Name: Sokare Beulah

Course Code: IRD 318

Course Title: Gender Studies in International Relations

Matric No.: 18/SMS09/091

**Question: What is Glass Ceiling? Is Breaking the Glass Ceiling Possible in Africa and What are the Challenges?**

**What is Glass Ceiling?**

Simply put, a glass ceiling is an unacknowledged barrier to advancement in a profession, especially affecting women and members of minorities. It is a metaphor referring to an artificial barrier that prevents women and minorities from being promoted to managerial- and executive-level positions within an organization. "Glass ceiling" is a metaphor for the hard-to-see informal barriers that keep women from getting promotions, pay raises, and further opportunities. It is "glass" because it's not usually a visible barrier, and a woman may not be aware of its existence until she "hits" the barrier. In other words, it's not an explicit practice of discriminating against women — though specific policies, practices, and attitudes may exist that produce this barrier without the intention to discriminate. In essence, the phrase is used to describe the difficulties faced by women when trying to move to higher roles in a male-dominated hierarchy. The barriers are most often unwritten, meaning that women are more likely to be restricted from advancing through accepted norms and implicit biases rather than defined corporate policies.

The glass ceiling concept was first popularized in a 1986 Wall Street Journal article discussing the corporate hierarchy and how invisible barriers seemed to be preventing women from advancing in their careers past a certain level. In more recent years the analysis of the glass ceiling has expanded to include issues preventing not only women from moving up but also minorities.

**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.

However, the impact of women in this modern world cannot be overstated in the 21st century. Many African women have proven over the years that breaking the glass ceiling is truly possible in every aspect of the male-dominated workplace. Some examples of such African women are given below.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who is a Nigerian Feminist, Novelist, and Author, is known as a fierce campaigner for equal gender rights and women empowerment. Adichie has been involved in several political movements and campaigns against sexual violence and is the face of feminism for many Nigerian/African women and women all around the world.

Also, Bogolo Joy Kewenedo is currently the Minister of Investment, Trade, and Industry for Botswana. Her zest in translating policy into action and goal of improving the living conditions of her people made the new President of Botswana, Mokgweetsi Masisi, to appoint her to his cabinet. At the age of 31, she is celebrated as Africa’s youngest minister. Last year, she was appointed by the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres to serve as a member of the UN High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation.

Furthermore, Ilhan Omar is a 36-year old Somalian who lived at a refugee camp in Kenya for around 4 years. She is the first naturalized African and Somali-American elected to the United States Congress. Before her political position, she has been a fierce campaigner for affordable housing, healthcare, and a living wage. In 2017, she was one of the 46 women to feature in Time’s Magazine’s report, “Firsts: Women who are changing the world.”

Finally, Wanjira Mathai is the daughter of late Wangari Mathai, the famous Nobel Prize winner and environmentalist who spent her life campaigning for sustainable development, democracy, and peace. In the same vein, her daughter is well known for continuing her mother’s legacy and thus, as a board member of the Green Belt Movement, she recently campaigned to plant over 30 million trees. She is also a senior adviser at the World Resources Institute and for the Partnerships for Women’s Entrepreneurs in Renewables (wPOWER).

These are just a few of the numerous African women that have successfully fought to break the glass ceiling in their respective fields and are paving the way for other young women. So yes, breaking the glass ceiling is possible in Africa.

**What are the Challenges of Breaking the Glass Ceiling in Africa?**

However, the chance and ability of these and many other women to break the glass ceiling has not come without its challenges.

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 favour men think they are doing women.

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.

Even when women everywhere are breaking the glass ceiling in politics, their voices still go unheard and their contributions are too often side-lined. In many places women are still seen as incapable of taking on responsibility in what are perceived as male-oriented areas, such as finance, energy, economic development, climate change, foreign affairs, defence, trade and infrastructure. This is often the case in parliaments where women are given ‘women’s only’ portfolios or only allowed to sit in women committees and are being pushed away from the other committees because of their gender.

**Conclusion**

Africa needs to start being serious about the ascension of women to top decision making jobs. The African women in turn need to have a change of mind-set 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.

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