NAME: AKERELOWO FAUZZIYAT OMOBOLANLE

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COURSE TITLE: gender studies in international relations.

ASSIGNMENT TITLE:

**What is glass ceiling**? IS BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING POSSIBLE IN AFRICA AND WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES.

ANSWER

**What is glass ceiling**?

A glass ceiling is a metaphor used to represent an invisible barrier that keeps a given demographic (typically applied to minorities) from rising beyond a certain level in a hierarchy.

The metaphor was first coined by feminist in reference to barriers in the careers of high-achieving women. In the US, the concept is sometimes extended to refer to obstacles hindering the advancement of minority women, as well as minority men. Minority women often find the most difficulty in "breaking the glass ceiling" because they lie at the intersection of two historically marginalized groups: women and people of color. East Asian and East Asian American news outlets have coined the term "bamboo ceiling" to refer to the obstacles that all East Asian Americans face in advancing their careers. Similarly, a set of invisible obstacles posed against refugees' efforts to workforce integration is coined "canvas ceiling.

A glass ceiling" represents a barrier that prohibits women from advancing toward the top of a hierarchical corporation. Women in the workforce are faced with "the glass ceiling." Those women are prevented from receiving promotion, especially to the executive rankings, within their corporation. Within the last twenty years, the women who are becoming more involved and pertinent in industries and organizations have rarely been in the executive ranks. Women in most corporations encompass below five percent of board of directors and corporate officer positions. The United States Federal Glass Ceiling Commission defines the glass ceiling as "the unseen, yet unbreakable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements.

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

The African woman has always been so close yet so far away from her moment of glory. 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 attaining leadership positions in organizations despite the numerous 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 countries like Liberia have managed to sustainably elevate their women with an estimated 30% of companies being led by a female Chief Executive. More so, Ellen Johnson-Sir leaf, the country’s President rewrote world history by becoming the first female President in Africa. Malawi’s Joyce Banda and Central African Republic’s Catherine Samba followed soon after to further cement the rise of the modern woman in Africa. It is easy to then assume that these are milestones that prove equality is now a reality yet there are 52 countries in Africa and only three have had female heads of state. It is better than nothing but it is also proof that the society is not yet as fair and as equal as it should be. In actual facts, if the society was where it should be, female presidents would not make the news. People still make noise because it is a monumental feat considering the highly patriarchal African landscape.

The greatest battles the African woman has had to fight are those against widely held convictions that have always relegated her to a second class citizen whose forte is the kitchen. Gender equality is still some sort of favor men think they are doing women. A case in point is Zimbabwe’s new constitution which provides for a mandatory quota of 30% women representation in the Parliament and Senate. It seems like a step in the right direction as women currently make up 35% Zimbabwe’s two law-making houses.

However, NETSAI MUSHONGA, the national coordinator of the Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe noted that in the last elections, “It was not unusual for women to be told ‘we gave you 60 seats, what more do you want?’” This steals the thunder from what are supposed to be positive steps as it confirms the assertion that men still think they are doing women favors by implementing policies that promote equality. The stark reality is that men are doing the least possible towards equality since these are after all just favors.

Another set-back in the African journey towards women empowerment has been cultural indoctrination. Women are taught from a tender age that success scares men away and they might not have families if they are successful. Men who are threatened by women’s success further perpetuate this belief. Marriage is essentially a luxury that ironically only the unsuccessful woman can afford. Many ladies are being pushed to give up on their lofty dreams of grandeur. The pressure cannot be underestimated as many girls are taught to value marital success over all else and they are falsely made to believe successful women do not get married. {The African Exponent Weekly}

With the above point, I conclude that breaking glass ceiling in Africa is not yet possible because of some challenges.

**WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF BREAKING GLASS CEILING?**

**ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS**: Some argue that the glass ceiling is more of a societal blocker than an individual barrier. Still others argue that corporate culture or organizational barriers are to blame (T&D, 2006). Organizational barriers refer to the o organizational-level factors that affect the differential hiring and promotion of men and women. While these barriers vary significantly from organization to organization, they can create a huge roadblock preventing women from advancement to top management. (Baker, 2003)

Selection Process: One of the most common and well known barriers to career advancement is that of the selection process used by most companies. As indicated previously, the pool of women that are qualified for promotion to executive positions is quite small and therefore women simply cannot be promoted. According to Burke and Nelson (2000), 82% of firms stated that lack of general management skills and line experience was a major contributing factor in their decisions not to promote women. However, another study finds some firms have a large pool of qualified women and simply do not consider them for the position (Burke, et al., 2000). Another rationale is that existing top management positions are held by men who tend to promote other men who are similar to themselves (VAN VIANEN & FISCHER, 2002).

**WORK PLACE RELATIONSHIPS**: Another organizational barrier is the relationships many women have with their mentors, bosses, and female co-workers. Most employees tend to bond through similar interests. Since there tend to be few executive women; many women are unab*le to find a female mentor*. Many people prefer to have mentors of the same gender because they tend to understand the challenges most commonly faced. Men do not face the same barriers, have the same family issues, and many times simply do not want to mentor a woman. The needs of women from their mentors also tend to differ from the needs of men. Many women claim to need more encouragement, an example to follow, and simply more tasks to complete. Male mentors tend to be resistant to mentor a woman because they perceive women as more emotional, not as skilled at problem-solving, and because of the risk of workplace sexual harassment issues (Hanson, 2008).

**GLOBALIZATION:** Globalization presents many new barriers for women. Senior level managers and top executives now have even more responsibility and higher expectations than before. Due to the time pressures and relocations of many businesses, top executives have had to move to new towns, cities, and countries. This presents a large barrier for many women with families and a working spouse or significant other (WELLINGTON, KROPG, & GERKOVICH, 2003).

**INTERNAL MOTIVATION**:Many senior executive and top management claim that women simply do not have a desire to excel in their current job positions. However, a recent study indicated that 55% of women not in management positions desire to be in the top most levels of their organizations. ANNIS (2008) finds many women lose their drive to excel due to the many obstacles met along the path of becoming a manager. These obstacles include discrimination, stereotyping,prejudice, family demands and lack of opportunities (Emory, 2008).

**LIFE STYLES CONFLICT**:For many women, in addition to the roles they hold in their companies, they remain the primary caretakers for their families (HUGHES GINNETT & CURPHY, 2009). As the time constraints and demands of a job become more important upon, promotion forces many women to choose between family and career. According to Jack and Suzy Welch (2007), very few women CEOs and women executives have children due to the affect it would have on their career. Conversely, many women have voluntarily left their jobs due to family decisions (Baxter, 2000; Wallac***e, 2008)***

#### STEREOTYPING AND LEADERSHIP STYLES: Past perceptions of leadership skills, competence, and assertiveness may hinder the ability of women to succeed in management. Many companies associate masculine characteristics with success and achievement. These include assertiveness, aggressiveness, and task-oriented leadership abilities (JOGULU & WOOD 2006; ENVICK, 2008). Other stereotypes of women include the expectation of being modest, quiet, selfless, and nurturing (EAGLY & CARL, 2003). These simple characteristics may be seen as non- executive material. Entities desire a leader who will execute, take criticism, and do what is best for the company at all cost (Nelson & Levesque 2007).

#### Leadership styles are closely associated with common perceptions and stereotypes of women leaders (Goff, 2005; Henderson, 2004). In early 1990 studies found that men emerged as task-oriented leaders more frequently than women who emerged as social leaders more frequently than men (MARRUJO & KLIENDER, 1992). Due to the demands of leadership positions, it became a socially accepted tendency for men to assume leadership because their task-oriented style was more widely accepted (RYAN & HASLAM 2007). As time moved on, the social leadership style of women was more accepted and valued in some circumstances (JOGULU & WOOD, 2006).

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