GENDER SOCIO-CULTURAL NORMS IN THE LEADERSHIP OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENT UNIONS: UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA, NIGERIA AS PARADIGM.

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Abstract

The circle of uneven representation of the female gender in politics, called for sustained research into forms and patterns of this reoccurring gender inequality problem in Nigerian society. This paper evaluated how gender socio-cultural norms of different complex affected leadership structures and values in Nigerian Student Union Government (SUGs). It argues that, with the import of various degrees of socio-cultural norms, existing bias gender representation in leadership structure, in all institutional organs would be difficult to eradicate. In this view, the paper examined the grip gender socio-cultural norms and practices have on leadership representations in University of Abuja, Student Union body. The why and how socio-cultural practices shaped the course of female gender leadership aspirations, is a paradigm of intellectual and development-based inquiry. Adopted research methodology is arts-based research (ABR) of secondary data content analysis. The conceptual framework is inequality, while theoretical framework is feminism. The paper found that with the numerous harmful cultural practices prevalent in Nigerian society, equal gender representation in leadership at all institutional organs, would remain elusive. Equally, the paper found that a correlation existed in leadership gaps at University Student Unions, Legislative Assembly, and Executive Governance in Nigeria. This trajectory is a function of the negative impact of socio-cultural norms and practices that hemmed the female gender. The study concluded that the given leadership inequalities in Nigeria, calls for an urgent reevaluation of some harmful cultural practices that created deep gender inequalities and leadership contradictions contrary to international best practices. This concern is thought necessary in the face of apparent underrepresentation of the female gender at University Student Unions' leadership and Nigeria's 10th assembly. The study recommended value change by patriarchs as well as domestication of international conventions on the subject by acts of parliament.

Keywords: **Gender, Harmful Practices, Representation, Socio-Cultural Norms, Student Union.**

INTRODUCTION

Development best practices in 21st century, contemplates the role consistent evaluation of gender parity index plays in proffering solutions to values that mitigates the effect of socio-economic and political challenges faced by individuals. These challenges are not peculiar to Nigeria, rather, pervade all nation states regardless of wealth and might. Leadership and political structures even representation in gender, is one proven approach acceptable in national and international researched literatures. Studies reveal that most nation states are beclouded by uneven development index, such that falls way short of acceptable standards. Hence the gender dimension in the interrogation and interpretation of leadership structures at the University Student Union Governments (SUGs). Nigerian universities remain a breeding ground for active political participation at an early stage in life. The foundations laid by unionist' activities, oftentimes fetters the ground for constructive participation and representation in politics at latter stages in life. Although, this paper does not imply that all active student leaders end up being political leaders in society. However, studies demonstrate the trajectory between the two, as well as suggests that leadership pattern is hugely uneven, and implicates the seeming female gender near invisibility in currentlegislative structure at Nigeria's 10th assembly. The apparent absence of the female gender in politics is one occasioned by gender socio-cultural norms found among and between different regions in Nigeria. It is argued by various scholars that these socio-cultural norms are factors that make it almost impossible for even political, social and economic ladder to emerge in Nigeria.

Inclusive leadership patterns have a way of mitigating the effects of socio-economic shocks in society, to this end, has studies consistently argue that the present reality in development blue prints include a gender analysis to viable solutions advanced. This paper is one of such commentaries aimed at interrogating the consequences of present gender socio-cultural norms prevalent in Nigerian society, leadership at (SUGs) and its concomitant effects on legislative assemblies. The descriptive and prescriptive norms society approves for women come with problems found strong enough to create apathy and consequent development problems in society. The consistent socio-cultural norms prominent in patriarchy, stereotypes and ethno-religious currents framed under the canopy of harmful cultural practices have an unhealthy hold on Nigeria's underdeveloped status and current pariah portrait held of her among committee of nations. Underrepresentation of the female gender in leadership positions unveils the level of inequality in both academic and non-academic spaces occupied by both genders. In all cases, women are hemmed and made to play out society's prejudicial subservient roles. The implication of these stereotypes portends danger for human and infrastructural capital in many forms. Literature accentuates the importance of locating investigations of this complex in academic spaces given that it is meant to be a breeding ground for society's intellectual base of research into ways and means of solving problems contingent on peculiar needs confronting democratic

governance.

Cultural and harmful practices associated with gender definition in different cultural locations in Nigeria, have shown inclinations as perpetuating agents for poor democratic governance in Nigeria. To this end, has research in different forms observed that gender socio-cultural norms, plays a vital role in creating leadership gaps that affects society in various ways. Strategic approaches of achieving these harmful goals on the female gender, portrays implicit and explicit patterns. These patterns for the purposes of this study, demonstrates a constancy with the argument of feminist critics in proven academic shades, who sees these harmful practices as obstacles to development. In like consequence, this study examines how gender socio-cultural norms of patriarchy, stereotypes and ethno- religious norms shape the variance of uneven leadership structures in (SUGs) and parliament in Nigeria. The approach in this paper is one structured first on clarifying concepts and their relatedness to issues advanced in this study, thereafter, an examination of gender socio-cultural norms and the leadership question is investigated. Closely following this examination, are the operational trajectories between (SUGs), legislative assembly leadership and politics of representation depicted in Nigeria's 10th assembly.

Conceptual Clarifications

(a) Gender Socio-Cultural Norms (GSCN)

Clarifying the concept of gender related socio-cultural norms in this study, exposes the variance of inequality in various cultural locations in Nigeria. (GSCN) and its corresponding harmful practices come in many foci and assume far more dangerous implication than often reported. In all definitive sense and interpretation, gender socio- cultural norms affects and fashions the relationship pattern between and amongst gender in intersectional cadences. They define and regulate codes, symbols, behavior of gender relationships. Often times, it comes in signs and reflects the unspoken rules which must be followed by all, in patterned ways, and means. Enforcement does not necessarily have to be by one gender, rather, both genders enforce it dictates, deviants are often melted with deadly consequences. Conformism thus becomes the unspoken rule society is doctored to follow through repetitive actions that confers roles, status and acceptable behavior on members of the given cultural society. Through these repeated actions, it consciously or unconsciously becomes an action learnt and imbibed as a rule of function by all.

(GSCN) principally refers to peculiar values and acceptable ways of beliefs of a given people. It is culture specific with attendant values often handed down from generation to generations. It practically consists of culture and ensuing social system governing a people. (Giwa & Babakatun, 2019) accentuates that social-cultural norms shape and conditions the behavior and personality of people, defining their tangible and intangible elements of life. Such elements of life they argue, includes beliefs, values, attitudes, habits, forms of behavior and lifestyles of persons as developed from cultural, religious, educational and social conditioning.

Various literatures indicate that socio-cultural norms are reflections of culture. Studies equally affirm that leadership contingencies, survival or dearth, is relative to cultural

tolerance or rigidity. Moreover, existing literature argue that the unequal leadership representation in gender forms, in (SUGs) is a function of culture's profound influence on the female gender. Socio-norms being an aspect of culture make this socio-cultural analysis critical to this paper's understanding and interpretation of emerging representation index inadequacies in (SUGs) and Nigerian society. (Peplau et al, 1999) posits that, the goal of a socio-cultural analysis of gender is to identify ways in which specific features of a cultural context influences specific aspect of the lives of women and men. This implies that any research that tends to undermine the role human factor plays in the analysis and understanding of the subject of research, is attempting to solve a societal problem without investigating the critical dimensions of the beneficiaries of such development aimed project. Consequently, Reid and Comas Diaz (1990) cited in (Peplau et al., 1999), warns that, {A}s in gender studies which ignores race, ethnic studies which overlook gender,present us with an incomplete and, possibly, distorted view of the behavior we attempt to investigate. This extrapolates to the very context of this paper in suggesting that any attemptto undermine factors creating apathy towards engendering the representation of students at (SUGs), and women at the legislative assemblies and executive arms, presents us all with a deliberate or unintended enthronement of weaponized poverty for the female gender in all ramifications.

(b) Representation

This implies equality in voice, participation and even presence of both genders in matters that affects their lives. Be it socio-economic or political, representation is a sensitive aspect of understanding and interpreting the role divergent views plays in social, economic and political well-being. According to (Abolaji, 2015), exploring the concept of representation in texts and its dynamics in the literature, suggests that it is a potent socializing agent in gendering learners into gendered persons that might be difficult to undo in their future adult life. Either in its primary or secondary notions, gender representation critics' argument has been that, uneven representation reinforces the act of gendered pattern that subjugates along hegemonic formation of authority.

The gender myth and metaphors that unequal representation advances in society, remain a critical analytical path of feminist ideologist' and critics. However, the presence of such collective representation in dominant authoritarian values, remain a contested area of investigation and academic debate. The impact of underrepresentation for the female gender, in all categories of leadership structure, exemplifies hegemonic values of male authority over female existence. One of such authorities defined by gender socio-cultural norms, in (Abolaji, 2015) views, is that all representation is encoded into texts and others are left out in order to give a preferred representation (the preferred syntagm).

Clarifying the concept representation further, calls for a reexamination of its existence in University of Abuja Student Union Government. In the words of Heywood (2007), cited in (Uzoma, Adegoke & Ibekwe, 2022), representation as a political principle is a relationship through which an individual or group stands for, or acts on behalf of, a large body of people. Either in person or group classification, the study found abysmal absence of the

female gender in all categories of decision-making circles. This paper's interest lies in the very heart of unequal representation occasioned by gender socio-cultural norms whose consequences breed dominant ideologies that excludes the female gender from decision making positions in (SUGs) and society. This argument opens crucial analytical insights into definition and understanding of how female gender representation reinforces gendered power system in culture. These forms of systemic representation, permeates viable means of stereotypical culture of dominance in society. Owen cited in (Abolaji, 2015) argues that, Representation is not neutral, it is an act of power in our culture ie masculine over feminine... which further represents the high and mass culture.

These definitions confirm that harmful cultural value systems are inimical to leadership quest and representation amongst female student in Nigerian universities. Representation critics' have as well consistently suggested that, unequal representation have the capacity of engendering stereotypes in society. The observed consequences of stereotypes in leadership, and democratic governance are telling and exposes the roots of retrogressive inequality in gender terms at the (SUGs) and Nigeria's 10th assembly. Representation this paper argues, have contextual implication in locating development in the female gender and society. Given that stereotypes remain a way of reinforcing differences in people and between them, critics argues that these differences are often presented in cultural norms as neutral and natural ways of living.

(c) Student Union Government (SUGs)

Conceptualizing (SUGs) for this paper, suggest forms of interpretation related to arguments foregrounded therein. Nigerian universities in various region, bears a mark of divergent issues peculiar to its existence. According to (Yusfu et al, 2023), Nigerian student unionism can be divided into two phases. First, is the pre-colonial era and the post-independence era. Generally, student unionism was noted to have begun in (1925) with the West African Students' Union (WASU), pioneered by some Nigerian students in London led by Ladipo Solanke. With the emergence of University College Ibadan in 1948, the very first indigenous (SUG) was formed with Kunle Adepoju as its pioneer president. In this sense, (SUGs) are formed with an understanding that peculiar challenges that affects students in universities are channeled through their respective student unions. The complex of gender equality in these unions especially at University of Abuja Nigeria, calls for critical interrogation to unearth the observed unequal representation of female gender in leadership of the (SUGs). (Global School News, 2023) provides a collaborative guide when they note, that Student Union is the only official body recognized by the university to represent the views and interest of all the students. The implication for female gender leadership now and future with existing unequal reality, depicts and truncates political voice in future leadership positions especially at the legislative arm.

Socio-Cultural Norms and Leadership Question in Nigeria.

The study observes that gender socio-cultural norms are harmful but not homogenous to Nigeria society, rather, occurs in all parts of the World. Studies reveal that these harmful norms foreground a viable foundation for women's minimal presence in classifications of quantifiable representation in leadership at (SUGs) and democratic governance. This aspect of the paper offers direction into multiple ways and forms (GSCN) derails equality in leadership and development of the human and capital infrastructure in Nigeria. Principally, these harmful practices that is desirous of urgent change, are, patriarchy, stereotypes and ethno-religious norms.

(a) Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a common denominator in this paradigm of discourse. The role patriarchal rule plays in denying women basic socio-economic and political rights have been the argument of feminist critics over the years. Patriarchy is defined as rulership by male subjects. The subject being male and object female. That is, rulership by the father in public and private spheres. According to (Abeda, 2012), the word patriarchy means the rule of the father or the patriarch 'and originally it was used to describe specific type of male- dominated family. Bhasin cited in (Abeda, 2012) holds that, now it is used more generally to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, andto characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. He further suggests that patriarchy as a concept has a multi focal hermeneutic interpretation and application. He observes that, patriarchy to feminist suggest power relationship between men and women in any given context. Bashin cited in (Abeda, 2012) concludes bynoting that, Feminist uses the concept as a tool to understand women realities‖. In the papers' analysis, it goes beyond understanding their realities to demystifying near absence of women in achieving set and expected leadership socio-economic goals deposited in political power systems.

If power, dominance, hierarchy and practices characterize patriarchy, it buttresses the papers' argument that; there is a mutually given relationship between gender, power systems, inequality and disempowerment of women in representation at the (SUGs) and Legislative assembly. Closely related and evident in this investigation, is the harmful practices of stereotypes.

(b) Stereotype Practices

Gender system of power is often pivoted through stereotypes created centuries ago of women and men in all societies. Stereotypes powers patriarchy and the consequent gender subordinate roles, status and subjugate complicate given. Stereotypes with its ensuing socio-cultural and religious ambience have grave consequences for the politics of female gender representation, disempowerment and access to, and participation in truly

representational (SUGs) and National leadership questions. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2015) notes that; stereotypes have the power to reduce the development and given natural talent and abilities of girls and boys, as well as their educational and professional experiences and life opportunities in general. This buttresses the fact that with stereotypes of different colorations and ethnic context, girls more than boys are discouraged from participating and benefiting from the opportunities and experiences in leadership. Apparently, these leadership inequalities present the country with unanswered questions relating to gains of democracy in a country filled with potentials of human and natural resources, yet struggling to ensure benefits of democratic governance to her people. The European institute further holds that, these stereotypes are applied in the context of deeply engrained attitude, norms and values that are prejudicial against women, using it to maintain and justify historical relations of power of men over women.

The place of stereotypes in this discourse especially as it concerns systems of power and powerlessness, and its concomitant offspring of inequality and disempowerment in National leadership question, presents more questions than answers for this paper. The position of the European institute for gender equality, who emphatically notes that stereotypes are used to justify and maintain the historical relations of power, lay huge credence to how critical the trajectory of (GSCN) in leadership representation can be in the analysis of social, economic and political milestone of the female gender, through experiences and opportunities provided for by leadership exposures.

(c) Ethno-Religious Practices

The place of ethno-religious practices in national leadership discourse is of high currency in creating apathy amongst female gender representation in governance. This represents the role ethnic inclined religious prejudices plays in determining the gender that dose what, when and how. The complex and sensitive nature of this (GSCN) with its harmful consequences, have overtime, being a clog on the wheel of self and national development in Nigeria. The multiethnic and religious diversities in Nigeria, makes the related representation by gender question, difficult to answer. The nature of multi-ethnic and religious congregation at Nigerian universities equally complicates this subject vis-à-vis leadership representation by gender at the (SUGs) and legislative assembly. As the name suggests, these are cultural norms applied over a long period of time by all religions and ethnic groups, to hem women and create deep subservient roles and status for majority of them. (Igiebor, 2021) notes that the hegemonic cultures embedded within Nigerian society have continued to be reflected in institutional rules and practices within these academic environments. (Ilo, 2010), says that such gender discrimination within the academia, is often subtle and systemic, though no policy documents discriminate against women, yet academia has long been dominated by men. The role of religion in this aspect of the paper's argument, calls for some careful consideration. Given that religion is opium of the people and often viewed as the final rule and remains unquestionable by custodians and followers of such religious practices.

Feminist critics in various disciplines has however not relented in questioning the deep inequality ethno-religious sentiments play in seeking productive leadership opportunities and dividends in society. Mallam (2006) cited in (Igiebor, 2012), articulates that often Christianity, the Atlantic slave trade, the invasion of Islamic culture and the imperial capitalist system reshaped gender roles and relationships, bringing about significant social changes. In specific critical paradigms for this paper, an examination of the hegemony of women's leadership quest through such religious colonialism becomes exigent. Vivid example of how society's opium through religion is shaped towards female invisibility runs deep and explicit in Biblical and koranic doctrines. A case as noted by (Evwierhoma, 2002), is; the rib based on (*Genesis*, 2:21-22), which centers on the creation of women from men, as well as being named Adam. (*Ephesians,* 5:22-24) as well as the first book of (*Corinthians,* 11:7-8) where Apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian Church that a man… is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man.; neither was man created for woman but woman for man (*Corinthians* 11:7-9) (De Beauvoir, 1953) in *The Second Sex* affirms that For the Jews, Mohammedans and Christians among others, man is master by divine right; the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse towards revolt in the downtrodden female.

The foregoing suggests that religious influences in human perception of gender, is as strong as its cultural strong hold. In this paper's observation, it appears stronger and attempts to question religious doctrines, often conflagrates into heated arguments, dialectics and consequent violence notable in the World. These dialectics extrapolates into female negative representation in broader democratic governance spaces for women and critical national leadership questions.

Trajectories in Student Union Government and Democratic Governance: A Representational Interrogation.

Interrogating the matrix between Student unionism and democratic governance in Nigeria comes with the responsibility of analyzing the content and contextual role each play in women underrepresentation in politics. The structure of (SUGs) in Nigerian universities implicates the very nature of legislative rule and dictates in wider political spectrum. The marriage and similarities of both systems of representation and leadership demands, corresponds and flow into same values and paradigms. To this end, has a historical background of the emergence of (SUGs) in the early twenties defined their core values as one principled on enthroning true democratic footprints for the entire West African region. (Emereonye, 2013) submits that some students' unions are politicized bodies, and often serve as training grounds for aspiring politicians. He further argues that historical survey reveals that long before independence, Student Unions have acted the role of watch dog in checking the excesses of the colonial authorities. This position defines (SUGs) role as similar to current role of Nigeria's legislatures in checking the excesses of the executive arms of government. However, the bond between (SUGs) and democratic rule and values, can be explicitly seen when this paper evaluates the role founding fathers of Student

unionism played in ensuring the independence of most West African sub region countries. (Emereonye, 2013) notes that no doubt, historians have acknowledged that one of the key institutions of nationalism among English speaking West African countries in the inert war period, was student union. The role of the West African Student Union in this predilection cannot be overstated. Critics' like (Emereonye, 2013) has argued that their role and consistent pressure brought about rapid independence in the region. The Solanke ledstudent union in 1925, with the concerted efforts of students like Zik, Awolowo, Nkuruma and other renowned activists is inspiring.

The foregoing implies that it is on the shoulders of such pressure groups of studentunionism, that the fruits of present democracy in Nigeria and other West African countries' independence were birthed. Arguably, this paper, asserts that a correlation exists between (SUGs) and mainstream politics, an assertion (Nwako & Aktintewe, 2023) confirm when they argue that, the organization and formation of the (SUGs) mirrors thatof mainstream political spaces in several areas. In this guide, they contend that they are similarities in elections, bureaucracy, formality, functionality, and representation. (Nwako & Akintewe, 2023) further holds that, our society exist in such a way that a small unit can be a mirror to the whole. Using the family and its representational powers of a larger society as a case in point, they argue that we can deduce that leadership and governance across student unions in Nigerian universities, replicate governance at State and Federal levels.

Most paramount here is the representation by gender in both political spaces. The representation which this paper perceives as the matrix of decision making that affects people not just one gender, is critical to the actualization of democratic values and goals. After all, it is argued by feminist' that lopsided representation exists as a result of gender socio-cultural norms and these norms hinder the full realization of the dividends of democracy by and for all. Maclever cited in (Emereonye, 2013) stated that in generalterms, democracy is regarded as a system of government where people participate in governance directly or through their representatives. Thus, democracy is primarily a way ofdetermining who shall govern and to what end. The implication of the given conception of democracy, thus suggest that representation of the people is critical and contingent upon achieving other developmental objective of a people and nation. The nature and shape of current democratic governance at both levels under interrogation in Nigeria, portrays a situation where participation is high in both genders but low at the level of female gender representation in decision making.

(a) University of Abuja Student Union Government and Female Gender

Representation in Governance.

The University was established in January 1988 in the Federal Capital City of Abuja, Nigeria. This ushered in a ray of hope for all irrespective of gender especially in achieving set educational goals within the Capital city. It was not until 1990 that the University

matriculated her first set of students. In over 30 years of existence, studies reveal that no female student has been elected President of the student union body. Again, the structure of leadership since inception of the student union led by the present Dean of Students Affairs, Professor Umar Kari, reflects a bias representation clearly predicated on the fact that the university leadership is not interested in critically interrogating these gender uneven representations in leadership of the (SUG). Currently, executive structure of the University's union underscores this paper' views that an urgent re-evaluation of the politicsof female representation is needed. The under listed current Executive organ demonstrates such perception as follows;

1. Emmanuel A. Ayantayo- President (Male)

2. Oloniyo Benita- Vice President (Female)

3. Abu Ebenezer Ochoyo- General Secretary (Male)

4. Yusuf Abdulbasit Opeyemi Assistant General Secretary (Male)

5. Bello Yayaha Badmasi- Director of Welfare (Male)

6. Sadiq Musa Babalola-Director of Finance (Male)

7. Igwe Chukwuemeka Cyprian-Director of Social and Culture (Male)

8. Oladeru Samson Olamilekan-Director of Sports (Male)

9. Akinduro Roland Akinyemi-Director of Information and Communication (Male)

10. Lukman Abdullahi Aremu-Provost (Male)

Nigeria's national and state political spaces operate in similar direction and has never had a female Governor, Senate President, or President of the Country. Earlier assertions of the role of (GSCN) are very profound in this anomaly. The description of (Kiamba, 2008) best clarifies this reality when she argues that, however this participation has not always translated into equal representation in political leadership positions. Once elections are conducted, and positions are assigned, one realizes that women are no longer visible. This invisibility is of major concern to feminist critics' when they argue that the role (GSCN) plays in this unequal circumstance, should be eradicated for even representation and benefit for decision-making in political leadership position at all levels. The invisibility of female students at the (SUGs) is a relational factor leading to the near absence of women at Federal and State legislatures in Nigeria. In this sense, this paper sees the contingent role ofsocio-cultural norms in creating uneven political leadership platforms for men and women despite their various proven leadership qualities. Notably are the role patriarchy plays, Sadie (2005) cited in (Kiamba, 2008) advances the argument that at the bottom of the constraints that women face is the patriarchal system where decision making powers are in the handsof males. In the African context, he says, traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes regarding the role and status of women in society are still prevalent and many women are part of this system finding it difficult to dislocate from this culture and tradition lest they be ostracized. This is the very reason the unipolar leadership representation of female students at (SUGs)

exists in University of Abuja amongst others. Less cannot be argued of the reason why the Nigeria's 10th assembly which (Opara, 2023) says, has only 3 female senators against 109 male senators and 16 women out a possible 360 members of House of Representatives. The thrust of emerging leadership contradiction thus, becomes the question of seeking to know how representational in all sense and purpose, is the lower and upper chambers in Nigeria's 10th assembly. Relatively, how representational is University of Abuja (SUG) where since the creation of the University 1st January, (1988), no female student has ever been elected as (SUG) President. The author of this paper was once a Vice President of the University of Abuja Student Union Government in (1998-99). The President was Nurudeen Guasu,(male), Vice President was Igweh Raphael (male), and Secretary General was Vashinmma Peter, (male). The conversation the author had with a female student of the university named Kadijah as at (1998), is worthy of note. Kadijah elatedly told the author that he would have been made the President had he been around at the time of elections. The gender leadership question that begs for answers is why did Kadijah not consider herself worthy of the leadership of University of Abuja (SUG)? Why the author? The basic import of (GSCN) into the socio-psycho personality traits of the female gender is a viable answer to this question. These cultural scripts are ones often wrapped in the cadences of earlier discussed patriarchal, stereotypical and ethno-religious categorization of the female gender. (Kiamba,2008) further notes that, in many African cultures, the rituals and rites of passage pertaining to the boy child, nurtures them for leadership positions, whether at local or national levels of governance, in business, politics or public administration, religion tendsto cement these cultural norms. Emmet (2001), cited in (Kiamba, 2008) corroborates this paper's views on the (GSCN) of ethno-religious categorization of women underrepresentation at governance. Emmet notes that all mainstream religions have stereotypical roles for men and women. Roles where women are perceived as less equal than men,often being kept separate in the way roles are assigned. In her discussion of women's experience of religion, Emmet (2001) analyzed the rituals performed for and by men in various religions (including Hinduism, Islam and Christianity), finding that men are generally valued and empowered by religion in many ways. Women do not enjoy such privilege, being disempowered by religious structures and practices. She concludes by noting that, in other public arenas, women's access to leadership positions has been hindered by discrimination and stereotyping. Women are more or less persecuted forseeking an executive position. This is largely due to society's attitude toward appropriate male and female behaviors in life.

The affronts of gender bias representation or underrepresentation of women, defines the less than 5% representation of women at Nigeria's 10th assembly which many critics' have argued remains one of the least in World politics. Profoundly, same reason can equally be advanced as rational for the strategic and subtle confinement of female students to the positions of Vice Presidents and Assistant Secretary General at the (SUGs). Conferring a 1% representation of female student at the University of Abuja's (SUG) and less than 5% at the Nigeria's 10th assembly,can thus be explained under the harmful effects of (GSCN). The trajectories are

wide and constraining for the female gender, especially under critical analysis of virtues of true democratic governance as recommended by UN, other international agencies and alternate protocols engaged in promoting gender equality. (Soaga, 2022) affirms that Nigeria has oneof the lowest rates of female political representation in the World. This culture of silence and political invisibility, she underscores are established and reinforced early. In her analysis of "How Campus Politics Sets Scene for Big Man Politics" she reports that, according to World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, Nigeria ranks 149th outof 155 countries in terms of female political representation. Only 10.3% of Ministerial positions and 5.8% of parliamentary seats are held by women. The ugly picture now might even be grimmer when the Ministerial list of the 4th Republic is out, the scene set at the parliamentary levels, is less than what it was at the time of her report, although Nigeria is currently ranked 123 out of 146 as at (2022), with the (2023) general elections over, the gains made at Nigeria's 9th assembly would have been eroded when the latest Global Gender Gap ranking index is out.   Given that representation by gender is less than 5% at the 10th assembly, and consistently less at (SUGs) in situations where the unspoken constitution of (SUGs) reserves the position of Vice Presidents, welfare and other sundry positions to female students. Women representation in politics needs an urgent review of mitigating factors. (Nwako & Akintewe, 2023) corroborates by noting that such factors are championed by social, cultural, religious and sexist standards and are also factors that reduce female representation in student politics. In this paper's views, same factors are major impediments to women visibility at mainstream governance as replicated in the 10th assembly. A female gender representation of only1% of executive leadership structure exposes the contradictions for this paper's analysis, far more, portrays undemocratic values in gross negation of ratified international protocols and charters signed into by Nigeria. Beside the Centre for Gender Security Studies and Youth Advancement which is purely a degree awarding institute, University of Abuja does not have a gender framework for strategic approach to dealing with gender inequality pointers in student union leadership, or academic paths and growth inequalities for female academics. University of Abuja is apparently lacking in other parameters of evaluation of its gender sensitive pointers as encapsulated by (Igeibor, 2021) who articulates of such gender sensitive pointers, to include but not limited to availability of Gender Centers', Gender Research Groups, Gender Policy and Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy. University of Abuja is only committed in the space of a gender cenrtre. The role of the centre is without an intrinsic sense of strategically envisioning gender equality goals both in student union leadership and academic circles.

Conclusion

Engendering society comes with a responsibility for both genders to change their perception of gender roles and corresponding status**.** This paper concludes that the prevailing gender narrative of female representation at (SUG) in University of Abuja Nigeria, portend grave danger for social, economic and political development for women and the country in general. It finds that the given gender socio-cultural norms are strong

impediments to female visibility in the social matrix of values and experiences that forms the fabric of human capital development. In line with feminist theorist' views, this study advocates a re-negotiation of critical gender variables that supports the traditional scripts perpetuating harmful cultural practices that hem women at all levels. The import of these harmful practices, it further concludes, deny women an opportunity to constructively participate and contribute to national leadership projects which reasonably determines their life choices and chances. Representations at the (SUGs) and wider political spectrum in Nigeria, thus calls for serious re-evaluation that incorporates altruism for socialconditioning of humanity's call for equality through equity-based processes. These institutional frameworks established to support equality of the human person regardless of gender, should endeavor to avoid window dressed approach in shaping the predilections structures and organs that leads to even representation in politics often follow.

Recommendations

(a) Ethnic or gender categorizations of any form, should promote non-bias patterns for even participation and representation of the female gender in politics especially, at early stages in life.

(b) Legislative frameworks should sincerely and immediately be put in place, to ensure at least, 35% affirmative action entrenchment at all leadership positions especially at the academia and parliament.

(c) An urgent domestication of international conventions and protocols which Nigeria is a signatory, through creation of gender equality sensitive units in all academic institutions.

(d) Socio–cultural and value re-orientation by relevant agencies focusing on the elimination of harmful traditional practices and not culture itself.

(e) Support research on the papers' subject by Ministry of Women Affairs through National Gender Policy framework.

(f) Further research on the subject of this paper in the academia for varied view ofthoughts, advocacy and action aimed at eliminating gender socio-cultural norms that impedes women's representation at the (SUGs), National, State assemblies and executive arms of leadership in Nigeria.

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In over two decades Dr. Raphael has carried out extensive research in gender and development studies. Raphael is a gender advocate majoring in areas of gender equality, strategic alternatives to engendering peace building and women political participation in Nigeria. Raphael is also a reviewer with Bujies online Journal, International Journal of Current Research in the Humanities, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, and Nigerian Theatre Journal. Raphael works in the Centre for Foundation and Interdisciplinary Studies, Baze University Abuja, Nigeria.