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An Overview of Gender Politics in Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper is an over view of the perception of women participation in politics it's a modest attempt at examining the important crucial roles of women in politics, women have a crucial role to play in socio-political and economic transformation of Nigeria as a Nation is no longer in contention there is a need to increase the understanding of the important role of women in our nation building, so many scholars had engaged in research of this area which is geared towards assisting in the struggle for the emancipation of Nigerian women. The paper looks at women participation in politics and not to be discriminated against in politics and holds the motion that there should be equality of all genders, it also writes about Nigerian women in the pre-colonial era where different ethnic regions all have their way of women participation in governance and the post-colonial era. In concluding the paper recommends that institutions should be empowered to create equal opportunity for all genders and government at all levels should create the needed environment for women to participate in politics and remove any form of discrimination against women.

Keywords: Discussion, Indian Music, Israeli Music, Lesson, Music, Teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

Before independence, females played prominent roles in governance in the different societies in Nigeria and held important positions among the majority of ethnic groups, particularly among the Hausa's, the Yoruba's and the Igbo's. Their participations before independence was through the institution of female chiefs, the authority of the first daughter and age grade associations. In the Hausa land for example, females had a very high status before the advent of colonial rule. This is because, the Hausa people belonged to a civilization characterized by matrilineal succession in the ruling class and the females held high political offices.

For example, the 15th century History of Zaria witnessed the rule of queen Amina who succeeded her father and conquered all the towns around Zamfara and Nupe and dominated these regions for 34 years. She also introduced fortifications into the Hausa Cities during her time (Palmer, 1998).

After the Fulani conquest of the Hausa land, in the early 19th century, Islam started to expand; this changed the position of the females in the Hausa community. However, because southern Nigerian females (Yoruba and Edo) including Muslims did not practice seclusions, they moved freely and controlled the market politics among the Yoruba and Edo. This politics was centered on the King (Oba) and his palace (Palmer, 192).

In contrast, during the first Republic 1963-1966 very few females contested for election. Therefore there was no female in the federal cabinet. Subsequently, during the military regime of major General Aguyi Ironsi, females did not occupy any positions. During the time of it, General Yakubu Gowon, there were no females in the cabinets. By 1975, the third military coup led by general Murtala Mohammed occurred followed by the aborted coup which brought in colonel Olusegun Obasanjo into power. During the second republic, 1979-1983 there was only one female senator out of 57 senate members and five male members out of 445 members of the federal House of Representative. 6 females were however, appointed into ministerial posts. Although females featured progressively in decision making structures during this period, they were nonetheless greatly under-presented in appointed positions relative to male for instance, of the 50 members of the constitution Drafting Committee which produced the 1976 constitution none was a female (Afonja, 1996).

However, it is important to stress at this juncture that representative is one of the principles of indirect democracy and as such cannot function in an under democratic society. The big question now is what is democracy? Abraham Lincoln, the 16th American President (1908-1965), in his Gettysburg address delivered in 1864, at the peak of the American civil war, gave a definition of democracy closest to the

Greek meaning of the concept, thus; “Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people”.

The origin of democracy can be traced back to the ancient Greece. Greeks originally used the idea to mean the “poor” or ‘many’. The linkage between democratic governance and women political participation is a historical one and since one of the principles of democracy is equality and fundamental human right. Also, the extension of franchise to adults who do not otherwise suffer from specific legal disability is a philosophical justification of democracy.

Research problem is all about an academic perplexing questions posed or resolution. It is an intellectual task and not physical one. This phenomenon of women political marginalization is an imperative one therefore, it will not focus on indebt analysis of political, socio-economic and cultural roots of prejudices on the whole.

In various Nigerian tribal cultures, it is seen as a taboo and hence out of place for a man to relinquish the leadership of the house to his wife and if this is done the man is considered feeble. Such practice within the family unit seems to be expressed within the societal level where women’s political ambitions are probably viewed with disguise and disrespect. Therefore women unlike their male counterparts are unlikely to receive positive reinforcement for participating in politics.

Also, female politicians seem out of place especially in a society that has strong religious restraint. In some other places like in the eastern part of Nigeria which is predominantly a Christian area. The commercial nature and outlook this part support western values and traditional in terms of beliefs, fashion style, ideology etc. the women of eastern states are less restricted compared to the northern women who dues to religious and cultural restrictions barely dress as they like talk more of effective participation in politics.

Women Participation in Nigeria Politics

The focus on the political empowerment of women by scholars in the last three decades, by governments and international and many other world countries. In West Africa for instance, attention on women affairs came into focus during the colonial and postcolonial eras when women discovered that not only were their traditional rights disappearing, but that they were being saddled with new economic burdens and responsibilities imposed by the new colonial government (Ibrahim & Salihu, 2004).The British colonial administration also exposed them to untold hardship, increased poverty and thus turned them to tools in the hands of men who dominated the social, economic and political environments (Awe, 1992).

Nigerian Women in the Pre-Colonial Era

A cursory look at the part about the level of women participation in government shows that the period was dynamic in that the roles of women changed or were adjusted to suit the prevailing political and economic situations. Thus, women’s contribution to development remained dynamic throughout the pre-colonial period (Awe, 1992).

In Hausa history in the 16th century, Queen Amina of Zaria was reputed to be a formidable woman who led her army to the battle field and succeeded in expanding her area of jurisdiction as far as the river Niger, the Kwarfa Empire and Kano in the north, the building of the walls f Zaria was also attributed to her. Long after Amina, was Zainab who ruled over Denika, Lokoja and Okene about the years 1800 to 1890. She fought many was like Amina and traded with the Europeans. These rules were however rare and set no precedent for such type of female leadership, they appeared like an aberration particularly as they were succeeded by male rulers who had maintained control of throne thereafter (Awe, 1992).

Nigerian Women in the Colonial Period

Deprivation in all these areas combined to make Nigerian women second class citizens. Women had to re-adjust themselves to new roles while playing their traditional roles. The colonial system generally opened new avenues to women and helped to release them from customs which had hitherto deterred them from participation in societal development. Nevertheless, the colonial system had its own prejudices against women (Nkwankwo, 2003).

Women in the Post-Independence Period

Right from the beginning of the new era here was one obstacle which impaired women’s effective participation in politics. In spite of this, the performance of women in politics was not too different. There was no female state governor, there was only three women representatives out of 1332 in the House of Assembly (Awe, 1992).

By this very nature a military administration is a male dominated one. Since independence, Nigerian women with a heritage of constructive participation and contribution to societal development continued in the various ascribed and achieved roles to contribute to national development. Independent Nigeria subscribed to the concept of the equality of all and non-discrimination on any ground what so ever. Above all, those developments split the women into opposing camps so that mass action became impossible (Umeha, 2003).

Finally, the marginalization of women in politics was aggravated by the imposition of military rule and abolition of political activities. Though the military showed concern for involvement of women in politics but the number of women that occupied

strategic positions was limited. The Gowon administration included women in the state cabinets and not in the federal cabinet, and that of traditional at least one woman in each state cabinet. There were two female deputy governors, more female director generals and two heads of service. However the contribution of women to the development of the political culture since independence have been minimal due to the fact that military rule discourage politics generally and women's politics in particular (Awe, 1992).

Finally, as a result of these facts, this research paper accepts the first hypothesis that: Religion accounts for poor public perception of women participation in politics in Bida local government area of Niger state. And also went further to assert that efforts to improve female education and religious participation in improving public perception of women's participation goes beyond rhetoric's and should involve effective policies and programs with measurable results.

CONCLUSION

The above discussions form the premise from the following suggestions and recommendations. Since the research work focuses on true democracy and attempts to harness supports and demands that would benefit not eh leaders alone but the entire populace and the poor masses in the street, it points towards a revitalization of feminist police and as such there is need to strengthen the institutions and movements that represent women.

Women's movements have great potentials in assisting women in preparing to play a full and active part in politics. Women should form a strong union which will be a powerful and useful organization. These unions can be used to achieve women's aims faster, through united action. This union is also useful because it can be used to build strong solidarity among women through information, education and other simple activities.

Women union is an efficient and effective organization which is needed to assist, strengthen and mobilize women groups. Elite women should assist rural women by mobilizing them through mass women organizations. NGO's should also assist with training and technical assistance for women's groups. Equality in political participation and decision making is necessary because women are not homogeneous groups. But one thing common among women is that they are not fully represented in public offices and other public sphere of life. So, there is need to create conditions in which there will be sufficient women in decision making position. This is because full democratic governance cannot be recognized in our society without, he full participation women in politics and other spheres of activities. There should be commitment to equality reflected in the law and national policies.

Finally due to the findings of this research work the first and second hypothesis were accepted respectively. The first hypothesis states that: Religion accounts for poor public perception of Niger state. With our analysis and empirical evidences, we were able to prove that during this research work. The second hypothesis which states that: there is a significant relationship between gender and poor public perception area of Niger state was also accepted and proven to be true by the research paper. Furthermore, the research work also indicates that unless the women folks are included and allowed equal political participation as the men the full dividends of democracy will never be enjoyed by the country.

Recommendation

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are curbing the perception of women participation in politics.

- They should support non-government organizations and research institutes that conduct studies on women political participation. They should also ensure that government founded organizations adopt non-discriminatory policies and practices to increase and raise the position of women in their organizations.
- Government should aim for gender balance in the list of national candidates nominated for election or appointed to United Nation bodies, specialized agencies and other autonomous organizations of the United Nations especially post at the senior level. Also, there is need to review the representation of women in elective bodies and consider adjustment and reforms were need be.
- Religious leaders should encourage the participation of women in political activities and through their teachings and preaching discourage the marginalization of women and their discrimination in politics and other spheres of the public sector.

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