Religious revivalism, human rights activism and the struggle for women's rights in Nigeria

Within the context of economic crisis, structural adjustment and political authoritarianism which have characterized Nigeria since the 1980s there has been a growth of human rights and civil liberties activism, together with a process of religious revivalism and a rising and institutionalized 'State' feminism. From their different positions, the various associations have either shown total disregard for women's rights issues or proved incapable of dealing with them. The struggles of activist women's organizations, such as Women in Nigeria (WIN), which emerged in 1983, have involved the articulation of strategies for responding to the de-politicizing thrust and consequences of 'State' feminism/'femocracy', whilst simultaneously attempting to tap potentially positive elements from the process for the benefit of Nigerian women. At another level, they have entailed the broadening of the campaign for women's rights with regard to issues of legal and constitutional reform. International networking has also been employed to advance the interests of Nigerian women, especially as they pertain to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Furthermore, there has been an attempt by some women's groups, such as the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), to use the idiom of religion and contestations over doctrinal interpretation to press the case for reforms. However, the struggles of Nigerian women for change still have to contend with resilient patriarchal structures, which aspects of religious revivalism have tended to reinforce and which the explosion of human rights activism has, so far, been insufficient to challenge significantly. Bibliogr. (p. 162-163).