



## WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF OSOFISAN'S *ARESTLESS RUN OF LOCUSTS*

**Francis Olabisi Jegede**

Department of English,  
College of Languages and Communication Arts Education,  
Lagos State University of Education, (LASUED),  
Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos, Nigeria.  
[bisikemijegede@yahoo.com](mailto:bisikemijegede@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

*This paper examines women in politics, political violence directed at women and their roles in the political process coupled with the issues that make them victims of electoral violence in the country's emerging democracy. Until recently, the political turf has been viewed by many as belonging exclusively to men and this explains why women are rarely seen at the centre stage of political activities in the country. Considering the new political dispensation where the electorate's votes now have the potential to count, the paper investigates possible factors that can perpetuate the continued participation of women at the periphery and at times outright exclusion in active politics. Using Femi Osofisan's *A Restless Run of Locusts* the paper identifies electoral violence, intimidation and thuggery as factors militating against women's active participation in politics and electoral process. Findings also reveal that some women could be victims of electoral violence by their political affiliations and relationship with political figures and not because they stand to contest election. It was, therefore, suggested that political parties should go beyond 35 per cent affirmative action to create a level playing field and a political environment devoid of tension, and electoral violence through constitutional amendment, party restructuring and empowerment. This no doubt will give women the opportunity to contribute to the growth of democracy and the quest for nation-building in the socio-political milieu.*

**Keywords:** *Electoral violence, Political violence, Thuggery, Victims, Violence*

## Introduction

The role of women in politics and democratization process in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. Nigerian women have a long history of active political struggle that cuts across Nigeria from the pre-colonial, the colonial periods and to the modern democracy. Parpart (1989) believes that most of the struggles by women were as a result of the colonial masters who paid scant attention to the role of women in the way society is organized. Parpart says "The colonial masters came from a society that paid scant attention to the role of women, expecting them to play a secondary role that was essentially supportive to male efforts" p.314. It must be noted that notable female political figure have had their names written in gold based on their active public activities that predate independence, in fact, it goes back to the pre-colonial period. Worthy of note is the fact that the pre-colonial women were not just active participants in politics but also in trade and the welfare of the womenfolk of their time. For instance, history documented the fierceness of Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti who was said to have founded in 1946 the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) with which she advanced the course of women in that period. Her active political orientation and struggle actually saw to the dethronement of the Alake of Egbaland considered to be collaborating with the colonial masters to oppress women Bawa (2015). Using Yoruba women of the pre-colonial and colonial periods as examples, MacIntosh (2010) cited in William (2021) posits that

I wanted to identify a society in which women were active participants in the market economy and played important roles in other aspects of community life during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Yoruba women quickly emerged as ideal candidates. Not only were they essential figures in many public arenas, but their history is unusually well documented p.327.

The choice of *A Restless Run of Locusts* among many plays by Femi Osofisan that foreground social re-engineering is justified by his vision of an egalitarian society devoid of oppression and

class segregation. Often described as a socialist, Osofisan never claimed to be a card carrying Marxist but a social critic committed to the liberation of the underdogs aptly described as the wretched of the earth. He advocates a political environment where individual can freely participate without fear or intimidation irrespective of class and gender. This is essentially one of his political and social visions as a playwright who believes in non-violent social change as a panacea for growth and social cohesion.

Osofisan's motivation for the exploration of themes such as power, corruption, resistance, greed and challenge of the status quo is not far from the prevailing fragmentation of the society through violence. For instance, his portraiture of Chief Kuti is a deliberate attempt to expose the social atrophy that characterizes Nigeria political landscape and the society in general where greed and avarice define social relations. Set in the 1960s political experience in Nigeria, *A Restless Run of Locusts* captures the political turbulence of the 1963-1966 First Republic elections where the political gladiators of the time heat up the polity. Froth with electoral malpractices of different shades, the outcome of the First Republic elections compelled politicians to mobilize their supporters to contest the results by engaging in all forms of violence, arson, kidnapping and murder (Olowojulu, *et al* 2019). The playwright satirizes the political class and its knack for greed and corruption coupled with the need to discourage the political philosophy of 'do or die' in politics.

Studies abound generally on political violence and specifically the consequences of electoral violence in Nigeria which more often than not manifest in intimidation of political opponents, arson, murder and kidnapping (Kurf 1983, Akande 1985). Ajidahun (2019) explores *A Restless Run of Locusts* from the angle of political satire to expose the greed, corruption and manipulation of the political process by Nigerian politicians. However, while Ajidahun concerns himself with political satire of the political class, this study focuses on the effects of political violence as one of the factors against women participation in the political process in Nigeria. Through close reading of the text, the study

### Women and Political Violence in Nigeria: A Reflection

Nigerian politics is known to have been violent-prone from independence till date. It can well be said that politics and violence are Siamese twin considering the level of violence associated with all the processes of election from voter's registration, to campaign and the actual voting process. Politicians give the impression that politics in Nigeria is designed by and for men to the exclusion of women who are also very important members of the society. From independence till recent time, women have been victims of political violence in Nigeria and this has been attributed to the way political parties are structured to allow only the moneybags with financial wherewithal emerge as parties' flag-bearers.

Women have not fared better in terms of representation both in military and civilian regimes in Nigeria. In most cases, women have had to pay the ultimate price throughout the reign of terror and brigandage that characterized conservative military rules in Nigeria. As women and mothers, they have been at the receiving end of the various political violence that characterized the struggle to wrest the country from the strangulating hold of military juntas since the military coup of 1966 that terminated the democratic government of the First Republic. Along their men counter parts, women suffered different degree of exclusion and right abuses in Nigerian quest for a democratic government. For instance, on September 2, 1995, Chief (Mrs.) Kuye, President of the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) got her passport seized at Murtala Mohammed Airport on her way to China to attend the 4<sup>th</sup> Women Conference in Beijing, Mrs. Bilikisu Yusuf, former Editor of the defunct *Tell* Magazine got the same treatment in the hands of the security operatives- the SSS, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, the wife of the late Chief M.K.O Abiola, the acclaimed winner of 1993 presidential election was murdered in cold blood as she continued to mobilize Nigerians in the quest for an enduring democracy. The examples above are proofs to the fact that women have also contributed immensely in all spheres to the entrenchment of democratic culture in Nigeria. However, they have not been adequately

integrated into the political system, rather the political process has been deliberately made violent prone and complicated in a way that excludes women.

This probably explains why women are rarely seen in the council of decision makers in their societies. Again, if contemporary societies are male-dominated, it stands to reason then that women are also subordinated in the process of choosing who becomes their leaders as men manipulate the political process. The truth is that the political terrain in the country has for a long time been trodden by men who see acquisition of power as a matter of do or die. These are men who see leadership position as an end in itself and would do anything including indulging in violent conflict and even murdering their political opponents to secure power. In the process, they turn women and children to refugees and beggars in a conflict negotiated on their behalf. This is a product of the insignificant role women play in the political process of their countries.

It stands to reason from the American women Declaration that the state of violence in the political system, especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular is a direct result of the significant role assigned to women in the process of nation-building and democracy. There is no doubt the fact that women have been schemed out of the political process in Nigeria due to factors ranging from violence associated with politics and financial burden it places on participants. This domination actually stems from the societal construction of women as second class citizens and the way the society is perceived as that under the firm control of men. This perception arrogates a lot of power and patriarchal privileges to men in such a way that the social space where men and women interact is unapologetically described as 'men's world.' The social construction, of course, mediated by men assigns roles to women according to the cultural codes of the social environment both boys and girls are socialized. Adichie (2014) posits that

So in a literal way, men rule the world. This made sense—a thousand years ago. Because human beings lived in a world in which physical strength was the most important attribute for

survival; the physically stronger person was more likely to lead. And men in general are physically stronger p.13

Gender politics especially as it concerns the role of women in the way society is organized becomes robust when issues of violence, patriarchal policies and other privileges skewed against women are factored into the social system that construct them. Little wonder Adichie insists “Gender is not an easy conversation to have. It makes people uncomfortable, sometimes even irritable. Both men and women are resistant to talk about gender or quick to dismiss the problem of gender” p.40. Women must be given a reorientation to position themselves as indispensable co-drivers of the political system in order to free them from the second fiddle mentality the socialization process has taught them. Again, women must break loose from the social system that views their participation in active politics and public life as a rebellion against the status quo.

### Conceptual Framework

The study is hinged on Cultural Materialism which combines the features of Marxist feminist approach. This theory believes that certain elements in the society such as technology, economy, language, gender and the landscape where these cultural materials are produced, ultimately shape and influence cultural beliefs and practices in such social milieu (Marvin 2001). These cultural beliefs and practices are therefore shaped by certain conditions and compelling needs to address some challenges brought about either by social construction or structural imbalances in the society. Cultural Materialism probes into the elements that contribute to the way the society is structured and organized historically and culturally. The manifestations of structural imbalances in human relations, this time between the rich and the poor, on the one hand and the oppressed and the oppressor on the other, coupled with the fact that these two opposing classes are gender-based make the choice of Cultural Materialism apt for this study. However, not much energy will be dissipated on the totality of the framework but the imbalance between genders that gives room for a social structure skewed

against women.

Cultural Materialism is linked both in terms of features and nomenclature to the British Raymond Williams. He is said to have invented the term 'structures of feeling,' carried with meanings and values as they are lived and felt. According to him, the cultural and social contexts in which cultural materials and practices are produced and consumed are very important in understanding and analyzing ideas in any socio-cultural milieu (1958). Structures of feeling are often antagonistic both to explicit systems of values and to the dominant ideologies within a society. These notions are characteristically based on literature, and they oppose the status quo. Due to its disposition to lived experience, Cultural Materialism is much more optimistic about the possibility of change and is willing to evolve using the past to 'read' the present, revealing the politics of our own society by what we come to emphasize or suppress of the past.

Cultural Materialism compels critics to do an in-depth analysis of literary texts in such a way as to 'recover its histories'. The recovery of its histories reveals the context of exploitation from which the literary text emerged. Apart from the use of the combination of Marxist and Feminist approaches, Cultural Materialism tends to employ the technique of close reading and textual analysis.

The application of Marxist-Feminist ideals as an integral part of Cultural Materialism for this study stems from sociological perspective to Feminism as championed by outspoken feminist like Virginia Woolf who believes that the imbalance between sexes must be resisted. According to Dobie (2009)

They assume that the economic system is at the root of the inequitable relationship and thus attack both the economic and the social exploitation of women. They charge that women are oppressed by a group that consciously works to hold them down through its ideology. p.116

Cultural Materialism is also in tune with Marxist's “Material Circumstances” which is the organic condition underlying the society. That is to understand social events, it is important for us

to understand the material circumstances and historical situation in which they occur. For instance, in Osofisan's *A Restless Run of Locusts*, the grasp of the material circumstances in the particular social milieu will shed light on what informs Chief Kuti's desperation to win in the election at all costs.

### **Electoral violence and Impacts on Women in Nigeria**

Discourse on electoral violence and its effects on women will not be complete without an understanding of violence generally and political violence in particular. Violence has been defined as any unlawful act or behavior capable of inflicting injury or harm on the people. Afolabi (2002:1) defined violence as:

...Any unlawful act that can cause physical, psychological or emotional harm or damage to the body, property or the psyche. It is any form of behavior, attitude or action that is capable of inflicting physical or psychological injury on people. The actions include fighting, beating other people, rioting, destruction of lives and property, war and conflict with the capacity to disrupt peace and cohesion.p.1

It is important to make a distinction between political violence and electoral violence in any social setting. In making a distinction between electoral violence and political violence Patrick (2019) categorizes political violence as a broader term that involves any form of violence targeted at women because of political affiliation, political activities or because they are contesting election. Political violence, he argues, “subsists in different kinds of political systems such as republican, military, monarchy, presidential, parliamentary, unitary, federal, and confederal government.” p.204 whereas “electoral violence is a limited aspect of political violence which usually occurs before, during or after periodic elections are conducted p.205. According to Patrick (2019) citing Ogundiya and Bada (2007) “electoral violence includes violent or destruction of electoral materials, assassination, political

thuggery, abduction, arson, murder, kidnapping, looting, riots inter and intra party violent clashes” p.204. It must be stated, however, that both political violence and electoral violence are used interchangeably ostensibly because the two terms are like two sides of the same coin considering the fact that they have the potential to discourage women from participating in politics.

By extension, any form of violence motivated by politics can therefore be termed political violence which may also include violent activities either before, during or after electioneering process. It is, therefore, safe to say that any politically motivated violence can be termed political/electoral violence in as much as it has to do with violence against man or woman because of their political involvement in their social milieu. Iyayi (2003)'s definition of political violence covers integral parts of electoral violence to show how thin the line that separates them is thus:

Actions and behaviours by political actors or processors, systems and ideologies established and applied by political actors which are designed to deny justice and maintain subordination for other political actors in the situation.p.11

It can be deduced from the definition above that any behavior, attitude or action taken that helps to manipulate or truncate the political process can be termed political violence.

A critical appraisal of the instances of political violence such as inducement, intimidation, giving political leadership to the highest bidder, manipulating the process, ballot box snatching, threat to life and kidnapping will reveal the character and forms of political violence as covering economic, legal and structural spheres. It, therefore, covers events before, during and after electoral process that have to do with the manipulation of the process on the ground of social, economic, legal and structural considerations. It stands to reason that if anyone of the above instances of political violence occurs before, during or after an electoral process, it can be termed electoral violence. This is so because electoral violence is almost synonymous with

political violence.

A premise must be set here as regards the impact of electoral violence on both male and female members of the society. The argument has always been that men are also affected by the negative outcomes of electoral violence but the truth of the matter is that women are more vulnerable because of the way society is structured. In fact, it will not be out of place to say that most of the instances of electoral violence that affect the society collectively, make the female a victim more than her male counterpart because of the patriarchal social setting that manipulates the system and the process.

It can be emphatically stated that electoral violence affects women directly or indirectly. This involves all manners of challenges they face in the hands of political actor such as opponents in other political parties, within the party structure or some criminal gangs poised at wreaking havoc for the purpose of altering election results, creating chaos by physically and psychologically assaulting, kidnapping or murdering women in order to prevent them and their supporters from voting or being voted for (Krook and Sanin 2016). Albright (2016) while giving awareness about various forms of violence women are exposed to highlights physical assault, sexual and psychological violence as some of the challenges that make the political turf very toxic for women and contends that it is wrong for women to participate in politics at the risk of their lives. A woman becomes the direct victim of electoral violence when such violence is committed physically or psychologically against her, her sex or class. For instance, when a female aspirant is schemed out of the political process, she becomes a direct victim of such manipulation. Again, victims may be members of the women's immediate family, the husband, children, mother, father, sibling or the woman becoming a victim because her husband is contesting election or a girl undergoing physical or psychological trauma because her father is contesting election. This is the nature of electoral violence suffered by Mrs. Kutu and Iyabo, Chief Kutu's wife and daughter respectively. The woman becomes a widow and the daughter fatherless and together they mourn the death of their bread winner who commits suicide.

So, any form of intimidation and harassment suffered by the woman in the process of putting in place an electoral process either in a democracy or transition from military regime to a democratic government also make her a victim of electoral violence. This reminds of the rights of women under the Babangida's endless transition to democracy. Babangida transition's civil rule decree no 27 of 1989 tactically proscribed the formation of women wings in the two prominent political parties (SDP and NRC). Of course, this stifled the political ambition of most women who vied for elective offices. As a matter of fact, none of the seven women that aspired to the governorship position in 1991 won their party's nomination. Of all the political parties that ran for election at the 2015 presidential election, only KOWA has a woman, Professor Sonaya, as presidential candidate. This comes about because political positions are known to be given to the highest bidders, especially the moneybags in the political parties.

Women become direct victims of electoral violence when physically assaulted, killed or labeled. During the First Republic, Hajia Gambo Sawaba and Ladi Shehu, the first generation of NP made their supporters pay dearly for their political leanings, for her participation in politics. Hajia Gambo Sawaba was labeled a prostitute by government officials, publicly flogged, had her hair shaved off with a broken bottle, jailed more than sixteen times and at a point expelled from the city of Kano by the Emir of Kano. Women were violated, vilified and subdued following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election claimed to have been won by the late Alhaji Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola. The violence that attended the annulment gave rise to state organized violence against protesters, male, female and children, when on July 6, 1993 soldiers took over the streets of Lagos. The post-election crises led to the victimization of many women among whom were Mrs. Chris Anyanwu, publisher of *TSM Magazine* who was arrested and tortured by the Abacha junta. So also was Mrs. Olorunyomi, wife of Dapo Olorunyomi, journalist and co-founder of (ICNI.), publishers of *TEMPO* and *The News* Magazines harassed and put under surveillance by security operatives in order to secure the arrest of her husband. On the

4th of June 1996, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola was murdered in cold blood near Seven Up depot, Ikeja, Lagos for her persistence in actualizing the mandate given to her husband at June 12, 1993 presidential election.

In the 2003 general elections, many women became victims of political assassination because of party affiliation. For instance, on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 2002, Janet Olapade, a prominent PDP leader was clubbed to death by youths for preventing them from pasting the posters of a chairmanship candidate on the wall of her house. The same ugly fate also befell Mrs. Emily Omope (a.k.a. Mrs. Thatcher). On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2003, Omope, a member of AD, died on this fateful day from the acid poured on her in December 2002.

In recent times, especially from the 2015 to 2023 gubernatorial and presidential elections, the heavy presence of security operatives, the combined forces of soldiers and the police gave a notion of militarized electoral environment. This was responsible for the low turnout of people, especially women at the polls. Apart from being direct victims of electoral violence, women can also be indirectly affected as wives or daughters of victims of political assassinations. For instance, when a political actor is murdered, his wife becomes a widow left alone to shoulder the responsibilities of providing for the family. At times, women are manipulated by politicians to go on the rampage against a ruling government for selfish reasons, in the end they become victims of police brutality.

Women are also unnecessarily exposed to danger by their politician husbands who in the face of serious political chaos or threat to life must have gone into hiding leaving the wife and children at the mercy of thugs and assassins. For many years, women have been victims of money politics and the new warped political ideology tagged "Stomach Infrastructure" as a result of poverty and illiteracy. In order to make women vote against their conscience and future, politicians hire them with food stuff and stipends as was the case with some political bigwigs in Kwara, Oyo and recently in Ekiti with Governor Ayodele Fayose, who actually invented the stomach infrastructure mantra. This in itself is a form of electoral violence made possible by poverty and lack weaponized to cow women,

since not many can resist such inducement in the face of hunger.

### **Electoral Violence and the Plight of Women in Osofisan's *A Restless Run of Locusts***

Osofisan as a playwright tries to respond to the call to African artists to demonstrate commitment to the people and the growth of the continent in *A Restless Run of Locusts*. Nigerian politicians are exposed as mere locusts devouring the Nigerian state and her people. Using Chief Kuti, Osofisan portrays Nigerian politicians as greedy and power drunk. He exposes their bid to get power at all costs at the expense of the poor masses including his wife, Mrs. Kuti and Iyabo, his daughter. Chief Kuti becomes so desperate about getting power at all costs that he cares less what becomes of them. No wonder, when Mrs. Kuti asks what will happen if he loses the election, he says victory must come at all costs;

**Mrs. Kuti:** And what if you lose?

**Chief Kuti:** The stakes are too high, I must win and at all costs.

By any means p.12

Through Chief Kuti, one gets to know the mind-set of a typical politician who cares less about his wife and daughter but rather commits all his life savings into the game of politics with the hope of getting his money back if he wins the election. The truth of the matter is that while Chief Kuti is busy pumping his entire savings into the election, including paying assassins (thugs) to kill his political opponent, Mrs. Kuti and Iyabo, her daughter are going through psychological unrest. Mrs. Kuti becomes uncomfortable with the thugs that frequent their home and the rate at which Chief Kuti spends money on the election. She becomes curious because she knows the consequences of a failed election bid on the welfare of the family. Of course, Chief Kuti does not mince words:

**Chief Kuti:** Where did you think I got the money for all those winnings and dining? For the numerous thugs, for supporters. To bribe this man or that man. You didn't think I stole it, did you? p.16

Chief Kuti intimidates the woman when she tries

to probe further into his financial recklessness and the source of the money he uses to finance the election;

**Mrs. Kuti:** But I thought the party.....

**Chief Kuti:** (Apparently offended). The party is but a group of swindlers and bankrupts like me, all fighting to grab something for themselves. Do you think the party mints money? p.17

**Mrs. Kuti:** So you took our money and spent it. The money we saved painfully over so many years for our children. To build them a home. To feed and clothe them. To educate them. Now you have gone and spent it! pp16-17

It is obvious from the dialogue above that Mrs. Kuti is more pained about her husband's decision to spend the family savings on an election that does not guarantee victory than Chief Kuti himself who even claims the money "...was not even enough. I've had to borrow more" p.17.

As a result of partisan politics, Chief Michael Kuti subjects his daughter, Iyabo to a harrowing experience because she falls in love with Sanda Adeyemi, younger brother to his political rival, Kunle Adeniyi. When Chief Kuti hears that Iyabo carries in her womb Sanda's baby, he feels like killing her.

In his desperate bid to win at all costs, Chief Kuti kidnaps Tunde Adeniyi his political rival so he can go to the polls unopposed. The desperation becomes necessary because of the huge campaign money he borrowed from the bank. However, events take a dramatic turn for Chief Kuti when Sanda Adeyemi, his daughter's lover, makes himself available to replace his brother in an electoral contest against him, Chief Kuti renews his antagonism against Sanda, his new political rival and husband to his daughter, Iyabo, who is already pregnant. Iyabo is left without a choice in that circumstance than to support Sanda's bid against her father. She becomes traumatized by the numerous atrocities her father committed against political rivals including the man whose

baby she carries in her womb. Iyabo is left with no choice than to confront her father who strikes her for standing against him and her audacity to support his political enemies. She dares her father:

**Chief Kuti:** Go now or I'll---  
(*Moves, threatening, towards her*)

**Iyabo:** (*No flinching.*) Strike, father! I am no longer afraid of you! Strike, chief! That's all you know! That's all you can do! Strike! Strike! As apes and wild gorillas do! Beasts with no sense or feeling, but only animal instincts! Strike, and murder me too, as you did HIM! Kill me, mur-ur-derer! (*Strikes her down in fury.*) p.18

Mrs. Kutibecomes a victim of the electoral violence in many respects. Firstly, she lives under the fate of a reprisal attack because of the desperation of her husband who engages the thugs to kidnap political rival. She finds it difficult to believe that her husband could be so desperate to kill a political rival. She says "So it's true! Michael, my husband! p.18. The psychological torture becomes deeper when Chief Kuti confesses to have carried out the dastardly act of kidnapping his political rival. He says:

**Chief Kuti:** (*Breaking out in frenzy*) All right, I did it! It is true! A mere boy! A stripling born only yesterday. A mere kid whose father cannot beat his chest where men are speaking! Whose father cannot stand in the assembly of the elders! Whose father's house is shown to strangers with the left hand! That boy, that nobody dares to stand in my way pp.18-19.

Mrs. Kuti's grief is beyond words having lost her husband to the tense political atmosphere that pervades the landscape and the entanglement of her daughter, Iyabo with her husband's political enemies. She likens her sorrowful look to "a night after a storm"p.27 and according to her "That's



what grief does to a woman” p.27. She captures her grief more succinctly:

Mrs. Kuti: Of course, I mean the supreme grief. The sorrow beyond which nothing can go. When one has lost so much that there is nothing left to lose p.27

Though grieved beyond expression, Mrs. Kuti elects to liberate herself from the attendant sorrow of her husband's demise. She takes the loss of her husband in her stride as she rather consoles herself with the reality of the fact that Chief Kuti also shed innocent blood. As Sanda attempts to commiserate with her, she says:

**Mrs. Kuti:** No need to be. He shed blood, and blood has caught up with him. A life for a life. (*Suddenly breaking down.*) Oh how I loved him! How I loved what he used to be, before politics made such a stranger of him! (*Controls herself.*) Well, that's gone now. Let no one mourn for him. Let no man stoop to pat his fallen head. We can bury our dead ourselves...only take care, you! Let his death serve as a warning to you! p.28

Secondly, when Chief Kuti fails to pay the bank for the money squandered on the election, his wife also shares in the trauma. Again, when Chief Kuti commits suicide having lost the election, unable to pay the bank and unable to stop Sanda from marrying his daughter, he leaves the responsibilities of caring and providing for the family to his wife now a widow. Iyabo, now fatherless, has to go through the emotional trauma of coping with the man whose baby she is carrying and the one who drives his father to committing suicide. Mrs. Kuti and her daughter, Iyabo suffer indescribable psychological pains as a result of Chief Kuti's reckless and desperate bid to get power at all costs. As the two women grieve the death of their beloved husbands lost to electioneering violence, Mrs. Kuti's self-consolation underscores the pains that unite the duo when she says “I promise..Come, dry your tears...sit here at my feet, and let me stroke your

hair. Two women who have lost their husbands. One to console the other. Me to strike your hair, till it is my turn to cry, and your turn to soothe me” p.36. The two women are united in sorrow as victims of electoral violence not because they vied for elective positions but by the reason of their relationship with Chief Kuti as wife and daughter.

### Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings revealed that electoral violence which is an integral part of broader political violence can be physical and psychological. It was also discovered that women could be victims of electoral violence not because they contested election but by reason of their relationship with a political gladiator. Again, the victims were not physically assaulted but suffered psychological trauma due to the death of their bread winner who committed suicide for losing all his investments in the election. The study showed that women can be victims of electoral violence by default and would be left behind to bear the agony of the death of their loved ones lost to political violence. In conclusion, electoral violence is, no doubt, an important aspect of Nigerian political reality that cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand. Devoid of social cohesion, electoral violence, in Nigerian political parlance is driven by myopic political vision, desperation and selfishness. It constitutes a random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault coupled with blackmail, destruction of property and assassination. When located within the context of Nigerian political space and textual analysis, electoral violence is understood as any act of gender-based electioneering violence directed at women as a result of their aspirations to seek political office, their link to political activities or the right to vote and to be voted for. Nigerian women have been victims of some if not all of the above kinds of electoral violence in the First Republic, through the military-mediated transition programmes and several other truncated electoral processes to the recently concluded 2023 elections in Nigeria.

It is, therefore, recommended that government should create environment that will

foster an unhindered women participation in the electoral process. Political parties should rise above socio-culturally ascribed roles to women as dancers and cooks for the parties which relegate them to the position of back benchers instead of equals in the political structure of the parties. At the primary level, party structure should ensure a gender balance that will encourage women to be flag-bearers of their political parties, not sold to the highest bidders. Government should provide legislative framework that will criminalize electoral violence of any kind so that offenders should be punished to serve as deterrent to others. Policies should be put in place by the government through the instrumentality of the party structure to ensure that family members of politicians assassinated or attacked during elections are adequately protected and compensated. Political parties must also have internal structure that will deal quickly and effectively with any post-election conflict capable of igniting crisis in the overall interest of the nation.

Money politics, inducement and the ideology of 'stomach infrastructure' should be discouraged in the polity. Women should be empowered, educated and sensitized so as to be able to resist inducement or intimidation by politicians that will make them vote against the candidate of their choice.

Finally, electoral body (INEC) should be strengthened and funded in order to sustain the gains of 2023 technologically-driven voting system so as to continue to make the votes of the electorate count.

## References

- Adiche, C. N. (2018). *We Should All Be Feminists*. Lagos. Narrative Landscape Press.
- Afolabi, S. (2002). "Electoral Violence and the Democratization Process. The Nigerian Experience, paper presented at a workshop organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) on Political violence and Democratization Process."
- Albright, M. A. (2016). "Hidden Reality: Violence against Women in Politics", available at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/07/opinion/madelaine-albright-protect-women-in-politics/> (Accessed on: October, 2024).
- Bawa, A. B. (2015). "Engineering Democratization: The Changing Political Image of Women in Post-colonial Nigeria," in Ajayi, S. & J.K Ayantayo, (Eds) *Essay in Memory of Professor Dorcas Olubanke Akintunde*, Ibadan, John Archers (Publishers) Limited. pp.259-264..
- Dobie, A. (2009). *Theory into practice: An introduction to literary criticism*. Boston. Wadworth Gengage Learning.
- Iyayi, F. (2003). "Reducing the Incidence of Political Violence." In Bash (Ed.) *Electoral violence in Nigeria: Issues and perspectives*, Lagos Frankad Publishers. pp. 1-21
- Krook, L. M. and Sanin, J. R. (2016). "Violence against women in politics: A defense of the concept." *Politica y Gobierno* pp.459-490.
- Harris, M. (2001). *The rise of anthropological theory: A history of culture*. AltaMira Press.
- Ogundiya, I. & Bada, T. K. (2007). "Electoral violence and prospects of democratic consolidation in Nigeria." In Jega, Attahiru & Ibeanu, Okechukwu (Eds.) *Elections in and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*. NPSA. pp.245-264.
- Olasupo, B. (2003). *Electoral violence in Nigeria: Issues and perspectives*. Lagos Frankad Publishers.
- Osofisan, F. (1975). *A Restless Run of Locusts*. Ibadan Onibonoje Press & Books Industries.
- Parpart, J. (1989). *Women and development in Africa: Comparative perspective*. Lanham, University Press.
- Patrick, P. (2019). "Poverty and electoral violence in Nigeria's fourth republic: The way forward." *The Oye Journal of Arts* (1), 2&2, pp.202-215.

Piscopo, J. M. (2016). State capacity, criminal justice, and political rights: Rethinking violence against women in politics.” *Politica y Gobierno*, xxiii (2), pp.471-492.

William, M. A. (2020). “Yoruba women in politics and society since the pre-colonial era.” In Toyin Falola & Dipo Olubomehin (Eds.) *Yoruba Nation and Politics Since the Nineteenth Century*. Austin. Pan-African University Press.

Williams, R. (1958). *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*. London: Chatto & Winus.