



## **Charisma, Sexuality and Governance: A Case of Queen Amina of Zaria and Catherine the Great of Russia**

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### ***Abstract***

Contemporary discourses on feminism have focused largely on violence and varying degrees of abuse meted out on women by their male counterparts in the matrimonies and the society at large. Of course, the role of women in the society has been scholarly debated with varying discussions bordering on religious, political, legal, economic and social concerns. Despite the availability of copious researches on the place of women in the society, the landmark endeavours of women are frequently sidelined in the society. It is on that basis that this study is carried out. This study examines charisma, sexuality and governance in pre-colonial Nigeria and imperial Russia with focus on Queen Amina of Zaria (Zazzau), Nigeria and Empress Catherine the Great of Russia. The study uses both primary and secondary data. Interviews provided by respondents form the primary source of data collection. Also, data were sourced from published books and articles in learned journals. Data were subjected to content analysis. Interpretive design was used. The study upholds Feminism as its theoretical framework. This theory explains the varying views of the female folks in relation to their male counterparts in the society. It further strengthened our discourse bordering on Queen Amina of Zaria and Empress Catherine the

Great. The study uncovered Queen Amina and Empress Catherine as great leaders in their respective domains. Despite the fact that they lived in societies that had been predominantly ruled by male, they distinguished themselves amidst all odds to be saddled with the responsibility of ruling their people.

**Keywords:** sexuality, Queen Amina, Catherine the Great, Nigeria, Zazzau, Russia

## Introduction

The human societies have always been predominantly ruled by male folks contrary to the capacities of their female folks (Pranathi & Lathabhavan, 2021). Male chauvinism in human societies has perhaps been empowered by both traditions and religions. Traditionally, within the African circle, leadership has always revolved around men. Generally, men were seen at every helm of affairs. This implies that the African sector favourably disposed men for leadership roles than women. Pranathi & Lathabhavan (2021) while deliberating on the ill-disposition of women in the society adumbrate thus:

*...the larger problem is to adapt to new cultures and social norms than family issues. Many women were not able to accept the culture shock and mostly find it*

*difficult in their new environments despite women being perceived to the natural ability to adapt.*  
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Apart from traditions, modern religions such as Islam and Christianity have also to certain degrees become favourably disposed to male leadership. In Christianity, leadership has always been within the custodian of men. It is in contemporary days that some women are challenging masculinity and taking various leadership roles, including being pastors and preachers on the altar. In that like manner, men have also been placed at the forefront in the leadership angle within Islam. For example, prayers and all other religious activities are carried out by men while women follow in worship.

It is worthy to note that this situation is not only particular of Africa. Across the globe, male chauvinism has always been a factor that the female folks have severally on different occasions work towards challenging.

In the contemporary age, women advocates have always claimed that women are regarded as a very great force of societal modification. What this implies is that women are airing their voices through divergent feminist debates that they are agents of change and as such, they should be regarded in that manner. Although they are still very much underrepresented in virtually all the societal spheres such as politics, economy, business among others, women still want to be acknowledged as leaders and as well, decision and policy-makers at virtually every spheres of the society, by so doing, advocating gender justice and equality and at the same time, furthering social, political and economic advancement. Academic debates on the leadership prowess of women across the globe, particularly within East-European, post-communist states, and nations with rich traditions especially the Middle East, Asia as well as the African continent are currently focusing on librating the female folks in amidst their male counterparts (Voicila et al, 2018)

### **Research Methodology**

The study relied on both primary and secondary data collection. In the course of the study, interviews were granted by purposively selected respondents. The various responses of the respondents formed the primary source of data collection. Furthermore, data were collected from published books and articles in learned journals. Data were subjected to content analysis. Interpretive design was used. The study upholds Feminism as its theoretical framework. This theory explains the varying views of the female folks in relation to their male counterparts in the society. It further strengthened our discourse bordering on Queen Amina of Zaria (Zazzau) and Empress Catherine the Great of Russia.

### **Theoretical Background**

This study uses Feminism as its theoretical background. Scholarly theories bordering on Feminism are looked into in varied and diversified angles. Notwithstanding, no matter the perspective that Feminism theories are considered, analysis of women predicaments particularly the ones pertaining to

gender subordination, women subjugation, causes of oppression meted out to women, the approach of perpetuating gender inequality, domestic violence, rape and abuse of varying degrees have always preoccupied feminist discourses (Tong, 1998; Jones & Budig, 2008; Lorber, 2005; Liskova et al, 2019). According to Tong (1998), Feminist thinking is summarized in eight diversified grounds namely, liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, care-focused feminism, multicultural, global and postcolonial feminism, eco-feminism, and postmodern and third-wave feminism. Looking at these angles, Liberal feminism postulates that women do not have equal access to legal, social, political and economic benefits and institutions. These factors of course result into innumerable oppression meted out on the female folks. In order to address these problems, women should be allowed to legal rights, economic rights, political participation, education, and employment on equal basis with their male counterparts.

From the scholarship of Jones and Budig (2008), it is argued that women's oppression emanates in sexuality. This maintained in relation to the claims of Radical feminism. From the argument of radical feminism, the physic of women is moved through violence, objectification, and social institutions such as medicine and religion (Jones & Budig, 2008). Consequent to this claim, sexism is argued to be the oldest and most pervasive form of oppression (Tong, 1998). Thus, the only solution in this case is eradication of patriarchy. Also, there should be compulsory heterosexuality. These steps of course are seen as the main solution to gender oppression. This would be accomplished by increasing women's control over their bodies, including transforming sexuality, childbirth, and motherhood (Jones & Budig 2008). While considering Marxist and Socialist feminism, it is averred that gender inequality is established in capitalism. In this case, capitalists and individual men are argued of indiscriminately exploiting unpaid reproductive labour and responsiveness of the female folks domestically. Within this view, women are made to contend with low paid jobs. According to Jones and Budig (2008: 2) it is substantiated that:

*Marxist feminists claim patriarchy is produced by capitalism and will end with capitalism's demise. Socialist feminists agree patriarchy and capitalism are separate systems of oppression.*

*They call for a transformation of relations within the family through a redistribution of responsibilities, and changes in access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities and political power.*

Psychoanalytic feminism, as its name implies, is based on the premises of Sigmund Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis. Within the context of feminism, this theory borders extensively on gender inequality. It seeks to correct the male bias in psychoanalytic theory, producing theories that explore women's experiences with their emotions, bodies and sexuality. Theories argue early childhood experiences shape women's psyches and create differences between men and women. As Tong (1998: p131) adumbrates:

*...it is much more difficult for the girl than the boy to achieve normal adult sexuality, precisely because the girl has to stop loving a woman (her mother) and start loving a man (her father)...total switch in love object requires the girl to derive sexual pleasure from the feminine vagina instead of the masculine clitoris.*

Thus, what preoccupies western culture is a metaphoric representation of male prowess, ably portrayed in the phallus. Consequently, the probable way out is the creation of an androgynous social and enabling environment. This is achievable via both parents. From the angle of women of colour, ignoring coexisting forms of oppression mitigates against feminist theory. Within this context, blackness, multicultural, and third world feminisms are discussed. Thus, there is the integration of analyses in relation to gender oppression regarding acculturated framework of inequality bordering on race, class and sexuality. In this regard, feminists unveil the construction of privilege and disadvantage into a matrix of domination, intersecting to showcase characterized oppression. Hence, remedies that are preoccupied by the sole focus of human entirety and general survival are looked into instead of focusing parochially in the direction of women alone. Intersectionality has been underscored by Postcolonial feminism. By so doing, emphasis has been placed on western colonization. Within this sphere, modernization and economic

restructuring gives room for sexism. Women are exploited as workers and sexual objects. In this case, the place of women as mothers within communities is established. In that case, women can use this power to advance education of girl child, provision of adequate healthcare and environmental protection for women. Plurality and difference have mainly preoccupied postmodern feminism. In this case, overarching causes or solutions of gender inequality have been resolved. They challenge inevitable and fixed characteristics of gender, including heteronormativity (assumption that heterosexuality is “natural”), and the undifferentiated category of “woman.” They argue performativity, the repetition of gendered identity and display, perpetuates gender inequality. They advocate *queering*, a blending of gendered characteristics, and questioning “normal” forms of gender and sexuality as remedies for gender inequality (Jones & Budig, 2008). It is worthy of note that these approaches have in one way or the other proffer better understanding to the discourse of charisma, sexuality and governance in relation Queen Amina of Zaria, Nigeria and Empress Catherine the great of Russia.

### **Revisiting Leadership in Women: A Case of Queen Amina of Zaria (Zazzau)**

Originally, in the pre-colonial era, there were seven Hausa States which included Zazzau, Daura, Kano, Gobir, Katsina, Rano and Garun Gabas (Palmer, 1908; Fisher 1977; Arnett, 1910; Smith, 1970; Hogben, 1966; Crowder, 1978; McEwan, 1968; Adamu, 1978; Davidson, 1998; July, 1974; Ajayi & Crowder, 1971). The era of Queen Amina’s reign was pre-colonial Nigeria. During this time, men did not feel threatened when women were in powerful positions (Levin et al, 2000; Smith, 2005; Agbese, 2003). Significantly it was often believed that they deserved to be there not necessarily because of gender, but of age, kinship or merit. Women could even oust men who were not performing their duties effectively. Although women’s and men’s roles were socially and economically delineated in the pre-colonial Nigerian societies, women still asserted their authority or themselves. Amina was born in the middle of the sixteenth century, around 1536 (Janis, 2008). She lived approximately 200 years prior to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate federation that governed the northern Nigeria during the period of British colonial rule following the Islamic

*jihad* that overtook the region in the 19th century. Her father was King Nikatau and her mother was Bakwa. The family was wealthy as a result of trading in imported metals, cloth, cola, salt, horses and imported metals (Smith, 1970; Adeleye, 1971).

Amina's father was adjudged to be the 22nd ruler of Zazzau. Her younger sister was Zaria. It was upon this name that the modern township of Zaria in the Kaduna state of the northern Nigeria assumed its nomenclature. Base on the testaments of existing debates, it was established that Amina had her early childhood in her grandfather's custody (Smith, 1970; Adeleye, 1971; Jones, 2000). Thus, she found favour before him. Little Amina was carefully instructed in matters that pertained to leadership, politics and military. Around 1566, upon the demise of her parents, the mantle of leadership shifted to Karami, Amina's brother. He became the king of Zazzau and built a military cavalry. Although her father's reign was characterised by peace and prosperity, Amina nonetheless chose to spend her time honing her military skills with the warriors of the Zazzau cavalry. This led to her eventually emerging as a leader of the Zazzau cavalry, during which time she accumulated great wealth and numerous military accolades. With this context, Amina became a famous warlord. Her military prowess was second to none.

In 1576 Karami died, leaving Amina with no option than to ascend the throne and assumed the position of queen. Upon the death of her brother after a 10 year rule, Amina had matured into a fierce warrior and earned the respect of the Zazzau military, so she was able to assume the reign of the kingdom. Before Amina assumed the throne, Zazzau was the main source of slaves that would be sold at the slave markets of the pre-colonial northern Nigeria. At the time of Amina's reign, Zazzau was situated at the crossroads of three major trade corridors of northern Africa, connecting the Sahara with the remote markets of the southern forest lands and the western Sudan. The rise and fall of the powerful and more dominant Songhai people, and the resulting competition for control of trade routes incited continual warring among the Hausa people and their neighbouring settlements during the 15th and 16th centuries.

During this period, the Arab merchants were particularly involved. Also, land expanse of the city was encroached upon by neighbouring cities. Within three months of her enthronement as the Queen of Zazzau, she spearheaded moves

against the neighbouring cities in order to expand the frontiers of her domain. She built about 20,000 foot soldiers and 1,000 cavalry troops that were skillful, reverend and very fearsome, making her to conquer and consequently acquire large expanse of land. This land expanse extended to cover Kwararafa and Nupe. Over a 34-year period, her many conquests and subsequent annexation of the territories extended the borders of Zaria, which also grew in importance and became the center of the North-South Saharan trade and the East-West Sudan trade. In the continual competition for power among the Hausa states, Zaria for a time achieved predominance under Queen Amina. She led her first military charge a few months after assuming power. For the rest of her 34 year reign, she continued to fight and expand her kingdom to its greatest in history. Heading up an army of 20,000 men, she tried to annex several surrounding cities up to Nupe, and ruled Kano and Katsina at the cost of 34 years of almost uninterrupted warfare.

The objectives of her conquests were twofold: extension of Zazzau beyond its primary borders and reduction of conquered cities to vassal status. The expansion of Amina's kingdom made it the trading centre for all of southern Hausaland, spanning the traditional east-to-west trans-Saharan axis and guaranteeing Zaria's prosperity. Amina brought unheard-of wealth to the land; one description cites a tribute payment of 40 eunuchs and 10,000 kola nuts. She boosted her kingdom's wealth and power with gold, slaves and new crops. Because her people were talented metal workers, Amina introduced metal armour, including iron helmets and chain mail, to her army. Consequently, Zazzau controlled more territory than ever before during the reign of Queen Amina. Notably, the motives of her territorial conquests were scholarly subjected to bi-angular discourse. While some scholarships claimed that it was to extend the frontiers of Zazzau beyond its original borders, others averred that reduction of the conquered cities to vassal status was a preoccupation. Hogben (1966:220) while relating the great exploits of Amina expresses Sultan Muhammad Bello's words thus:

*She made war upon these countries and overcame them entirely so that the people of Katsina paid tribute to her and the men of Kano [and]... also made war on cities of Bauchi till her kingdom reached to the sea in the south and the west.*



In that like manner, as it has been stated by the Kano Chronicle, *the Sarkin Nupe sent her [the princess] 40 eunuchs and 10,000 kola nuts. She was the first in Hausaland to own eunuchs and kola nuts.* In order to partition and safeguard the newly acquired lands, earthen walls were made to surround them. As it was argued, these walls became a prototype in the nation until about 1904 when Zazzau was conquered by the British colonial expatriates. Thus, Amina is credited as the architect that made the strong earthen walls around the city, which was the prototype for the fortifications used in all Hausa states. Walling was a vitally important consideration in the development of African urban life. Significantly, walls gave definition to settlements and prevented uncontrollable sprawl. They also provided psychological and physical security. In unstable times, they afforded protection against theft or destruction and in peacetime, they controlled entry and exit. Significantly, many of the walls survived the test of time till today. They are symbolically tagged *Amina's walls*. Also, politically, walls were considered prestigious, their size a measure of a ruler's ability to command the labour of his or her subjects. The walls constructed by Queen Amina of Zaria not only protected Hausa markets from external threats emanating from the south, but also became an enduring testimony to her glorious reign. It is also debated that she took a new lover in every town she went through, each of whom was said to meet the same unfortunate fate in the morning. It is believed that each of her brief bridegrooms was beheaded so that none should live to tell the tale of the romance.

It is worthy of note that Queen Amina of Zaria was the first woman to become a queen in a male-dominated society of the pre-colonial Nigeria. She expanded the territory of the Hausa people of North Nigeria to its largest borders in history. Much of what is known of Queen Amina is based on information related in the *Kano Chronicles*. Other details are pulled from the oral traditions of Nigeria. As a result, the memory of Queen Amina has assumed legendary proportions in her native Hausaland and beyond. The modern state of Nigeria has immortalized Amina by erecting her statue, holding a spear in hand while sitting on a horse, in the centre of Lagos.

It was argued that she died during a military campaign at Atagara near Bida in Nigeria. Today, her memory represents the spirit and strength of womanhood.

Queen Amina undoubtedly managed to forge and imprint a legacy that contradicts all stereotypes of women's leadership in patriarchal African societies, where the inequality that women face affects virtually all aspects of society. There is significant evidence that women were allowed to make ample contributions to the social, political and economic structure of their societies in pre-colonial Nigeria, if not with the same clout as men. Where they were prevented from being openly active, women used loopholes inherent in their social structures to gain and maintain some level of power. The obstacles facing women in Nigeria and across Africa may persist, yet the legacies and examples of women such as Amina point to the possibilities that exist for African women to reshape the destinies of their societies and communities.

### **Catherine the Great of Russia: An Overview of a Charismatic Leader**

Catherine the Great was not a Russian by birth. She was a German princess. Catherine was chosen to marry Peter. Although he bears the same name with his grandfather, Catherine's husband, Peter, was a grandson of Peter the Great of imperial Russia. Catherine was born in Stettin, a Kingdom of Prussia as Princess Sophie Friederike Auguste von Anhalt-Zerbst-Dornburg. Her mother was Johanna Elizabeth of Holstein-Gottorp. Her father, Christian August, Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst, belonged to the ruling German family of Anhalt. At the birth of Catherine, her father was already a Prussian general in the capacity as governor of the city of Stettin. When Peter III converted to Orthodox Christianity, two Catherine's were already Kings of Sweden. These were Gustav III and Charles XIII (Cronholm, 1902).

Catherine's education was specifically from a French governess and tutors. This was particularly based the custom and prevailing tradition that was in place then among the ruling dynasties of Germany. She possessed masculine brevity and became a great master of the sword with which she later brought her subjects and conquests under control. Sophie, as Catherine the Great was called in her early life, had an uneventful childhood (Sergeant, 2004: 5). Despite the fact that she was a royalty, her family was not that wealthy. But with the help of her mother relatives who were wealthy, nobles and royals, Catherine's fame rose to a limelight. Her mother's brother became the heir to the Swedish throne after her second cousin Peter III converted to Orthodoxy (Streeter, 2007: 3; Massie,

2011: 10-19). By virtue of implication, over 300 sovereign entities of the Holy Roman Empire, advanced towards a highly competitive political system. This was as a result of the fact that various princely families devised and sought advantage over one another. Thus, they saw political marriages as a formidable medium of achieving political influences (Rounding, 2006:p7-8).

Hence, while considering the smaller German princely families, it became imperative to look towards political marriage. Such marriage became an advantageous approach towards advancing their interests politically, economically, culturally, among others. Consequent to these orientations, Catherine was all her childhood growth and developments, socially and culturally trained to later in her life, marry some powerful ruler so as to elevate the status of the Anhalt royalty. Besides her native German, Sophie (Catherine) became fluent in French, the lingua franca of European elites in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Rounding, 2006: 10). She received the standard education for an 18<sup>th</sup> century German princess, with a concentration upon learning the etiquette expected of a lady, French, and Lutheran theology (Brechka, 1969: 40). About her being ten years of age, she first met her husband to be. This husband later on turned out to become Peter III of Russia. Although Peter was her second cousin, she found Peter detestable upon meeting him. Peter's pale complexions as well as his fondness for drinking alcohol at such a tender age made Catherine dislike his kind of individual from the outset. Apart from that, she found him detestable because she could not phantom out why Peter could still be playing with toy soldiers while he was to be building himself for the future challenges surrounding him. She later wrote that she stayed at one end of the castle, and Peter at the other (Streeter, 2007: 6). As an imperial Russia ruler, Peter III initiated a series of policies. Notably, a great number of the policies angered powerful nobles. He entered into an alliance with Prussia, a long-time rival, expanded religious freedom, and closed down the secret police. Significantly, Catherine and Peter III were not well suited for each other. As a result, they both had unhappy marriage as Catherine's charisma and fame subsequently overshadow that of her husband, Peter III. Catherine became grossly immersed into Russian culture and civilization having spent almost twenty years in the Russian domain. In order to oust her husband out of power, she joined a conspiracy against Peter III. Consequently, the events resulted to the removal

of Peter III as the leader of Russia. Catherine was subsequently enthroned to become the sole ruler of the imperial Russia.

As a charismatic leader, Catherine greatly expanded the frontiers of the Russian state. During her reign, the Baltic region was enlarged. She also included Ukraine into the coverage of the Russian expanse. Her reign was significant with the war against the Ottoman Turks. As a result of the outcome of the war, she conquered and confiscated portions of their empire. Not only that, when Poland was partitioned by the European might around 1772 and 1793, she gained the largest part for Russia. It was during her reign that Russian exploration and colonization of Alaska began. Like Peter the Great, Catherine was interested in the west. When she began her reign, she intended to make a number of reforms to ease the life of serfs (peasants), promote education, and limit land acquisitions by nobles. However, the peasant revolt led by Pugachev between 1773 and 1775 and the French Revolution soon caused Catherine to become as autocratic as earlier czars.

The peasant uprising was a bloody and brutal revolt that resulted in the death of thousands of wealthy Russian landowners, priests of the Russian Orthodox Church, and merchants. Not wishing to antagonize the nobility, Catherine increased the privileges of the nobility and decreased the freedom of peasants. The reforms of Peter and Catherine had little effect on the peasants, except to bind them to the land as serfs. By the time of Peter, many peasants already had no personal freedom of movement. A peasant family could not decide to move from one landed estate to another because the second landowner offered better working terms. During Peter's reign, peasants became chattel, the property of the landholders on whose estate they worked. They could, therefore, be bought and sold. After the peasant uprising during Catherine's reign, she allowed the nobles to continue the process of turning peasants into serfs.

The word serf is from the Latin word for slave; however, the status of the serf was somewhere in between that of a slave and a free person. Serfs were the property of nobles, yet they had certain rights. They were required to give certain payments to and perform specific services for their owner. On the other hand, a serf was usually given a house, a plot of land on which to grow crops, and some animals. Serfs were required to give some of what they grew to their nobleman masters. In addition, serfs were required to work the noble's land.

Serfdom, the agricultural system based on the ownership of serfs, had existed in Russia for centuries. In Western Europe, the actual bonding of the peasant to the soil had largely ended by the 1400s and 1500s. By contrast, in Russia, serfdom was gaining strength. In the 1700s, during the reign of Peter and Catherine, while the Industrial Revolution was getting underway in Great Britain, the restrictive powers of serfdom reached their height. Serfdom was not abolished in Russia until 1861.

## Conclusion

Queen Amina of Zaria and Empress Catherine the Great were great leaders in their respective domains. Although they lived in societies that had been predominantly ruled by male, they distinguished themselves amidst all odds to be saddled with the responsibility of ruling their people. In the course of leading the people, they displayed unparalleled leadership prowess, ranging from administrative to military might. These leaders both expanded the frontiers of their respective domains through conquest and military hegemony. They both ruled as sole queens of their lands amidst men. This thus implies that women should not be considered as weak folks. Like men, they also possess the charisma to lead. Hence, societal orientations of male chauvinism should be readdressed so as to enhance women the privilege of being actively involved in societal growth and development.

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