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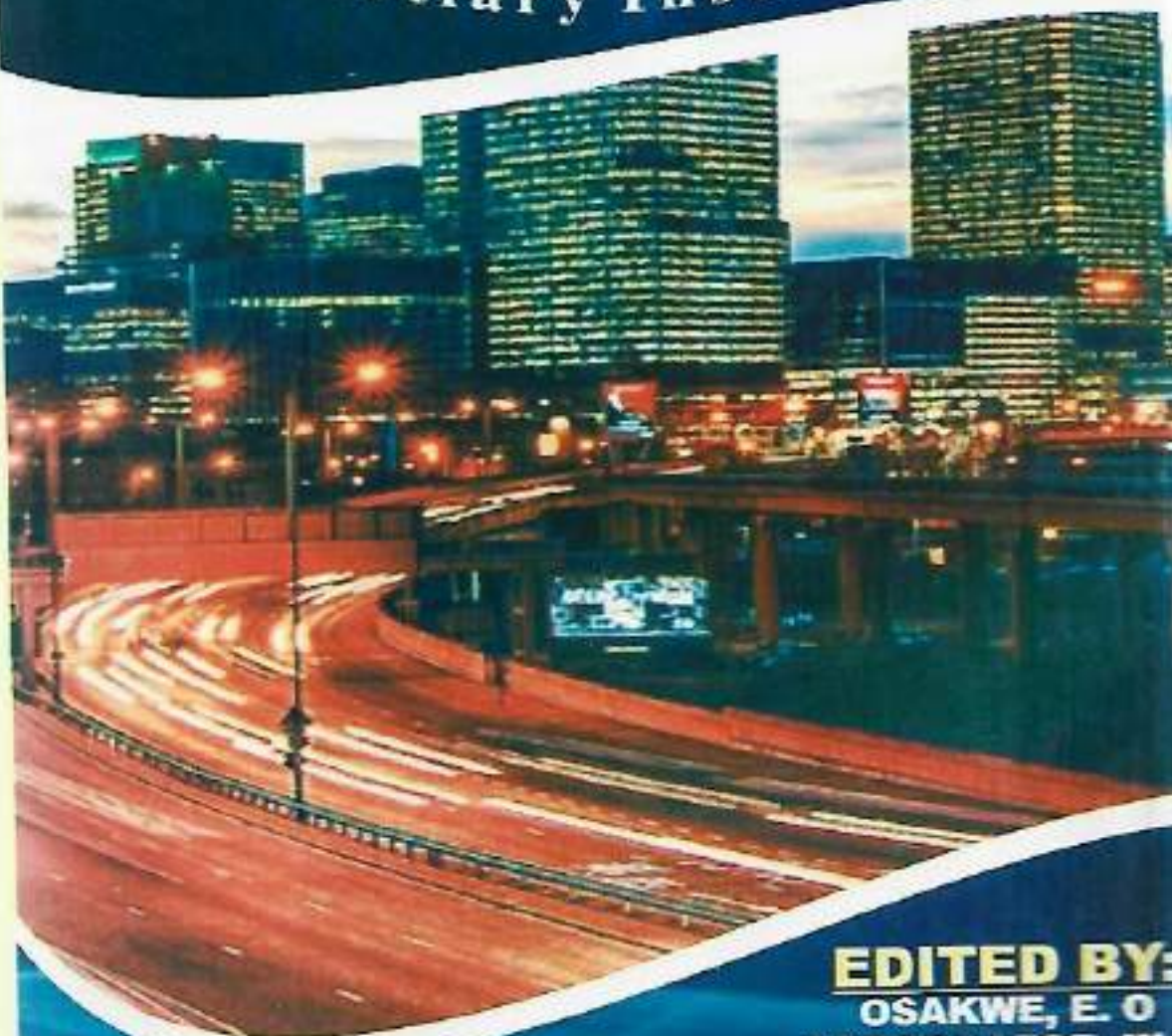## in the 21ˢᵗ Century
For Tertiary Institutions

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Chapter Nine
FEMINISM IN NIGERIA

By

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Historical Overview of Feminism in Nigeria

The country's National population commission estimated the 2011 population to be about 168 million with women representing about 49% of the total population. This represents an annual growth of 5.6 million people since 2006 when the last census was undertaken. There are about 250 ethnic groups within Nigeria that speaks about nearly 400 native dialects. The prominent religious groups in Nigeria are Islam and Christianity. The country operates federal system of Government with 36 states having Abuja as the Federal Capital Territory.

Nigeria gained independence from Britain after being colonized for more than five decades. Nigeria was ruled by the military for almost 30years after obtaining her independence from colonial masters in 1960, before the return of democratic

rule in 1999. The civil war between 1967-1970 was as a result of political anarchy that operated in Nigeria. There was series of military coup d'état in the country which brought about economic and political instability in Nigeria. The fifty-seven years of Nigeria's Post colonial history have been series of interchange between the military and the civilian government leading to a political climate and gender relations influenced by a strong military presence with minimal civil rules.

Inspite of the oil boom in the 1960s, poverty is still pervasive in the country and human development statistics are not encouraging. According to the 2010 UNDP Human Development Report, life expectancy at birth is 48.4 years. The Nigerian Millennium Development Report 2010 shows infant mortality of 75 deaths per births; maternal mortality of 545 deaths per 1000 births; youths literacy of 80% and HIV/AIDS prevalence among pregnant women of 4.2%. The report expresses fear that Nigeria may not meet majority of the goals at the target date of 2015 (GER 2010)[4]. Provision of infrastructure and services like roads, water, housing, energy, health care and educational facilities is relatively low compared to the revenue earnings over the years. Increased

crime rate and other social problems which resulted from high unemployment is an exacerbating problem of the country's economy. Provision of housing, portable water, sanitation, basic education and primary health care, among others, is not adequate to a large number of the citizens. Politically, women occupy 7.3% of seats in Nigeria.

Feminism in Nigeria

Feminism in Nigeria is not a new concept. According to Adamu (2006), feminism has been a tool of intellectual discourse and political action to the majority of women scholars and activist in sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, records of women's struggles to correct acts of discrimination have been in existence since the 19th century. Feminism in Nigeria emerged out of the demands of women to improve women's status and eliminate deliberate factors that may deprive women of enjoying their full human rights.

According to History, women in Nigeria have faced a wide spectrum of experiences in navigating through several hindrances that have confronted them. The culture of male chauvinism, patriarchy and anarchy has undermined the rights

of women and thus resulting in the subjugation of women in the affairs of development both at the private and public spheres. The formation of women's movements was as a result of the struggles during the National Independence and social modernization. The intervention of women in social and political landscape helped to improve their status at the grassroot, national and regional levels. Women have involved themselves in various movements and activities in Nigeria though it has not been recognized. At the beginning, feminist attracted negative connotations, and usually feminist were associated as being men hater, frustrated women with nothing better to do but to cause trouble. Several attempts made by women to secure and sustain equal rights and opportunities for women made feminism to gain ground in the country. The issue of inequality between men and women in the disproportionate distribution of rights and privileges to women has been a great concern giving rise to different interventions by individuals and women's groups to eradicate this problem.

Definition of Feminist

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, defines a Feminist as a person who supports the beliefs that women

should have the same rights and opportunities as men. In other words, it is the believe that both men and women should be given equal rights and opportunities. On the other hand, feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes. According to Wikipedia the free encyclopedia cited by Akpochafo (2009), feminism is a collection of social theories. Political movements and moral philosophies largely motivated by or concerned with the liberation of women from subordination to men. It is also the belief that men and women deserve equality in all opportunities, treatment, respect and social rights. Akpochafo (2009) states that feminism is a belief in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes, a movement organized and based on the conviction that biological sex should not be the pre-determined factor shaping a person's social identity or socio-political or economic rights.

Many feminists believe that an effective feminist movement should address both universal issues such as rape incest, and prostitution and culturally specific issues relevant to women of the society. Some people imagine that all feminists are angry and bitter women who only want to

subjugate men. One of the reasons for this discrepancy might be as a result of different specific types of feminism, which are: radical feminism, socialist feminism, cultural feminism and liberal feminism.

Radical Feminism

It is the believes of radical feminists that the concept of gender should be eliminated entirely. It is the opinion of the radical feminist that there should be changes and improvement in technology which will allow babies to be grown outside the women's body to ensure equality between men and women. The radical feminists argue that the entire traditional family system is sexist. Men are expected to work outside the home while women were meant to care for the children and keep the home clean. This traditional dichotomy according to radical the feminist presents men as economically in power over women. The radical feminist feels that this traditional family structure should be rejected.

Social Feminism

This is the second type of feminism that calls for major social change. Socialist feminism is a movement that calls for social reformation of our economy through eradication of

capitalism. Socialist feminism emphasize that the capitalist are in support of sexist status quo because men are the ones who currently have power and money and also share this money to their other fellow men. This keeps women under the control of men.

Cultural Feminism

This is the third type of feminism. Cultural feminism is of the opinion that feminine behaviour should be encouraged rather than masculine behaviour.

Challenges facing Feminist in Nigeria

The following are most of the challenges facing feminists or the feminists in Nigeria:

a. Poor recognition of feminist by the Government

b. Gross misconception on the feminist Agenda

c. Negative press

d. Double standards within and outside the movement

Poor Recognition of the Feminist by the Government

Governments don't recognize the feminist in Nigeria. Nigerian feminists and some women organizations have been agitating for an egalitarian society as stipulated in Nigerian

policy on Education. Due to the fact that males are dominating/dominated the structure of government, the approach of feminist in the advocacy on broad human rights is yet to be politicized and institutionalized. Nigerian Government's intervention on women's issues has not yet yielded a positive result in the national debate. This is a challenge to feminists that the government needs to give immediate attention.

Gross Misconception on the Female Gender

There is a belief or an idea about feminism that is not based on correct information. Subjugation of women by men is as a result of misrepresentation of religious text and unjust use of culture. Women are seen as second class citizens just because the bible stated that women are under men and some cultures accord recognition to men than women. Based on this, men took it as an advantage over women to deny them of their right.

Negative Press

Based on the traditional and cultural stereotypes on the roles of women, they (women) especially those who identify themselves as feminists are concerned rebels and dissident due

to their feminist ideologies that challenge the patriarchal status quo.

There are different categories of feminists in Nigeria. Some see themselves as feminist but are constrained by cultural and religious ideologies, while there are those who although have a culture and religious orientation yet argue that some aspect of religious and cultural trend reduces the status of women in comparison to their counterparts.

Double Standards within and outside the Movement

There is a double standard due to the negative press and societal consciousness about feminists. There is controversy on the feminist issue because within the movement, it is easy to discuss and advocate feminist issues without restrictions coming to the domestic sphere due to public opinions on the family structure and gender division of labour. It becomes difficult to completely introduce the feminist system in a society where they see it as disrespect to the family structure. There is a serious issue that needs to be addressed for the benefits of feminists.

Feminism and Political Participation in Nigeria

Nigerian women have encountered several problems while venturing into politics. There is a large scale discrimination from the male folk, both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices. Both at the national and international levels, there is a growing interest in the level of participation of woman in politics. African women, especially in Nigeria are exploited and marginalized despite the fact that they constitute about 56% of the total population (NPC, 2011). They are discriminated against in the political interest. Awolowo and Abe (2008) posit that the essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive is to seek control of power. To Awolowo and Abe (2008), the acquisition of power is aimed at dispensing such power to organize society, harness and distribute resources and influence decision making in line with individual interests. Hence the question that remained unanswered is, to what extent have women as a category been able to harness this power to their interests?

It appears that the marginalization of Nigerian women is more pronounced in the democratization process. Women in

Nigeria constitute more than two-third of the country's 70% adult non literate population while they hold less than 5 percent of the important decision making position (UNDPHDI 2009). Despite accounting for half of the world's population, one expect that women should occupy key position in the political area but this is not the case as empirical observations showed that in most societies women assume five key roles, as mothers, producers, home managers, community organizers and socio-cultural and political activists. Of these roles mentioned, the last, political activist has been engendered by women movements attributed to historical gender discrimination and inequality (Agbalaobi. 2010) in (Fatile and Akhakpe, 2012).

Agbalajobi (2010) further states how women have remained subjects to domination by men in recorded history throughout the world. Women as a subject of domination and subjugation by men is made possible through persisting cultural stereotypes, interpretation of religious beliefs and doctrines to favour men; traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures in which economic. political and social power are dominated by men. These forms of manipulations

and discriminations is a global one but not just an African phenomena. The only difference is that the African and other developing countries of this world is that they stick firm to this cultural and traditional beliefs that discriminate against women. In Nigeria, the present national assembly has an appallingly low average of 0.05 percent of women in both Senate and those of Representatives.

The marginalization of women in the parliamentary leadership manifest deep bias in their in-house politics. Apart from competitive elective positions, women have also been reduced to sideline actors in appointive posts at all levels of governance. During Obasanjo's second regime, at the Federal level, there are about 6 or 12 percent women out of 49 Ministers in his Cabinet. The rest were men. None of the women out of the three substantive post was in charge of key ministerial positions such as the Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Petroleum and Defence. One of the three women given substantive position was sacked by the president for the administrative of impropriety on government's housing scheme, thereby reducing women slots to 5 or 10 percent Ministers. Out of 11 Senior Special Advisers to the president,

only 1 Or 9.1 percent was a female. Appointment to ambassadorial positions and into 36 states cabinets and board of public parastatals and corporations at the federal and state levels are also lacking in gender justice and consciousness (Ajayi 2005).

Challenges facing Nigerian Women in Politics

Nigerian women have encountered a lot of problems in trying to venture into politics. First and foremost, is the large scale discrimination from the male folk both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices. According to Walter (2005), in the political arena, throughout the world, women face obstacles to equal participation in political decision making processes. Despite the increase of female representation at national level, in the recent years, progress still remains marginal and slow. Women in Nigeria have always been grossly underrepresented in party membership as well as decision making structure of the society. This started when women were excluded from political governance and leadership in the colonial rule which introduced single sex model of administration as it was practiced in other British

colonies. The reason was that women are not to function in public domains as men but to be domesticated.

Another problem facing women is cooperate culture. Employers of labour prefer to recruit and promote men rather than women on the ground that women are less achievement oriented and are easily distracted from their jobs by domestic activities thus denying them of economic prosperity (Olojede, 1996).

The conflict in multiple roles of women is another limiting factor. It is an established fact that multiple roles of women as caretakers of homes and office works tend to divide their attention in different direction with negative consequences. The multiple factors that hinder women's political participation include: male-dominated cultures of formal political processes, traditional gender roles that exclude women from political sphere and lack of knowledge concerning public rights and duties, imbalances in access to education and resources as well as unequal share of the burdens of reproduction. The women folk are discriminated against in leadership and education policies. This makes them

play the second fiddle and suffer many loses (Olojede 2009, Walter 2005, Narayan 1997).

Political instability arising from frequent and uncoordinated changes of government hinders women participation in politics. The existing intra-party politics makes it difficult for women to get party nomination. This prevents them from contesting elective positions as there are few women party members. Most of the political parties even refuse the candidature of women and thus, after campaigning with their resources, they are dropped at nomination level in favour of male candidates. Women constitute a smaller percentage of political party membership because of the social, cultural and religious beliefs of different Nigerian societies which most often tend to relegate women to the background. Due to this fact only few men even among the educated, permit their wives to come out and participate in politics. The purdah system (i.e. house seclusion of women) is an important factor inhibiting women participation in politics in Northern Nigeria (Adamu 1997).

Lack of adequate education is another problem inhabiting women from active political participation. Women

constitute a larger percentage of illiterate group in Nigeria. This could be attributed to the belief of some families who see women as a property of another family in marriage. Most parents prefer to send their sons to school instead of their daughters whom they feel would eventually marry and thus get incorporated into another family (Nwagwu, 2009).

Another crucial hindrance to female participation in politics in Nigeria is inadequate finance. Large portions of the Nigerian women are not as economically buoyant or financially strong as their male counterparts. Family responsibilities and child bearing also prevent women from taking active part in politics as most of their time have been devoted to maternal challenges and obligations instead of politics.

Nigerian Women and Political Participation: The way forward

According to Aele (2008) in Akpochafo (2009), men and women in this planets together need each other. Besides, he says men cannot be genuinely happy and actualize their full potentials if women remain in a state of subjugation. The subjugation includes political which has been discussed with

facts and figure earlier in this chapter. The question is what can be done to ensure more equitable participation of men and women in politics and governance?

The following steps are suggested: Hamalai (1998) argues that the most important key to enhancing women participation in politics has been affirmative action by political parties and governments to ensure thorough quotas or reserved seats and post for women. Countries such as Sweden and Tunisia have achieved the near equitable representation of men and women through such affirmative action. We are told that in 1988, the Social Democratic Party in Germany changed its laws so that at least 40 percent of men and women must be represented in the offices and functions of the party. In 1991, Argentina established a quota of not less than 30 percent for women participation in the membership list of political parties. In 1992, Tanzania passed a law requiring at least 15 percent of all members of parliament to be women. These are the types of responses that are expected of political parties and governments. There must be vigorous enforcement of non discriminatory policies against women (Akpachafo 2009)

The need for sensitization and concretizations is necessary for all especially men who control the parties and government. According to Hamalai (1998), it is imperative that a campaign be launched by government, the political parties, women and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the aim of changing the attitude towards equity between men and women. The acceptance of women's participation in parties and governance should be encouraged.

The political awareness of women should be increased by Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs). These organizations should be active so as to bridge the gap between men and women. There is need for women (NGOs) like women in Nigeria (WIN), National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Women Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA). The Nigerian Association of Women Journalist (NAWOJ) to be more proactive in promoting political awareness, sensitization and participation.

Women should come together; form a strong cohesive and formidable groups to achieve their desires. There should

be unity of purpose and avoid differences which can only lead to rivalry, jealousy and disunity.

The 2011 general election calls for sober reflection and urgent need to restrategize for the further general elections. There is immediate need for internal democracy in the political parties to whittle down male dominated party executives. There should be examination of parties primaries with an idea of formulating and implementing a more level playing field. This in one way or the other will give women opportunities of participating fully in politics.

The establishment of women's political institute where parties and all female aspirants and candidates would be equipped with relevant skills that support/underpin the positions would be of great importance to women. The result of this would bring a remedial step which the aspirants should take to address the gaps between them and men, and also to reposition them for exigency of elective campaigns and electoral positions/Offices.

Formal education bills of right, famous development programmes of different governments have helped in the

upliftment of Nigerian women. Nigerian women contribute enough to national development as their contributions to development still leaves much to be desired when compared to that of men. The situation could be improved by raising female literacy in Nigeria. Accidental pregnancy should not be an excuse for a young lady to drop out of school. Such a victim can still make it academically, if she is not discriminated against in the society. In some places in the world, single parents are in key professions through formal education. They are relegated to background in those cultures. Government can promote the education of girls by making education free for girls from poor homes. (Nwaguru and Ifeanacho, 2009. Acholonu 2001, iwennebor 1996).

Women in Nigeria should also develop positive attitude towards politics. It is by taking up leadership positions that they can institute reforms in favour of women. Nigerian women should learn to assert discriminatory and sexiest practices even in the wider society. They should not nurture patriarchy but fight it. Nigerian women need spiritual reawakening in order to rediscover themselves and have lofty

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dreams that will take them to greater heights (Madunaga 1985).

In order to bring improvement in political participation of women, there is need for women empowerment. Empowerment according to Bergriffswelt in Faiite (2012) means providing resources to people in disadvantaged situations, so that they can strengthen their own capacities in order to fully participate in the community and to articulate their interest. This requires the full participation of all affected people in the formulation and evaluation of decisions that determine the well being of societies. Empowerment of women is a bottom-up process of transforming gendered power relations as well as social, economic legal and political institutions. Increasing women's participation and improving their shares in resources, land, employment and income relative to men, are necessary and sufficient for lasting changes in their economic and social position. This cannot be achieved in the absence of the good gender relations and interactions between men and women (Fatile, 2012)

Conclusion

Feminism in Nigeria is not a new concept. It is a worldwide movement and Nigerian feminists have been part of the country's history, right from pre-colonial era. In Nigerian traditional society, women are visible before colonization and this is evident from their heroic acts, political and religious activities. Nigerian feminists all over the country are demanding or requesting for a common cause, which is emancipation of women and an egalitarian society. If women, are given equal opportunity like men in the country, there will be positive change in political and economy life of Nigerians. Therefore, men and women should be given equal opportunity in the country for proper enhancement and development.

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