NAME; OKODUWA EROMOSELE ANTHONY

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**WHAT IS GLASS CEILING?**

"A glass ceiling is a political term used to describe the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements."

Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995

Twenty years ago, the glass ceiling was considered to be the reason why the arenas of power were dominated by men. The concept stresses out the impossibility of women to advance on the scale of professions higher than they already have, claiming that women do not lack ambition or strong will, but they are kept from doing so by invisible obstacles (Lorber, 1994). The glass ceiling is described as ‘those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management level positions’ (Martin, 1991, apud. Lorber, 1994, 227). Invisible and impossible to overcome, it is not found only at the top of the pyramid, but also in middle-management and where minorities are concerned (people of color, people with disabilities). The artificial barriers are stereotypes, media related issues, informal boundaries. Two decades later, we wish to observe the evolution of the glass ceiling hoping to gain further insight on the women and positions of power emphasizing the role of women in contemporary politics. In order to do so, we will analyze the role of the media in portraying the women that occupy power-related position. Studies (Gidengil, 2003) reveal that the media plays a significant part in perpetuating stereotypes and setting standards for (women) candidates. Another issue that we consider to be relevant for this matter is the way the public perceives the women in the positions of power. Apart from the media influence, researchers (Doland, 2007, Galligan, 2007) believe that we should not deny the relevance of the gender affinity effect – and we will see the arguments and the counter arguments of using this type of explanation. The issue of gender differentiation in politics has not been of interest to scholars until early 80’s (Griffiths, 1999, 349). The role of women in the areas associated with power and prestige were significant only to some historians who underlined that, on the scene of history, women were most likely playing second roles. It was the feminist movement that drew attention that scientist should look more into this matter. Therefore, feminist researchers (Jean Bethke Elshtain, Cynthia Enloe, Judith Lorber, to name a few) set about to build up a new type of paradigm, where critics pointed out the flaws of the state and politics, which undermined gender equality in the favor of men. If politics, foreign affairs and leadership were male-related areas, then women were associated with the private, personal sphere of life, like the family. Elshtain (1987) stresses out the relationship between the role of women in public and personal areas. The stereotypes draw us to believe that there is no successful way in joining the two spheres. The author proves that the way men and women think about themselves has direct consequences on the way men and women act in matters concerning politics, so it is not only an issue regarding the public, but also regarding the way oneself understands his or her role. Politics has a male-related meaning and, as a result, it remains the prerogative of men, states the author. The public domain is ruled by men, while the private, personal sphere of life is mostly feminine. It appears to be a trend in common knowledge that women are first of all linked to their family and the people surrounding them, and secondly to their professions. Other analysis show that the social context favors mental exclusion of some specific categories of people (women in politics) and that there is a social control that induces people to reject alternatives (women should be wives of presidents, not presidents). The way we think is socially controlled by the pre-existent paradigms (Enloe, 1990 apud. Griffiths, 1999). The constantly changing social structure should enable us to see “beyond the horizon” and realize that there is more to reality that meets the eye.

**IS BREAKING THE GLASS POSSIBLE IN AFRICA?**

The African woman is still off reach in getting the glass broken. Between the kitchen and the boardroom is the glass ceiling that prevents her smooth ascension to positions of leadership. African women continue to be marginalized from being in leadership positions in organizations despite the massive efforts that have been made to achieve equality. The Africa Gender Equality Index of 2015 ranked the continent as having an average score of 54.1 out a possible 100 which is a visible pointer that the continent is making strides but gender parity and equal opportunities are still a far cry away. With numerous cultural barriers standing in the way of women’s ascension, the glass ceiling remains the present reality. African governments should do more to achieve a more equitable state of affairs. It is a shame that in Zimbabwe where there is a Gender Responsive Budget on paper, the Ministry of Women Affairs has never been in the top 10 of the government’s top prioritized ministries. This in itself is a reflection of the low levels of commitment that governments have towards achieving a gender blind society. This level of commitment is still lacking from many African countries where the concept of equality is still a political pawn that is used to gain votes and popularity during election time. The promises that are made to empower the girl child on grass root levels are not followed through and consequently, no one ever gets to see what that child could have potentially become had she received the tools she needed. In 2015, the General Election had just one female candidate and she voted for herself. This is to show that women are not fully rated by the male leaders in power, believing that they should stay in the kitchen. The President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari at some point made a controversial statement when he was asked if his wife should be referred to as “First Lady” he the said shockingly that “She belongs to the other room” and this provoked some activists in the country. Women in Africa are referred to as weaklings because the men feel that they are covered with excess emotions. Africa needs to start being serious about raising women to top decision making jobs. The African women in turn need to have a change of mindset and fight the “woman for a kitchen” mental syndrome that keeps holding them back. It is possible to have a perfect family and be successful all at once. Only weak men are intimidated by a woman’s success. In fact, it is imperative that everyone start appreciating the rise of the 21st century woman who can stand on her own two feet without anyone holding her hand. Gender equality as a movement should therefore be financed to educate people that women can and should also be successful.

**CHALLENGES OF GLASS CEILING**

**Equality in the workplace**

Society has come a long way in the race to gender equality, and yet there’s still more ground to cover. In fact, gender bias is deeply rooted and its effects are profound. Men, and even other women, may not even be aware that they are making decisions based on these biases.For example, ambition and assertiveness are qualities that are normal and even admirable in men. However, when women display these traits, it’s unfeminine and unappealing—as if appeal and attractiveness even have a place in succeeding at the top. And yet, these are realities women with senior roles face on a regular basis.These and a range of other stereotypes hold women back from leadership roles, further stretching the centuries-old gender disparity, especially in the continuing male-dominated industries, such as the energy industry in which there are no women CEOs.

**The burden of work-life balance**

Work-life balance, which is actually work-family balance, is also a major obstacle to women getting into senior roles and staying there. This work-family dilemma presents itself as if it’s just every woman’s obligation to bear. This is exactly the reason why, even in the top echelons of big companies, women are gently yet resolutely nudged off the leadership path more frequently than men. Add this to the fact that not every country in the world is generous in granting paid maternity leaves to mothers with guarantees that they can return to their previous jobs. More often than not, women feel out of touch after returning from maternity leaves, and this is largely due to lack of understanding in the workforce. Also, many women in leadership roles feel there’s a motherhood penalty against fair compensation and promotion, while at the same time a necessity to grapple for nannies and childcare services that are costly and not readily available.

**Getting support and building alliances**

All over the world, you’ll hear stories of women being put down and told they don’t belong at the table. They don’t receive support from their colleagues, especially in industries that are stubbornly male-dominated.According to an article by Fast Company, 47 percent of women surveyed in the United States believed that men have better access to career growth and professional development opportunities. In fact, women aren’t given enough high-budget and high-profile assignments that can help propel them to the C-Suite.

**The gender wage gap**

Studies from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Thomson Reuters Foundation shows that one in ten women who participated in the global survey said that pay is one of the most pressing issues they face. The global wage disparity between men and women is profound and persistent across all levels of the organization. According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR), women earn an average of only 66 percent of what men receive. And looking at the trends over the years, especially the slow progress towards pay equality, it would take 41 years for women to finally take home the same pay men do. For women of color, however, the progress is much slower.In fact, many women would have to study more, earn more MBAs and/or have more experience if they want to receive the same amount as men in the same positions doing the exact same things. This may also be due to the fact that women are scrutinized based on what they have already delivered to the table, what results they have produced. Meanwhile, men are judged based on their potential.

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