Agency and Capabilities: Rethinking Zimbabwean Women's Participation in Politics

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Abstract

The paper acknowledges the role of international, Regional and Local instruments towards the social justices system that embraces women's participation in politics. Despite the inherent nature of the domesticated gender equality policies, Zimbabwean women still lag behind. The country has failed to reach a critical mass from 1980 to 2018. As a phenomenological study, the research adopted a qualitative paradigm to purposively profile the experiences and achievements of women who broke the 'glass ceilings' to participate in the masculinized political domain. The sample constituted of selected members of parliament. Importantly the study focused on women's political lived experiences. Findings revealed that despite making it to the political realm women were faced with a masculinist culture reinforced by internal political cultures and deep seated structures that denies the acceptance of women as capable political leaders. The paper reflected on the country's political system of incremental change and concluded that even when women have been mainstreamed into politics; men continue to defend and protect their political status quo. Men have denigrating views about women in politics as a result women find themselves playing right into the hands of patriarchal domination. Recognition and manipulation of women's capabilities and agency were adapted into the study as normative prescriptions; this study recommended the use of these variables to articulate how, individual and collective women's visibility in the political realm can be enhanced. The study also touches on the significant value of women's organizations as platforms for sharing political knowledge amongst candidates as well as potential political actors. The said women's organizations were found to be valuable for the support base they offer through lobbying, advocacy and awareness campaigns for gender sensitive policies and gender mainstreaming into politics. The importance of organizations therefore links women to their political constituencies. Lastly the study recommends attitude changes as a way of embracing female political participation.

1. Introduction and the Background to Women Participation in Politics

Political assembles are the backbone of democratic governance because they offer platforms for legislative deliberations, discussions and decision making. Males and female participation in these platforms is conceived as a democratic necessity, as they both shape and represent the voice of the voice less. The need to have women participate in politics is founded in historical feminist's movements that support women empowerment. Analysing democratic issues from a Longwerian perspective of mobilisation and conscientization, contributes towards the view that women's positions in the contemporary national politics has duly improved compared to the previous colonial era.

Questions have been raised concerning women's participation in politics and this dates back to the colonial era were in most African States gender discrimination in the sector was evident. An analysis of Nigerian women in politics by Odimba and Mba (1997) cited in Ogunyankin (2014) reveals how women experienced deeply entrenched public and private sphere dichotomy. The separation of the private and public sphere resulted in politics becoming a lost institution for women, in essence being a woman was synonymous with failed access to the political realm. Ogunyankin (2014) further alludes to discourses that perceive women in politics as 'spare tires, second fiddle, and prostitutes'. Similarly in Cameroon colonial policies contributed towards the western notions of female domesticity (Adams 2006). In this view women's place was firmly in private confinement contrary to their male counterparts who enjoyed both the public sphere and well defined civil and political rights.

The Apartheid regime in South Africa is historically known for having set discriminatory laws that eliminated women from the public and political life. Muyakayaka-Manzini (1995) identifies the Natal Code of 1930 for its gender insensitivity defined by how it viewed women as perpetual minors. Relating to the above policy evaluation on gender retrogressive policies, Nolde (1991) concisely points to how black South Africa women suffered a triple yoke of oppression; gender, race and class. The intersectionality of the three defining variables categorically placed women into subordinate positions, denying them participatory rights in politics and decision making.

The political positioning of women in Zimbabwe during the colonial era is historically profiled by Bourdillion (1976) and Papart (1998). The duo reveals how the political domain of the Rhodesian government was characterised by laws and policies that were set to divest women off their prestigious culturally sanctioned political powers. Narratives by Bourdillion (1976) clearly show how the restrictive, draconian laws by the colonial regime contributed towards women remaining as perpetual minors even at law. It is in my view that a common thread runs through the political positioning of African women, in both cases studied, evidence abounds that women are relegated to subordinate positions. Decision making has thus remained a preserve for men while crafting, enunciation of policy issues from the stand point of women has been denied.

Knippernberge and Hogg (2003) illustrate the nature and extent of prejudice against women as political leaders. The duo postulates that discrimination against women is a result of gendered personal attributes bestowed upon men. According to Knippernberge et.al (2003) these include viewing men as 'agentic', referring to qualities of confidence, controlling, strong and eminence in what endeavours men embark on. The result has been the placement of men onto the political spotlight, while women stereotypical accept men as ordained political leaders.

Gaidzanwa (2011, 2013) & Chiroro, (2005), agree that women's are politically marginalized in Zimbabwe; the gender analysis in politics by the duo is in accord with Knippernberge and Hogg (2003)'s views and perceptions about the accepted positioning of men and women in politics. As will be discussed in this article these scholars have argued that poor representation is a result of lack of access and control of resources and the domination of the patriarchal rule. Although these factors obtain in Zimbabwe, this paper argues that there is more to female poor political representation and this will be explained in relation to the intersectionality of participation, agency and capabilities

2. Review of Related Literature

Literature guiding the study was systematically reviewed, focusing largely on journal articles, book chapters, and policy documents speaking to women as political actors. An analysis of States adherence to the prescriptions of International and Regional Policies towards gender mainstreaming in politics was sought after. Of significant to the study was reviewing and conceptualizing the phrase Political Participation, from Arnstein's (1969) view, that participation is about the redistribution of the political power to those who were previously marginalized. Participation is further understood in relation to the prescriptions of the universal declaration on human rights, which takes cognisance of the individual political rights for a person to participate freely in governance. The paper also reviews Shevdova (2003)'s view on the fundamental nature of gender and political participation.
The study also examines the concept of gender mainstreaming as a strategy for political participation (Matshalaga 2013). This strategy is taken as a reconciliatory approach were both males and females are considered in a relational political context. In this regard it is believed that the two individuals can work together and successfully share political ideas. Despite efforts in gender mainstreaming, the realisation is that males in the Zimbabwean political sphere continue to be overrepresented compared their female counter parts. [Gaidzanwa 2011]

2.1 Women in Asian Politics: Vietnam and India

The paper reviewed literature on female participation in Asian political spheres and found that in India and Vietnam, female political participation is a paradox (Thin Nga 2015].The two countries' political domains have been marred by inconsistencies towards gender mainstreaming, resulting in the glass ceiling effect. Even the adoption of affirmative action policies for gender equality as well as ideological changes set to promote egalitarian political structures has failed to yield positive results for the women. Religious fundamentalism has also been blamed for discrimination against women in politics.

2.2 The Middle East African Region (MENA)

Literature for this region was derived from the scholarly works of (Tripp 2000, Noork Khalfa Alftamimi 2016 & Shelby 2016). Evaluation of these different countries in the Middle East shows the least female political representation compared to other nations the world over. The Arab countries differ in the way they embrace female political participation. In this regard, constitutionalism and constitutional amendments have played a significant role towards politically empowering women. A report by the Government of Morocco 2011 shows that the Arab Spring in 2011 created opportunity freedoms for women to participate in politics as a result of the constitutional changes that followed the revolutions. Despite the significant changes in legislation, uptake of the political office by women was compromised by religious fundamentalism in the Arab world.

2.3 Economic Community of West African (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS has in the past witnessed a chronic and ubiquitous phenomenon in women political marginalisation. The regional block is identified by scholars as having hard-line masculine political tendencies that rejects women's values especially in policy making contributing towards male overrepresentation in politics. However despite these retrogressive gender tendencies, Rwanda is an exception celebrating a critical mass of female political representation. Matshalaga (2013) points to how good gender mainstreaming practices in Rwanda has gained the nation a status of being the political beacon of West Africa.

3. Theoretical Approach: The Capabilities Approach Amartya Sen

The study was informed by the Capabilities Approach which according to Sen (2002) entails the capability by an individual to act independently and make free choices out of one's will. This paper questions the extent to which women enter into politics as individuals or as collectives to achieve desired political functions.

The main objective is to understand reasons why women continue to lag behind in politics despites the provision from various international and regional policies. In other words women have been presented with 'opportunities freedoms' (Sen 2000) but still remain in the peripheries of politics. An understanding of agency as understood from McNay (2016)'s point of view contributes towards the deconstruction of the gendered stereotypes in politics. McNay (2016) steers this current discussion towards understanding women's agency from a transformational point of view. In reality, this transformational agency is the agency which when manipulated brings about positive change. This paper therefore argues that agency should lead to women engaging in politics that transforms the lives of those they represent in parliament.

On the other hand the capabilities as articulated by Sen (2000) and Nussbaum (2005) was discussed in this study in relation to women's political freedoms, functions being and doings It is through understanding as well as a manipulations of these variables that individuals can show case what they can or they are able to do. In this study we set to interrogate how women have since 1980-2018 manipulated opportunity freedoms to maximize their political potential.

4. Methodology

The capabilities approach in this study was used to conceptualise and create an understanding on the issue of female political participation. It is the capabilities as expressed by Sen (2000) to explain how women have been able to make choices to participate in politics in the post colonial era, for instance opportunity freedoms, conversion factors and functions. Incorporating agency in this regard was also to show case how woman may fail to participate in politics as a result of their own doing, for instance failure to take up opportunity freedoms as they are presented to them. In this case the view may be on how women and their political organisations have taken advantage of international and regional policies crafted for gender equality. The study made use of feminist lens to gather the women's lived experiences, for instance the Stand Point Theory by Hardings (1995) was used in a subtle way to underpin these experiences and how they have impacted on women's effective representation.

The study is qualitative in nature and it straddles the descriptive (Hood 2014), exploratory, and causal design as stipulated by Creswell (2006). This was essential for the study to gain the background to the understanding of the gendered disparities between males and females in politics. The descriptive method was for describing phenomenon as they emerged for-instance describing how women were being systematically marginalised in the sector. Purposive sampling was used due to the need to deal with women in specific circumstances with the political sphere. For example the need to interact with women who had been fired from the political system or those who felt their careers were revolving without significant enhancement or elevation to the echelons of power. Four female politicians were sampled and media, excerpts on their profiles and political activities analysed. Key documents were also analysed with the focus to having an understanding of legislative views on women and political participation and also ascertaining the extent to which these legal policies have aided the women's positions. Various data generating techniques were used to allow for the triangulation of the gathered data. Analysis was mainly done inductively to allow the data to speak for it-self as such emerging themes were used.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 International and Regional Influence of Gender and Politics

Document analysis shows that Zimbabwe like many other states has signed and ratified International and Regional Instrument on Gender Equality. Focus was on the United Nations S-ICCPR 1966 signed and ratified by Zimbabwe, the Convention on the elimination of discrimination against women and the Beijing Platform for action 1995.

The study's quest to understand the extent to which the international policies on gender equality are implemented points to the institutionalization of the quota system, provided for in the country's constitutional amendment of 2013, where sixty parliamentary none contested seats were reserved for women. This mechanism therefore sets the record on the country's adherence to the demands of the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995. The Beijing Declaration shows how the Zimbabwean Government has a greater extent adhered to archive gender equality in the Political Sector. By providing a country report on the position of the

country's gender equality efforts, for example the Beijing +5, +10, +15 since its inceptions in 1995 bear witness of this merited governmental effort. Bound by this international reporting mandate Zimbabwe has thus been given an impetus to adopt and implement gender progressive policies, strategies, measures in the political sector to ensure gender equality.

At the regional level reviewed document shows that Zimbabwe like many other SADC States is bound by the protocol on the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and also by the need to respect the Country's 2004 Constitutional pronouns on the Fundamental Freedoms of every human being. Adherence in the political sphere is thus observed were all political parties in the country have made efforts to incorporate these demands through their gender sensitive political manifestos.

Interviews with officials from the Ministry of Women and Gender and Economic Developments (MoWGCD) pointed out that the Constitution of Zimbabwe gives precedents to civil and political rights. However participants lamented the prevalence of low female representation in politics

Paradoxically the opportunities presented by the constitution of Zimbabwe as guided by the international and regional politics have not openly embraced the majority of the Zimbabwean Women whose political positions has remained in the peripheries while participation has become an elitist endeavour with only a minority group of women making it to the echelons of political from 1980 to 2018 as shown by the trends in political representation. The framing of the female political gender divided was articulated by one female respondent who pointed out that:

"Not all of us can get into politics even if we wanted to, not all of us can be connected to win the elections to become legislators".

Following the above opinion is clear that a deep culture postulated by Sen (1999), exists in the country's political realm and this culture prescribes how women secure their political party position, as well as positions at the national political level. Further interrogations revealed that women who have the agency and will to become legislators are frustrated given the extent to which personal agency and capabilities were undermined.

5.2 The Role of Women Political Organizations

The study sought to establish how women's organisations in Zimbabwe have played a role towards political conscientization and mobilization of women into the political sphere as both voters and aspiring legislators. As pointed out by Butaumocho (2018), Women's organisations have until the 2018 electoral process harboured optimism of imminent victory over contested parliamentary seats the female populace were contesting for. Guided by legislation and provisions of gender equality embedded in the national Gender Policy, Women's Organisations and Civil organisations such as the women coalition Zimbabwe, Women Politics Support Unit, Gender links have had to input towards fighting gender imbalance in the political sphere by training and supporting female candidates as well as providing support for the contestants. To help gain women's legitimacy in politics selected Women's Organisations, pointed out that they were frantically trying to battle tokenism in

politics by providing qualitative and quantitative participation by women aspiring to be politicians.

The study observes that the importance of the Women's organisations has been in the ability of these organisations to pave the way for women to access the formal political institutions and for them to be able to interpret the gender laws and policies of equality. The study therefore argues that in the absence of unifying social political movements, it may be difficult for female political aspirants to find their way into the hyper -masculinized culture. Obrien (2015) reinforces the above findings by stating that agency, collectivism and individuality are inter-connected in pursuance of a common political goal.

Despite efforts by Women's Organisation results in the study shows that electoral results in Zimbabwe 1980 to 2018 have been unfavourable for women. Media analysis on the commitment of women's organisations during the political campaign periods shows how women's optimism grew from hope to a futile gesture characterized by dissatisfaction and anger towards the patriarchal system and the unwarranted stereotypical views of women in politics. The findings reinforce views by Gander links (2011) on how the 50/50 campaign and advocacy has failed to come to pass. Hamandishe (2018)'s analysis of the 2013 electoral outcomes has come to a conclusion that both the 2013 and 2018 elections outcomes "Upset women". Hamandishe (2018) further argues that the 50/50 SADC Gender Protocol call, on equality in political representation continues to be a political dream for women. This view is corroborated by findings from documents showing inconsistence in female representation were women have failed to reach the political critical mass. Current statistics confirm that equality in politics is a mirage for women. Attitudes, views and behaviours by both males and females in the country's political sector confirm raptness of patriarchal political domination that continues to anchor its roots in both the formal and informal political sector which in turn has created a hyper masculinized culture.

5.3 A Masculinist Political Enterprise

Despite the sterling socio-political and moral support women receive during campaign time, data gathered in this study reveal pervasive informal institutions embedded in cultural, norms and values foreshadowing the works of women's political organisations. Interesting to note however is the fact that where the formal and informal institution is concerned there has been a mushrooming of what this study refers to as 'patriarchal women'. This group has been castigated for compromising women's access to opportunity freedoms and fulfilling their political 'functioning's', This aspect will be looked into when the paper discusses what it has dabbed the 'female political genocide' in Zimbabwe.

Any analysis of the barriers militating against women shows how the political sphere continues to become a masculinist enterprise. Analysis of excerpts extracted from media publications reveal women's discontentment with regards to patriarchal tendencies towards monopolising the sector. One respondent pointed out that it has become the norm for women's political agency and capabilities to be vilified. Excerpts from the Zimbabwean's former president quoted by Reuters (2014) shows the extent to which women's political agency is trivialized. Blinded by patriarchal beliefs and stereotypically views of women, the

former president would rather have a married woman support her political husband than contest against him in politics, again starting that;

'....after all she is a woman'

These utterances by Robert Mugabe were at a time when Mariana Chombo contested against former husband Ignatius Chombo for a parliamentary seat. The statement above was a direct caution that no woman should harbour ambitions of becoming political candidate if it meant competing with especially her husband.

A female politician said her political career came to an abrupt end and she lamented failure by the Zimbabwean Political Parties to adhere the demands of National Constitution and the National Gender Policy on gender mainstreaming in politics. The interviewee criticized selection of female political representatives through the quota system. Her argument revealed that female politicians were being selected on patronage basis. The views from the respondent above encores what Aviel (1981) referred to as a mere practice of "embellishment". Respondents were also of the view that organisations were failing to 'aggressively' use their constitutional voices to demand for women's space in politics, Dongo (2015) is quoted to have said gender political equality has failed to hold water in Zimbabwe because of failed implementation of policies against gender discrimination in politics.

Guided by the Capabilitarian perspective, this paper argues that, women as a political category continue to be destroyed by their own "mild mannered appeasement'' where those who have been in politics (1980-2018) becoming totally complacent with being parliamentarians lead by men. Conclusion drawn in this study was that women should be held responsible for perpetuating masculinist culture within the political sphere. One respondent argued that there's no way women will reach the critical mass, because women were selling their votes to males "*as women we need to give our vote to one of our own''*. It was very clear from the discussion with female participants that women were crippling themselves by failing to support the political agency of fellow female counterparts.

5.4 Gender Relations and Politics: The Case of a Gendered Divide

A major dilemma that has emerged in recent years in the Zimbabwean political sphere is the gender political divide between women themselves. Equity principles are observed to be lacking. As observed in the UNECA (1995-2005) report, these principles are yet to be fully integrated and articulated in the democratization process. For instance access to political leadership position has recently been marked by individual's tendencies to take political leadership positions as personal entitlement. The nature of domination has however, been castigated for creating artificial barriers for aspiring female political candidates. At some point the country has had women breaking the glassing ceiling, entering the 'previously un authorised sector'. However, such achievements have been marred by gender divide were there has been manifestation of a pull her down syndrome. Several reasons have been given for, male over representations however this paper argues that chief amongst all is the vindication of the women's political agency by fellow women. Conclusions drawn from the above discussion thus connects clearly with Kinppenberg and Hogg (2003)'s view that

women's attitude towards one another exacerbates male domination, making their overrepresentation culturally acceptable.

This paper gathered substantial data with regards to how males in the political sphere are prepared to 'use' women against their fellow women's political careers. Due to loyalty to male politicians, the generality of women were said not to be prepared to support their fellow female counterparts as long as these were perceived as threats to male political standing. As such interviewed female politicians revealed that their political careers are attacked by fellow women. The observation also follows views from one outspoken Zimbabwean Member of Parliament (male) who has of late been passionately condescending on female politician's role in pulling other women's political careers down and how various women's political organisations and the gender commission has failed to stand up for fellow women (Zim-Eye 2018).

Further emphasis was placed on the view that individual credibility or lack of it is no longer evaluated based on a one's political ideology, rather it is now about who the individual is and what connections they have in the political system. Such social attitudes and over reliance on familial relations has caused women's political credibility to be questioned and challenged. Such a condition has contributed towards failure by female politicians, these findings are reinforced by Alkire and Sabrina (2005)'s views on 'freedoms' which they have argued to be important for the creation of opportunities to accomplish what people value the most.

The lack of individual agency was in the study evaluated through the lenses of familial relations, which are connections that women have with men to give them the advantages in securing positions in politics. There is evidence from narratives by female politicians and those who tried but failed to secure parliamentary seats of deep rooted tendencies to rely on women's quota and familial relations for the expansion of one's political goals. Such tendencies have however been blamed for undermining the democratic nature of formal political organisation. Hogg and Kinppenberg (2003) on the other hand argue that male domination in the public becomes acceptable and is exercabated by the attitudes of women themselves and lack of articulation of policy issues. The above views are evidenced in the Zimbabwean political sphere where only a marginal percentage of female parliamentarians are able to engage in parliamentary debates. This scenario is however different from observation elsewhere, for instance Tripp (2000) acknowledges the changing face of the African legislature through women's quota e.g. Rwanda and South Africa. Female politicians in these countries even when they are products of the quota system, their significance in the sector have been applauded.

In view of the above the study therefore argues that lack of self-confidence and self-esteem compounded by diminished agency has contributed immensely towards women being over shadowed by their male counterparts in the political sector, Markham (2013) emphasises the above by arguing that without agency women's may not be empowered with abilities to take advantage of the present opportunity freedoms to participants in politics.

5.5 Political Genocide in Zimbabwe Experiences of a Female

In recent years, the Zimbabwean Female Politicians have experienced rampant Political persecutions. The study has chosen to regard these experiences as 'political genocide'. The interviews and reviews from media excerpts of what happens in the political sectors shows how women have lived to tell the tales of political firing. One respondent pointed out that;

"We are at an age where women are simply fired for being perceived as political threats to the political statuses of males"

As has been observe by UNECA (2009) under representation is symptomatic of persistent gender stereotypes, patriarchy and lack of enabling environment, the findings from this study concurs with the above views given the current Zimbabwean political environment that has been marred by political hacking. Interviews have shown that problems within the political system have been exacerbated by political hacking that has seen unqualified persons, without political agency penetrating the system at the expense of women who have been through the 'Political pipeline hypothesis' informed by political education and training. The convoluted process of dealing with female politicians who have been perceived as threat to the masculinist institution is therefore figured in this paper to be the only way that sustains male over-representations in politics. For example some of the most twisted ways identified are the use of propaganda within the political party systems and government itself.

The study found the existence of individuals whose desire to remain in power has forced them to assimilate into male political culture (Boyer 2001). Assimilation is a process in which a minority group comes to resemble those of a dominant group or individuals. In this regard female politicians have adopted the use of propaganda, violence and engaging in practices that promotes gendered divides to manufacture personal political statuses. Such tendencies have been criticised for impacting negatively on capabilities and agency to adaptive political preferences by the majority of women in politics.

To emphasize the views above, the study analysed the profiles of three selected female politician and amongst the selected one has been depicted through media discourses as typically critical of male patriarchal domination in politics. Political agency, and functions are noted when the female politician denied adaptation to the politics of patronage. Having reason to value beings and doings as pointed out by Sen (2002) is shown by making choices to participate in politics as an independent candidate. In reality being able to make choices and to stand by what one believes in has been synonymous with defying patriarchal expectations of female subordination and expected failed political careers. A move that defied all the political odds and patriarchal expectation of failed Political careers

6. Conclusion

The paper has highlighted that whilst there have been significant efforts towards adhering to international and regional policies on gender equality in politics, female politicians in Zimbabwe are yet to attain the 50/50 political representation. Women continue to encounter glass ceiling in their journey to the echelons of political power. Whilst those who once shattered the glass ceiling have had their successes impacted on by poor gender relations. The

study concludes that blaming the patriarchal system on its own should not be the ultimate goal, but rather women and the various groups should endeavour to uphold Sara Longwe's principles of empowerment that would enhance the effectiveness of agency and capabilities in politics. A self check is of paramount importance amongst women themselves to enhance attitude change that has been noted to militate against the development of women's political careers.

7. Way Forward on Women's Successful Political Participation

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

- For women to participate effectively in politics and have transformative agency women should commit themselves to the principle and practice of collectivism. Building collective agency where women belong to a collective group would foster shared conceptualized understanding of political representation.

- Women should have concerted, collaborated efforts to work towards political empowerment and articulation of political issues from the stand point of women which embraces their lived experiences.

- From a capabilities approach the study suggests the utilization of capabilities, allowing changes in the formal and informal masculinist sectors. This means attitudes should change, stereotypical depictions of women in politics to be removed and to allow women to archive their political 'functionings'

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