

## SEXUAL POLITICS\* AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract.** *Nigeria's political transformation has been tainted by years of military dictatorship, which has played a decisive role in limiting social and political developments for women. Women's under-represented in the military regimes widened the gap between men and women in today's democratic governance. This explains Nigeria's weak democratic culture and the emergence of gender barriers wherein women are unrepresented in power structures and decision-making bodies. This article attempts to chart the raison d'être that women find challenging in vying for political office and the antecedent non-representation of women in public office as well as to explore the political conditions that account for women's exclusion from political participation. In that respect, laws should be promulgated to promote female representation in politics and awareness programs should be put in place to eradicate the deeply rooted beliefs and stereotypes. As women tend to co-operate with each other and build viable networks for establishing representation in political structures, an association of women politicians should be established. Given that women constitute half the population of Nigeria, it is quite clear that networking is likely to redress gender imbalance in politics. A united front of Nigerian women would go a long way in making positive impact on the political climate of Nigeria.*

**Key words:** *sexual (gender) politics, gender gap, democracy, political participation, women.*

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's complex history has been tainted by years of military dictatorship. This period has left deep scars in Nigeria's political transformation. This has played a decisive role in limiting social and political developments for women. Women were always under-represented in the military regimes; hence, it could be safely argued that it laid the foundation for the wide gap between men and women in today's democratic governance

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\*See: Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Avon Books, 1971). The Oxford Dictionary defines 'sexual politics' as "the principles determining the relationship of the sexes; relations between the sexes regarded in terms of power."

(Mba, 1990: 69-90). In some ways, this explains Nigeria's weak democratic culture and the emergence of gender barriers wherein women are unrepresented in power structures and decision-making bodies. In order not to indulge in historical narratives, it seems expedient to explore why women are not politically represented in public office since the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic.

This article attempts to chart the *raison d'être* that women find challenging in vying for political office and the antecedent non-representation of women in public office. Although women seeking participation and representation in politics were not interviewed, for clarity purposes we have attempted to explore the political conditions that account for women's exclusion from political participation.

#### GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION DURING THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

The history of Nigeria showcases that women contributed immensely to community development in different levels in society, such as the family unit, the extended family unit, and the clan unit. Women played significant roles in the economic industry by taking part in the production, distribution agricultural produce. Women were not confined to domestic chores under the canopy of 'housewives' but held complimentary positions with men within their communities. During the pre-colonial era women were divided into groups that specialized in various skills, crafts or trade for the development of their communities. Women also played a significant role in production of goods as most communities at that time survived on sustenance farming and food processing. Aside from women's role in communal development, women had important roles in traditional rule within their domain. For instance, women were important religious advisers to traditional rulers, and some kingdoms had a council of women as leaders for the traders.

#### GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

The British not only brought a new institutionalized political system but also conveyed diverse cultural values to the African people. The communal roles that were handled by women gradually withered away. At this point in time, the British regarded women as mere chattels; this assumed identity bestowed on women eroded the way the indigenous people of Nigeria viewed women, an identity that reduced women to the point of having little or no participation in their communities. This is not surprising as women were allowed to vote in Britain in 1928 whereas men started voting earlier in 1877.

However, during the colonial period, women contributed enormously to the political and economic development of Nigeria. Notably they constituted themselves into powerful pressure groups by fighting injustice and exploitation of the colonial imperialists and their traditional stooges. A significant event of this period is the 1929 Aba Women Riots, where women protested in large numbers about the rise in cost of tax imposed by the colonialists.

#### GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION DURING THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

After declaring independence, Nigeria still lagged behind in female representation in politics and government. It is significant to reiterate that after Nigeria became independent,

women in northern Nigeria did not have right to vote or be voted for until 1979. However, women were accorded the right to vote in southern Nigeria in 1956.

Soon after independence, Nigeria faced a bleak period of history intertwined with despotic and dictatorial regimes, aside from a brief spell of civil rule from 1960-1966 and 1979-1983. Political brinkmanship sexually colonized women to be seen but not heard. It could be argued with a large degree of certainty that the successive military regime, being an exclusive 'boys club' in Nigeria, further enhanced the subjugation of women and contributed to the exclusion of women from governance and decision-making process, especially in the public sector.

Democratic governance came back to the political shores of Nigeria in 1999. It should be noted that there has been some improvement in women being elected into political offices; however, more is desired for improvement, as women's actual participation in political structures is still not significant.

#### GENDER AND DEMOCRACY

As noted by Runyan and Peterson (Pettman, 1996: 5), it is quite clear that: "*Gendered and feminist analyses reveal that the state is in almost all cases male dominated, and is in different ways a masculinist construct. It is simply not possible to explain state power without explaining women's systematic exclusion from it.*" Thus, when women attempt to participate in politics, it is not uncommon to hear the slogan: 'Women, go back to the kitchen!' In order to achieve a viable democracy, women's voices are crucial for governance. However, from time immemorial, women have been positioned to specific traditional gender roles in most Nigerian societies. In many ways, this state of affairs is a clog in the wheel of achieving democratic principles of governance and attaining the wider goal of gender equality.

True democratic governance implies political participation by all citizens within a State. However, women's political participation and representation is difficult to attain in Nigeria due to the system of patriarchy. Aligned with this, the United Nations states that:

*Democracy must be embedded in a political system built on the rule of law and respect for human rights. The role of civil society, women and young people in democratization as well as the fundamental need for the peaceful alternation of leaders in power were stressed. The promotion of a democratic culture, based on tolerance, acceptance of differences and a permanent search for compromise, was seen as an essential factor for the consolidation of democracy.<sup>1</sup>*

Democracy is all about establishing equal participation of both women and men in deciding on the way their country is governed. Participatory democracy simply means stable democracy, in which all levels of citizenship are active participants in all major decisions affecting the polity. In simpler terms, the accepted idiom is that of the ancient Greek ideal of 'government of the people, by the people and for the people', which implies the government by and for both men and women.

It is then clear that a State cannot be democratic if half its citizens are excluded from participation either by not being able to compete for public offices or by not being represented

<sup>1</sup> UN doc. A/55/489, 13 October 2000, para. 10.

adequately after elections. Despite the political repression of women, the exclusion of women from political participation and representation is due to the notion that women are fragile and emotional, as a result of which they cannot be assigned with important affairs such as military assessments or political decisions and political debate. Furthermore, it should be noted that for women to effectively participate in political leadership, women must agree to choose themselves; then, they need to be selected as political candidates by political parties; ultimately, and most crucially, they need to be elected by the voters.

A more subtle exercise of the obstacles of being selected and elected is that women have been branded as mothers and wives exclusively for the private sphere, while men act as political gladiators and god-fathers exclusively in the public sphere. This diagnosis is best described as follows: "Women are contained and constrained in the home and in their sexed bodies. This is because public space is male and women are seen as belonging in the private; women appearing in the public space appear to be 'out of place.'"<sup>2</sup>

It is of crucial importance for women to equally participate in decision-making offices to enable joint participation in the economic development of communities and the State at large. This assertion finds concurrence with the UN Deputy Secretary General Asha Rose Migiro, who perceptively noted that: "When women are empowered, all of society benefits."<sup>3</sup>

Empowering women to compete on the same foothold as men for access to political office is an ideal hallmark for democracy and it would help foment viable partnerships and political debates for achieving gender equality in Nigeria. It is important to note that robust debates are an essential ingredient of democracy, especially where equal participation of both men and women are involved, as underscored in the words of President Obama:<sup>4</sup>

*"The strongest democracies flourish from frequent and lively debate, but they endure when people of every background and belief find a way to set aside smaller differences in service of a greater purpose."*

#### GENDER AND NIGERIAN POLITICS

Despite the seemingly poor participation of Nigerian women in politics, Nigerian history bear witness of an admirable number of women participating in political leadership. These exemplary lives are illustrated in the military and leadership skills of Queen Amina of Zaria (reigned from 1421–38) who laid the foundation of the ancient city of Zaria, in the selfless leadership of Moremi of Ife, in the feminist activities of Mrs Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978) who lead a protest that eventually gave rise to that renunciation of Oba Ademola II in 1949, in the endless efforts of Hadjia Gambo Sawaba (1933-2001) who sought to end women discrimination in northern Nigeria, and Margaret Ekpo (1914-2006) who was a popular Human Rights Activist in the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic. Despite these admirable leadership roles played by the above named women, the striking question is why women are still finding it difficult to participate in politics. The answer to this question may be found in the words of Bell Hooks: "*Black men are able to dismiss the*

<sup>2</sup> Pettman (1996), *Worlding Women: A feminist International Politics*, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> "National Democratic Institute, 2010"; accessed April 5, 2013; <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO0711/S00695.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> "Barack Obama, Press Conference, February 9, 2009"; accessed April 5, 2013; <http://www.iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2010/11/>.

*sufferings of black women as unimportant because sexist socialization teaches them to see women as objects with no human value or worth. This anti-woman attitude is endemic to patriarchy”* (Hooks, 1981: 101).

Incidentally, the National Gender Policy has been formulated to promote a 35 % affirmative action by President Goodluck Jonathan to fill seats in parliament with women. However, this policy has not been able to make any real difference in women’s political participation in Nigeria. It is, therefore, necessary to evaluate the obstacles still encountered by women in seeking political leadership:

#### MOTHERHOOD AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Family responsibilities and childbearing obstruct women from effectively participating in politics. When a woman or a young girl marries and is plunged into motherhood, certain traditional roles become imperative. The primary role as a mother and a wife is the key detrimental factor that delimits gender participation in politics. Customs and traditions, especially in respect of marriage, may be a crucial factor in sidelining women from political participation.

The responsibility for motherhood is quite a challenge for women seeking political leadership. Moreover, where a woman has little or no education she is imprisoned to a lifetime of sweat and child rearing. Most crucially, such women will not be endowed to make useful and reasonable contributions to their social and economic communes. Since women are saddled with the responsibility of catering for their families, they are not privileged to make useful and informed decisions about governance in male-dominated societies. For this reason, men have the potential for a greater awareness and interest in politics, which kindles their greater political aspirations and designates political participation as men’s ‘exclusive preserve’. This partly explains the inability and difficulty in providing for women’s political empowerment. However, Barbara Rogers argues that a woman’s inability to participate in politics due to motherhood responsibilities is a misinformation. She notes that:

*There is a great deal of what can be called propaganda about the supposed ‘maternal deprivation’ that will be caused in children if a mother is not at home in the afternoons when they return from school, and particularly if she does not spend almost every minute for the first five years of their lives constantly available to them. This theory plays a large part in the argument those women should stay ‘at home’, in effect housebound, and give up our chance of a paid job* (Rogers, 1983: 66).

It seems that Rogers’ argument is that placing a woman solely to raise children is a socially constructed role, which should not be a barrier for women to participate in politics. However, it is quite important to remember that educated women are not given free avenue to participate in politics. More importantly, many educated women are prevented from exploring politics by their husbands. It is noteworthy to comment on another crucial feature of Nigerian politics; namely, political meetings are usually held at odd hours at night, at a time when women need to be overseeing their children. This may be explained by reason that women may have sentiments of the trauma of motherhood and nature emanates a protective instinct that develops in the female so that she will rather spend time taking care of her children than vying for chasing political positions.

A woman faces more daunting challenges when she is a single parent or belongs to a polygamous home. A mother who is a single parent has to play the role of the mother and father, while concurrently acting as the bread winner in the home. A woman in a polygamous home has the duty of taking care of the children, as the father has too many wives and children, and catering for all their emotional needs. These challenges constitute obstacles for a single mother or a wife from a polygamous marriage to run for political office.

#### THE SANCTIMONIOUS MASK OF RELIGION

Religion has been used as a sanctimonious mask to prevent women from political participation. It is especially prominent in northern Nigeria, featuring a well-rooted patriarchal culture wherein women are to a large extent secluded from the public due to the cultural practice of *purdah* which prevents women's political participation and representation. An illustration showcasing this assertion is an episode during the transition period of 1992, when the Chairman of Bakori Local Government, Hajiya Mariya Abdullahi of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), complained that she experienced gender barriers to political office because her political adversaries had campaigned in the mosque. Furthermore, she complained women did not vote for her, mainly for the reason that they were told not to do so by their husbands (Olomjobi, 2013). Furthermore, it is observed that Christian women attend church more frequently than men. This social feature does not have a reverberating effect as women remain politically disinterested, whilst men dictate religious morality to a larger congregation of women.

#### ECONOMIC INEQUITY

Money and politics are interwoven. The absence of finance keeps women excluded from participating in politics. The base of this predicament is that patriarchy is found in all societies (Castells, 1997). The spirit of patriarchy is found in the utterance of Lord Fraser, who noted in 1881 that: "*The protection which has been thrown around a married woman already is sufficient, and why she should be allowed to have money in her pocket to deal with as she thinks fit I cannot understand.*" (Strachey, 1978: 274). The lack of sufficient sponsorship is a decisive impediment to effective political participation in Nigeria. Any individual running for a political position must be financially independent and capable. This is due to the fact that a large amount of funds is usually sucked into political parties and events such as campaigns, posters, advertisement which would invariably be financially expensive. This perhaps explains why women, who *earn one of tenth of the world's income*, are mostly housewives or manage to own small roadside shops rather than seek to run for a political office which traditionally belongs to male bastions. The best illustration of the low political participation of women in politics is given by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf,<sup>5</sup> the first female President of Liberia:

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<sup>5</sup> H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, "African Women and Political Participation" (paper presented on 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the African Women's Development Fund [AWDF] Accra, Ghana, November 12, 2010); accessed June 3, 2013, [http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/20101112AWDF\\_final\\_speech.pdf](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/20101112AWDF_final_speech.pdf).

*There is power in numbers. The lone female voices one encounters in political circles, including in Africa, are insufficient to effect the changes that are so important to women. As a tiny minority in governance, women could be subjected to pressures, and their capacities as representatives, policy makers and decision takers are constrained by their numbers. We still need those numbers in critical mass to make those decisions and make them stick.*

Women's lack of access to production resources and to the ownership of goods limits their access to political participation and representation. Most women do not have half of what their husbands have in savings. Also, taking into consideration single mothers and women from polygamous marriages, it is quite evident that every penny earned by the mother will be used to take care of their children rather than take part in 'gambling' for a political post they might not win at the end of the election. Conversely, it is important to note that this appears to be more prominent in parts of north-east and north-west Nigeria where religion is a strong identity marker in everyday life.

#### POLITICAL THUGGERY

A deeper and major cause for the low level of women's participation in politics is the bane of political thuggery. It is trite to assert that elections in Nigeria have been very contentious and sometimes violent. The history of elections in Nigeria is a story characterized by the institutionalization of violence, distrust, corruption and the unwillingness of losers to accept the election results. Both intra-party elections and inter-party elections have been characterized by manipulation and deceit. This might in some way explain the unwillingness of women to participate in politics. A relevant rationale behind this is that women are generalized to be politically more conservative than men (Randall, 1982: 49-53).

A common characteristic of political elections in Nigeria is that it is ridden with chronic tension and violence. A potential successful politician needs a formidable group of thugs (area boys) to ensure victory at the polls. Political brigandage, hooliganism, god-fatherism and violent behaviour prevent women from reaching their full potential in political participation. In such a political climate tinted with strong local patriarchies, women tend to shy away from political participation for the reason that they are weary about getting their hands stained with blood.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL DIMENSION

A crucial reoccurring variable that seems to regress women from being empowered is the low level of literacy and lack of education. Women invariably constitute a generously proportioned percentage of the uneducated group of the society in Nigeria. This explains the difficulty in vying for political office. The wide educational bridge between women and men affords the restriction of women in political activity. Furthermore, male dominated political parties have a male perception on issues of national interest. The world is seen only from the lens of men; the disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of development, modernization, access to infrastructures and the overwhelming existence of archaic customs tend to prevent women to harness power structures and decision-making positions.

## CULTURAL CONVENTIONS

Women constitute majority of voters during elections in Nigeria. This pattern is not peculiar to Nigeria but also to western societies. Lynne Ford notes that “*women vote at higher rates than men do, but men exhibit more interest in and attentiveness to national politics and demonstrate more knowledge about politics than women.*” (Ford, 2002: 83) It appears that the role of women in politics in Nigeria has been revolving around singing and dancing during party manifestos and campaigns with the intention of being reimbursed with bags of rice, tubers of yam and yards of cheap cloth.

The cultural and belief system of Nigerians have contributed hugely to the exclusion of women in the economic, political and social era. Cultural, religious and other social norms and prejudices accepted by Nigerians have placed women in the backseat and have positioned their full potential merely to the 3 Cs: *cleaning, cooking, childbearing*, while concurrently facing the challenges of everyday life.

Social, cultural and religious factors are largely responsible for the marginalisation of women in politics in Nigeria, predominantly in the Muslim northern part of Nigeria where politics is seen as men’s ‘private affair’. It has been reiterated that the contributions of women within their family are not important and this, in turn, prevents women from being heard when they desire to venture into politics. It is hard, then, to escape the conclusion that women find it almost impossible to participate more fully in decision-making process.

**Table 1** Women elected to public office in Nigeria 1999-2011

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011	
	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3(2.8)	109	4(3.7)	109	9(8.3)	109	7(6.4)
House of Reps	306	7(1.9)	306	21(5.8)	306	27(7.5)	306	25(6.9)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
State House of Assembly Honourable Members	990	24(2.4)	990	40(3.9)	990	57(5.8)	990	68(6.9)
State House of Assembly Committee Chairperson	829	18(2.2)	881	32(3.6)	887	52(5.9)	887	.....
Local Government Chairpersons	710	13(1.8)	774	15(1.9)	740	27(3.6)	740	.....
Local Government Councillors	6368	69(1.1)	6368	267(4.2)	6368	235(3.7)	6368	

Source: British Council Report (2012):

‘Gender in Nigeria Report 2012: Improving Lives of Girls and Women in Nigeria.’

## INTERNATIONAL POLICIES ON WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Conference of 1995, identifies the need for women’s political participation and representation in governance. It boldly stipulates that all States should take “*measures to ensure women’s equal access to*



*and full participation in power structures and decision-making” and “must increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.”*

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and came into force in 1981, states in Article 7 that:

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:*

*(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;*

*(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;*

*(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.*

Singing from the same hymnbook, the *UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000)* is the first Security Council resolution that legitimately reiterates the significance of women’s political participation and representation in politics. The Resolution also acknowledges women’s role as participating peacemakers in preventing conflicts and establishing peace-building in conflict prone regions.

The international community is against oppression of any individual on the basis of sex (gender). Article 9 (1) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the rights of women in Africa 2003 states that:

*States Parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that women participate without any discrimination in all elections.*

#### THE NIGERIAN CONSTITUTION ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states in section 14:

*(1) The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a State based on the principles of democracy and social justice.*

*(2) The participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.*

The Constitution guarantees the right of all persons to participate in determining the political destiny of the State. Section 42(1) of the Constitution further states that:

*A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination.*

Despite the clear language of the Constitution, the fact still remains that women have not been able to break the jinx of attaining equal participation in democratic governance. It is suggested that Nigeria should borrow from a sister State - Rwanda, which in spite of

its history of genocide in 1994 was the first State with a majority of 56% of women in Parliament. Moreover, according to the statistical data (January 2015) provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Rwanda ranks first in the global ranking of women in national parliaments.

#### LEGAL MECHANISMS TO ENCOURAGE GENDER PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA

##### **Raising the level of literacy**

Many women do not have basic education. A woman who does not have the basic literacy skills cannot participate actively in politics. Every individual must be equipped with education to have a useful contribution to the society today. As Katarina Tomasevski pointed out: “*Human rights are increasingly defined by one word only: empowerment. For women, the process of empowerment entails breaking away from the cycle of learned and taught submission to discrimination, carried on from one generation of women to the next*” (Tomasevski, 1993: 24). Empowerment on this account means that certain qualifications have to be obtained before a person is eligible for political posts. Therefore, women should be educated and should be encouraged to go to educational institutions and acquire relevant qualifications if they want to change the *status quo* in the world today.

##### **Financial empowerment**

Every individual interested in running for a political post must have a strong financial base. This is because a lot of finances will be spent in financing campaigns, advertisements, posters, etc. Women are usually housewives or own small kiosks/shops. Only a few women are in top positions in their offices. This makes it impossible for many women to run for any political post. Therefore, every woman should be encouraged to earn a steady and reasonable income that will allow her to participate in politics. When this is achieved, women will be one step closer to gaining equality in political participation in Nigeria.

##### **Breaking free from cultural beliefs and superstitions**

Some cultures believe that women should be seen not heard. Some cultures believe that a woman’s job is cooking, cleaning and childcare, and nothing else. Until these cultural beliefs, stereotypes and attitudes are dropped, they will only serve as an obstacle to the women’s political participation and representation in Nigeria. Women should therefore release themselves from such barbaric beliefs and values if they want to participate actively in politics.

##### **Deliberate quota**

The Federal government should assist the women by implementing the National Gender Policy at local, State and Federal level in order to ensure that gender is duly represented in the day to day running of the country, and to make sure that there is no oppression or suppression of any kind. It is also important to note that, if women know that there is a quota system just for them, they will be encouraged to participate in politics without the fear of losing completely. Jody Newman notes that: “*The reason there aren’t*

*more women in public office is not that women don't win, but that not enough women have been candidates in general elections"*(Ford, 2002: 105). It is important to point out that women in Nigeria constitute a larger portion of registered voters. However, during elections their mandates are usually side-lined by mass rigging. This circumstance has become an impediment for democratic governance. Cognizance should be taken of the 2005 General Election in Liberia, where women's political participation and representation was coherent, thereby ushering Ellen Sirleaf Johnson as the first elected democratic President of Liberia.

#### **Celebration of women who have played pioneer roles**

Women such as Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ife, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti who played major roles in Nigeria's political history should be celebrated. This will serve as an incentive for other women as well as an encouragement and a challenge for women seeking political office.

#### **Vocational training for women interested in political participation**

Women interested in vocational training should be encouraged and trained. When a woman has vocational skills or has been trained in a particular vocational skill, it leads her to financial sustainability and independence. This will encourage women to participate in politics and eradicate issues such as financial disempowerment and lack of confidence.

#### **Enlightenment of the women**

Many women do not know that it is their right and duty to participate in politics; hence, they hardly have any interest in politics. Women should be enlightened that participating in politics will be to their own benefit, and that it is their duty and right to know how their country is being governed. The key to tackling this problem is to enlighten women on the need to cooperate amongst each other. Rian Voet revealed the root of this perspective by noting that: "*Women also have the freedom to form a women's party but, to date, these have not been successful*" (Voet, 1998: 101). This, according to social liberals, is no wonder because women are too divided amongst themselves on 'general issues'. This means that there is lack of awareness for the need to balance gender awareness in political participation.

### **CONCLUSION**

Laws should be promulgated to promote female representation in politics and awareness programs should be put in place to eradicate the deeply rooted beliefs and stereotypes that a woman's place is in the kitchen and that her only jobs are cooking, cleaning and childcare. As women tend to co-operate with each other and build viable networks for establishing representation in political structures, an association of women politicians should be established. Given that women constitute half the population of Nigeria, it is quite clear that networking is likely to redress gender imbalance in politics. It should be recalled that the networking of market women led to the often debated moment in history when women decided to sing in harmony against oppression during the Igbo Women's War of 1927, also known as the Aba riots. A notable aftermath of this uprising was that women's living conditions were enhanced and women began to hold titles such as Warrant Chiefs, a

political office that had not been granted to women before the riots. A united front of Nigerian women would go a long way in making positive impact on the political climate of Nigeria.

All things considered, the concise words of Joan Chittister may serve as a source of inspiration for women:

*The moment a woman comes home to herself, the moment she knows that she has become a person of influence, an artist of her life, a sculptor of her universe, a person with rights and responsibilities, who is respected and respects herself and her deepest knowing, ...the resurrection of the world begins.*<sup>6</sup>

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## RODNA POLITIKA I DEMOKRATIJA U NIGERIJU

*Dugogodišnji period vojne diktature imao je štetan uticaj na političke promene u Nigeriji i odlučujuću ulogu u kreiranju socijalno-političkog položaja žene u nigerijskom društvu. S obzirom da su žene uvek bile nedovoljno zastupljene u vojnim režimima, ova činjenica je u velikoj meri doprinela stvaranju velikog jaza između muškaraca i žena koji još uvek postoji u sadašnjem demokratskom sistemu upravljanja. To na neki način objašnjava nizak nivo demokratske kulture i pojavu raznih prepreka sa kojima se žene suočavaju u svakodnevnom životu, prvenstveno usled neadekvatne zastupljenosti u strukturama vlasti i organima odlučivanja. Ovaj rad nastoji da prikaže izazove sa kojima se žene suočavaju u borbi za ostvarivanje svoje političke uloge u društvu, objasni razloge nedovoljne političke zastupljenosti žena u javnim funkcijama i analizira političke okolnosti koje onemogućavaju političku*

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<sup>6</sup> Benedictine. "Global Peace Initiative of Women."; Accessed June 23, 2011, [http://carolhansengrey.com/Quotes/Women\\_Quotes.html](http://carolhansengrey.com/Quotes/Women_Quotes.html).

*participaciju žena. U tom kontekstu, najpre se moraju doneti zakoni koji bi promovisali veću zastupljenost žena u politici. Osim toga, neophodno je organizovati edukativne programe u cilju podizanja svesti i iskorenjivanja duboko uvreženih stereotipa o položaju žene u društvu. S obzirom na činjenicu da žene sve više saraduju i uspostavljaju održive ženske mreže koje omogućavaju da se njihov glas čuje u političkim strukturama, trebalo bi uspostaviti neku vrstu udruženja politički aktivnih žena. Kako žene čine polovinu ukupnog stanovništva u Nigeriji, takva vrsta udruživanja bi znatno ublažila rodni disbalans u politici. Ujedinjeni front žena bi istovremeno imao ogroman pozitivan uticaj na političku klimu u Nigeriji.*

**Ključne reči:** *rodna politika, rodni disbalans, demokratija, politička participacija žena.*