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WOMEN AND PUBLIC LIFE IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

CHUKA CHUKWUBE*

Summary

In an attempt to correctly x-ray women and their public life in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, there are many salient points and questions that must be asked and answered. It is important to ascertain the level of perception of feminism in Russian population. What rights do women have in Soviet Union and post-soviet era? What is the percentage of women workforce in the two periods under review? How passive or active are Russian women? Their position in many national issues and policy making in the country; their attitude to violence and war especially in the 1920s; how have Russian women fared under increased cases of male domestic violence against them, etc.?

In order to address these issues, the work is divided into different sub-headings with the first chapter giving a general overview of the position of women during the Soviet era. The work gives good assessment of successes and failures of women's organization.

Keywords: Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, women, working women, women in politics, women's organizations.

Russian Women in Soviet Era

With the enthronement of Socialism in 1917, the Soviet State propagated equal opportunity for both sexes. This extends to education, right to vote and be voted for in any election, right to equal pay at work. The state was also mindful of maternity leave and maternity benefits for women which was improved from 1936. The state also extended interest to marriage and made it a civil union. Women were given legal backing to either obey or disobey their husbands and could easily

obtain divorce. This was possible till 1936 and again after 1968. Abortion was legalized from 1923 but later made illegal once again from 1936 to 1955. Nursing mothers made use of the Kindergartens where they could leave their children and go to work and collect them at the end of the day's work.

Although all these rights were well spelt out by the state, in reality, they were rarely obtainable. There was disparity between wages by women and their male counterpart. Averagely, women earned two-thirds of male wages (Sacks 1976; Lapidus, 1978, McAuley, 1981). In a bid to level up political disparity between men and women who were considered to be politically backwards, Zhenotdel, a women department of the Communist Party, was created in 1920 primarily to mobilize and educate them politically. Zhenotdel had a wide spread throughout the Soviet Union and to boost awareness especially to the remotest parts of the country, women's clubs were also created. Women's clubs in the Muslim areas of the Central Asia and in the Caucasus aimed at liberating women and to teach them the skills of literacy (Marsell, 1974; Akiner 1997). The positive result of Zhenotdel and women's clubs was far reaching but was unfortunately closed down in 1930 when it was presumed that women had been fully integrated into socio-political life of the country. However, the activities of the women's clubs persisted in the rural areas and wives movements were formed in towns and in some state farms. As a result of the extinction of the Zhenotdel, women's councils known as Zhensoveti were formed. The Zhensoveti was created by Khrushchev after he realized that women had started developing interest in politics and that there was need to further encourage them into taking political posts. The Zhensoveti was given a revival in the 1980s when Gorbachev decided to accommodate them into the Soviet Women's committee (SWC). While counting on the advantages of both Zhenotdel, the Zhensoveti and the Soviet Women's Committee, it is imperative to say that women under these groups were rubber stamps to decisions taken by the government. Only very few women had had the opportunity of rising to high political positions. From the period of enthronement of the Communist Party of Soviet Union in 1917 to the post-Soviet era, only three women had sat in the Politburo, which was the highest decision making body of the party. They were Ekaterina Furtseva (1957-60) under Khrushchev; Aleksandra Biryokova (1988-90) and Galina Semenova (1990-1), both served during the period of Gorbachev. They were equally not noticeable at the Council of Ministers. It is only at the lower levels that handful of women were politically viable.

However, the quota basis representation formula of Soviets made women participation in politics inevitable. They made up about 33 percent of the USSR Supreme Soviet, 36 percent of republican level Supreme Soviets and 50 percent of local Soviets (White, Pravda, Gitelman, 1997). This representation, however, represents women participation in government but not in power as the decision making body of the government did not lie with the Soviets.

With the introduction of *Glasnost*, the state of affairs attracted the attention of some influential women who decried the situation and called its reverse. Notable among such women was Larisa Kuznetsova, a prominent journalist who vehemently criticized the situation where only five women delegates were allowed to make speeches at the 19th Party Conference when there were over 1,250 delegates present at the conference. She was quick to observe that women were gradually being edged out by their men counterpart. Kuznetsova maintained that women should be given higher representation especially in policy making bodies of the party and government. She also stated that more incentives and encouragement must be given to women to enable them effectively participate in government. Other notable critics of women's position in government are Zoya Pukhova who was then the Chair-lady of Soviet Women's Committee and Philosopher Olga Veronina. Pukhova questioned why women made up only 7 percent of Party Secretaries in regional and territorial committee when 29 percent of policy members were women. Olga Veronina held the

opinion that 'men have created the world for themselves' (Buckley, 1989).

Apart from women, some notable Russian men-folk added their voices in urging the government to guarantee more participation of women in government affairs. At the 19th Party Conference in 1985, Gorbachev pointed out that the women's movement was "at a standstill" and argued that "women are not duly represented in governing bodies and concluded that "the door should be wide open for them to governing bodies at all levels" (Gorbachev, 1989). After three months then, he appointed Biryackova to membership of Politburo.

The woes of women's participation in government was further orchestrated by the introduction of the reforms of Gorbachev. The number of women in parliament got reduced except the 75 reserved seats for women (along with 100 reserved for CPSU and 75 for the Komsomol and various other social organizations). Women became less interested in contesting political posts and elections into the parliament and where they did, preference was given to their male counterparts by the electorate. Consequently, the percentage of women in parliament reduced to 15.6 percent. Elections held in different republics indicated that women made up 11 percent of the Supreme Soviet in Turkmenia, 7 percent in the Ukraine and Belorussia, 5.4 percent in the new Russian Supreme soviet and 4.8 percent in Moldava (Buckely, 1992). This trend further deteriorated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the abandonment of fixed quota for women.

Politicking and Women

The Soviet system did not actually give women the free hand to be involved in full politics and practice politicking. Women in the Supreme Soviet and other levels of parliament were not allowed by the system to articulate an independently formulate viewpoints but rather were mobilized to raise up their hands in support of policies and issues already decided upon by the party policy making organ. This raised the question of whether women actually had a place in politics.

Another issue that is related to this problem is the idea that politics is a dirty game. A reference to this was frequently made during the Soviet era indicating that politics does not befit the kind and gentle nature of women. Contrary to this, however, the state guarantees equality of the sexes not only in politics but in other spheres of life. For example, the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation declares in Articles 19.3 that "man and woman have equal rights and freedoms and equal opportunities for their realization." Although this article was initially lacking in the constitution, President Boris Yeltsin, under pressure from women, had to have it inserted in the constitution. Other former Soviet republics had to adopt similar steps to further encourage some participation in politics. This was very important as women needed to be stimulated into politics after the abandonment of fixed quota system which consequently reduced drastically the presence of women in the parliament across the commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and also in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The noticeable manifestation of this reduction is seen in the result of 1995 election. But before this, the 1993 election shows that 60 women won seats out of a total of 450 in the new Duma amounting to 13 percent. On that of 1995, the number fell to 45 or 10 percent of all the seats. The breakdown is seen on Table 1. 1 below:

Table 1.1: Seats in the Duma from the Party List, 1995 Election

Parties	No. of Women	No. of Men	Total	Women as a % of total of each list
Our Home is Russia	2	43	45	4.4
Yabloko	2	29	31	6.5
Communist Party	9	90	96	9.4
Liberal Democratic Party	1	49	50	2.0
Total	14	211	222	22.3

Source: Compiled from Rossiiskaya Federatsiya, No. 2, 1996, pp. 8 – 12.

The table gives a breakdown of the election's result using the only four political parties that were able to meet the 5 percent barrier in the 1995 election.

Table 1.2: Political Affiliation of Women Elected to the Duma in the Single Member constituencies, 1995 Election

Party or Movement	No. of Women
Pamfilova-Gurov-Lysenko	1
Obshchee Geils (common Cause)	1
Our Home is Russia	2
Vlast Narodu (Power to the People)	2
Women of Russia	3
Yabloko	4
Communist Party	8
Independents	10
Total	31

Source: Compiled from Rossiiskaya Federatsiya, No. 2, 1996, pp. 12 – 20.

Table 1.2 shows that women did better in 1995 in the single member constituencies. They won 31 out of the total 225 seats amounting to 13.8 percent while that of men amounted to 86.2 percent. The table further shows that, ten women candidates contested as independents while others held different political views and were affiliated to different political parties. From the table, it is evident that not all parties fielded women candidates as none of the elected women was from Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party.

Women Political Movement

The new Russian State was in a hurry to contain new political ideas and changes expected of a new independent state. This led to dissolution of the parliament elected in 1990 and another election held in December 1993. Prior to this election, some women activists had concluded plans on how best to fight in the election and to defend women's interest in the Duma, an assignment they strongly believed would be done only by themselves. Consequent upon this, they formed a new women's political movement known as "Women of Russia" which was made up of three organizations: the Union of Women of Russia (formerly known as SWK), Women of Fleet and the Association of Women Entrepreneurs.

The election of December 1993 was a turning point in women's election into the Russian Duma. Women of Russia won 8.1 percent of the 21 seats in the State Duma. There were more two seats which came from the single-member constituencies thereby bringing the total number of seats won by women to 23. With this number of seats to their advantage, Women of Russia formed a faction in the Duma which met weekly or bi-weekly. The faction was led by an experienced politician who had been a deputy in previous Russian Parliament. She was Eketerina Lakhova. She was formerly an Adviser to President Yeltsin on Women's Affairs. Apart from Lakhova, Alevtina Fedulova was another influential leader of the faction. She was the Chair of the Union of Women of Russia and was elected within the Duma to the prominent position of a Deputy Speaker. Some of these women had wide range of experiences in politics as quite a number of them were members of the moribund CPSU and they were mostly professionals from education, arts, medicine, entertainments, etc.

With strong footing in the state Duma, the sky was the limit to Women of Russia in particular and Russian women generally. They saw this as the beginning of good things that were yet to come into women's participation in politics and government. Because of their numerical strength and experience of many of the deputies in different fields of human endeavour, they were appointed into different committees of the parliament. They were not only represented in Committee for Women, the Family and Youth and on the committee for Health Protection (they sent three members to each), Women of Russia was also represented in Committees for Defence, Security, Budget, Economic Policy, International Affairs, cooperation with independent States, etc. To the women, this has turned around the popular belief that women can only do better in matters relating to women. They now began to realize and enjoy equality with their male counterparts who could sometimes rely on their suggestions in carrying out some government policies and decisions. This in effect became a sort of morale booster for Women of Russia as it enhanced the movement's grasp of contemporary issues.

However, the activities of Women of Russia in the Duma have been viewed as having a lot of inconsistencies. It was on record that Women of Russia voted in favour of non-inflationary budget in 1995 but later supported a draft law on the minimum wage which was inflationary itself. Before this, it was also known that on 21 June, 1994, the faction voted for government's privatization programme but later on 7 April 1995 agreed that the President's decree should be referred to the constitution court. On the war in Chechnya, the Women of Russia demanded debate on the war but special relationship that existed between especially Lakhova and Yeltsin hindered it. What is more, on 13 January 1995, over half of the faction voted in support of a bill prohibiting war in Chechnya but refused to back a bill which denies finances to military act in the Chechnya. In view of all these,

the faction was variously branded 'inconsistent', 'support of the government', 'supporter of the communists' and also 'supporter of the Liberal Democrats'. The faction defended this by insisting that their voting patterns had always changed according to the changes of time and regarded their actions as being pragmatic. (White, Pravda, Gitelman 1994)

With this euphoria at the back of their minds, they were full of expectations in the elections and hoped to make over 5 percent barrier on the party list. The results, however, showed that the results varied in different regions in the elections of 1993 and 1995. The result of 1995 elections showed that Women of Russia won over 5 percent in 44 of the 89 'areas of the federation'. In ten of these subjects, the vote was over 8 percent, reaching 10 percent in the Evenk autonomous Okrug. In nine regions, the vote was over 7 percent. By contrast, however, Women of Russia fell below the 5 percent threshold in 45 of the republics and regions; and in 16, their support was under 2 percent. These included the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, the Chuvash Republic, Krasnodar Krai, Voronezh, Tambov, and Kursk Oblasts. Borderline areas which nearly made the 5 percent hurdle included Iskov, Kaliningrad and Novosibirsk Oblasts; but in all the republics and regions, with just one exception, the percentage vote for Women of Russia fell in 1995 as compared with 1993 (only in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic did the vote negligibly increase from 4.6 percent in 1993 to 4.74 percent in 1995 – White, Pravda, Gitelman, 1997).

The question has been why Women of Russia had persistently been losing popularity. This is notwithstanding the fact that there had been increase in number of voters in many republics. The reason was obvious. It is attributable to the inability of Women of Russia to consolidate on the support they gained in election of 1993. Although larger number of voters turned out in the 1995 election, they voted other political parties more than the women of Russia.

>Other hurdles that Women of Russia had to scale through in the 1995 elections was the practice of other political parties', a part from Women of Russia's inclusion of women in strategic positions of the party and expose them to contest important posts in government. Through this practice, electorates were made to agree that it was not only Women of Russia as a political group that cared for the interest of Russian women but that others equally did. Notable among parties that fielded women were Chemomyrchu's Our Home is Russia, which put women in fifth and seventh places on its list. Others were Gaidar's Democratic Choice of Russia, which gave a woman third place and Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, which allowed a woman tenth place.

Success at polls, therefore, depended largely on interest and membership of a party and not because of protection of a particular sex. Equally significant was that there was a large turnout of voters in the 1995 elections and many voters in that election who did not vote in 1993 chose to vote other parties instead of Women of Russia. Consequently, popularity of Women of Russia started dwindling.

The unsuccessful outing of the party, that is her inability to make over 5 percent barrier was very demoralizing and was described by many as plague that hit the party hard. This has been attributed to many factors. Eketerina Lakhova attributed it to misunderstanding about the party's position on Chechnya while Sveltana Orlova heaped it on unpleasant attempt to discredit women.

The view of feminists on the poor performance of Women of Russia is rather different. They blame it on the party's inability to challenge violence against women. They equally criticized the contradictory position taken by Women of Russia on Chechnya which put a lot of voters into confusion.

Working Women in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia

There has not been clear cut demarcation in sex related jobs in both Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Russian women at work cut across all skills and professions. Women work in road and railway constructions, building high-rise houses, bridges, mining, and other strenuous works that naturally should have been left for men. This trend has been much criticized and discredited by other cultures who see it as unfortunate results of the repressive past. The criticism has been that women have been forced out to work by the government; they lose their femininity and forget their natural role in the society. Because of the urgency for a change of this trend, democrats and nationalist have championed the call on women to quickly return to their natural domestic duties at homes. However, there has not been positive follow-up of this clamour by women voices whether democrats, communists or nationalists. It was therefore regarded as men speaking for women when women should have been speaking for themselves. There are indications that women did not want this in the 1970s, the 1980s and now again in the 1990s (Buckley, 1989, p. 169; Ashwin and Bowers, 1997).

Modern Russian women from some interviews conducted have shown their desire to be part of working community. According to them, there are some emotional benefits gained when they leave home to share their aspirations, problems and joy with their colleagues at their working places. Apart from this, they emphasize on the financial benefits for working. Inflationary prices and the inadequacy of one salary or two pensions mean that most women must work and that even female pensioners are being driven back into the labour force or on to the street, where they stand in underpasses trying to sell old possessions or a loaf of bread, cigarettes or carton of milk bought earlier that day (White, Pravada, Gitelman, 1997). To most women, working is inevitable if they must be able to meet up with everyday financial requirement of homes and to live a fulfilled life.

But no matter how much some of these women would like to contribute to the labourforce of the state in the 1990s, it remains an illusion as the present level of unemployment and uncertainty of remaining in jobs was not known in the Soviet era. The rate at which people are losing their jobs is unprecedented in the history of Russia and women constitute about 70 percent of them. This was to bring home the argument of people who hold the view that the state has not really done anything to give women correct bearing and place them where they rightly belong. This is followed by opinion of critics of women remaining at jobs who argue that keeping women at jobs is rather expensive and that their marginal output is usually low compared to their male counterparts. They see them as being unstable at work as they are oftentimes fund of asking for maternity leave and asking for permission to take care of their sick children or for excuses related to taking care of their homes.

However, the rate of unemployment in Russia has been over-exaggerated. There is no gainsaying the fact that a lot of people, both male and female did lose their jobs but it was not to the proportion it has been blown. According to figures from the Federal Employment Service published in the newspaper *Segodnya*, the official unemployment rate was 2.9 percent at the end of 1995 and real unemployment was estimated at 8.2 percent or approximately 6 million people. Real unemployment reached 9.5 percent in 1996 and 10.8 percent in 1997 affecting 7 and 8 million people respectively. Official statistics also suggested that the percentage of women among the registered unemployed was falling. At the end of 1992, women were 72.2 percent of the officially unemployed, falling to 62.3 percent in the spring of 1995. Moreover, survey data from Goskomstat even indicated that unemployment among women was lower than among men, contrary to all earlier statements. As early as October 1992, for instance, surveys suggested that women made up 49.5 percent of the unemployed and men constituted 50.5 percent, challenging the much written on the

subject hitherto (Ashwin and Bowers, 1997).

It is not very simple to get accurate statistics of women who are unemployed. According to *Rebotintsa*, a women's magazine, women are not often inclined to register as unemployed. They could not afford to declare themselves unemployed thereby lose their benefits. It has been observed that both in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, women have concentrated themselves at lower paid jobs in factories and allowing their male counterparts to occupy higher paid positions thereby making it possible for men to receive higher pay than them. Equally observed is the fact that female labour often is not paid on time; that their salaries often come in arrears.

A study of Russian women at work in the 1990s indicates that women are more inclined towards expanding their involvement in what is known in Russia as "individual economic activity", or "individual labour activity". According to research carried out by Liliya Babaeva and Alla Chirkova, women go for some jobs for "supplementary income" rather than for a main salary. Writing in 1996 in the journal *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, they pointed out that this work generally embraces sewing, knifing, embroidery, wicker work, gathering berries, conserving fruits and vegetables. Hardly new to post-Soviet women, these skills bring in necessary "extra" money on which they avoid paying taxes. Not requiring capital outlay, this sort of work can be stepped up when money is especially needed. Fewer women have ventured into small business. Those who have, according to Babaeva and Chirkova, tend to work in fashion accessories. They often suffer, however, from inflationary spirals which threaten the longevity of their business* (Bridger, Kay and Pinnick, 1996).

Figures from Goskomstar for 1994 show that women made up 39 percent of joint owners of commercial companies (of which there were over 900,000), 23 percent of "cooperative" businesspersons hiring labour. Babaeva and Chirkova suggest that women are more reluctant to start business than men but once in business; they are more attentive to their workforce (as is often the case in the West). Interviews done by Marta Bruno in Moscow also illustrate that women street-vendors have developed a very different working culture from men in business, often a more "moral" one, in which the women support each other and try to promote Russian products rather than imported ones (Bruno, 1997).

Babaeva and Chirkova went further to know people's reaction on women in business. Responding to a question in their questionnaire 'can women be successfully involved in business?', 55 percent of the total response said "yes" while 22 percent said "no". "When questioned about why women might not be good in business, 22 percent thought they were not gifted in this way; 22 percent considered that financial institutions would not take them seriously so credit would be unavailable, and 12 percent suggested that women lacked the necessary training" (White, Pravda and Gitelman, 1997)

Women Activities in NGOs

The Russian populace has been skeptical about feminism which it sees as Western consciousness imported to transform women into men. The country therefore has witnessed low formation and spread of women's non-governmental organizations across the country. The closed-door policy of the state further crippled incentives in forming such organizations.

Presently, however, significant women groups have started emerging and with the introduction of *Glasnost* under Gorbachev, a lot of women's professional associations such as the Club of Women Journalists, Federation of Women Writers and the Union of Women

Cinematographers were formed to set up feminist organizations and to establish women's studies as an academic discipline in the Academy of Science (Veronica, 1994). A remarkable attempt to bring together women from different regions for a central co-ordinate action was made in 1991 in a gathering in Dubna of "The First Independent Women" forum and was later followed by the second in 1992. Among participants in the forum are SAFO (The Free Association of Feminist Organization) and NEZDHI (The Independent Women's Democratic Initiative) which grew out of seminars held at the centre for Gender studies in Moscow (Lipovskaya, 1992).

The outcome of this initiative and awareness amongst women was that many further developments frequently organized around particular local needs or issues have taken place. Example of such organizations is "a girl's shelter", *Euphimia*, which was formed in St. Petersburg with the aim of helping homeless adolescents. There is also *Nadezhda* (Hope) which was also formed to support women suffering from cancer. Other such organizations are lesbian groups, MOLLI (the Moscow Organization of Lesbian Literature and Art) and Sappho-Petersburg, both were formed to protect professional interest of their members in particular and womenfolk in general.

With increase in violence against women in the 1990s, more centres with the aim of assisting victims were established. Many a times, similar centres in the West have provided financial and moral support to these centres. The centres are provided with sufficient communication networks for prompt reach and are equipped with facilities that make them respond fast to emergency cases. The first independent centre for Aid to Victims of Sexual Violence known as the '*Sisters*' was opened in Moscow in 1994. There are doctors and psychologists in this centre who give psychological, medical and legal help and as well as social support to victims. This support is "unconditional". This stems out from the all-pervasive myth both in Russia and elsewhere that all cases of rape and violence against women are their "fault". A second "Sister" was opened in 1995 in St. Petersburg and over 15 such centres are now established all over the Russian Federation.

In trying to assess and determine the rate of violence against women in Russia, Lynne Attwood pointed out that in 1993 alone, 14, 500 women were reported to have been murdered by their male partners, amounting to over half of all recorded murders (Attwood, 1997). By all calculations, this is outrageous. Commenting on this rate, Tatyana Sotnikova writing in the newspaper *Segodnya* in January 1996 said that in the previous years there had been 12,500 rapes. But "Sisters" pointed out that only 2 percent of victims ever went to the police, so this figure was a gross understatement. Frequently, women were not treated with much sympathy, which was a disincentive to report the incident. One rape victim had been quoted to the effect that a militia man had responded to her complaint with 'what are you upset about? It's not as if you are a virgin'. Such crushing insensitivity and sheer disrespect for women is deeply embedded in the Russian social fabric and deters women from coming forward (White, Pravda, Gitelman, 1997). This, however, is applicable in the West and in fact, all over the world.

Another popular and important women's group that was formed in 1989 during the time of Gorbachev, was the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers which brought together mothers whose sons had died, were injured or were still fighting in Afghanistan. The main objective of this group was to fight for social security and benefits to those whose Mothers' made an important impact on public awareness and Gorbachev set up a special commission to respond to the thousands of complaints received (Pinnick, 1997).

After troops were sent into Chechnya, the mothers began demonstrating in Red Square and bombarding Yeltsin with letters of protest. By 1994, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers had local committees across the country and so established a coordinating committee. Like Gorbachev,

Yeltsin felt pressured to react and he asked his staff to draft a report 'On Appeal from Soldiers' Mothers'. Although the mothers enjoy considerable support among women and exude a 'moral' authority, they have been accused of being unpatriotic and of fuelling the anti-conscription movement. Indeed, the mothers threatened to disrupt the call-up procedure for Chechnya (Pinnick, 1997). But of all the women's groups to have formed since *Glasnost*, The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers has made perhaps the largest impact on Russian society and politics. International recognition came in 1996 when they were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (White, Pravda, Gitelman, 1997). Remarkable is also their stance on the present Russian forces battle with Islamic militants in the mountains of the North Caucasus of Dagastan, where they have persistently criticized the use of inexperienced young soldiers in the war.

Conclusion

The reforms introduced by Gorbachev and inherited by Boris Yeltain turned the table against the euphoric 'good days' of Communist era and the presumed worst hit is women. Good number of Russian women born in pre-reform era of the then Soviet Union believe that their rights are currently being eroded; their fixed percentages of political representations have been taken away; their savings loosing value; their pensions are grossly inadequate and prices of services and certain commodities unaffordable. The problem of child rearing is posing untold hardship to women considering the fact that kindergartens have closed down or where available, have introduced very high fee charges. Also, hiring nurses or making use of grandmothers (babushki) is not only expensive but unreliable as before because they too are looking for ways to augment their low pension.

Another area where women have made an impact is in politics. Suffice it to say that women have political opportunities but top political positions are still held by men, notwithstanding few exceptions. Even when outstanding women do make it to highly responsible posts, such as Tatyana Paramonova in 1994 as acting Head of the Central Bank, their tenure is insecure. When Victor Gerashchenko resigned and recommended her appointment to Yeltsin and to the Duma committee on the Budget, she was passed over. Admittedly, this occurred at a complicated political moment. The situation was muddled since Gerashchenko had left his job without approval from the Duma after the ruble collapsed on "Black Tuesday" (White, Pravda, Gitelman, 1997).

This is made more complex by failure of women to present themselves for these vital positions. According to available records, it was only Galina Starovoitova of the Democratic Russia that put herself forward in the presidential elections of 1996. Many Russian women politicians were yet to believe that time was already ripe for women to hold a very sensitive and most challenging position of President of Russia. This jinx, however, was broken by the swearing in of Vaira Vike-Freiberg as Latvia's President on July 8, 1999 making her the first woman elected as a head of State in Eastern Europe (*Guardian*, July 9, 1999). The challenge therefore as thrown to Russian women. It is high time they realized that gender is a concept and that civilization is supposed to include sexual equality in practice as well as in rhetoric.

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***Chuka Chukwube** - Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of European Languages, University of Lagos, Nigeria. Dr. Chukwube has been teaching Russian Language and Civilization in the University for good number of years and has published extensively in that area of studies e mail: chukachukwube@yahoo.com