GENDER: PRIVILEGED WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

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Abstract

In contrast to the realist proposition of male-led states, military power and individual state interests which are all masculine ways of thinking, thereby giving less attention to the feminal gender in global politics. To understand the place of women in international diplomacy, therefore, necessitates a thorough appraisal of selected privileged women. Accordingly, this paper, takes an overview of the roles women have played in diplomatic rows between belligerent nations which have sometimes resulted to war or restoration of national interest. It then examines in detail the ideologies women introduces from their country home to their new marital nations, exercising a great degree of control in their political affairs. Finally, the paper attempts to contribute towards complementing feminist and constructivist perspectives on the relationship of power equality against the stereotype patriarch assumption of leadership in public roles. It concludes that to help make diplomatic history of the past more relevant and easily intelligible, the roles of women in societies dominated by the masculine gender should not be swept under the carpet even in contemporary times.

Key Words: Privileged women, International Diplomacy, Gender.

A. Introduction

Diplomacy, an art, tact or skill by which foreign relations are conducted and foreign policy is framed and implemented. Diplomacy which had evolved among peoples independently is observed to have been practiced in most of the primitive communities in all regions of the World. The basic issue in diplomacy is to enable people live with their neighbours, a practice that requires the accommodation of the interest of others which is equally universal. Diplomacy, a practice that involves the questions of war and peace and such matters as the conclusion of treaties, the making, maintenance and breaking of alliances, the establishment of boundaries, the development and protection of trade and the payment of tributes (Smith, 1976: 11).

The place of women in international diplomacy as it could not be ignored in ancient time so it should not be in contemporary times. Privileged women in high places had played very significant roles in international diplomacy which served the interest of their people, state and neighbours. Women of privileged position have also played very crucial roles in diplomatic rows between belligerent nations which have sometimes resulted to war. An example of such was the war between ancient Greece and Troy which broke out because of the actions of Prince Paris of Troy who eloped with Hellen the wife of one of the Kings of Greece (Barron, 1999: 108). This singular event extremely broke the diplomatic tire between Greece and Troy, resulting to the Trojan War that lasted for ten years leading to the final obliteration of Troy from the surface of the earth.

However, the evidence of women participation in international diplomacy is unhappily meagre. Thus, there were cases of women married off to Kings and chiefs to cement relationship between Kingdoms and Empires. For example, Marie Antoinette, the daughter of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria got married to the Boubou King Louis XVI. The union was to concretize the relationship between the Harshburgs of Austria and the Boubou ruling family of France (Hanes III, 1997: 471). Furthermore, to cement cordial relations between the Oyo and Dahomey, Ojigi of Oyo and Agaja of Dahomey each entered into marital union with Princess from the rival courts (Stride and Ifeka, 1971: 283). In this position, women were able to introduce ideas from their home states into their new marital states. They further learnt new ways of relations which they brought back to their own states whenever they visited.

Gender at this point refers to social attributes that are required or learned during
socialization and define activities, responsibilities and needs connected to being male or female. Such attributes are expressed as power, roles, resources and privileges of men and women. Thus, gender is a socially constructed identity through which roles are assigned at different levels which can differ according to culture. In recent years, historians and policy makers have come to realize the importance of women as capable contributors to events and development in the international arena. This realization came as a result of people coming to know that all humans are subject to some degree of forces, social, economic and political which limits participation in society. Both men and women are exposed to these limiting forces of different degrees (Ikpe, 2009: 20). However, within such limited conditions privileged women were able to exert greater or lesser degree of control over their lives and participated in international diplomacy. Privileged women had played significant roles in international diplomacy in societies dominated by patriarchy. A good example of such personality was Queen Nzinga of Matamba kingdom in present day Angola about 1581 to 1663, an heroic queen who withdrew from Ndongo under the Portuguese slave traders pressure, continued her resistance from Matamba after a lifetime of battles with the Portuguese whether by peaceful negotiation, by alliance with the Dutch or by wars of self defence (Onaolapo, 2009: 185).

Despite the Portuguese strategy of trying to seize political power from the African of Matamba. The Angolan state of Matamba which was founded around 1630 on the river Kwango was a direct reaction against the Portuguese presence in Angola. With Queen Nzinga at its head, Matamba forces tried to coordinate resistance against the Portuguese. However, Portugal gained the upper hand in 1648 and Matamba was isolated, but Matamba could not forever stand aside so long as it opposed trade with the Portuguese, she became an object of hostility from neighbouring African states which had compromised with Europeans and slave trading. Thereafter, in 1656 Queen Nzinga resumed business with the Portuguese, a major concession to the decision making role of Europeans within the Angolan economy was reached (Rodney, 2009: 93).

The fact that international diplomacy, like most functions of Government is an exclusive reserve of the male gender. Despite the dominance of the male gender in the international system, a few privileged women had sealed through the huddles to play significant roles in international diplomacy. In order to fully discuss the contribution of the female gender in international diplomacy, the essay focuses on a few privileged women who have left indelible marks in the international scene. Such ladies are Caroline Murat and Marie Louise in the struggle between France and Austria in Napoleonic Europe and the Countess de Castiglione in the making of the first King of United Italy. It concludes with prominent figures like Princess Kaiulani and Queen Liliuokalani of Hawaii and their roles in the annexation of Hawaii in 1893 by the United States of America and the role of Yaa Asantewaa in the struggle between the British and the Asante in the Gold Coast.

B. Caroline Murat and Archduess Marie Louise in the struggle between France and Austria in Napoleonic Europe

In 1793 Louis xvi and his wife, Marie Antoinette, the King and Queen of France were beheaded by the new administration put in place after the French Revolution. Marie Antoinette who happens be the daughter of Empress Marie Theresa of Austria and as a result of her execution the Austrians became sworn enemies of France (Greene, 2006: 230). By 1796, the Austrians invaded France in a bid to stall the spread of revolution into other parts of the European nations. In 1805, Napoleon Bonaparte defeated the Austrians at the battles of Ulm and Austerlitz. In the treaty that followed, he carved up the Austrian Empire by taking over its lands in Italy and Germany. His aim was to make Austria a weak and subordinate ally so as to build an ego in the courts of Europe since Austria was the centre piece of European diplomacy. As part of his plan, Napoleon Bonaparte made further advancement, requesting for a new Austrian ambassador to France.

However, a brilliant Austrian diplomat, Prince Klemens Von Metternich was assign for that job. Metternich who came from one of Europe’s most illustrious family, a staunch conservatives and a womanizer of a sort. The inclusion of a great personality like Metternich would help in his plan to make Austria a satellite state. Metternich, an outstanding national diplomat with all
its attributes tending to promote the national interest of his state sometimes make very attractive comments, even complementing Napoleon on his wisdom. Soon Napoleon began to crave Metternich’s presence and their discussions of European affairs became clearer as a close union between both was established. Taking advantage of Metternich’s love for women, Napoleon Bonaparte set up his sister, Caroline Murat to have an affair with Metternich (Greene, 2006: 169-170). He got from her a few piece of diplomatic gossip and she told Napoleon Bonaparte that Metternich had come to respect him. In turn she told Metternich that Napoleon was unhappy with his wife, Empress Josephine, who could not bear children and was considering divorce in 1809. Austria, seeking a payback for its humiliation at Austerlitz, declared war on France. The war was hard fought but the French were victorious and Napoleon Bonaparte imposed a humiliating settlement, annexing sections of the Austrian Empire. Austria’s military was dismantled, its government was over handed and Metternich was named foreign minister.

Several months later, the Austrian Emperor offered him his eldest daughter, Archduchess Marie Louise in marriage derived from the information leaked by Caroline Murat that Napoleon was considering divorce with Empress Josephine. Napoleon knew that the Austrians hated him but an alliance by marriage with Austria would be to his advantage of making Austria a satellite state. Thus, Napoleon happily accepted the offer, first divorcing Josephine and marrying Marie Louise in 1810. Napoleon’s marital union with Marie Louise made him a member of one of Europe’s most illustrious families and won a dynastic legitimacy which he had long been looking for. He became very happy with his new wife when she revealed a keen diplomatic interest and confided in her his place for an Empire in Europe. By 1812, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Russia and Metternich came to him with a request for the formation of an army of thirty thousand Austrian soldiers. Napoleon consented to that seeing no harm in that direction since he was allied with Austria by marriage. Months later when the Russian invasion failed Napoleon was forced to retreat. However, Metternich offered himself to mediate between France and the other European powers and being his in-law, Napoleon was not perturbed even if Austria’s role as a mediator would lead to her independent of French control. As negotiation failed a new war was about to break out between France and an alliance of Russia, Prussia (Germany), Britain and Sweden. Napoleon hoped to use the Austrian army but his spies reported that Metternich had entered into secret agreement with allies. Napoleon was shocked over his in-law’s action. However, few weeks later it became clear that unless France negotiates a peace deal, Austria would abandon its mediating role and join the allies. On the realization of this action Napoleon travelled to Dresden in Germany for a meeting with Metternich on June 26, 1813 and in a rather cold tone, Metternich informed him that France must accept a settlement that would limit her to its natural boundaries. At this point the Austrian government never minded the relationship between her and Napoleon but was bent on fighting for her interest and stability of Europe. Responding to this relation, Napoleon exclaimed; “so I have perpetrated a very stupid piece of folly in marrying an archduchess of Austria”

When it was clear to Napoleon Bonaparte that he was been fooled, Metternich retorted; “I will candidly say that Napoleon the Conqueror has made a great mistake” (Greene, 2006: 171).

That notwithstanding, Napoleon refused to accept Metternich dictated peace and Austria dropped its neutrality and joined the allies and defeated Napoleon Bonaparte in April 1814. He was then exiled to the Mediterranean island of Elba (Szachowicz, 1999: 577).

By getting close to Napoleon Bonaparte through his sister Caroline Murat and Archduchess, Marie Louise, Metternich was able to choke Napoleon in a friendly manner. Suddenly it occurred to Napoleon that Metternich had been playing him all along. The marriage between Napoleon and the Austrian Princess was just a play to pull him down and re-assert Austrian independence.
C. Countess de Castiglione in the making of the first King of United Italy

Countess de Castiglione played a very crucial role in the making of the first King of United Italy. Before the unification, Italy was made up of several kingdoms: Sardinia, Sicily, and Piedmont; a condition that had rendered Italy politically weak in European diplomacy. This had spurred the emergence of unification movements all over Italy. Some of these patriots who moved for the unification of Italy were people like King Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia, Garibaldi, and Count di Cavour etc (Kimberly, 1999: 677).

The big question in the amalgamation of these independent kingdoms is who is going to be the first King of United Italy? King Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia hoped to be the first King of United Italy. To achieve his aim, he created strong diplomatic links with France whose foreign policy under Napoleon III seek to destabilize great European Empires and free indigenous people within such empires in order to weaken such empires and to create room for France's predominance in European politics (Norman, 1992: 104). Thus, Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia through the help of his Prime Minister Count di Cavour joined the French in the Crimean war of 1853 to 1856 in order to secure the support of the French forces in a planned war against the Austrians in Venetia and other Italian territories under Austrian rule.

In 1858, Count di Cavour met secretly with Napoleon III at Plombieres-Les-Bains in France. In that meeting Napoleon III promised to aid Sardinia in expelling Austria, if Sardinia found itself at war with Austria. In return, Sardinia agreed that it will give the Provinces of Savoy and Nice to France in the event of an Italian-French victory over Austria (Kimberly, 1999: 679). The Sardinian authorities having the full understanding of Louis Napoleon III as a lady's man used a pretty Princess from Sardinia, Countess de Castiglione to seduce and sway decisions on who should inherit the throne of a United Italy in favour of Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia. She was stunningly beautiful hence, she portrayed herself like a Greek statue come to life. At palace reception in Paris in 1856, Emperor Napoleon III, a notorious womanizer, could not help but take notice and was fascinated at Castiglione. Yet as he saw her again over the months that followed, he became intrigued. In events at court, Napoleon III and the Countess would exchange glances and occasional remarks. She wore stunning dresses and long after the evening was over, her image would return to Napoleon III's mind. He began to court her assiduously and after weeks of assault, she finally succumbed. In her conversations with Napoleon III, the Countess would occasionally talk of the King of Sardinia, praising his character and describing his love for France and his strength as a leader. The Emperor could only agree: Victor Emmanuel would make the perfect King of Italy. Soon Napoleon III was discussing this idea with his advisers, then actively promoting Victor Emmanuel for the throne as if it were his own idea and eventually he made this happen (Greene, 2006: 238).

However, Emperor Napoleon III never knew his affair with the Countess had been set up by Victor Emmanuel II and his astute adviser, the Count di Cavour to ensure that King Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia become the first King of United Italy. The Countess seduction of Emperor Napoleon III had been planned right down to the dresses she would wear, the words she would speak and the glances she would throw at him. The Countess used charm, pleasant discussions, humour, flattery and whatever means to hold Emperor Napoleon III's attention to show case the role of the female gender in the struggle of who would make the first King of United Italy and the emergence of Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia as the first King of United Italy.

Princess Kaiulani and Queen Liliuokalani in the Annexation of Hawaii 1893

Driven by many of the same motives as other imperial powers, the United States of America joined the league of imperialist nations in the late 19th century. Being an attribute of imperialism, the United States eventually faced growing demands for freedom from peoples within its sphere of influence. As the United States became more aggressive in its imperial policies in the pacific, it encountered the rise of indigenous nationalist movements.

The process of building a Hawaiian national identity had started in the 1790s in the reign of King Kamehameha I, who brought all the Hawaiian Islands under his rule. In the 1800s missionaries, businessmen and farmers from the United States of America and Europe flood the area and became major land holders in the Hawaiian Islands. There influence began to
change the nature of traditional Hawaiian society. After a period of moderate reforms under King Kamehameha III, old Hawaiian ways of life began to resurface. Hawaiian Kings tried to limit foreign influences, particularly American influence. In reaction to these developments, some of the leading Western traders, farmers and missionaries formed the secret Hawaiian league. In 1887 these foreigners forced King Kalakaua to accept a new constitution that almost stripped him of power and automatically placed the government in the hands of Westerners (Hanes III, 1997: 678). Their aim was to encourage the United States to annex the Kingdom. However, Princess Kaiulani, the niece of King Kalakaua, was trained from an early age to assume the role of Queen of Hawaii. Kaiulani was sent to school in Britain when she was fourteen years old. Although separated by a long distance, she managed to get information through letters from friends and family members about the happenings at home. The information was basically centered on troubles with foreigners. These foreigner's, were mostly made up of politically powerful American businessmen who were encouraging the United States government to annex the Kingdom of Hawaii located in the pacific. Her uncle particularly wrote a letter to her warning her to be on guard against certain enemies I do not feel free to enclose their names in writing (Hanes III, 1997: 678). King Kalakaua died in 1891 and was succeeded by his sister Liliuokalani. She was determined to restore full Hawaiian control over the Kingdom and to reduce American influence in her country. This was base on her strong will that the Hawaiian people had nominated her to succeed her brother. In 1893, when the Queen announced plans for a new constitution, members of the Hawaiian league carried out a bloodless coup de tat which overthrew the monarchy in Hawaii (Ritchie, 1999: 372). With the help of the American Minister to Hawaii, who ordered American naval troops to protect United States interest in the Kingdom and a provisional government was set up. However, when these foreigners deposed Queen Liliuokalani and took control of government, Princess Kaiulani then was a seventeen years old student in Britain. She quietly moved to the United States to plead her case for her country when her ship docked in New York in March 1893, Kaiulani read a statement addressed to the American people. She cried:

"Today I, a poor, weak girl, with not one of my people near me, and with all these Hawaiian Statesmen against me, have strength stand up for the rights of my people........... And I am strong ... strong in the faith of God, strong in the knowledge. That I am right, strong in the strength of seventy million people, who in this free land will hear my cry, and will refuse to let their flag cover dishonor to mine (Hanes III, 1997: 679)."

This powerful statement gained Kaiulani the admiration and support of many Americans. She got a promise from President Grover Cleverland that Hawaiian case would be given a fair consideration. However, the powers that stood for the annexation of Hawaii proved sturdy to be broken and in 1898 Hawaii was officially annexed by United States of America (Brinkley, 2000: 607-609).

**Yaa Asante Waa in the war between Asante and Britain in the Gold Coast**

For about one hundred and fifty years the Asante Empire was the most important discuss in the political and commercial history of the Gold Coast. Asante imperialism in the Gold Coast came into collision with British imperialism and fought intransigence against Asante influence and the authority in the coastal states. The relationship between Asante and Fante were cold. One basic reason for the perpetual enmity between both parties was because Fante had control over the trade with the Europeans and the Castles situated around Cape Coast (Stride and Ifeka, 1971: 270). Fante wanted to prevent the Asante from having an access to the sea so as she could continue in her dominant position as middlemen in the trade between the Europeans and the hinterland states. For Fante prosperity and her survival as an independent people depended upon several factors significant of such was the custom revenues and the profit that accrue to Fante middlemen and also the direct access she intend to have
with the Europeans who supplied guns and gun powder which the Asante could otherwise use to crush her and other southern states (Stride and Ifeka, 1971: 244,272-273).

Although Fante expected an invasion of the coastal states during the eighteenth century, it was only in three occasions that Asante actually invaded Fante. These were in 1727, 1765 and 1776. In all of these invasions the British always stood by the Fante. The fear that Asante would invade the coast and remove all influence from the European traders prompted Britain to always back the Fante against the Asante whenever there is a fracas between both parties. On the other side of the bargain, the Asante wanted to gain access to trade with the Europeans on items such as firearms and gun powder. They also claim that the Fante and the southern states were their vassal states. But the fear of the Asante influence in the coast made the British in January, 1873 in deciding to conquer the Asante nation.

However, Major General Sir, Garnet Wosley was commissioned to carry out duty in October, 1873. With an army made up of British West Indian and West African Soldiers, the General launched an attack on Kumasi, the Asante capital. Though the Asante warriors fought gallantly but were unable to withstand the attack and Kumasi was deserted. Since General Wosley found nobody with whom to negotiate, he returned to the coast. However, an emissary of the Asante hene, Kofikarifari met with General, Sir, Wosley at Formena on the 14th of March, 1874. By the agreement, Asante gave up all her claims to claims to the Coastal States including Elmina and to pay fifty thousand ounces of gold as war damages. The defeat of Asante led to the deposition of Kofikarifari as Asante hene (Webster and Boahen, 1980: 95).

In 1896, the British Governor General at the coast, William Maxwell got instructions from England to put Asante effectively under British rule. The Asante hene was requested to accept British protection with a British Resident permanently stationed in Kumasi. The Asante was also asked to pay the balance of the fifty thousand ounces of gold contained in the Formena Treaty. But this request had proved to be unacceptable to the Asante. The refusal to accept the terms of settlement gave the British the excuse to justify the conquest of Asante. Soon a military expedition was sent to Kumasi. The Asante hene, Prempe I surrendered and accepted British protection (Stride and Ifeka, 1971: 32-33). This time the British occupied Asante for two reasons; first they wanted to forestall the French and Germans who were closing in on Asante from the Ivory Coast and Togo respectively. Secondly, they also wanted to stop Prempe from forming an alliance with Samori Toure of the Mandinka Empire against European imperialism. Prempe decided after understanding the skims among the European imperialist, resorted to diplomacy rather than armed confrontation. He resolved to negotiate and not to fight, hence he sent a diplomatic mission to England. In addition, Prempe gave away to Britain’s demand by accepting British Resident in Kumasi hoping for a protectorate treaty that would keep him in power. Prempe’s miscalculation of the British aim caused the invasion of the Asante Kingdom to a final crush.

In March, 1896 a powerful British force occupied Kumasi and arrested, deposed and exiled Asante hene, Prempe I along with his mother, his father and his uncles and other members of the Royal family, first to Sierra Leone, then in 1900 to Seychelles Islands. Britain planned to destroy the Asante institutions and rule the natives directly (Webster and Boahen, 1980: 93). The basic reason for the British determination in destroying the Asante imperial stool was to prevent further threat to her imperial ambition in the Gold Coast.

The Golden Stool Saga

The most frequently encountered role of importance played by women among most Africans was that of “Queen Mother”. In practice, that position was usually occupied by a female of royal blood who might be mother, sister or aunty of the King. Her influence was enormous and there were occasions when the “Queen Mother” was the real power (Rodney, 2009: 275). Though deprived of their leaders, the Asante were hopeful that Prempe would be restored in the near future. They would not have reacted very aggressively if Governor Hodgson had not added insult to the whole saga by demanding the surrender of the Golden stool in March, 1900 (Barkindo, et al; 2012: 33). The “Golden Stool” was the only sacred symbol that the Asante could not part with. The answer to the governor’s demand was an armed rebellion in April, 1900 and under the leadership of Yaa Asante Waa, the “Queen Mother of Edweso”, the
Asante warriors siege the governor in the Kumasi fort. The Yaa Asante Waa war was crushed but only after the British sent four expeditions, the first three having been defeated. The Asante soldiers using skilful guerrilla tactics under their commander Kofikofia, were only defeated because they ran out of ammunition (Webster and Boahen, 1980: 194). Asante was now formally annexed as a crown colony of Britain, but the British authority transferred Prempe and other Asante captives away from Freetown to the Seychelles Islands.

That revolution called by the Yaa Asante Waa lasted for about nine months before it was finally crushed, bringing with it the end of Asante’s independence. In the same year Asante was declared a British Protectorate.

D. Conclusion

Privileged women have played critical roles in global diplomacy from time immemorial. They have been involved in one way or the other in the interplay of diplomatic relations between nations. Women of royal blood have been used in different societies to concretize relationship between royal families in historical past. However, some of these dynastic marriages had turned out to be the anti-thesis to peace between these nations, as was the case of Marie Antoinette who was married to King Louis XVI to cement the relationship between the Harsburgs of Austria and the Boubou ruling family of France. However, the beheading of Queen Marie Antoinette by the revolutionary government in France was at the bottom of the belligerent relationship between France and Austria in the years ahead. Thus, women are a major cause of soar diplomacy between nations.

Women of royal blood have assisted in the seduction of big players (diplomats) in the international theatre, possibly to sway decision in favour of a party or their countries. Privileged women also played critical role in lobbying. They extract useful information from the diplomatic frontiers which were used for diplomatic maneuvering between nations. Some have been the mouth piece of their countries as they campaigned abroad for the freedom of their people at home. However, the dominance of the male gender has diminished the influence of the female gender in the realm of international diplomacy. That notwithstanding, privileged women in some societies have achieved power and influence in their male dominated societies. For example, Yaa Asante Waa (Queen Mother) commanded respect and power among the Asante. Yaa Asante Waa was locked in a long struggle with the British over the sacred “Golden Stool”, the symbol of the Asante Nation. Yaa Asante Waa believed that to be firm and assertive was the only way for the Asante in the face of British imperialist intimidation by demanding for the “Golden Stool”. Therefore, she made a tough statement not minding the circumstances, while the men sat at home displayed some cowardice as Governor Hodgson demanded to sit on the “Golden Stool”. To prevent the desecration of the symbol of the Asante nation by a foreigner, she mobilized the cowed Asante soldiers and fought the British sizing the British governor at Kumasi the capital of the Asante. Yaa Asante Waa and her soldiers were victorious since they were able to defend and save the Golden Stool even though they were defeated at the battle field.

A cursory survey into the role women play in international diplomacy will reveal the fact that privileged women have contributed enormously to the maintenance of peace and war between nations. The contributions of the female gender in international diplomacy have awakened various memories on how privileged women have promoted the use of power and achievement in a male dominated world as against the realist assumption by the feminist theorists.

References


