FEMINISM AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN NORTHEASTERN NIGERIA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT
It is a universal fact that women, unlike men gender used to be marginalized, oppressed, abused, and deprived their socio-economic, educational, political and legal rights. This necessitated a broader global feminist movement to advocate for equal rights and opportunities of all genders. This paper titled "Feminism and Gender Discrimination in Northeast Nigeria: A Theoretical Perspective on Northeastern Nigeria" presents an attempt to examine the existing discrimination of women with regards to their socio-economic, political, educational and legal rights in Northeastern Nigeria. The paper uses secondary source of data collection through major instruments such as textbooks, journals, online publications, among others, while content method of data analysis was explored in the analysis of the data collated. The research also employs Legal feminist theories as its theoretical framework. Some of the findings of the paper reveals that, religion, culture, societal division of labour, among other things, contribute a lot in promoting gender discrimination in Northeastern Nigeria. The paper recommends for a designed policy that is "northeastern-centric" in nature that would address a notion of "men gender naturally ahead"; strengthen the activities of nongovernmental organizations for their advocacy against gender discrimination, and so forth.

Introduction

History has shown that, women across the globe are marginalized, oppressed and abused to the extent that they are deprived from their socio-political, economic, educational and legal rights just because of their genders. Many perspectives of feminism; liberal, Marxist, black, existential feminism etcetera exist to promote the gospel of full right and liberty of women across the globe and to stress the equal rights and benefit of genders. Feminism is therefore with the belief that, individuals should not experience any form of discrimination based on their genders and it seeks to stabilize systemic inequalities as well as challenging societal beliefs and norms that promote gender-based differences.

Connectedly, feminism evolved through different waves, history and stages and each wave addresses specific issue(s) ranging from suffrage movements to intersectional perspectives etc. thereby expanding the scope of gender equality and promoting inclusive and equitable world. Speaking from the universal experience, the basic slogan of feminism centers on the creation of a just and equitable society or creation of a classless society as well as the creation of a neutrality in genders respectively. As such, this gives room for the equality of genders as it is accepted in many societies where women accepting responsibilities as against the other societies that denied them taking same advantages as males especially when it comes to holding public responsibilities.

As the most populous African state, Nigeria still suffers from uncountable cases of gender discrimination which continued to put women in the country in gross disadvantage. Despite the fact that women constitute about half of the population of the Nigerian State and are known to play vital roles as mothers, producers, managers, community developers/organizers etc and their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres, however, their participation in formal and informal structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant.

The case remains the same in the Northeastern region of the country. The level of discrimination of women in Northeastern Nigeria notably stemmed from the culture, religious beliefs and the patriarchal nature of the societies accross the region. This translates in women's unequal access to education, healthcare, legal, and political opportunities in the region. Women have no choices in regards to their education, abortion, marriage, job selection, political appointment to mention but few just because of the culture of the contemporary northeast Nigeria. It is based on this background that this research seeks to examine the basis of gender/women discrimination vis-a-vis feminism in the Northeastern Nigeria with a view to profer solution to certain scenarios that result in the subjugation and unequal treatment of women in the region.

Conceptual and Historical Development of Feminism

The term "Feminism" was derived from the Latin word "Femina", which means "women", and was first used with regards to issues of equality and women's right movement (Raina, 2017). It presents a set of beliefs and ideas that belong to the broad social and political movement to achieve greater equality for women. As it is governing ideology, feminism gives shape and direction to the women movement and of course, is shaped by it (Fiss, 1994).

The concept of feminism however, was defined differently by different scholars, though, one common thread that goes through most of the definition is quest and compaign for protection of rights of women and simply gender equality. According to (Stephen, 2019) the words ‘feminist’ or ‘feminism’ are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new Woman’s Movement which emerged in the late 1960s. Likewise, Raina (2017) believes that the idea behind feminism revolves around advocacy for equal rights and opportunities of all genders, as well as challenging the gender-based discrimination already in existence and dismantling patriarchal structures of domination.

In various societies of the world, the pattern of women oppression and subordination are believed to be different, consequently, different feminist groups have emerged in different times. But the main goal of every group is to achieve gender equality (Tong, 2009). Feminism can be manifested into seven categories as; i) liberal feminism, ii) Marxist feminism iii) socialist feminism, iv) radical feminism, v) ecofeminism, vi) cultural feminism, vii) black feminism, and viii) postmodern feminism (Jaggar, 1983). Each ideology tries to describe women's oppression, explains the causes and consequences, and suggested strategies for women liberation. Feminists support a gender-based view of the state, which is based on the creation of a gender-neutral society (Brunell and Burkett, 2019).

To work toward social transformation of gender inequality to equality, feminism undergoes various stages through the following waves, each of which marked by specific goals and challenges as follows:

The First Waves of Feminism

The first wave of feminism emerged in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries with focused on suffrage and legal rights. The first wave was championed by Elizabeth Candy Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage etc. as liberal feminism. As part of their advocacy, they called for the introduction of laws to promote the rights of women to vote, have access to education and legal recognition. However, the first wave feminism took place in Western countries with some important remarkable events such as the Seneca Falls Convention in the year 1848 where the major concern was put to kick against the sentiments on women and blacks and the year 1920 which was the period United States passed the 19th Amendment law granting women the right to vote. Many activists engaged in protests, marches and civil disobedience to secure this voting rights and this has played a significant victory in the first wave because women gained right to vote in different countries and has addressed issues that cut across property rights, marriage and employment opportunities as well as challenging the societal norms that restricted women to only domestic roles. In contrast, this wave have been criticized on the ground that, it focused on issues primarily relevant to middle-class white women and neglecting broader intersectional concerns.

The Second Wave of Feminism

The second wave of feminism occurred during the 1960's and 1990's with emphasis on women of color and developing nations seeking sisterhood, and solidarity. Like Marx, in this wave, they see women's struggle as class struggle addressing a broader range of issues that go beyond legal rights. In this phase, emphasis was given on social and cultural inequalities such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination and the general women status in society. To address these, there were call to give women access to birth control, reproductive rights and the right for legal abortion. Women should have sexual liberation, tackle workplace discrimination, to have equal pay as well as advocacy for equal opportunities and fair treatment. The most important figures during the second wave were Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem etc. who played an important role in expanding the scope of gender equality and influencing policy changes. Some of the important events during the second wave include the formation of the National Organization for Women, the Education Amendments of 1972 etc. (Rampton, 2008).

Third Wave of Feminism

The third wave started from 1990's to the 2000s with focus on diversity, intersectionality, and individual empowerment. However, this wave focused to address the shortcomings of first and second waves and embraced more inclusiveness that considered the experiences of women from various cultural, racial and sexual backgrounds. To this waive, women's experiences are intersectional and interconnected with other social identities such as race, class and sexual orientation.

Fourth Wave of Feminism

The fourth wave of feminism primarily focused on the use of technology for activism and it acknowledged a wide range of platforms in playing a significant role in escalating women's voices and organizing feminist movements. In other words, the fourth wave feminism is a digital advocacy that highlights the issues related to reproductive rights, workplace discrimination and gender-based violence. It also seeks to dismantle systemic barriers in fostering inclusive and equitable gender society. This wave promotes hashtag campaigns and online movements through social media as a big seal of the fourth wave because it is through the social media and technology gargets, unique challenges faced by women of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and socio-economic backgrounds would be recognized and addressed.

Theoretical framework

There are lots of theories in social and political science that can explain the issue of women inequality.

Liberal Feminist Theory

This research adopts the theory of liberal feminism in analyzing the gender and women discrimination phenomenon in northerneastern Nigeria, as the theory explains the origins and causes of socio-economic, political, cultural, and psychological inequalities women face. There are many scholars that work in promoting the arguments put forward by liberal feminist thesis, the initial work that gave birth to what is seen

today as Liberal Feminist theory is usually attributed to the efforts of Abigail Adams and Mary Wollstonecraft (West, 1913).

Liberal feminism was born in Western countries from the contact of educated women with liberal ideas. Liberal feminists want to apply the philosophy of liberalism to gender equality: the oppression of women lies in their lack of political and civil rights. This has been made possible according to the theory basically due to female subordination which is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance to and success in the so-called public world, and strive for gender equality via political and legal reform. According to the assumption of this theory, gender discrimination and inequality are the result of social and cultural practices, rather than innate differences between men and women. It can, therefore, be countered by reforms aiming at establishing equal opportunities for both women and men. Women's 'liberation' would, thereby, be achieved by putting an end to discriminatory practices, and by pushing for equal rights (Chatterjee, 2001).

Thus, contemporary Liberal feminists seek to reform the legal and political system so that women can access opportunities and produce a state of equality between men and women (Sindhuja and Murugan, 2001). Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects marked the beginning of feminist theory in the early-to-mid 18th century (1792). Mary Wollstonecraft was not concerned with the equality of men and women in essence, but she believes that women have a more extensive function in society than simply maintaining the household.

Relevance of the Theory to the Study

The theory appeared to be relevant in explaining gender and women discrimination in Northeastern Nigeria. As has been explained by the theory, the basis for women's discrimination rooted the customary practices of the societies across northeastern Nigeria resulting in subjugation of women and undermining their self-esteem. The overall impact of gender bias, cultural norms and practices has entrenched a feeling of inferiority in women and place them at disadvantage position over their male counterpart in the socio-political, economic, cultural and social interaction. These socially constructed norms and stereotype roles make women overplay their 'feminity' by accepting that they are 'weaker sexes', overemphasizing the dainty nature of their sex and regarding exceptional achievement as masculine.

Methodology

This paper gathered its data from secondary source through such instruments like textbooks, journals, conference papers and online publications among others. The data gathered were reviewed in a thematic way using content analysis and the results gotten were presented qualitatively.

Feminism and Gender Discrimination in Northeastern Nigeria

Issues that have to do with gender discrimination have been a general global phenomenon, with almost all the sections of the world (both developed, developing and underdeveloped countries) experiencing various modes of gender, or more precisely unequal treatment of women in the socio-economic and political landscapes. However, Nigeria is not immune from this, especially the states in the Northeastern region which factual statistical data presented as the most backward region in the whole of Nigerian State. Thus, the following presents a sample picture of the pattern of gender discrimination in the region (Northeast):

Feminism and Discrimination on Education

One of the factors that causes discrimination to women gender in the northeastern Nigeria is their level of education. Northeastern Nigeria has the belief of giving priority of formal education to men over women. The traditional Northeastern Nigerian society paid less attention to girl's formal education and focus on informal education as the major training young girls received to prepare themselves for household work. Women are mainly trained to cook, home craft, child rearing etc. and they were not encouraged by parents to send them to schools. As a result, they received little or no parental support. Unlike boys who on the other hand went to school with parental support and approval which give them a feeling of importance and superiority. A clear example is that, according to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), more than 50 percent of girls in Nigeria constituting about 7.6 million girls are

not attending school out of which 3.9 million of them are at primary level and 3.7 at secondary junior level. However, out of this 50 percent of out of school girls, 48 percent of them are in northeast and northwest respectively (Odeyemi, 2027). The data above simply suggests that Northeastern Nigeria is hit harder by challenges that have to do with gender inequality in terms of educational training for men and women. While education remains vital need for all human specie, it is very visible that in some Nigerian regions, especially Northwest and Northeast, women were left behind.

Feminism and the Attitude of Early Marriage

The notion on girls' early marriage in Northeastern Nigeria is a serious issue of major concern that have continued to draw the attention of feminist advocates in the region. The attitude of early marriage by girls in the northeast regardless of their ages comes because of the feelings and fear that girls who waited for long might not find suitable husbands. Also, In many parts of the Northern Nigeria, females are the victims of such inequalities in terms of early and force marriage as some men view women's roles only in the "kitchen, the living room and the other room" (Buhari, 2022). This denies them access to many opportunities including access to reproductive choices. In many instances, women used to be deprived their reproductive rights including the right to make abortion or birth control when the need be. Despite the fact that Nigeria co-sponsored the 2018 UN General Assembly resolutions on child, early and forced marriage and also signed a joint statement on Human Rights Council 2014 resolution, child marriage continues to prevail by 77% especially in the poorest communities dominantly residing in the northeast and west Nigeria. In such communities, the early marriage is mostly carried out to lessen the economic burden for their respective families. According to Multi Indicator Cluster Survey (2018), Nigeria had witnessed over 23 million girl child marriages many of which are in the North West and North Eastern part of Nigeria constituting the highest prevalence of child brides at 68% and 57% respectively (Save the Children, 2021). Therefore, this stresses that feminist advocacy has a long way to go in fighting this long tradition that has almost become order of the day in Northeastern Nigeria. Based on this also, the advocacy for the equality of women in terms of reproductive rights may be very difficult in such patriarchal society where male gender takes leading role in providing the basic need and necessities to the family.

Feminism and Job Discrimination

Another issue on gender discrimination in northeastern Nigeria is the question of job discrimination. Women's historical experience of discrimination puts them at a disadvantage position economically. Over the years, sexual division of labour and job opportunities offered on sex basis has given men productive gender roles, enabling them to possess more purchasing power over their female counterparts. As an implication, the Nigerian labor force participation rate among females was 52.2% while for the males was 65.9% in 2023 alone (https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/nigeria). For example, in northern Nigeria with the exception of few States, women are not partaking in high lucrative business, they were reserve petty trades mostly at their matrimonial homes. Moreover, there are clear division of jobs in the northeast unlike in the south where woman would join military and paramilitary without being stigmatize by the society. This economic disparity favours men taking advantage over women, and this makes women dependent on men financially. This has revealed the extent of financial incapacitation of women especially in the northeast. It affects what jobs women are able to get and how much they are to be paid. These pay gaps between men and women continues and has created a legacy of discrimination and contributes to gender inequality.

Feminism and Patriarchal Domination

Moreso, the believe on men naturally ahead of women is another serious gender discrimination concern in the northernestern Nigeria. Patriarchy literarily denotes a rule by the father, it refers to a society's rule subscribe to men domination over women as practice in northernestern Nigeria and other sub-saharan African countries within the families giving men a higher social status over women. As a result, the northeastern Nigeria's families play crucial role in maintaining the status quo, thereby promoting the patriarchal order for longer generation. In other words, such patrichial tendency gives an ample opportunity to men to decide what to be done and what not to be done in their home. They feed the family, they decide what to cook, which school their children to attend, what time the woman should go out, and

what roles their wives to perform at home (Allanana, 2013). This patriarchal system practice upto now in the northeastern Nigeria has created alot of mayhem leading to destabilization of many families because not every directive would be tolerated by women at home.

Feminism, Religion, Culture and the issue of Political Participation

Religious belief has been and is still a challenge to feminist movement in northern Nigeria. Religion s a range of social-cultural systems, including designated behaviors and practices, morals, beliefs, world views, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations, that generally relate humanity to supernatural, transcendental and spiritual elements although there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion. It is also described as a system of beliefs and practices that relate to supernatural beings and are intended to organize and define the environment in which the religious community operates (Gaitanos, 2019). Islam and Christianity as religious faiths belief in supernatural being or beings. These religions are practice in northern Nigeria with majority Muslims. With the introduction of Sharia in some northern states as being practiced in Kano and Zamfara states, has rising some issues regarding such practice, this makes it so difficult to present women candidates in the northeastern Nigeria as aspirant (the cases of Aishatu Binani in Adamawa and Aishatu M.B Ahmad in Gombe State (as been discussed below) have been is a tangible example of how gender discrimination affects women's participation in politics in the Northeastern Nigeria).

Feminism, Political Identity and Representation

Connected with the above, the northeastern Nigeria is experiencing unequal political participation because of political identity. Political identity is group identification with political relevance and people build their political selves based on political group membership (Buddy, 2013). Political identity is one of the issues challenging the representation of women in politics especially in the northeast Nigeria. For example, in Adamawa state, a woman gubernatorial aspirant; Aishatu Dahiru Ahmed known as Binani came out second position after the official announcement of 2023 governorship election result. This happened because of what is called politics of identity; mostly women voted their fellow women likewise men voted their fellow men. In the case of Gombe state, the case of Aishatu M.B Ahmed whose saga between her and her counterpart contestant in the national assembly; Usman Bello Kumo and many of their kinds show the level of inequality when it comes to representation as the number of men in state and national assembly supersede that of women. The issue of "Mai 'Dankwali" (subscribing to women symbolize by "head tie" and "Mai Hula "Suscribing to men symbolize by cap) dominate the political atmosphere in the north causing poor representation of women in governance and causing difficulty in correcting this notion.

Feminism rape and stigmatization in northeastern

To buttress further, Boko Haram and bandits have caused serious threats to women. Women are facing issues related to sexual harassment by these terrorists groups especially when abducted. Women faced many consequences when abducted because in most cases, these terrorists usually derive their sexual pleasure from the women abductees, which as a result, they felt stigmatized by the society to the extent that if such case of harassment is known in the public domain, such women find it difficult to get partners for marriage. And for the married women, their husbands mostly run away from them (Abubakar, 2023). Feminist movement may find such instance very difficult to rehabilitate the mindsets of such husbands and societies with the raw information on such women that fall under the victim of raping.

Feminism and Racism

Racism is the bias that member of a particular group is more superior than the other race. Racism is practice in many societies including the northern Nigeria. For example, women from another region of the country (Southwest and Southeast) living in the north or women from different tribes that are not northerners find it very difficult to get married in the north. Hausa man goes for Hausa girl and Yoruba Man goes for Yoruba girl etc. They face serious unequal treatment from the fellow men and relatives when it comes to marriage. Those that are not Hausa/Fulani are term as "Qabilu", meaning

tribe outside Hausa/Fulani. Not only this, issue of fair complexion women versus black, the tall versus short, the slim versus fat, educated versus uneducated dichotomy mostly comes out visible when issues related to women gender comes in and correcting this notion requires a total commitment.

The Recommendation/Prospect to Feminism in Northeastern Nigeria

1. There is serious need to address the burning issues concerning women's right to choices with regards to marriage, and choosing partner. This has to do with the work to break the long-term tradition of forced marriages; uncontrolled and unhealthy pregnancy, among other things that in many cases put the lives of women in disarray. There should be a policy framework (northern-centric in nature) that would focus on women choices about marriage and the right to make choices about one's own sexual preference etc. This will enable personal choices and freedom from external control or coercion.

2. There is need for political and legal reform in the context of gender equality. This will help in revising and reshaping political and legal structures to eliminate discriminatory practices and promote equitable treatment of all genders. This can be done through advocacy for increased representation of all genders in political offices and decision-making positions as well as enacting and enforcing laws that prohibit gender-based discrimination in various areas, including employment, education etc.

3. The governments across the regions need to work round the clock to ensure speedy implementation of laws and policies that address the existing disparity in wage payment between the genders, especially in the mini private business environments, where some jobs with very meager wages are being advertised for women alone. Likewise, strict measures need to be taken against all Gender-Based violence and sexual harassment of whatever kind in order to ensure the protection of the right and dignity of all. All legal frameworks to this end should be strengthened.

4. Implementing policies that provide equal opportunities for both genders in terms of jobs. Addressing and rectifying gender biases within legal systems to ensure fair treatment is the issue that requires prompt intervention by the federal, state, local governments and nongovernmental organizations.

5. Also, the activities of non-state actors, especially civil society organizations and the entire non-governmental bodies that work in the area of gender equality should be consolidated and encouraged in order to promote massive inclusion of women in day-to-day affairs of the states within the Northeastern region of Nigeria.

Conclusion

Feminism is a movement for the equal treatment of all genders. It has challenged the intersecting form of oppression that women face globally such as race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability intersect with gender, influencing women's experiences in complex ways. Addressing these intersections is crucial for crafting inclusive solutions that uplift all women. Feminism undergoes series of waves, the first wave of feminism emerged in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries with focused on suffrage and legal rights. The second wave, from the 1960s to the 1980s, addressed broader issues like reproductive rights and workplace equality. The third wave, emerging in the 1990s, emphasized diversity, intersectionality, and individual empowerment. Each wave built upon the achievements and shortcomings of its predecessor, contributing to the ongoing evolution of feminist thought and activism. Feminism therefore creates opportunities for women and addresses challenges women faced.

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