the adoption of special measures, quotas and mechanisms for achieving the threshold of pursuing 35% affirmative action in favour of
women to bridge gender gaps in political representation in both elective and appointive posts at all levels (NGP: 20) ILO, (2010) Durkin, (1971); Giddens, (2004); Mathur-Helm, (2005); Storvik, (2011) that this research is about to bridge.

This research explores how women in senior management positions in Nigeria have fought the ‘glass ceiling’ (if any) and balanced their family and professional roles in order to move up the managerial echelons, as well as the challenges that they had faced, and the prices they have to pay while advancing into management positions over the last 10years (2000-2010). These barriers include the ‘glass ceiling’ phenomenon; ‘work life balance’ and exclusion from male-only clubs.

1.2. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In Nigeria, culturally men are prepared and groomed to take over from their fathers, while women are considered to be properties of men (Omotola, 2007; Agbalajobi, 2010). Women had many challenges from an early age when they were socialised into ‘female’ roles and were prevented within their families, in the society, at school and even in the workplace from realising their potentials and rising to top positions in a traditionally ‘male’ world (Durkin, 1971; Fenn, 1976; Geddes, 2009). There is therefore the tendency not to send a girl child to school, educating her is considered as a waste of resources (Ngwaekwe, 2002) as she will end up in someone’s house and bear the name of that person, because of this cultural factor women are not sent to school, therefore there is no opportunity for most of them to contend with men in the boardrooms since they do not have the educational qualifications required for this top jobs. There is a common saying that the place of the women is in the kitchen and not in the boardroom (Olurode, 1990). This study will explore the impact of social-cultural factors of the under-representation of Nigerian women in the boardroom.

Despite the Glass Ceiling against women, many women have fought hard to overcome the obstacles (Werner & DeSimone, 2006) and got into positions reserved exclusively for men i.e. Directors & C.E.O.s (Schreuder & Theron, 2004). There is little (if any) literature on Nigeria women directors which is another gap in the literature which this study intends to bridge. The challenge is that there are very few Nigerian women directors that can share their success stories to help boost other women aspiration. This study aims to investigate how these women fought the glass ceiling effect that they faced and how they balanced their roles as a mother, wife and career growth in a Nigeria context.

1.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research investigates how women Directors balance both their family and professional roles; that is to say how they have broken free from the ‘purgatory syndrome’.

**Key Research Question (KRQ):**

What are the obstacles (Glass Ceiling) faced by Nigerian women as they advance to Senior Management Positions?

**Sub Research Question 1 (SRQ1):**

How do female Directors learn to balance their private and professional roles and advance to senior management positions?

**Sub Research Question 2(SRQ2):**

What are the prices paid by women towards breaking the glass ceiling?
CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

This section discusses the ‘glass ceiling’ that barricades the managerial echelons for women and put them in a state of purgatory waiting endless for their deliverance that might never come (Morrison, 1992; Adair, 1994; Mathur-Helm, 2005). It will also provide an in-depth understanding of the barriers and challenges that have hindered women from an upward movement. The section also discusses the ‘work-life- balance’, the social learning theory, Organisational culture and how this helps the ‘glass ceiling’ in keeping the women away.

GENDER: origin, definition and explanation

The U.S. Department of Labour defines the glass ceiling as ‘those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias, intentional or unintentional, which prevent or thwarts qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organizations into management level positions (Morrison et al, 1987; Adair, 1994). Gender is neither inborn nor necessarily constant; it is acquired through interaction in social world and it changes over time. It is a social construction that varies across cultures, over time within a given culture relation to the other gender. In Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) policy on ‘Gender Equality’ (1996), gender refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men. The concept also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviours of both men and women Momoh, (2008). Momoh (2008) believes that Wollstone-Craft (1792) is presumed to be the first to recognise the social character of gender; she declares that most differences between the sexes are socially created and not natural.

Williams (1985) perceives gender as ‘those non-physiological components of sex that are culturally regarded as appropriate to males or females.’ Oakley, (1987) as quoted by Momoh (2008) says that there is confusion between sex and gender and makes an attempt to distinguish the two terms. She sees sex, as a biological, which is both psychological and cultural. She (2008) goes further to support the above contention with a number of facts. First, anthropologists have reported wide variations in the way different cultures define gender. She further points out that every society uses biological sex as criterion for the prescription of gender; although no two cultures would agree completely on what distinguishes one gender from the other.

Durkin (1971) writes that gender division is not fixed biologically; but constitutes an aspect of the inter-social division of labour and this, in turn, is rooted in the conditions of production and reproduction which are reinforced by the cultural, religious, and ideological system prevailing in a society. Basow (1992) views gender as subjective feelings of maleness or femaleness irrespective of one’s sex. One’s gender can be determined in many ways, for example, behaviour. In most societies, humility, submissiveness, gentility emotion, and quietness are considered feminine behaviour and women are expected to behave that way. While men, on the other hand, are expected to be dominant, aggressive, unemotional, and talkative.

There are economic reasons attached to the increase of women in the workplace in recent times, as many households require two incomes in order to sustain a desired lifestyle; thus the traditional roles of women being housewives are diminishing as women have seized the opportunities to enter the labour force. This is to say that women have to balance their roles at home and at work (Giddens, 2004; Geddes, 2009)

Gender is the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person, and obviously, while there are mixtures of both in many humans, the normal male has a preponderance of masculinity and the normal female a preponderance of femininity; gender is a psychological and cultural term, while sex is a biological one (Stoller, 1968). To be a man or woman, a boy or a girl therefore is as much a function of dress, gesture, occupation, social network and personality, as it is of possessing a particular set of genitals. The experience of women in the world of work is a topic of unparalleled importance in the field of organisational
psychology, and yet few books/studies have appeared either in European academic or business spheres, addressing the area (Akindele, 2002).

Gender refers to differences between men and women that are learned. It is not fixed but determined by social and cultural values, that therefore means that gender differences between men and women vary across countries and regions as well as over time within countries and consequently can be changed through education, government policy, media images and opinion leaders; attesting to the fact that gender role is learnt, Oakley, (1985) suggests that the approach in which very young children pick up their gender roles is not principally verbal or disciplinary but kinaesthetic.

The process of kinaesthetic is grouped into four socialisation processes: (1) by manipulation, (2) through canalisation, (3) by verbal appellation and (4) by acting exposure. While agreeing to the gender learning process, the social learning theorists suggested that a child learns his or her knowledge or repertoire of sex-types behaviours on the basis of observation, parents, other children, teachers, picture books, school subjects and reading scheme are instruments of social learning (Akindele 2002).

Gender Discrimination are guided by more progressive legislation, there are still many discriminatory practices and behaviours in the corporate world against women; these discriminatory practices are often related to sex-role stereotypes and these behaviours work to the disadvantage of women (Lord, 1975; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002; Geddes, 2009). The enactment of National Gender Policy in 2006 is an indication that women are still experiencing discrimination in most parts of the corporate industry in Nigeria (NGP, 2006; Omotola, 2007; Agbalajobi, 2010; ILO, 1993).

Above introduction shows the difficulties experienced by women in Nigeria and around the world in getting to the top of their careers as dynamic and significant corporate positions are sealed off for women (Mathur-Helm, 2005; Omotola, 2007; Agbalajobi, 2010). This has hindered the upcoming of women into management positions, with few women breaking through and holding positions of authority (Taylor & Conradie, 1997; Werner & DeSimone, 2006). It has been discovered that the barriers is not only in the corporate field but also in the academic (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

**THE GLASS CEILING: origin, definitions, explanation and the Price of segregation**

The glass ceiling as a term first appeared in a 1986 article in the Wall Street Journal entitled ‘The glass ceiling: why women can’t break the invisible barrier that blocks them from top jobs’ (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). It entered academia and gained its capital G and C by Morrison et.al (1987) ‘Breaking the Glass Ceiling’; Benders & Van Veen, (2001) concluded that it took a few years for the term to gain momentum, a research in the University library’s Picarta -database revealed that eleven publications on the glass ceiling appeared between 1987 and 1991 and thirteen in 1992 while 1993 saw 26 publications and since, speed has picked up to a steady 30 to 40 publications each year.

A steady flow of authors inside and outside of academia have drawn and are continuing to draw on the term (Morrison, White & Velsor, 1987; Morrison and Von Glinow 1990; Adair, 1994). The term glass ceiling stems from a metaphor for working women who operate in ‘glasshouses’ whose behaviour is not only scrutinized by individuals on every level of the organization; but whose success or failure might affect the status of such working women. Morrison and Von Glinow, (1990) state that glass ceiling is a concept popularised in the 1980s to describe a barrier so subtle, so transparent, and yet strong that it prevents women from moving up in the management hierarchy, it is a plateau for women at levels below top management (U.S. Department of Labour, 1991, 1995; Morrison, White, and Van Velsor, 1987). Many women have paid their dues even a premium for a chance at a top position, only to find a purgatory between them and their goal.

Mead (1935) as quoted in Adair (1994:23) suggested that ‘if we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognise the whole gamut of human
potentialities’. The ‘glass ceiling’ is one of the most compelling metaphors for analyzing inequalities between men and women in the workplace. The expression has been used widely in the popular media as well as in official government reports and academic publications (Catalyst 1990; Baxter & Wright 2000).

The image suggests that although it may be easy that women are able to get through the front door of managerial hierarchies, at some point they enter into the purgatory, the invisible barrier that hinder any further upward movement. As one of the early writers who used the metaphor commented, the glass ceiling is ‘a transparent barrier that appears invisible but is strong enough to hold women back from top-level jobs merely because they are women rather than because they lack job-relevant skills, education, or experience (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990; Morrison et al. 1987, 13). However, Pearce (2000) also pointed out that rather than women seen as a drain by the male counterpart, women are in reality, the unrecognised and poorly compensated contributors to economic, social and cultural development.

There is considerable empirical evidence suggesting that formal internal labour markets are detrimental to women's progress in organizations because women are segregated in jobs without job ladders, whereas men are given the jobs with formal promotion opportunities (Werner & DeSimone, 2006).

Women also face the challenge of fighting the traditional roles, into which they have been socialised from birth, and thus in the corporate world they face the challenge of exclusion from the traditionally male-only areas such as male-only clubs (Fenn, 1976; Gerson & Horowitz, 2002; Smith, 1975; White et al. 1992; Geddes, 2009). Females are refused entry to some corporate clubs where senior executives in the organisation mentor junior executives, many important issues are discussed as well as grooming and promotion opportunities; if women cannot be present at these clubs then they miss out all the opportunities (Smith, 1975; Geddes, 2009).

WORK LIFE BALANCE: origin, definition and explanation

The two most important aspect of an adult life are Family and work; conflicts involving these two aspects of life possess potential danger for individuals, families and organisations (Andrews & Withey, 1976). Men increasingly express interest in a more balanced commitment to their work role than women, it is women who experience the highest levels of conflict between work and family because society expect women to perform the bulk of family and household tasks and responsibilities (Burke, 2001).

Work life balance has been a thing of concern in the last twenty years as it reinforces the ‘glass ceiling’ phenomenon making it more difficult for women to break through the barrier (Burchielli, Bartram, & Thanacoody (2008). Women prefer a career that allows them the balance needed Schwartz (1974). As more and more women join the management ranks in the corporate and public worlds, work-family balance has become a key concern; this is because women have to deal with the conflicting demands of their careers, caring for their children, as well as caring for their elders and other personal life issues such as marriage demands (Marcinkus, Whelan-Berry & Gordon, 2007).

During the 1960s and 1970s, employers considered work-life mainly an issue for working mothers who struggled with the demands of their jobs and raising children. Throughout this period and into the mid-1980s, the U. S. government had the major impact in the field, as reflected by the Presidential Conference on Families, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, and the Quality of Employment Survey. During the 1980s, recognizing the value and needs of their women contributors, pioneering organizations such as Merck, Deloitte & Touche & Co. and IBM began to change their internal workplace policies, procedures, and benefits. The changes included maternity leave; employee assistance programs (EAPs), flexitime, home-based work, and child-care referral. During the 1980s men also began voicing work-life concerns. By the end of the decade, work-life balance was seen as more than just a women’s issue, affecting men, families, organizations and cultures. The 1990s solidified the
recognition of work-life balance as a vital issue for everyone---women, men, parents and non-parents, singles, and couples.

The notion of work-life balance encompasses the family-friendly perspective seeking to help all employed people, irrespective of marital or parental status, to achieve a better fit between their professional and private lives (White et al, 2003; Bird, 2006). Work Life Balance tends to imply that a person’s life is neatly divided between the two distinct domains of 'work' and 'life', with the former seen as a negative restriction on the latter. ‘Work’ is projected as that which is paid or undertaken in relation to the market, whilst ‘life’ is generally taken to be everything that lies outside the realm of formal paid employment. ‘Balance’, on the other hand, appears as that which is simultaneously positive, achievable and synonymous with equity (Dixon, 2009).

Flexible working practice has been referred to as, flexible working arrangements (Bird, 2006), alternative work arrangements and family-friendly programs (Dixon, 2009). Main types of Family Work Policy are Part-time, Flexi-time, Annualised hours, compressed hours, staggered hours, Job sharing Home working & Working from home (Dixon, 2009). Conflict occurs when there is ‘a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect”. Work life conflict is associated to job frustration, high staff turnover, absenteeism and stress (Anderson, Coffey & Byerly, 2002; Worrall & Cooper, 2007; Epie, 2006).

CAREER PROGRESSION

Findings by Wood (2006) on the career development of middle managers in Australia revealed that male middle managers are promoted to senior manager’s position much quicker than female middle managers. Wood’s study advances the gender inequalities that persist in the workplace and the ‘glass ceiling’ that prevent women from attaining senior management positions (Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007; Wood, 2006; Geddes, 2009).

Women’s progression to the upper rug is largely hindered by their home roles which has direct influence of their career.. Nevertheless (Schreuder and Theron 2004; Geddes, 2009) noted that there has been a shift in the traditional responsibilities of men and women and thus more women are moving into positions of senior management. Policies such as equal job opportunities, provisions for childcare, and maternity leave, flexible work time have seen an in flock of women into the paid labour force all around the world (Dreyer, 2003; Noble & Moore, 2006; Geddes, 2009). These policies will help to improve and equalize the imbalances in the business world.

Coping Mechanisms

For women to be successful and attain management position in the Nigerian boardrooms they have to sacrifice more than the men; these sacrifices include not having social, personal and free life (Olojode, 1999; O’Connor, 2005; Geddes, 2009). All her free time are use caring for children unlike the male counterpart who uses their free time to socialise in clubs like (Ikoyi Club 1938, Yoruba Tennis Club, Country club) where lots of the appointment are done in the social network (Burchielli et al., 2008; Geddes, 2009). Part time work & flexitime are ways women cope with career, those coping mechanism have disadvantages like low pay, discrimination against employing women, lack of promotion, and stress (Giddens, 2004; White et al., 1992; Geddes, 2009; Marcinkus et al., 2007).

WOMEN IN SERVICE

Women are in a complex position as they face a ‘no win’ situation, they have the task of matching the standard and norm of their male counterparts; though women are as knowledgeable as men as regard compliance to the requirements of the organisation, most women have other vital family responsibilities to perform. These women are unable to show the same participation within the organisation as most men who do not have the same family roles; therefore, these women will not be awarded many promotions as the policy for
career advancement and promotion may not be so flexible (Wilson, 2005: 234; Geddes, 2009)

THE CASE STUDY: Women and Education in Nigeria

Historically, education in Sub-Saharan Africa and even Asia was initially available only for males (EFA Report, 2003/2004). This subsequently entails that women were from the onset disadvantaged in the formal employment sector since jobs in this sector are mainly negotiable through acquisition of education and skill. In fact women’s late entrance into education and the tailoring of women’s education to meet mainly domestic needs is not peculiar to Nigeria; thus, it has been reported that even in Latin America where the expansion of the educational system started earlier, women were denied formal education during colonialism but often received instructions to enable them perform domestic tasks and raise their children (Olojede, 1999).

Discrimination against women has been a long-standing issue with which society continues to fight; as soon as a girl is born, society starts to limit the girl child possibilities, regardless of what qualities she displays (Abiola, 2004; Nwezeh, 2009). It is therefore not in dispute that from the beginning of civilisation, women have suffered subjugation, degradation, oppression and all forms of inhuman treatment on account of their genders. This is especially so in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) where gender roles are distinct; women are occupied with domestic responsibilities, which naturally involve household chores and caring for the home (Majanja and Kiplang’at, 2003; Nwezeh, 2009). In Africa (Nigeria inclusive) more emphasis was placed on educating the male child than the female child; even when a female child grew up and wanted to take on a job, she was left with limited choices. Typical female jobs included petty trading, subsistence farming and causal labour. These were low paying and low status jobs Nwezeh, (2009).

In Nigeria, legislation favoured men and relegate women to their traditional role of home maker and culturally men are prepared and groomed to take over from their fathers, while women are considered to be properties of men and educating her is considered as a waste of resources (Ngwakwe, 2002; Mathur-Helm, 2005; White et al., 1992; Omotola, 2007; Agbalajobi, 2010). As a result of this cultural factor women are not sent to school, therefore there is no opportunity for most of them to contend with men; women are not meant to work in high powered professions in the corporate world; it is an aberration for women to participate in public affairs and many potentially qualified women shy away completely from any visible position (White et al., 1992; Mathur-Helm, 2005; Olojede, 2009: 11).

NIGERIAN WOMEN IN BOARD

It has been proved that the upward movement of women to management positions is slower than that of men, thus indicating that the ‘purgatory’ effect is apparent in Nigeria (Olurode, 1990; Olojede, 1999; Ngwakwe, 2002; Abiola, 2004). Men are refusing to distinguish that women have another role to play apart from the traditional role of supporting a man (Singh, 2005; Geddes, 2009). The Nigeria business is dominated by men, women who progress to positions of power and authority have to break down the ‘glass ceiling’ which is a very tough; when those women eventually break through the ‘glass ceiling’ and ascend to the top management, they are marginalised, discriminated against and are seen as filling women quota and not for their ability or the contribution they have to offer. This research will unveil the slow change that has taken place by looking into the lives of successful women who fought tirelessly to break the glass ceiling and attained to the position of director on Nigerian Boards (Schreuder & Theron, 2004; Geddes, 2009).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The general trend globally of about only 1-5% of top executive are women hold few corporate board seats (women’s bureau, 1989; catalyst 1990; etc) is reflected in Nigeria. This is due to the impact of culture and the work –life balance. The culture does not allow
women to take up positions of authority both privately at home and in the office. According to George (2010) male workers at Cadbury Nigeria Plc do not accept women managers whereas workers at Cadbury (UK) Plc. do not mind to work under women managers. This is also observed in the offices where women are harassed by their bosses in order to gain promotions while the ones that manage to get to the top on merit are not respected as it is assumed that the post was bought with sex. As culture is an enduring it will be difficult for Nigerian women to get to the top so they will remain in the in the ‘purgatory’ for a long time until the culture ‘frees’ them.

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