

WHAT IS THIS GENDER TALK ALL ABOUT AFTER ALL? GENDER, POWER AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

J. Shola OMOTOLA

Department of Political Science, University of Ilorin

ABSTRACT Gender discourse is very influential everywhere, calling to attention the unwarranted discrepancy between the locations of men and women in the state and society in almost every facet of life. It places particular emphasis on the oppression and marginalisation of women at all levels. The feminist movements have for years continued to advocate for gender balance especially through affirmative action. Yet, only marginal progress has been made. Drawing insights from contemporary Nigeria, this paper argues that if the gender discourse will ever be productive, it would have to be reoriented and situated within the framework of power politics.

Key Words: Gender; Power; Politics; Women; Culture; Affirmative action; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Gender talk, or the discourse on gender, is very influential everywhere. Following the declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year by the United Nations, the attention accorded to gender issues has been on the increase. This concern climaxed with the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 held in Beijing, China, with the theme "Equality, Development and Peace", the aim of which was to review and appraise the achievements of the UN Decade for Women from 1975 to 1985 (Akinboye, 2004). The increasing attempt to mainstream gender issues not only into academic discourses, but also advocacy and public policy domains is understandable. For one, women constitute half of the world's population and have contributed to human development. Their contributions manifest in five key roles, namely, mother, producer, home manager, community organiser and social, cultural and political activists (Anifowose, 2004; Oyekanmi, 2004; Dauda, 2004). By so being, women have been generally seen as positive agents of social change (Olurode, 1990). However, despite the centrality of women to development, given their demographic strength and roles, they are today, as ever, still being treated as the "weaker" sex.

The feminist movements, drawn from across academia, civil society/non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and public policy decision making domains, feed on this discrepancy. The thrust of their talk/advocacy is that there is an unwarranted discrimination in the locations of men and women in the state and society in every facet of life. They place particular emphasis on the oppression and marginalisation of women at all levels, politically, economically, and

socio-culturally. Recent studies explore the issues of the feminization of poverty and domestic violence against women (Davies, 1994; Wallace, 1996; World Health Organisation, 1996; Moore, 1979; Therborn, 2004). The rising magnitude of domestic violence against women, or what Tenuche (2003) referred to as “the burden of marital vows”, with its attendant negative implications for the reproductive capacity and mental health of women, among others, represents a crucial dimension of the feminization of violence (Taylor & Stewart, 1991; Tenuche, 2003). These developments have been imputed largely to the door steps of certain cultural practices that relegate women to the back-ground and the low responsiveness of government to these issues.

The struggles to integrate and mainstream gender issues into national politics and policies have been the pivot of feminist movements. For decades, feminists have continued to advocate for gender balance especially through affirmative action, whereby both elective and appointive seats/offices are to be automatically allocated to women. While some progress has been recorded in certain respects, such progress appears to be very marginal and of little impact. This paper concerns itself with an analysis of the complex relation among gender, power and politics in contemporary Nigeria. I argue that the bases of all these claims of improved gender equality through affirmative action are faulty, leading to the failure/ineffectiveness of policy measures designed so far to address the problem. For the gender discourse, or gender talk, to be very meaningful and productive, I submit that it has to be situated within the context of power politics, as a basis for identifying the real problems and designing appropriate remedies. The paper begins by situating gender, power and politics in a theoretical context. It then reviews the state of knowledge on gender politics in Nigeria. It proceeds to detail the various forms of responses from both the government and civil society to the challenges of mainstreaming gender into national politics and policies, reflecting on the failure and inadequacies of these responses. It goes on to illustrate this failure, drawing on insights from contemporary Nigerian politics especially since the birth of the nascent democracy in 1999, and finally examines the centrality of power politics to the understanding of the wide gap between the theory and practice of gender politics in Nigeria, and the long term prospects of mainstreaming gender issues into national politics and policies.

GENDER, POWER AND POLITICS: A THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

The relationships among gender, power and politics are not only complex but also dynamic. Any attempt to sufficiently grasp and grapple with it must as a matter of necessity tread with caution, treating each of them as a distinct category of analysis in its own right, before a synthesis. The concept of gender typifies not women or men *per se*, but the ideological and material relation between them, which historically has been an unequal relationship. It connotes a kind of “socially constructed inequality between women and men”. It also

relates to the political, economic and cultural contexts of relations between men and women, where the latter are most often subordinated to the former.

The asymmetrical pattern of gender relations constitutes the focus of the feminist theorists. Basically, the feminist theory focuses on the distinctions between men and women in terms of roles, interests and capabilities. It argues, for example, that women are much more versatile than men in handling issues such as conflict resolution, negotiation and diplomacy because they possess an enhanced capability to bond, form lasting relationships and empathise with others. Beyond this role differentiation, some feminists argue for a general expansion of women's participation in public affairs by giving them an equal opportunity to compete with their male counterparts. In sum, feminism is of the view that the world today is disproportionately and perhaps deliberately skewed and rigged by men against women. It therefore seeks to advance women, women's interests and perspectives, and to correct gender inequalities (Grant & Newland, 1991: Chapter 9). Obviously, these arguments are persuasive and supported by reality. Yet, their greatest limitation, as articulated by the critics of the feminist theory, is that they risk "reinforcing the same gender stereotyping they are trying to overcome" (Grant & Newland, 1991: 511).

Morgenthau is famous for his political realism. His analysis is anchored on the concept of power, which according to him, is nothing more than the control of man over man. It is the ability of one to control the minds and actions of others (Morgenthau, 1978: 9). Following this tradition, Barry defined power as "the ability to get people to do what you want them to do or to refrain from doing things you do not want them to do" (Barry, 2003: 323). Or, power is "the ability to get people to do things" (Barry, 2002: 162-163). This realistic conception of power has, however, not gone unchallenged. Tickner (1991, 1988) contended that by relying heavily on assumptions about human nature, political realism was not only partial but also masculine in approach, in her feminist reformulation of Morgenthau's principles of political realism, which she summarized to include its emphasis on rationality and objectivity, human nature and interest, the tension between morality and the requirement of successful political action, and the autonomy of the political sphere. Whereas, masculinity and femininity refer to "a set of socially constructed categories that vary in time and space rather than to biological determinants" (Tickner, 1991: 23, 1988). This thinking has been dominant among feminist scholars. For example, Hannah Arendt defined power as "the human ability to act in connection with others who share similar concerns" (Tickner, 1991). This definition, according to Tickner, is coterminous with that of McClelland which described female power as "shared rather than assertive" (Tickner, 1991: 26). With this reformulation, the concept of power would appear to have fallen prey to what Dowding called "linguistic oddities", not as useful in making important causal and therefore normative distinctions (Dowding, 2003: 309).

Be that as it may, power remains central to the understanding of gender discourse. As we may have known, power is at the very heart of politics. And given the pertinence of power as "resources", any means of acquiring it, in

the Machiavellian tradition, is justifiable. Whatever the motivation for seeking power, be it personal, collective or psychological ends, it is doubtful whether any holder(s) of power will voluntarily relinquish it, for whatever reason. It is the power seekers who have the responsibility to struggle to acquire it at all cost, for the whole essence of politics is the struggle for power whereby the "ends justify the means." When power is not captured or won, but allocated on a compensatory and/or emotional/sentimental basis as is the case in affirmative action, the tendencies are that such power can easily be circumvented to denude it of autonomy and effect. Such power is therefore qualified and may not be able to advance the purposes for which it was sought. Rather, it may be perverted and used to advance some hidden agenda of the "benevolent" leader who apportioned it in the first instance. This perception can be gleaned from the debate between Dowding and Barry over the relationship among resources, power and systematic luck (Dowding, 1991, 1996, 2003; Barry, 2002, 2003). This is also supported by reality, as exemplified by the Ugandan experience under Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's government where what the women gained on the one hand with the increase in the numbers of women in public representative office through affirmative action measures, they lost on the other in the compromised women's political effectiveness and autonomy (Tripp, 2001; Goetz, 2002).

The Ugandan experience under Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's government shows that actually, feminist movements recorded significant and widely acclaimed improvement in political representation. This was made possible through the creation and reservation of new seats in national and local government for women, and through a principle of affirmative action in administrative appointments. It was so resounding that in the June 2001 parliamentary elections, down through all five tiers of local government, nearly 25% of members of parliament became women and averaged 30% of representation among local councilors (Goetz, 2002: 541-550).

But as it turned out, what the women gained with the right hand, they lost with the left. Goetz (2002) documented in great detail how the strategy of affirmative action, which he described as the "relatively non-democratic means of women's access to power through reservations", produced some unintended consequences and ensured mortgaging the "intended" benefits. Among such consequences, the strategy helped to legitimize what he called Museveni's "benevolent autocracy", epitomised mainly by his no-party democracy. With respect to the latter, the strategy did not only weaken, but eroded women's legitimacy and effectiveness in policy-making. In the long run, the individual occupants of such seats and the government benefited, not women as a collectivity. In effect, the development did not "threaten incumbent politicians or male aspirants", just as it did not "challenge entrenched interest" by suggesting that women as a group may have a set of interests to represent which may change the policy orientation and beneficiaries of these institutions." This is because, as Goetz (2002: 559) put it, "it is their gender, not their politics, that is their admission ticket." Analysing the Ugandan experience from a different perspective, Tripp empha-

sized the centrality of associational autonomy to the success of any organisation. While the women in the Museveni's government were able to maintain some level of autonomy, their co-optation served to limit their autonomy and effectiveness in decision-making (Tripp, 2001). The message and lesson to be learned, to borrow the expression of Goetz (2002: 549), is that there are "no shortcuts to power".

THE STATE OF THE STUDY

In recent years, gender studies have gained increasing recognition and attention in Nigeria (Olurode, 1990; Adesina, 1991; Ayoade et al., 1992; Uchendu, 1995; Awe, 1996; Obi, 2001). The general consensus that runs through these studies is that women have always been treated as the weaker sex, marginalized, oppressed and alienated. These deprivations manifest in diverse forms, including the political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. Politically, it has been argued that women are not only underrepresented, but also victims of repressive public policies and political violence. Economically, women are said to have been discriminated against, particularly in terms of employment in the economy due to the occupational structure of employed persons, access to land, credit facilities and other financial resources, and as victims of poverty. On the socio-cultural front, women are known to have suffered no better fate. Gender differences have been identified in the development of human health capital in Nigeria. For instance, men reportedly fare better than women in terms of life expectancy at birth, total fertility rate, etc. Studies now speak about the feminization of the HIV/AIDS infection in Nigeria. With respect to education, women are also under-privileged, coming second far behind their male counterparts in terms of adult literacy level, primary and secondary school enrolment, and record high rate of primary school dropouts (Dauda, 2004; Oyekanmi, 2004; Lewu, 2005; Ako-Nai, 2005; Bruce, 2005; Adereti, 2005).

The political marginalization of women in Nigeria was well played out during the First Republic (1960-1966) when there were only two female legislators, Mrs. Wuraola Esan and Mrs. Bernice Kerry in the federal parliament, and two others, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Janet Muokelu in the Eastern House of Assembly. There was no female minister. During the Second Republic, there was one female senator out of 571, and 11 members of the House of Representatives out of 445. In the 19 states of the federation, there was no female representation in all the State Houses of Assembly, neither was there a female chairperson nor councillor at the local government level (Agina-Ude, 2003: 3). Under the infamous transition programme of General Babangida, the longest and most expensive in Nigeria (1985-1993), women were also grossly alienated. For instance, in the 19-member Political Bureau of 1986, only two were women. In the 1990 local government elections, 3 women were elected out of 591. In the State Houses of Assembly, there were 27 out of 1172 members, where there was no women legislator in 14 States. In the House of Representatives, women

counted 14 out of 589, and 1 out of 91 in the Senate. Of the 3000 presidential aspirants in 1991, only 8 were women (Agina-Ude, 2003: 3-4). At the political party level, the trend was the same. In the Social Democratic Party (SDP) for example, there were 23,020 (96%) men in executive positions at national and state levels, compared to 958 (4%) for female. In the National Republic Convention (NRC), men accounted for 19,464 (99.57%) of the executive positions, against women's 85 (0.43%). Men had 42,486 (98.12%) executive positions, against 816 (1.88%) for women (Adereti, 2005: 521). Under General Sani Abacha, there were 20 women out of 360 members of the House of Representatives, and 9 out of 109 Senators (Ajina-Ude, 2003: 4). On the socio-economic front, there is no significant difference. For example, the percentage of women in the labour force, which was 35.9% in 1994, stood at 34.3% and 38.1% in 1993 and 1994 respectively. Since 1986, the proportion of female primary school dropouts are larger (Dauda, 2004).

Several reasons have been advanced for the marginalization of women in Nigeria. These include constitutional inadequacies, that no specified provisions were made to ensure gender equality, with only a nebulous reference to non-discrimination on the basis of sex; the general lack of political will on the part of Nigerian political leadership and the women; harmful traditional practices such as humiliating widowhood rites, taboos against acquisition of property and exclusion from decision making in the family or community. Among other reasons, there are the low level of education of women, political instability, religion, weak financial base, and the masculine nature of politics, which tends to promote and sustain inadequate party interests in women issues (Olojede, 1999, 2004; Agina-Ude, 2003; Adeleke, 2004; Adereti, 2005; Lewu, 2005). Some studies have also stressed the salience of certain historical legacies of gender inequality in Nigeria. Of particular importance here is the epochal character of colonialism. As Ikpe pointed out, "colonialism did nothing to deviate from the preclusion of women from the public sphere and their limitation in the economic sphere. Colonialism itself was a male-dominated venture as all colonial officers were male" (Mba, 1982; Ikpe, 2004: 30). The independence of Nigeria in 1960 did not change anything, but was a mere change of guards, not the substance of governance.

Of all these constraints, the cultural dimensions stand out as the most crucial and therefore deserve some elaboration. Traditionally in Nigeria, women are considered to be properties of men. This traditional belief was later to be reinforced by the two imported religions, Islam and Christianity, both of which preached that women should be submissive to their husbands, the heads of the family. For this reason, the society tends to measure a woman's devotedness to God partially in terms of her loyalty and submission to her husband. Within this context, women are expected to be home keepers in all ramifications, including child rearing.

Some examples suffice. Among the Yoruba people of South Western Nigeria, the wife (Aya) is under traditional obligations to be submissive to the husband (Oko). This is well captured in the Yoruba popular expression, "Oko lolori

Aya”, that the husband is the head/master/crown of the wife. The situation is not so different among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria where women are also considered to be the weaker sex. In fact, wives here regard and address their husbands as “nnan ukuwu”, meaning “my big master” (Ojo, 2006). The situation is worse among the Hausa Fulani of Northern Nigeria. Here, they operate what they call “matan kule”, that is purdah, under which women/wives are mandated to dress in a flowing gown that totally cover their body, including the face. Such women are not even allowed freedom of movement and interaction, as their husbands must not see them outside their homes for whatever reason. The essence of this, they claim, was to checkmate any tendencies towards infidelity and promiscuity on the part of women, even when men, not only entitled to marry four women, are apparently known to be promiscuous. Consequently, the Nigerian society has become patriarchal where traditional male values are institutionalised not only in the family, but also in the economic, social and religious dimensions. The implication is that the state is perpetually rigged against women, with a devastating legacy of inequalities between genders.

OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGE

Following the increasing attention accorded to gender discourse, the state and society have seemingly been responding to its challenges. In the Nigerian context, I discuss these responses under official and unofficial responses, the former being the government’s and the latter, the civil society’s.

I. Government Response

Successive Nigerian governments have responded to the challenges of gender politics, most notable being the legal and institutional responses. Legally, Section 15 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria provides that no one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status and ethnic ties (FRN, 1999). Although, the reference to sex here is important, it is however not sufficient to guarantee gender equality. Other references to equality in the constitution, as in Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution are not categorical, but emphasize masculinity especially in language with the use of “he/his” (Agomo, 2004: 93-97).

Another major innovation on the part of the government was the creation in 1995 of a separate Ministry of Women Affairs with a cabinet rank minister. Since its inauguration in 1999, women have been the occupant of the office, with specialisation in the promotion of women issues. Much earlier in 1989, the Federal Military Government, in compliance with the United Nation’s directive, established the National Commission for Women by Decree 30. The Commission was to improve the welfare of women in general, to promote responsible womanhood and maternal health, stimulate actions that would improve civic, political, cultural, economic and educational conditions of women, support the

work of NGOs, co-ordinate government and women's organizations, encourage the establishment of co-operative societies, formulate and propagate moral values within the family units, and work towards the total elimination of all socio-cultural practices tending to discriminate against and dehumanize womanhood (Olojede, 2004: 121-122). Its achievements included the organization of workshops on women's affairs, public enlightenment campaigns, and the production of an acceptable national policy document on women's development.

Other official responses included the initiation of economic empowerment strategies for women. Most prominent among such economic empowerment measures included the Family Support Programme, anchored by Maryam Abacha, wife of the then Head of State, and Better Life for Rural Women established in 1987 under the Babangida regime. While each had its specific objectives, a common denominator was the general concern for women's affairs. Both sought to contribute to the development of the family, strengthen the human rights of women, improve health care delivery and the general well-being of women (Olojede, 2004). These programmes, together with others, were said to have enhanced the status of women in Nigeria, despite their shortcomings, particularly their politicization, urban-bias and corrupt dispositions.

II. Civil Society Responses

The civil society has responded in several ways to complement government efforts. Civil society operates through NGOs, which incidentally have witnessed explosive growth in number, size and reach. In Nigeria today, there are many such women's organisations working towards enhancing women's empowerment and gender equality. They include Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), Community Partners for Development (CPD), Gender and Development Action (GADA), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), and the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL).

Karunwi has developed a classificatory scheme through which we can appropriately view these NGOs. According to her, NGOs in Nigeria can be categorized into four groups: professional groups, activist women's group, research driven groups and women's religious groups (Karunwi, 2004: 195-199). While the professional groups, such as the NAWL, focus on the struggle to empower women in their respective professions, the activist women's groups are concerned with the total emancipation of women and the eradication of any form of class inequality and oppression, for example, Women In Nigeria (WIN). Research driven groups deal with the research and documentation of activities of women in gender-related fields, as is the case for Women, Law and Development Centre (WLDCN) and the Women Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC). Women's religious group, such as the YWCA and FOMWAN, concern themselves with the eradication of harmful traditional practices against women (Karunwi, 2004). To these groups, I add women's human rights based groups, such as the Women Trafficking and Child Labour

Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF).

Whatever the leanings, these NGOs have important roles to play in the advancement of women's affairs. Essentially, they are expected to provide veritable platforms for the advancement of gender balance through popular education and empowerment, social mobilisation and sensitisation, not only of women, but also of the government and the general public, on the need to formulate and implement gender-friendly policies. They are also to champion and externalise the gender struggle, linking the local to the global in the gender discourse. Such a linkage can only be possible if they effectively build partnerships and networks among the local NGOs, harmonise their views and positions to articulate alternative perspectives on the way forward. Without any doubt, NGOs in Nigeria have been responding positively to these challenges. Groups such as the JDPC, CPD, GADA, WOTCLEF, and WORDOC have engaged in advocacy, popular sensitisation and mobilisation as well as research and publication (Karunwi, 2004; Agina-Ude, 2003). These responses, the official and unofficial put together, may have accounted for the marginal improvement in gender awareness and discourse in Nigeria today.

NO RESPITE YET: THE CONTEMPORARY REALITY

Despite these responses and attendant progress, there is still a very deep and wide gully between theory and practice. It is important to first reflect on the marginal improvement in women's political empowerment in contemporary Nigeria (1999 to date). In General Abdulsalam Abubakar's transitional programmes that ushered in the Fourth Republic in 1999, although women representation increased, it was however negligible as shown in the Table 1.

Although the above table is self-explanatory, a few comments are necessary. Despite the marginal increase, women's representation still remains unimaginably poor. Also the marginal increase was most noticeable in appointive positions, that is the Ministerial and Special Advisers, not elective positions such as governors, senators, representatives, local government chairman and council-

Table 1. Gender and Politics/Decision-Making Political Positions, 1999.

Position	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Minister/Special Adviser	35	9	44	20.5
Speaker	35	1	36	2.8
Governor	36	-	36	0
Deputy Governor	35	1	36	2.8
Local Govt. Chairman	765	9	774	1.2
Councillor	8,667	143	8,810	1.6
State Assembly Member	978	12	990	1.2
Senator	106	3	109	2.8
Representative	349	13	362	3.6

Source: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) 2000; reproduced in Dauda, 2004: 84.

lors. This suggests that the marginal increase may be due largely, if not solely, to the implementation of certain affirmative action measures by the President in the composition of the federal cabinet. By implication, it can be argued that women are yet to fully “penetrate” the core circle of power politics, where the “real” things happen. Hence, their seeming powerlessness and gross lack of autonomy.

A major question that readily comes to mind at this juncture is: why has there been only marginal improvement, despite the massive responses to the challenges of gender politics from both State and society? The answer may not differ fundamentally from the forces earlier highlighted, yet, we may need to look elsewhere for a better understanding. This can in turn be aided by some critical reflections on the limits of affirmative action and appointment, as against the election of women into public offices.

BEYOND AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS: THE CENTRALITY OF POWER POLITICS

Admittedly, affirmative action may help to improve the situation of women in politics. This point is supported by reality. Yet, it presents some dilemmas in its implementation, effectiveness and the irony of the fact that it is hardly supported by reality, especially in the Third World. From comparative experience, while affirmative action measures can improve women’s representation in public offices, they have some internal contradictions that tend to ambush and neutralize their intended benefits. A worrisome dimension is that the real agenda of such measures can be concealed, touting only the good reason to the public, particularly women.

The Ugandan experience under Yoweri Kaguta Museveni’s government, as I have earlier shown, best illustrated this possibility.

In a more recent exposition on legislative quotas for women in Africa, Tripp (2005: 57) noted that although women became very vocal and active in parliamentary debates, they had more difficulty pushing through legislation that would provide key supports to women. He illustrated that while women parliamentarians in Uganda were able to insert key gender related provisions into the 1998 Land Act, they however failed to include the key co-ownership clauses into the passage of the 2000 Amendments of the Land Act. This becomes more intriguing because given customary practices, the current legislation, according to Tripp, provides limited possibilities for women to own land. The inability of women parliamentarians in Uganda to effect desirable legislation in the best interest of women, in the view of Tripp (2005: 57), stemmed from their mode of power acquisition, namely quotas and affirmative action.

The Nigerian experience under the Fourth Republic does not differ substantially from the Ugandan episode. However, there has not yet been a specific affirmative action measure geared towards reserving seats for women in parliamentary and local government elections. Yet, the method of co-optation especially in political appointment has been well played out, giving women 20.5%

of Ministerial and Special Advisers' appointments in 1999. Regrettably, this marginal increase has not been able to generate much increase in women's ability to promote and influence gender-friendly legislations and policies. It may be that due to their non-elective ascension to power, they lack legitimacy or a clear-cut constituency among women, political parties and President

Given the foregoing, there is need to refocus beyond affirmative action measures. It will be preposterous and counter-productive to assume that gender acts as a proxy for the political and social values held by an individual (Tamale, 1999: 77, cited in Goetz, 2002: 559). As the situation stands today, no threat or change has been effected in the structure of male domination of politics and governance in Nigeria. And unless tactics are changed, it is doubtful whether any meaningful progress can be made in mainstreaming gender into national politics and policies. More emphasis should be placed on power politics, without necessarily deemphasizing alternative options such as affirmative action. It should however be pursued within the framework of competitive politics so that the legitimacy, effectiveness and autonomy of women in decision-making will not be compromised.

As I noted earlier, the whole essence of politics is the acquisition of power. Power, realistically speaking, is central to human existence and survival. To envisage its holders to voluntarily relinquish it on the frivolous grounds of gender equality may continue for decades, to remain a dream in the pipeline. Rather than commit such political suicide, women would gain more if they design ways of circumventing all legal, institutional, and procedural devices aimed at achieving such. The onus of seeking and actualising a better balance rests with the power seekers, in this case the women, who seek to establish power equality with men.

There are a number of difficulties in the way of women, mainly economic and financial constraints. Yet, there is no denying the fact that they, along with feminists, have a responsibility to bear. Power, as a resource, cannot be attained on a platter of gold. It has to be fought for. Whatever the odds, women need to force their ways into the mainstream of power politics. If it will require staking family affairs to enlist the support of men for the struggle, why not? This may sound amoral. But power itself is an amoral phenomenon, being the most corruptible object. In any case, can one talk about morality in the context of Third World politics generally and Nigeria in particular? The reality is that from comparative experience, gaining power at the expense of others has never been a tea party. The cost has always been and will continue to be very high.

All the same, the struggle should be predicated upon popular education, mobilization and sensitization of all and sundry, drawing attention to the plight of women in politics, preaching unity of purpose among all gender-based organisations, and intensive lobbying of public policy decision makers and party leaders. For affirmative actions to be effective, they must begin with the political parties in all their dealings, and promoted through popular, competitive politics at all levels of national politics.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the increasing influence of gender politics in Nigeria. Starting from a theoretical standpoint that emphasizes the centrality of power politics to the understanding of gender politics, the paper argues that the failure of official and unofficial responses to the feminist challenge in Nigeria is largely due to the fact that they proceeded from faulty institutional and procedural devices. After a review of such measures and the attendant marginal improvement in women's political representation in Nigeria, the paper notes that there is still a very long way to go in Nigeria. The easiest and fastest path is to emphasize power politics, rather than official affirmative actions, in advancing gender equality. This is necessary, given the inherent contradictions of affirmative actions that tend to hinder its effectiveness and the legitimacy and autonomy of women in advancing their own cause, from the experience of Uganda under Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.

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Author's Name and Address: J. Shola OMOTOLA, *Department of Political Science, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, NIGERIA.*
E-mail: sholaomotola@yahoo.com