

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Preamble

Nigerian male writers have all in their earlier works played down on the vital role of women due to the adoption of oppressive cultural practices and the system of patriarchy in Africa and Igboland in particular. They have in many occasions portrayed women negatively in their subordination to men, thereby promoting gender inequality. The focus as Nwapa (2007:528) observes has always been on the physical prurient, negative nature of woman. This has been occasioned by the cultural practices of the people and dehumanizing attitude of patriarchy. The patriarchal society always holds women as subservient to men; thereby encouraging gender roles and gender discrimination in family and in society. Through literature, the people's culture is portrayed. That is to say that literature transmits the culture of the people. And so in whichever way male writers portrayed their women characters in their literary works, they are just perpetuating the cultural heritage and patriarchal structures of African (Igbo) society. Thus, in this study, the researcher tends to attempt a study of how the female major characters are portrayed in selected works of six Igbo playwrights.

1.1 Background of Study

Many African males in general and Nigerian males in particular, have failed to appreciate the powerful role which women play in order to sustain the race and the nation. The status of women is a very compelling issue, essentially because women are yet to attain their full potentials. There are gender inequalities and discriminations due to existing African oppressive cultural practices and patriarchal structures. Women's struggle and agitation for women rights within the regimented patriarchal system and structures have given rise to series

of serious feminist discourses. These struggles and agitations should be understood in terms of women's inability to make demands on the government and also their inability to actively participate in policy making due to gender inequalities.

According to Omonubi-McDonnell (2003:4), the consequence of the unequal status between men and women is a higher level of economic and political powerlessness among women. Powerlessness in turn retards development at any level politically, economically and socially. Thus the Nigerian women are confronted by two distinct yet, related systems of power; the economic mode of capitalism, the ideological mode of patriarchy and oppressive cultural practices. Due to their subjugation by the African socio-cultural and political systems, women have been relegated to the lowest rung of the political and economic ladder. Obviously, women generally have been frowning at their subjugating position. Lucas (2009:131) in Utoh-Ezeajugh (2013:2) notes:

That time has come for the dismantling of old concepts and values, old mentality and principles and replaces them with pragmatic ones based on fairness and justice. If it happens in the creative arts world, then it is just a matter of time before it occurs in the real world.

In the thinking of many Nigerians, the most disturbing problems facing the country and militating against its democratization and development are ethnicity, corruption and religious intolerance. Only few people reflect on the fact that sexism or gender oppression ranks as one of the most insidious problems plaguing the country and slowing down its pace of growth and development. Over the years women have been suffering various forms of oppression such as sexual harassment, early or forced marriage, rape, kidnap, acid attack to mention just a few.

In addition, this gender oppression also includes disregard for literary works produced by female writers. African women writers and their works have been neglected in literary criticism. In characterizing African literature, critics have ignored gender as a social and

analytical category. Such characterization operates to exclude women's literary expression as part of African literature. Hence what they define is the male literary tradition. In upholding this view Stratton (2007:455-56) notes that;

When African literary discourse is considered from the perspectives of gender, it becomes evident that dialogic interaction between men's and women's writing is one of the defining features of the contemporary African tradition. Such a redefinition has important implications for both critical and pedagogical practices.

What this indicates is that neither men nor women's writings can be fully appreciated in isolation from the other. Yet general surveys have neglected women writers and thus rendered them invisible in literary criticism. Stratton asserts that typical example can be seen in the first book-length treatment of African fiction, Eustace Palmer's *An Introduction to the African Novels* which refers only once to a woman writer – a reference to Flora Nwapa- that labels her 'an inferior novelist'. Also women authors are notably absent from Palmer's *The Growth of African Novels*. All these are indicators to the manifestation of gender discrimination, oppression, and inequalities in African patriarchal system.

Moreover, this gender oppression manifests in the negative ways in which male writers represent their female major characters in their literary works. In this regard, Chukwukere (1995:6) notes that,

...the unsatisfactory appreciation of the significance of women in life has spilled into imaginative literature. Through their own points of view, majority of male writers often present their cultural reality as the global cultural reality. The paucity of African female writers and critics has equally encouraged the perspective of an unbalanced representation.

That is to say that most male writers project unbalanced image of African womanhood. They understandably neglect to point out the positive side of womanhood because of their cultural

reality. Such male authors tend to assume that what obtains in their culture is the ideal thing and as such they allow their cultural reality to manifest in their literary works.

Chukwukere (1995:7) further observes that the ideal female character created by male writers acts within the framework of her traditional roles as wife and mother. She opines that so strong are social values that the respect and love which a woman earns is relative to the degree of her adaptation to these roles.

In Nigeria, just as in other countries of Africa, women are more disadvantaged than men. In terms of wealth, women are poorer; they do most of the menial jobs in the labour market and in the home in order to cater for their families. In politics, women are terribly marginalized and disorganized. In political leadership, they are not allowed to take up important offices. For instance, it is difficult for the women in Nigeria to pay for and collect nomination forms for governorship elections. It was only per chance that Dame Virgy Etiaba once became the first woman governor in Anambra State even though there are women deputy Governors too minimal to be mentioned in Nigeria. Women are always busy at home struggling to make their children behave well and also feel well. Obviously, they readily fall victims to violence than men. During any critical period such as war situation, women are exposed to danger even as they struggle to take care of the children and manage their homes.

In the words of Ezeigbo (2001:400), there is the need to adopt a more democratic and pluralist approach to gender issues in Nigeria, taking into consideration people's religious, ethnic, and cultural and other identities. The construction of gender differs in Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, so it is imperative that functional strategies should be adopted to satisfy the aspirations of both genders through the establishment of a healthy

environment that could foster harmonious relationships and equity between men and women.

Ezeigbo further posits that;

To redress the wrongs suffered by women worldwide, the United Nations (UN) declared 1975 through 1985 as a decade for women. In addition, the UN organized four world conferences on women in Mexico City (1977), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) in order to focus on women and issues relating to their development.

Evidently, many women activists in Nigeria, among the Igbo in particular as well as other parts of Africa believe that only very little have changed in the unhealthy condition of women in the country in spite of Nigeria's participation in these international conferences.

Obviously, the unhealthy condition of women in Nigeria is consequent on various forms of oppressive cultural practices and unbridled patriarchal authority (domination of the female gender by the male) which precludes the right of women to participate in decision-making on issues affecting them. Epuchie (2013:1) notes that for one to understand the position of African women in general and Igbo women in particular, one needs to know what culture is all about. Culture has been variously defined to mean several things to different people. More often than not, the variegated meanings attached to it are direct reflections of professional biases or inclinations.

According to Enem (1990:72), the cultural policy for Nigeria (1999:5) sees culture as the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and models of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours. And quoting Mallinowski, Bello (1991) asserts that culture is partly human, partly spiritual and partly materialistic. In its humanistic form, culture consists of ideas, values, knowledge, philosophy, law, morals and so on. Spiritually, culture is made up of beliefs and

religious practices. In its materialistic aspect, it consists of artifacts and consumer goods made by man as opposed to things found in nature. Evidently therefore, culture is made by man and for man and handed over from one generation to another.

Quoting Clark, Epuchie (2013:2) notes that scholars are fairly in agreement that culture is:

- i) A social heritage, in the sense that culture is hereditary and transmissible from one generation to another...
- ii) Culture is man-made – it is a human response to the biological environmental conditions and requirements of his existence.
- iii) Culture is marked by continuity in time and comprehensiveness in the scope of its sway over its member..., its impact on all its members is comprehensive or without exception, and as inescapable as death...

Enem (1990:730) notes that, the various definitions of culture also point out to the following characteristic attributes of culture:

- i) Culture is learned and not biologically inherited.
- ii) Culture is not restricted but shared among a homogeneous group of people and transmitted on from generation to generation. Thus, while the individual in society may die, culture and society do not die.
- iii. Culture is historically derived and often transmitted through the process of socialization.

iv. Culture is diverse. Cultural diversity implies that different societies have different things that constitute culture unto them. Some societies forbid cross-cousin marriages, while others like Arochuwu, Ohafia and Egypt prescribe it.

Culture elements and aspects include societal norms, values, language, music, dance, folklores, ceremonies, religion, literature, arts and craft and so on.

Culture is the totality of human efforts in life, it is an all-embracing concept that is capable of influencing everybody in the society. It could then be said that gender oppression and inequality which African women and Igbo women in particular grapple with and agitate for is their heritage. The socio-cultural realities of African societies to a large extent have entrenched male dominance over their female counterparts. That is why the issue of gender inequality has come to stay because it is culturally rooted. It then means that the oppressive practices and patriarchy which women struggle against in Africa with particular reference to the Igbo people of Nigeria could be attributed to what obtains in the people's culture than to the making of African or Igbo men.

Culture is also characterized by continuity. In this wise, Epuchie notes;

Since culture is marked by continuity, what African men are perpetuating is the culture that they have inherited from their ancestors. Hence most African societies were organized by gender and tasks were divided and standards set according to patriarchal values. It is this situation that African women in general and Igbo women in particular have aggressively attacked.

Obviously, culture is marked with continuity because it is transferable from one generation to another. In view of this, the African men and Igbo men in particular have continued to practice what they learnt from their ancestors. Thus, the submission of African women to men is pre-eminent in all areas of human endeavour. As a result of that, for the

African men, the primary role of women is procreation. Gender roles are the expected behavior, attitude, obligations and privileges that a society assigns to each sex. In the past, gender roles were based on a set of gender stereotypes that have been challenged by both social science and the women's movement.

Actually, gender roles differ across culture. For example, in Africa and specifically among the Igbo people of Nigeria, roofing the house, plucking of kola nut, climbing palm tree etc. are considered men's work in some societies. In fact, in Nnewi in Anambra State, it is a taboo for women to pluck kola nut or climb palm tree no matter how little the size, while in other parts of the country, such works are meant for women. The truth is that many aspects of African culture seem to be oppressive on women and also encourage gender discrimination and oppression. The contention of this research is that those aspects of African culture and patriarchal structures that do not encourage gender equity and peaceful co-existence between men and women in the family and society should be identified and re-adjusted to be in line with core womanist ideals.

According to Phillips (2006:75-6), the womanism theory advocates for eradication of inequality not just for black women but for all people. In other words, the theory advocates freedom for men, women and children. The focus of the womanist is not on gender inequality which the feminists advocate, but on how to eradicate race and class-based oppression.

Most often, the issue of gender oppression and discrimination which springs up from African social and cultural traditions, and environmental factors which provoke the subjugation of women, manifest in the way male writers present their female characters in their literary works. Most male writers have in many instances portrayed women negatively in their subordination to men. In some cases for instance, male writers have projected the female

major characters as perpetual nagging women who make life intolerable for their husbands, or as prostitutes who have nothing good to offer neither to their families nor to society. It is in this backdrop that the researcher tends to study six selected Igbo male and female-authored plays to ascertain whether there are issues of gender discrimination in the area of portrayals of women major characters which primarily aims at subjugating women in these selected Igbo plays. The three Igbo male plays include Akoma's *Obidiya*, Onyekawu's *Nwata Rie Awo*, and Nwadike's *Okwe Agbaala*. On the other hand, the three Igbo female plays are Okediadi's *Ihe Onye Metere* and Obidiebube's *Qnodu Ugo* and Akpiri Richie Uzo...(*O Were Anya Zie Ozi*). The study will find out whether the female playwrights have also given their women major characters subordinate positions as their male counterpart or whether they have portrayed them in a different way rather than subjugating them.

As noted above, subjugation which is associated with oppressive cultural and patriarchal structures has led to series of women's struggle and agitation over the years and has led to African feminism. This has been variously defined by African women scholars and theorists. According to Walker (2012:19/4/2014), feminism has given rise to other variants and one of these variants is womanism theory which is the methodology incorporated in this study. Womanism Theory was propounded by an award winning poet and author, Alice Walker, in 1983. Womanism is a social theory deeply rooted in the racial and gender oppression of black women.

According to Philips (2006:102), womanism theory is a social change perspective based upon everyday problems and experiences of black women and other women of colour. Womanism theory advocates for methods to eradicate inequalities not just for black women but for all people. In other words, the theory advocates freedom for men, women and children.

Walker (2012) notes that; feminism is incorporated into womanism. The focus of the womanist is not on gender inequalities (which the feminists advocate), but on race and class-based oppression. The main contention of the womanist is on how to work out modalities that will enable male and female to co-exist happily irrespective of their gender, race, and class differences without oppression, unnecessary wrangling and gender discrimination. Hence, the direction of the present study is that the oppressive cultural heritage and patriarchal structures that encourage and perpetuate this unhealthy situation have to be identified and the necessary adjustment affected so as to maintain and sustain a cordial relationship between male and female in the family in particular and to the entire society in general.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The patriarchal structure of the African society, which engendered gender inequality is said to have encouraged discrimination and subjugation of women. Following the above, diverse literature has emerged in which there is existing impression that female characters are portrayed negatively in male-authored literary works. This has given the female folk great concern. Most of the time; women are portrayed as “never-do-well” in society. This prompted the researcher into carrying out this study in selected six Igbo plays to ascertain whether the perceived negative portrayals of female major characters manifested in these Igbo plays.

The problem of this research therefore is that there is imbalance in portrayals of female major characters in literary works due to African patriarchy and oppressive cultural practices and over the years, this has been affecting the position of women in the society. The negative portrayals has given women great concern and has led to women agitations, feminist writings and feminist theory. As a result of the male writers’ negative portrayals, women have been seeing men as their oppressors and this has led to societal imbalance and wrangling.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The cultural heritage of African society and the patriarchy that goes with it has been creating unnecessary tension in the society. This has led to series of struggle and agitations. Patriarchy, which implies the institution of male rule and privilege depend on female subjugation. It emphasized gender inequality and discrimination against women. Over the years, this has led to feminist theory and writings. Feminism was perceived by many in Africa as being Western and too radical as a result, various theories have to emerge as derivations from mainstream feminist concepts. Thus, feminism theory eventually gave rise to womanism as a movement which has presented an alternative to feminism. Womanism advocates inclusiveness instead of exclusiveness, whether it is related to race, class or gender. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to ascertain;

- i. How the male and female playwrights portray their female major characters in the six selected Igbo plays.
- ii. Whether there are differences in the way both genders represent womenfolk in their literary works based on the selected Igbo plays.
- iii. Whether the existing impression that women major characters are given subordinate position are actually applicable to both Igbo male and female playwrights.
- iv. Whether the female playwrights have taken any step to debunk the negative representation of women folk in literary works.

1.4 Significance of Study

Following the fact that womanism as a methodology advocates freedom from race and class-based oppression and inequalities, dialogue, consensus and plurality of views –(tenets

that are indispensable in achieving social justice and harmony in any system or relationship), the significance of this study are as follows:

- i. The study will help to restore and sustain societal balance and equity which is the only panacea for peaceful co-existence in gender issues.
- ii. The study will be relevant to women because it will help to make necessary adjustment on African culture and patriarchy that oppresses women.
- iii. The study will help to control women's struggle and agitation for women's rights within the patriarchal systems and structures.
- iv. How necessary awareness will be created on the vital role and position of women in the society for improved positive portrayals in literary works as well as in gender relations in the family and in the society.
- v. Lastly, the study will recommend possible solution that will bring peaceful co-existence and equity between males and females in the family and in the society at large.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What is the cause of women subjugation in African society?.
- ii. In what ways has patriarchy in Africa emphasized gender inequality and discrimination?
- iii. What is the relationship between language, literature and cultural reality of the people?
- iv. How can the men folk be made to understand the vital role and significance of African women in general and Igbo women in particular?
- v. Have women writers taken any step to debunk the perceived impression that women are "never-do-well" in the society?

- vi. How can continuous women struggles and agitations due to Africa's oppressive cultural practices and patriarchal structures be controlled to sustain peace and harmony in African society?.

1.6 Scope of Study

Because of the level of work involved in analyzing Igbo plays in order to study and analyse how women major characters are presented, the study is limited to six selected Igbo plays. These plays will be critically studied and analyzed by the researcher to examine how women major characters were presented in the selected plays; and how women have reacted to their negative presentation by male writers.

1.7 Assumption of Study

Over the years, women have been negatively represented in the literary works. Moreover, the socio-cultural realities of African societies have so entrenched male dominance over their women counterpart to the extent that it spilled into imaginative literature. This has eventually escalated into various aspects of gender discourse and the struggles of black/African women to gain freedom from oppressive cultural practices and institutionalized conventions.

In order to carry out the study effectively, the researcher made the following assumptions:

- i. Male authors understandably neglect to point out the positive side of womanhood as a result of what obtains in African culture.
- ii. Most cultural heritage of the Igbo people in particular encourage perpetual male dominance over their female counter part and most Igbo male authors tend to represent this in their literary works.

- iii. Some authors particularly the males, have portrayed women as victims of male subjugation in a patriarchal society.
- iv. Women have started to redefine themselves, they have started to project themselves as they feel they should be presented.
- v. Gender oppression and discrimination that manifest even in literary works lead to women struggle with patriarchy and oppressive cultural practices which imposed restrictive norms on them.
- vi. Womanism as a social theory in literature which advocates for freedom for all people – male, female and children is based on the assumption that there are racial and gender oppression of black women (African women).

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Criticism is the process of reading a literary text critically to bring out all the necessary ideas as presented by the author. These ideas include the theme, plot, setting, character and characterization and of course language and the tone of the text. Criticism which is otherwise called literary appreciation tends to answer the question “what is the work saying?” As a result, the role of the critic is analyzing, appreciating, evaluating and making his/her own input. In doing this, the critic usually depend on various available critical approaches. Some of these critical approaches include Marxist, Reader-Response, Queen theory, Formalist, Structuralist, Psychological and Psychoanalytic theories, feminist, womanist etc. Each of these methodologies is relevant to literature in one way or the other. Therefore one of the challenges of the critic and scholars of literature is to ascertain the approach or approaches that will lead to effective appreciation of the work and arrive at objective conclusion.

Thus, the study will adopt a womanist theory approach. Alice Walker coined the womanist theory in 1983. She first applied it to her work *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*. She explained that the term womanist is derived from the Southern folk expression “acting womanish”. The womanish girl, as she opines, exhibits wilful, courageous, and outrageous behaviour that is considered to be beyond the scope of societal norms.

Womanism by its radical nature advocates freedom from race and class-based oppression, dialogue, consensus and plurality of view – tenets that are indispensable in achieving social justice and harmony in any system or relationship. A womanist is committed to the survival of both males and females and desires a world where men and women can co-exist while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness. Thus, the inclusion of men provides black women with an opportunity to address gender oppression and consequent suppression without directly attacking men. Womanism as a concept; advocates gender complementarity, which; would ensure the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Therefore womanism is centered around the natural order of life, family and a complimentary relationship between men and women.

In conclusion, African feminism which has been variously defined by African women scholars and theorists, has given rise to such variants as “womanism”, “femalism”, “motherism” and so on.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

In every serious research work, there is the need to look into the works done earlier by researchers and scholars in a given field of study. The reason for this is either to agree or disagree with opinions, ideas, feelings, observations, suggestions and conclusions of the earlier studies. The review will not only show the work already done and the topics open for research in the area of interest to the researcher on the one hand but also sharpen the wits of the researcher on the other hand.

It is pertinent to group the review of relevant literature into three for clarity purpose. These three groups include conceptual, theoretical and empirical studies. The conceptual studies, deal with the researcher's working definition of terms or concepts in the study. The second group is the theoretical studies in which works on relevant theories will be discussed. The next group is the empirical studies in which works on particular topics relevant to the study will be looked into. At the end of these three groups, is the summary. It is in the summary that the researcher concludes that there is the need for the study at hand.

2.1 Conceptual Studies

The conceptual studies deal with the researcher's working definition of terms or concepts in the study as follows:

Patriarchy which according to *Encarta World English Dictionary* (1999:1383) is defined as a social system in which man dominates. It is also a social system in which men are regarded as the authority within the family and society.

Azikiwe (2001:371) asserts that sociologists have variously defined gender. Gender therefore is seen as psychological, cultural and social dimensions of maleness and femaleness. It is a social construct because it refers to roles which each society assigns to men and women, boys and girls. Azikiwe then observes that every society ascribes different works to be performed by men and women within and outside the household environment. When we talk about gender, we often think of gender equality and gender equity. These, according to Onwuegbuchunam and Okoye(2012:799) refer to equal opportunities or uniformity in quantity, amount and intensity of provisions. Gender equality demands interventions to close gender gaps in all sectors that exist between women, men, boys and girls. However, equal treatment will not necessarily produce equal benefits and as such there is a need for equity. Gender equity then refers to the act of doing whatever is necessary to ensure equality of outcomes in life for men and women.

There are minor and major characters. Character is a person portrayed in a narrative or dramatic work. Abrams (2009:42-43), notes that characters are persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as possessing particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inference from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it -- the **dialogue** -- and from what they do --the **action**. *Merrian Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* notes that character is a personality as represented or realized in fiction or drama.

Nature abhors oppression of individuals. To oppress someone means to treat with unjust harshness.. Epuchie (2013:9) quoting Okolo notes that “power inequality between the oppressor and the oppressed, which may be physical, psychological, emotional, mental, social, moral or economic” is a clear manifestation of oppression. In this study, oppression

refers to a situation wherein a group of person's behaviour, actions or writings serve as a veritable instrument to relegate another group to the rear thereby causing discomfort on them. This brings us to the concept of culture which determines man's condition in a given society. Culture, in the words of Enem (1999:72), is the totality of a man's life as exemplified in his society. It is an all-embracing concept about the way of life of a group of people occupying a given territorial space, their established norms, behaviour and practices to succeeding generations. The cultural policy for Nigerians (1988:5) which is in line with the above assertion defines culture as:

The totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and models of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours.

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies that share a common goal: to define, establish and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal, and equal rights for women. According to Ikekaonwu (2004:96-98) 'feminism in its basic sense presupposes the pursuit of equal rights, privileges and responsibilities for men and women, that is, gender equality in its ramifications'. African male and female writers have variously written on culture and propounded them and concepts to delineate their claims.

Alice Walker, a black American came up with womanist theory in 1983 which transcends women's and men's selfish cultures. Walker defines womanism as a theory committed to the survival of both males and females and desires a world where men and women can co-exist, while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness. Walker introduced womanism in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*. According to her;

A woman who loves another woman, sexually and/or non-sexually. She appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility. She is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male or female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health...loves the spirit... loves struggle, loves herself. Regardless.

- This study adopts Alice Walker's definition of womanism as a working definition.

2.2 Theoretical Studies

The basic interest of the theoretical review is the theory of feminism and womanism. Wikipedia defines feminism as "a collection of movements and ideologies that share a common goal to define, establish and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal and social rights for women". This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. A feminist advocates or supports the rights and equality of women. Feminist movements have campaigned and continued to campaign for women's rights, including the right to vote, to hold public offices, to work, to fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to enter into contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Besides, feminists have also worked to promote bodily autonomy and integrity, and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence.

Goring et al (2010:194-197) define feminism as a socio-political movement. They note that in general usage, the term 'feminism' is usually treated as an umbrella term to describe those (normally women but sometimes also men) who think that it is necessary to struggle against the oppression of women on different levels as: social, economic and ideological. Such struggle takes varied forms and has differing objectives.

Feminism as a socio-political movement therefore experienced a resurgence in the 1960s and early 1970s, especially in Western Europe and the United States. This resurgence has continued and has established a number of seemingly permanent changes in some

developed countries in– Europe and Asia, Currently feminism has become more and more an international movement, with increasing contacts between activists and sympathizers in different parts of the world. This is because the literature of the past written (especially) by women offered itself as a record and analysis of the past oppression of women. It is from their study that they came up with the term ‘radical feminism’ which is still current, but perhaps more in use in the 1960s and 1970s.

Rice and Waugh (2001:143-6) consider feminism as being rooted in the political discourse of modernity, inheriting but also challenging its ideas of sovereignty, equality, liberty, rights and rationality. They assert that modern political discourses have been concerned, in particular, with issues of rights, agency, freedom and equality. However, many political discourses which developed such concepts as feminism claim to be universal but actually exclude women from full citizenship and sovereignty. They reiterate that liberal modernity may be said to be founded on the fundamental split between the private and the public which relegates women to the demesne of domesticity and deprives them of a political voice while requiring that men identify with a discourse of rationality which splits off and denies them the sense of feeling. Although the discourses of feminism clearly arise out of and are made possible by those of enlightened modernity, and its models of reason, justice and autonomous subjectivity as universal categories; feminism has been one of the most powerful movements in thought to expose some of the contractions and inadequacies of this political legacy. Thus by raising the issue of sexual difference and its construction, feminism weakens the rootedness of Enlightenment thought in the principle of sameness and universality.

Furthermore, feminism has thoroughly exposed the ways in which this universal principle is contradicted by the construction of a public/private split which consigns women to

the private realm of feeling nurturance, intuition, domesticity and the body, in order to clarify a 'public' realm of reason, efficiency and objectivity as masculine.

Female writers in the 1970s sought to challenge and dismantle the existence of a central contradiction set up in an attempt to define women's demand for equality and gendered identity.

Rice and Waugh specify that what emerged in feminist theory in the 1970s, therefore, was a recognition on the part of feminists of a central contradiction in attempts to define an epistemology and a foundation of its politics that women seek equality and recognition of a gendered identity which has been constructed through the very culture and ideological formations which feminists were seeking to challenge and dismantle.

Furthermore, Dobie (2012:103-5) in his own contribution discusses feminism on the premise that Western culture had operated on the assumption that women were inferior to men. She asserts that philosophical thinkers from Aristotle to Charles Darwin, reiterated that women were lesser beings, and one does not have to look hard to find comments from writers, theologians, and other public figures that disparage and denigrate women.

According to her, some women, in spite of that denigration, still stood out as eloquent spokespersons for women and their efforts greatly enhanced the development of women's history socially and literarily. Some of such history were traced by Elaine Showalter, who divided them into three phases: the feminine phase (1840 - 80), the feminist phase (1880 - 1920), and the female phase (1920 - present). Initially in Europe, female writers imitated the literary tradition established by men, taking additional care to avoid offensive language or subject matter. Showalter asserts that novelists such as Charlotte Bronte and Mary Ann Evans wrote in the form and style of recognized writers, all of whom were males. Sometimes,

female writers even used men's names (Currer Bell for Bronte and George Eliot for Evans, for example) to hide their female authorship because of women degradation.

In the second phase, according to Dobie, women protested their lack of rights and worked to secure them. In the political realm, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others pushed to secure equality under the law, and some more radical feminists envisioned separate female utopia. Dobie noted that in the literary world, they decried the unjust depictions of women by male writers. In the third phase, the female phase, female writers initially concentrated on exploring the female experience in art and literature. For them, this meant turning to their own lives, for subjects. This goes to stress the fact that the delicacy of expression that had typified women's writing had begun to crumble as a new dawn of sexuality emerged. Thus for feminist critics, it meant looking at the depiction of women in male texts in an effort to reveal the misogyny (negative attitudes toward women) lurking there. Consequent on this, female writers have in recent times turned their attention to an examination of works written by female writers. These latest efforts, Elaine Showalter refers to as gynocriticism, a movement that examines the distinctive characteristics of the female experience, in contrast to earlier methods that explained the female by using male models.

Cuddon (2014:273-6), attempted a definition of feminist criticism. He posits that feminist criticism is a development and movement in critical theory and in the evaluation of literature which was well under way by the late 1960s and which has burgeoned steadily since. For Cuddon, feminist criticism as an attempt to describe and interpret (and reinterpret) women's experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature – especially in the novel; and to a lesser extent, poetry and drama. It interrogates the long-standing, dominant, male

phallogocentric ideologies, (which add up to a kind of male conspiracy), patriarchal attitudes and male interpretation in literature (and critical evaluation of literature).

Based on Cuddon's assertion, one can say that feminist criticism attacks male notions of value in literature – by offering critiques of male authors and representations of men in literature and also by privileging women writers. The whole female nature, how women think, feel and act remain a challenge to male world and a puzzle to them in spite of all prejudices and unwarranted assumptions by male writers.

In late 1960s, there was a spate of criticism of diverse nature. It was polemical, often political and violent, masterminded by women who claim that women were being oppressed, suppressed, exploited and unjustly marginalized. Feminist criticism goes well beyond literature to explore the socio-economic status of women; and where literature is concerned, to look at women's economic position as authors and the problems they have with allegedly prejudiced male publishers and critics.

Acholonu (2002:131-37) in her explanation of the theoretical concept of feminism, discusses the term feminism and the impact of the feminist discourse on the growth and development of Nigerian literary tradition. She observes that in the current global drive for an engendered human order, engendered policies, strategies, actions, and the realities of cultural artefacts, in this case, literary works of art, serve as good indicators of national progress and meaningful development.

For Acholonu feminism today stands for the thinking, theory, philosophy and ideology, which has to do with the changing conditions of women (and men) in the historical evolution of the human race. Evidently feminism today has a wide spectrum of divergent views and ideological orientations. Obviously, feminist discourse which basically focuses on

African feminism is concerned with the revision, deconstruction and reconstruction of language as set up by the patriarchal system. Consequently, feminist works especially those of women writers, have made possible the creation of more realistic, up-to-date, authentic female major characters, with discernible faces, voice and choices which are essential attributes of their humanness. To buttress the above assertion Rose Acholonu posits that:

Feminist philosophy and thinking have changed the theory, practice and agenda, content, form and procedure in almost all disciplines of academia. Today, we hear of feminist philosophy, feminist theology, women in history, in the arts, science and technology etc. These diverse fields of knowledge have yielded meaningful fruits by way of expanding the horizon and purview of human knowledge and capabilities. Also many of the male fantasies about women, that pass for eternal truths, are being exposed and demystified.

Feminist scholarship therefore has given cause for the re-discovery and re-vision of old texts, many of which are being given new and fresh feminist interpretations.

Hooks (2000:250-51) in her own states that feminist theory which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and life experiences. It has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues such as the social construction of sex and gender. Hooks notes that some forms of feminism have been criticized for taking into account only white, middle-class, educated perspectives. She states that this led to the creation of ethnically specific or multiculturalist forms of feminism.

Chodorow (1989:151) further looks at feminism and literature. She notes that feminist movement produced feminist fiction and non-fiction and created new interest in women's writing. She states that it also prompted a general re-evaluation of women's historical and academic contributions in response to the belief that women's lives and contributions have

been under represented in areas of scholarly interest. Chodorow explains that much of the early period of feminist literary scholarship was given over to the rediscovery and reclamation of texts written by women.

Booth et al (2006:1766-69) discuss feminist criticism. They note that feminist criticism like Marxist criticism, derives from a critique of history of oppression, in this case the history of women's inequality. They explain that feminist criticism has no single founder like Freud or Marx; it has been practised to some extent since the 1790s, when praise of women's cultural achievements went hand in hand with arguments that women were rational beings deserving equal rights in education. In addition, Booth et al posit that contemporary feminist criticism emerged from a "second wave" of feminist activism, in the 1960s and 1970s associated with the civil rights and anti war movements. They also assert that one of the first disciplines in which women's activism took root was literary criticism, but feminist theory and women's studies quickly became recognized methods across the disciplines. Further, Booth et al observe that:

Feminist literary studies began by denouncing the misrepresentation of women in literature and affirming women's writings, before quickly adopting the insights of poststructuralist theory, yet the early strategies continue to have their use. At first, feminist criticism in the 1970s, like early Marxist criticism, regarded literature as a reflection of patriarchal society's sexist base; the demeaning images of women in literature were symptoms of a system that had to be overthrown.

They discovered that feminist literary studies soon began, however, to claim the equal worth of distinctive themes of writings by women and men.

Okoye (2010:1-5) in her contribution indicates that feminism, as an ideology, incorporates both a doctrine of equal rights for women and an ideology of social transformation aiming to create a world for women beyond simple social equality. Okoye

notes that Alice Walker, who for many years has been asking feminist questions about racism, sexual violence, reproductive rights and the relation of these issues to black women's culture, comes up with a new ideology, womanism.

Alice Walker, who for many years has been asking feminist questions about race and class – based oppressions, sexual violence, reproductive rights and the relationship between these issues and black women's culture, comes up with a new ideology, womanism. Walker (2012:2014) notes that:

Feminism is incorporated into womanism. The focus of womanism theory is not on gender inequality, but on race and class-based oppressions. A womanist is committed to the survival of both male and female and desires a world where men and women can co-exist, while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness.

The 1990s presented a new kind of challenge with the proliferation of black feminism theory and womanism theory became the most acceptable. Thus, Alice Walker's womanist theory surfaced as a unique social change perspective. Womanism, as a theory, as well as a movement, unlike feminism, is not just a woman affair. It is committed to the well-being of both black men and black women. This inclusion of men provides black women with an opportunity to address gender oppression without directly attacking men. Walker's much used phrase "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" suggests that feminism is a component of the much larger ideological umbrella of womanism.

Alice Walker asserts that womanism, by its radical nature advocates freedom from race and class-based oppression, dialogue, consensus and plurality of view – tenets that are indispensable in achieving social justice and harmony in any system or relationship. For Alice Walker, womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. Walker, who introduced the term feminism, refuses to be addressed as a feminist but a womanist. She dissociates herself from

the 'bra-breaking' feminism of the West. For Walker, a woman who loves another woman sexually or non-sexually, appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, who is not a separatist and who loves struggling is a true womanist. Then Opara (1999:27), another female critic in Okoye (2010:1) posits that African womanism is committed to the quest for total freedom of the colonized African men and women. It recognizes the fact that the freedom of the African woman is hinged on that of her man. Opara, (2004:20) sees African womanism as "committed to the quest for total freedom of the colonized African men and women". It recognizes the fact that the freedom of the African woman is hinged on that of her man.

Utoh-Ezeajugh (2013:11-13) observes that feminist postulations hinging on varied ideological conceptions have been espoused by scholars concerned with the empowerment, self-actualisation and self reclamation of the woman in a male dominated world. She also notes that feminism has metamorphosed to other variants – from feminism to femalism, to womanism, to motherism, to black feminism, to humanism. She opines that Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin has been upheld as the originator of feminism based on the postulations in her book, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Ezeajugh observes that arguments have been advanced to the effect that feminism has its root in the medieval writings of a French woman, Christine De Pinan, who wrote on the rights and duties of women at that period.

Utoh-Ezeajugh further explains that scholars as Lucas (2009:1170) take us back to the biblical age and locate the first stirrings for women's freedom in the biblical account of Queen Vashti's (Esther 1:10) rejection of the "lowering of the dignity of womanhood by refusing to accept being made an object of display and ogling". Feminism therefore has advanced since

then to a movement for dismantling entrenched patriarchal structures that have deprived women of equal rights and opportunities as men. Thus feminism is a literary as well as a cultural reaction to the excesses of male stereotypes. Scholars, we dare say have made the distinction between radical feminism, accomodationism, humanist feminism, womanism and mothersnism. Uto-Ezeajugh notes that social and cultural factors have rendered western feminism inappropriate and ineffective in solving problems of gender discrimination in the African social sphere. As a result, concepts which are more culture specific and take care of women's needs from supposed African perspectives include womanism, black feminism and motherism.

Furthermore, Uto-Ezeajugh (2013; 12) observes that womanist posturing addresses the woman questions from the point of view of African social settings better than feminism. It seeks to relieve the everyday lives and situations of African women under the shackle of cultural inhibitions and social conventions.

Even Ezeigbo (2001:409) argues that African womanism valorizes marriage but insists it should not be used to subjugate women or tarnish their individuality. Therefore the patriarchal wish for women's passive endurance in the face of oppression, mental and physical torture is untenable and should be abandoned so that women can be accorded equal treatment with men. This of course is the only true path to conflict resolution and gender harmony in our beleaguered country. Humm (1992:404), asserts that "womanism, which implies black feminism, is a theory of black-defined women's struggles". Black feminists argue that all feminist theory must understand imperialism and change it. Hogan (1995:105) argues that a need for the term "womanism" arose during the early Feminist Movement, which was mainly led by middle – class white women advocating for social change in the

form of woman's suffrage. All in all, one must note that while the Feminist Movement focus is on ending gender-based oppression, it largely ignores race and class-based oppression.

Furthermore, Philips (2006:105) avers that the height of womanism discourse occurred during the late 1980's when scholars began to share findings with the world. During this time, womanism was embraced, debated and dismissed by academics mainly due to its perspective on the African-American experience. Phillips (2006:125) contends that despite womanism's characterization, its main concern is not the black women per se, but rather the black women are the point of origination for womanism. He opines that the basic tenets of womanism include a strong self-authored spirit of activism evident that is especially evident in literature.

In African context many people see feminism as being too western and too radical, and so are the various theories that have emerged as derivatives from mainstream feminism concepts. It is observed that the feminist movement focuses on gender-based oppression, and largely ignores race and class-based oppression. Hence, there is the need for the womanism theory.

Ogunyemi (1996:126) insists that gender equity demands the enthronement of womanist principles of reconciliation, collaboration, consensus and complementarity between women and men before Nigeria can become a just and democratic country. These four principles which are pluralistic in conception and practice if thoroughly implemented will see our country out of the woods. Complementarity between the two genders simply means that each would build the other up, enrich the other, thereby contributing to the collective well-being of the nation.

2.3 Empirical Studies

In this empirical study, particular topics relevant to the study will be discussed.

2.3.1 Gender

In words of Onuwegbuchunam and Okoye (2012:799-80), gender refers to the roles, norms, customs and practices by which biological differences between males and females are translated into socially constructed differences, between men and women, boys and girls. They note that these differences result in the two genders being valued differently and in their having unequal opportunities and life chances which is referred to as gender inequality. They assert that gender roles consist of those activities, task and responsibilities that are considered by society as 'natural' for men and women. For example, the traditional gender roles may design women as housewives and mothers while men as breadwinners. They note that individuals learn and accept these roles through the process of socialization. These roles however are not static, rather they vary from culture to culture. Even within a culture, roles may still differ according to class and race and changes over time.

For Alutulu and Ajakor (2011:796-7), gender is the "fact of being male or female; issues of class, race and gender". They note that gender can also be defined as an inflectional form showing membership in such a sub class as sex, the behavioural, cultural or psychological traits typically associated with one's sex. Osuafor (2001:152), Pateman 1988:960, Stoller (1968:201) and Moi (2002:301) described gender as a process of differentiating between men and women. These scholars uphold the socially constructed nature of gender differences and gender subordination.

Calhoun et al (1998:269) also uphold the above view by referring to gender as nonbiological but culturally and socially produced distinctions between men and women and

between masculinity and femininity. They noted that all societies, from the most primitive to the most advanced, use gender as an organizing principle, dividing the chores and rewards of social life into men's and women's role. They further assert that "no aspect of social life – whether the gathering of crops, the ritual of religion, the formal dinner party, or the organization of government – is free from the dichotomous thinking that casts the world in categories of 'male' and 'female'. These critiques aptly posit that gender roles are the expected behaviours, attitudes, obligations, and privileges that a society assigns to each sex. They note that even though more women are working today and new job opportunities created for women in formerly all-male fields, the gender roles formed during the 1950s persist as ideals. Even though these are based on a set of gender stereotypes that have been challenged by both social science and the women's movement.

Azikiwe (2001:371) in her contribution asserts that sociologists have defined gender in many ways. Gender is seen from psychological, cultural and sociological dimensions of men and women. Gender is a social construct because it refers to roles, which each society assigns to men and women, boys and girls. Azikiwe observes that every society ascribes different works to be performed by men and women both inside and outside the household. Hence there are terminologies like "men's work" and "masculine" and the opposites are "women's work" and "feminine".

Consequently, gender role is not a matter of biology or psychology, but of social convention. Gender roles differ across cultures and they are also dynamic. In Africa, for instance and in Nigeria in particular, roofing houses, climbing palm trees etc. are considered men's work in almost all societies. In Igbo land specifically, it is a taboo for women to climb palm trees no matter how small the size is.

Contrary to the above assertion, Okwechime and Ofuani (2008:178-9) observe that the sexual division between men and women are not natural in the ways that gender social construction is expressed in patriarchal society like ours. Rather, the denial or restriction of women from certain crafts has no biological justification. Such restrictions contribute to the grand plan to suppress or stifle the female voice. The struggle to liberate women from this unjust relationship of power therefore becomes most compelling. This is because the restriction of women from certain crafts is technically a way of keeping them out of economic power. There is an urgent need for female economic empowerment. It is thus important to remark here that women empowerment is one of the main points of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Chukwukere (1995:246) sees gender as a socio-historical phenomenon which refers to social and historical constructs for masculine and feminine roles, behaviours, attributes and ideologies, which connote some notion of biological sex.. Although gender roles vary from culture to culture, gender issues have been part of every society. It is believed that the failure to realize some goals of development programme lies in the truth that planners in our country failed to take into account the fact that men and women play different roles and consequently thereby have different needs or challenges which should be given due considerations in the development and implementation stages. Failure to do this has been, to a large extent, responsible for non-accomplishment of goals in any projects in our country.

However, Ezeigbo (2001:400-401) observes that despite their gender identities, men and women have to live in close proximity and share the same space and facilities, in a world in which they, especially women, are progressively being sensitized about their self-worth and their inalienable rights as human beings. Patriarchial domination of the female gender is

unacceptable because it precludes the right of women to participate in joint decision-making on issues affecting them in the family. According to Ezeigbo:

Gender equity is a necessary condition for social justice and peace in the family and the nation. It is indeed our argument that the disempowering structures of patriarchy, which deny women a voice in matters that affect them – education, politics, work, marriage, reproduction and sexuality etc. – are largely responsible for the conflict generated in the relationship between the two genders.

Consequent on the disempowering structures of patriarchy, women rebel against the subjugation they suffer and the dehumanization meted on them by their oppressors. This vehement reaction orchestrated the release by the World Bank Policy and Research Bulletin, while dealing on “Engendering development through gender equality”. It observe three areas where women have been denied their rights and thus intimidated into the culture of silence. These include social, economic and legal rights. It further remarks:

In no region do women and men have equal right. In many countries women still lack independent rights to own land, manage property conduct business, or even travel without their husband’s consent. In many parts of sub-Sahara Africa women obtain land rights chiefly through their husbands, and lose those rights when they are divorced or widowed. Gender disparities in rights constrain the sets of choices available to women in many aspects of life-often profoundly limiting their ability to participate in or benefit from development.

It is note worthy that the World Bank has come up with a new strategy as the best way to achieve the Millennium Goals in economic and human development. According to the World Bank white paper, it is “the best way to ensure that women are not left at the margin of the development process” as it seeks to “analyse the relative roles of and responsibilities of men and women and to apply the insights gained from the research to the design of programmes and projects. This underscores the need for complementarity of the sexes.

To achieve these goals therefore, gender is placed at the epicenter and this becomes a focal point. Gender relationship in the family and in the community is considered more important than on women in isolation.

In relation to the above decision, Ntekim-Rex (2001:242) remarks that when one examines gender inequalities in relation to employment opportunities available to women, one observes that the wide-spread tendency has been to use gender inequalities as a tool of economic and social suppression of women in Nigeria. He asserts that it also constitutes an infringement on the rights of women to equal opportunities in the labour market. For Ntekim-Rex, in spite of the argument that Nigerian women have ample opportunities to participate in economic, political and social activities of their society without much hindrance, women are still judged by their sex and physical features rather than their achievement, ability or skill when it comes to employment in certain professions. He opines that some employers of labour would prefer the male, even if the female is capable or even more qualified for the job. It therefore follows that some employers also demand, as pre-requisite for employment, of the female employees, the signing of a bond. Most unfortunately such bonds require that the female employee will not marry within a specified number of years and even if such a female employee marries or is already married, she should not contemplate having children within the specified period.

This is a clear exposition of gender politics in the labour market. This misdemeanor is rampant in Nigerian labour market especially in the banking sector, oil industry and the management sector including all ministries. The issue of gender is pluralistic and each gender in any given society has its positive and negative peculiarities. A humanistic approach is

therefore vital in the management of gender pluralism in order to achieve equity and justice, and uphold the rights of women and, in deed, everyone in society.

The fore-going discussion makes a solid case for equity as the only panacea for peaceful co-existence as far as gender issues are concerned. Besides, gender inequalities reduce the productivity of agricultural sectors and thus lower the prospects of reducing poverty and achieving economic progress. It weakens a country's governance and thus the effectiveness of its development policies and sustenance.

2.3.2 Culture and Portrayals of Women in Literature

Culture is a social heritage which is transmissible from one generation to the other. It is also marked with continuity. African people including the Igbo people inherit what is in their culture and continue to live with it from one generation to another. African culture recognizes gender roles. Many aspects of African culture help to relegate the womenfolk to the rear especially in Igbo society. Over the years, this relegation has spilled into imaginative literature. Many Nigerian writers especially, the male Igbo writers, have in their earlier works played down the powerful role of women. The male writers have in many instances portrayed women negatively in their subordination to men following what they inherited from their culture.

Nwankwo (2002:74-75) asserts that culture is the super organic syndrome that was biologically transmitted or inherited through biological means by social groups and individuals in the society. Beattie (1964:105) holds that culture is species specific; although other species can communicate, only human beings can communicate through symbols, and language being the most important symbol system, is more a part of culture. In support of Beattie, Rosamund and Billington et al (1991:1) add that culture in its generality involves the

society, the system, the structure and the origin combined with tradition. In line with the above argument, Douglas (1980:117) observes that attempts to split off culture from the rest of the human behavior have been relatively unsuccessful. This is because the concept of culture has to do with the biological transmission of the beliefs, values and customs of a particular people and society.

Asigbo (2012:65) sees culture as a people's way of life; how they dress, how they bring up their young, bury their dead, sing, dance, respond to insults, fight their battles, cook and eat their food. It therefore follows, as earlier observed that any development plan which does not factor in cultural variables can never be sustainable.

Asigbo further notes that it is in recognition of the pivotal role of culture that the United Nations created an agency like UNESCO so that issues bordering on the cultural component of development can be harnessed for world peace and understanding. The cultural policy for Nigerians in the world of Enem (1990:72) lends credence to Asigbo's description of culture as it defines culture as:

The totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours.

Culture, therefore, is a totality of a man's life as practised in his society. It is an all-embracing concept about the way of life of a group of people occupying a given territorial space, their established norms, behaviour, tradition and practices.

Just as Enem observes, Onuora (2009:17) notes that culture is the totality of people's way of life. She defines culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief,

morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of the society'. In support of this, Ukeje (1979:100) upholds that,

Culture is people's total way of life like their dance, songs, food, festivals, habits etc. which manifest itself in behaviour that have certain factors in common. In another sense, culture means the way people think and behave which include what they produce.

Culture therefore can equally be regarded as an aggregate of habit that is characterized by a particular society's way of life. The phenomena of culture is dependent on the life and habits of a particular society, how they live, what they do, and even their use of language, what they eat, their artifacts and their taboos. And that is why the literary artist, particularly the males are portraying the female major characters negatively because of what obtains in their culture because literature is always there to portray the cultural practices of the people.

Hence, Udechukwu (2009:367) notes that:

Culture is a way of life in a society or community which the literary writers portray through language. In view of this, literature, language and culture are symbolically related in such a way that they cannot be separated from one another. Culture is to literature and language what the heart is to the body.

Udechukwu (2009:370-71) quoting Taylor (1990:23) further notes that culture has both material and non-material aspects. The material aspects are related to overt or explicit aspects of culture. This means the products of industry, technology, art. That includes all visible or concrete acquisition of man in the society such as: agricultural equipment, houses, cooking utensils, handicraft etc. The non-material aspect of culture consists of the knowledge, philosophy, moral, motivation, language, attitudes, values etc. shared and transmitted in a given society. These are sometimes referred to as the covert aspects of culture. All these

aspects of culture are usually portrayed in the literary works of literature through a particular language.

Gyekye (1997:198) sees culture as;

The way of life of people. It is a public phenomenon, a product consciously and purposively created by a people or society. Most, if not all members of the society share and participate in the cultural products of their society.

Culture from these assertions means the totality of life with any given group of people or community. This includes their work of art, music, mode of dressing, beliefs, symbols, attitudes and practices. Williams (1967:273-6) observes that the word culture in its socio intellectual and artistic senses, is a metaphorical term derived from the act of cultivating the soil. William's assertion holds sway because the cultivation of the mind is considered a process comparable to the cultivation of the soil. In like terms, Lurie (1992:193-204), understands culture from a social perspective in which man is a cultural being. Thus, this leads to a situation in which the aim of culture is to interpret and transmit to future generations the system of value giving the participants a form of life with meaning and purpose. Dalfovo (1999:37-49), makes a distinction between an inner and outer aspects of culture. The inner aspect is the collective mental and spiritual heritage such as systems of symbols, belief aesthetic perceptions, values, ideas, motivations and the world view expressible in the outer aspect of culture. The outer aspect is the social heritage of a community that is under perception.

All in all, culture is principally dynamic but still remains an attributive and identifying term. It therefore follows that in spite of series of changes we are passing through in life, there are some things in people's culture which remain unchanged and as such identify and individualize people.

Calhoun et al (1998:51-54) note that we praise democracy, worship one God, and value competition in part because our culture teaches us to do so. Falling in love is another cultural phenomenon, in that how we act when we are in love is something we learn from our culture – its books, magazines, movies, television shows, song lyrics and so forth like other beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour that people in a society share. Romantic love is a product of culture.

Calhoun et al observe that culture includes our beliefs about what is important in life and shapes our interpretation of what events mean. Culture as they note encompasses common, trivial, everyday habits we so take for granted that we hardly notice. For instance, Americans commonly answer the telephone by saying “Hello”; the British, in contrast typically answer by stating their telephone number or their name. Calhoun et al further posit that:

We expect people in certain jobs (for example, flight attendants) to smile constantly and people in other occupations (lawyers and surgeons) to act serious, regardless of their true feelings. Each must control his or her emotions in accord with cultural expectation. We would be shocked if a lawyer in a murder trial smiled and seemed to enjoy himself – even if the trial was truly exciting and a big step up in his career.

It is worthy of note that a particular content of culture varies from place to place, but all human cultures however have the same basic elements which include knowledge, language, symbols of all kinds, values, norms, and artifacts. People use this cultural “tool kit” to maintain and change their way of life.

According to Rufai (2000:56-57), the cultural policy for Nigeria defined culture as “the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment which give order and meaning to their social, political, economic,

aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours”. And habit acquired by man as a member of society”. It is the distinctive way of life of a group of people, their complete design for life.

Udeze (2004:24) defines culture as the total way of life of a people. Udeze notes that it is the social legacy the individual acquires from his group as well as a way of thinking, feeling and believing. Ofoegbu (1982:2) refers to culture as “the prevailing technique by which a people maintain themselves with their environment. It is a shorthand definition of the knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws and other capabilities acquired by man as member of society”. It represents the pool of ideas, goals, means and products of man in society; serving as a man’s social conscience, and represents the basis of consensus within a given human community or social order. On the other hand, Boldley (1994:97) opines that culture is “a social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on to future generations which is equally a shared and learned human behaviour. It is also ideals, values, or rules for living”. Ideally, culture is everything. It is the way we dress, the way we carry our heads, and the way we walk. It is not only the fact of writing books or building houses, rather, it is also the fine flowering of real education and is entirely the society’s way or manner of life.

Functionally, culture is the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together. It is a complex of ideas, or learned habits, that inhibit impulses and distinguish people from animals. It consists of patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols or behaviours, which is also based on arbitrarily assigned meanings that are shared by a society. Culture involves three major components: what people think, what they do and what they produce.

The various definitions of culture point to the fact that culture is not restricted but shared among a homogeneous group of people and transmitted on from generation to generation. Thus, while the individual in the society may die, culture and society do not die.

Culture is also diverse. Cultural diversity implies that different societies have different things that constitute culture unto them. For instance, some societies forbid cross-cousin marriages, while others like Arochukwu, Ohafia and Egypt prescribe it. My town Nnewi, in Nnewi Local Government of Anambra State forbids the killing of python. If a vehicle driver accidentally kill a python in Nnewi, he/she will stop and show some sign of remorse. This can be by way of dropping some amount of money near the dead python along the road. This is referred to as “igba aruru eke”: that is mourning the dead python. Whereas in some other places, people will kill the python and equally eat it. So culture is indeed diverse.

Furthermore, culture elements and aspects include societal norms, values, languages, music, dance, folklores, ceremonies, religion, literature, art and crafts etc. Thus, one can rightly assert that culture is the totality of human effort in life.

Since culture is a complete design, a complete whole which includes knowledge, laws and beliefs, it may be said to consist of rules, guidelines, values, norms and standards which are cherished and observed for one to enjoy a decent human life. It has some ideals and standards of perfection which it directs adherents to acquire. Culture is symbolically related to the present study – Gender Issues and the Study of Female Major Characters in Selected Works of Six Igbo Playwrights. Obviously what the authors are portraying through language and literature according to Ngugi (1981:24) are already existing ideas. And these ideas are the people’s culture in this context.

Culture, separates one from the other. Language is a medium of transmitting people's ideas, and literature and language therefore are inextricably bound together that you cannot separate one from the other. Literature transmits culture. Language (be it Igbo, English or any other) is a medium of transmitting people's ideas, and literature transmits culture. Thus, language and literature work together in the dissemination of culture and cultural issues of which gender issues are part. For example, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Ezenwa-Ohaeto's *The Voice of the Night Masquerade*, Ekwensi's *Where Love Whispers*, Asigbo's *Once Upon a School*, Abraham's *A Wreath for Udoma*, Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, Nwapa's *Efuru* and *Idu*, Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* are all literatures written in English language portraying the people's culture. Also, Onyekaonwu's *Uwa Ntooo*, Nwadike's *Okwe Agbaala*, and Nwata *Bulie Nna Ya Elu*, Obidiebube's *Chukwu Kwuo* and Nwaozuzu's *Ajo Obi* etc. are all literatures written in Igbo language portraying the people's culture. Thus, language and literature work together in the dissemination of culture and cultural issues of which gender issues are part.

This research thus, reaffirms that whichever way the playwrights under study here portray women in their plays, their focus depends solely on what obtains in the people's culture because literature is not written in a vacuum; but it always depends on the existing culture of every society. It then means that whether women folk are negatively or positively represented in such literary works, as the Igbo plays, are based on the people's culture which is Igbo culture. It then means that the Igbo male literary writers are perpetuating the culture and patriarchal values they inherited from their ancestors. Thus, Epuchie (2013:4) notes that "African societies were organized by gender, roles were allotted and standards set according to

patriarchal values". Therefore, it is this situation that African writers, and Igbo male writers in particular, always represent in their literary works such as the Igbo plays under study.

2.3.3 Influence of Patriarchy on Creation of Female Characters

Over the years, women have been struggling to liberate themselves from patriarchy which imposed norms and negative stereotypes on them. Patriarchy as a social structure in which the role of the male, as the head and the primary authoritative figure in the family is central to social organization. It is also a social system where men hold authority which enables them to exercise control over women, children and property. In addition, patriarchy can say to be the institution of privilege for the male gender which encourages the subjugation of women in the society. Thus Epuchie (2013:12) quoting Ekpong notes that:

Female inferiority is perpetuated through patriarchy which permeates religion, educational and economic ideologies, psycho-social attitudes and cultural institutions like marriage, the family and the law.... It can be said that Christian religion condones patriarchy, oppression and slavery....

For Epuchie therefore the human culture had not been fair to females. It is worthy of note that from primeval times, most societal norms, institutions and values have been designed by men who are the perpetrators of culture just to favour themselves. This design has given them greater opportunities to attain self realization, self fulfillment and even transcendence over natural condition.

Alutulu and Ajakor (2011:795-96) speaking on the same issue observe that though patriarchy takes different forms in different cultures, its different belief is the same. The man is superior by nature, born to rule in all walks of life; the woman, inferior, is born to be ruled and to serve man. They note that this mindset is the beginning of gender discrimination, and it cuts across cultures, tribes and nationalities.

Obviously, discrimination is at the epicentre of women's suffering, oppression, enslavement and marginalization. Male superiority and female inferiority is perpetuated through patriarchy which expounds racism, sexism and classism. This unbridled superiority of man over all other creatures can be traced to the various mythological stories of the beginning of human existence. Typically the Christian Bible in Genesis (1: 26) says that 'God created man in His own image and also empowered man to have dominion over all other creature upon the earth'. The Bible also affirms that man is the head of the family of which woman is part. Erroneously men believe that God created man out of His image, but created woman to be less than man. But woman is a helper to man. This age-long wrong mindset of men being superior to women has led to gender inequality and discrimination. This belief, this mind-set affects the creation of female characters in literature.

Ezeigbo (2001:401-10), observes that from the pluralistic point of view, unbridled patriarchal authority or domination of the female gender by the male is unacceptable because it precludes the right of women to participate in joint decision-making on issues affecting them in the family. She further asserts:

Indeed, we are aware of the contradiction patriarchy erects in its lack of commitment to pluralism when it disregards some of our culture's age old beliefs, thus causing a rupture in gender relations. Patriarchy, as it is structured, encourages sexism. It abhors gender equity, but approves the subjugation of women to men.

In literary works written by men as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, women are thus socialized or pressured to be "dumb" passive and obedient even when their interests are undermined. According to Segun (1995:54), women protagonists in her stories usually resort to violence or rebellion as a reaction against patriarchal oppression. In one of her short story titled *The Surrender*, Segun explores the plight of women in a male-dominated society. The

story focuses on the issues of gender oppression or sexism and the negative impact cultural traditions have on women. Segun points out that the relation between men and women, which, in the context of Nigeria where the story is set, is often influenced by cultural considerations.

For Okoye, (2010:60) patriarchy is a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions, it has power from men's greater access to resources and rewards of authority in the home and society. It describes a political system ruled by men in which women have inferior social and political status including human rights. Okoye observes that;

patriarchy has an oppressive character in every society. Patriarchy uses the spatial setting which includes physical, psychological or religious setting to oppress women. Women, especially Muslim women, are restricted in what one may call a micro-spatial setting suffused with patriarchal ethos. Their human potentials are, thus, buried in shallow definitions of sex.

But if Okoye's observation of muslim women is a restricted one most Igbo women are assertive.

Aston (2006:78) identified men privileged by capitalist and patriarchal systems as largely responsible for women's oppression. She notes that for most radical feminists especially, men were the problem women needed to address. Female playwrights try in their creation of female characters to dismantle the ambiguities webbing up women human rights. Consequently Uto-Ezeajugh (2014:4) observes that Tess Onwueme et al advocate for the abolition of patriarchal values that subjugate women and insist on women confronting traditional barriers that hold them down and relegate them to second-class citizenship. Tess Onwueme, the foremost Nigerian female playwright to buttress this assertion has written many plays which highlight the African women's ordeal in the face of patriarchal domination while pointing the way forward to higher ideals.

As one observes from the above discussion, patriarchy is a system of male authority which tends to subjugate women through its social, political and economic institutions. It is worthy of note that whichever historical forms that patriarchal society takes, be it capitalist, socialist or feudal, sex/gender/class distinction and economic discrimination, operate simultaneously. Patriarchy always adopts restrictive traditional norms to subjugate women. This subjugation of women that goes with patriarchy has spilled into imaginative writings. Many Nigerian writers of Igbo extraction have always portrayed female major characters in a position of the subaltern in their literary works. Presently, educated women cultivate the courage and determination to subvert patriarchal subjugation so as to be self-assertive. This has permeated our literature. In their own literary works therefore, women writers strive to paint positive images of female major characters in their works.

2.3.4 Male and Female Nigerian Writers

The unsatisfactory appreciation of the significance of women in life has spilled into imaginative literature. Through their own points of view, the majority of male writers often present their cultural reality as the global cultural reality. The paucity of African female writers and critics has equally encouraged the perpetuation of an unbalanced perspective.

Evidently though, some male writers have created female major characters whose characters and mannerisms are treated with precision and authenticity of detail. Yet some have departed from this to project certain homogeneity attributable to some basic similarity in men's overall conception of women. She observes that in the latter role in prose writing, female characters are made marginal to the plot of the stories while only a few emerge as powerful and credible major characters.

Saadawi (2007:520) asserts that men have negatively represented women in the literary world. She notes that in African literature, there have been female portraits of sorts

presented by men from their own points of view, leading one to conclude that there is a difference between the African male writer and his female counterpart. Saadawi remarks;

Among the male authors I have read both in the West and in the Arab world, irrespective of the language in which they have written, or of the region from which they have come, not one has been able to free himself from this age-old image of women handed down to us from an ancient past, no matter how famous many of them have been for their passionate defence of human rights, human values and justice, and their vigorous resistance to gender oppression and tyranny in any form.

As Saadawi, Nwapa (2007:527) commenting on male writers insists:

Male authors understandably neglect to point out the positive side of womanhood, for very many reasons which I will not attempt to discuss in this address. Recent changes in Nigeria – the 1967 -70 civil war, economic changes, and an emphasis on the education of women – have affected men's views about women.

For Nwapa, only a few male writers have tried to project an objective image of women, an image that actually reflects the reality of women's role in the society. Majority of male writers have portrayed women as victims of male subjugation in a patriarchal society.

Obviously Nigerian male writers such as Chinua Achebe, Cyprain Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark and Elechi Amadi have, in their earlier works, played down the powerful role of women. Nigerian male writers have in many instances portrayed women negatively or in their subordination to men. Examples of such negative portrayals abound. Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* is a prostitute; Wole Soyinka's *Amope* is a ceaselessly nagging woman who makes life intolerable for her husband. Achebe's *Miss Mark* does not hesitate to put her sex appeal to work in order to attain desired objectives, J. P. Clark's *Ebiere* entices her husband's younger brother into a sexual relationship.

There has always been a physically prurient, negative portrayal of women in African literature. There has been a female portrait of sorts presented by men from their own points

of view, suggesting that there is a difference between the African male writer and his female counterpart.

Furthermore male writers who paint images of urban women endorse an institutionalized and one-sided picture of female 'heroism' in African fiction. Cyprain Ekwensi, a writer much pre-occupied with female characters in contemporary life, projects negative stereotypes of women and juxtaposed prostitution on motherhood and wifehood. For him women as undoings should not be seen at the centre stage.

For Ojo-Ade (1984:159), male writers, just as male social animals, are more fortunate than females. Their presence is taken for granted. Publishers seek them out, unlike the women whose silence is also taken for granted. Cultural misconceptions and taboos becloud women's efforts. It is believed that women must keep quiet when men are talking. A woman is considered a mother, child-bearer and a supporter of man. A woman who is assertive is considered uncouth and uncultured. If she is educated, she is classified as a disconcerted and frumpish 'been-to'

Fortunately women have now found a voice even though Ojo-Ade says that it is a voice of confusion, of confrontation, of commitment. Men have had their say in the affairs of the society. They continue to have it, but women are now agitating for necessary re-adjustment.

2.3.5 Female Writers

In the words of Chukwukere (1995:9), "for the female writers in Africa, their dilemma partly constitutes their desire to make their voices heard". The limited opportunities women have surely originate from history. This is because in the time past, only a small percentage of women acquired university education which is a great advantage for creative writing. As a

result, African literature and African literary criticism have largely become a male-oriented and male controlled 'cult.' Apart from the above, Chukwukere also asserts that:

The female African writer has the added disability that men have blazed the literary trail and pointed in particular directions. Often therefore, women are forced to respond to this literary tradition and frequently insist upon correcting the imbalance in the portrayal of women.

African female writers still offer us a concentrated vision of the female experience. That is, that the artist ensures that women play crucial roles in the unfolding of the plot and in our appreciation of the story. When female characters are put in a position of importance in any literary work, they often display enduring qualities of dignity and industry. Such characters when set in an urban environment exhibit a dynamic personality often transcending the limiting roles which characterizes their attributes in fiction written by male novelists. Thus, in their attempt to present a balanced viewpoint, female writers prove to be objective in their analysis of female roles especially in exposing the inherent weaknesses of their victims which assists to perpetuate their subjugation and suppression within the patriarchal society.

Female writers like Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta who evidently create female characters that function within the traditional African society, specifically challenge the myth of the unchanging docile and naïve rural women. These accept without question the social norms of their male-oriented society. While these writers accept the significance of wifehood and motherhood, they also expose the dilemma in the lives of their heroines whose difficulties are instigated by the conflict between desired personal aspirations and endorsed social norms of behaviour. In Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970) the award winning female writer, Flora Nwapa's heroines are portrayed as dignified and responsible women who have problems and who try to resolve them themselves. *Efuru*, for instance, decides to abandon an unhappy marriage owing to her challenge of barrenness. She accepted to worship Uhamiri, the river-

goddess, thereby showing that a traditional woman may revolt against unacceptable conditions within her society. In the same vein, Idu on her own part flouts social conventions that enthrone parenthood and chooses to die for the love of her departed husband. Besides, Emecheta (1980:31-35), in *The Joys of Motherhood*, provides a unique dimension that also challenge the myth that motherhood is synonymous with female self-fulfillment. Nnu Ego labours throughout her life to bring up her numerous children. Buchi Emecheta, through her word carefully establishes the need for the traditional and modern heroines to fight against oppressive sexual code within the society.

In an attempt to debunk the myth surrounding the African women's self-reliance and self-assertiveness and project a more realistic portrayal of their human condition, Ogundipe-Leslie (1981:11) lends stronger belief to the true commitment of the female writers in contemporary Africa, as seen by Okoye (2010:48-50). This critic asserts that setting is a vital element that plays a vital role in the manifestation of gender consciousness in the works of African women writers who see writing as a major avenue to the emancipation of women. There is, however, a common element which Flora Nwapa, Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, Calixthe, Beyala, Nafissatou Diallo and Buchi Emecheta dwell on while treating setting as an element in their works of fiction. This is the theme of infidelity, polygamy and woman liberation. Going by this common interest, African women hinge on the discrimination shown by patriarchy in gender-related issues.

For Okoye, African women writers present distinct local colour in their novels as they describe their environment and represent time and space with natural phenomena such as moon, sun, shadow, cock-crow, rocks, village square and rivers. African women writers, therefore, get closely in touch with nature as they present their readers with characters set in

ideal African situation replete with time, space, colour, proverbs and other structural elements in writing.

Generally, African women writers also represent psychological setting as well as temporal and spatial elements such as portraying village life. These elements of fiction help in the portrayal of gender consciousness in a patriarchal society. Obviously, African women writers see writing as a major avenue to the emancipation of women.

Gay (2002:25) observes that women have largely been 'hidden from history' as far as playwrighting is concerned. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there were no women theatre managers in the modern sense of being, responsible for administration and selecting plays to produce, since women had little social or economic powers in any sphere. Gay observes that of all types of literature, playwrighting is perhaps the one in which women's historical contribution have remained most obscure. He further opines that the mid-nineteenth century saw fewer plays by women, as the novel became the dominant medium for women writers.

This situation has continued till the present day. In carrying out research for this study, the researcher encountered a lot of difficulties to get female- authored plays required to make this study a success.

In the words of Uto-Ezeajugh (2013:4), the emergence of female playwrights on the Nigerian literary scene signaled a departure from prescriptive feminist presentations to descriptive feminist literature. She notes that although male playwrights have thematically explored the various facets of Nigeria's socio-political life with regards to gender interactions, many of these playwrights overlook or ignore some of the pertinent issues crucial to women empowerment. Uto-Ezeajugh quoting Nwankwo (2008:172) notes that:

The coming of feminism no doubt encouraged the emergence of female writers in Africa. The likes of Zulu Sofola, Ama Ata Aidoo and a host of others, emerged in the dramatic writings to re-write the women back into positivity after the unwholesome portraiture they received at the hands of the early male writers.

The presentation of women in Igbo drama exposes the fact that despite their vital roles and contributions to the socio-political development of African societies particularly Igbo society, women have continued to occupy a subordinate position. Instances of this can easily be seen in the way many Nigerian writers portray women negatively in their literary works, which is the focus of this study. Evidently, Zulu Sofola's work titled, *Wedlock of the Gods* which exposed women whose lives are inextricably intertwined with tradition and controlled by cultural dictates opened the space for other female playwrights to create iconic female characters who are determined to subvert culture and tradition in a bid to champion and promote the universal rights of women. Prominent among these playwrights are Tess Onwueme, Tracie Uto-Ezeajugh, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Stella Oyedepo and Julie Okoh. These playwrights have identified drama as an ally and instrument in the emancipation and development of African women. To buttress this assertion, Uto-Ezeajugh notes that this identification of drama as an instrument can:

Be achieved through the dismantling of oppressive cultural and patriarchal structures, acquisition of higher education, striving for freedom from social inequality and economic bondage, the creation of awareness and platform for self actualization and a collective framework for the survival of women through sisterhood.

These goals, when achieved, would go a long way to justifying the numerous efforts and struggles by women to present women issues in ways more appropriate to their gender than male writers have done.

The African woman writer therefore is urged to break new grounds by projecting the features of a female president. This is possible because women's issues are currently on the drawing board in African socio-political endeavours and various African governments are using women as resources in nation building. Creative writers, male and female, should therefore explore this new awareness, this new image of women's sensibilities, possibilities and realities, and produce works which modern African women can relate to and be sensitized. Women writers write on issues of barrenness that devour the human personality in women. The experience of childlessness devastates women and subjects them to total psychological trauma. But childlessness does not make a woman less human. However, we must not force issues on imaginative literature. In the issue of barrenness, women are what they are because they can procreate. In African societies, when this unique function is denied a woman, she is devastated. But, this should not be so all the time especially in this present age. This is because this challenge of childlessness does not make a woman less woman or less human. , In Nwapa (1966:215-218) Efurū, in her self assertiveness decides to abandon an unhappy childless marriage and becomes fulfilled by becoming the priestess of 'Uhamiri', the water goddess. Female writers should therefore create characters that are fulfilled and not weighed down by the issues, and shackles of marriage and motherhood.

2.4 Summary

Having examined works on feminist and womanist theories and particular topics relevant to the study available, this piece of work has aimed at the conclusion that it is vital to carry out a research on gender issues and the study of female major characters in selected works of six Igbo playwrights. This is consequent on the fact that no one has ever worked on this aspect of gender study to determine how women are negatively represented in Igbo

plays written by male playwrights. This study is important as it helps to determine whether the existing impression that women are given a subordinate position is equally applicable to their portrayal in literary works. Because of series of gender questions which people are asking, one can expressly assert that this work is very important to the Igbo people in particular and the entire African society in general.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The design of study adopted for this research is textual analysis of qualitative research design which seeks information and facts from available data. This design was selected because it allows the use of simple random sampling technique which can provide the researcher with the justification or reason to make generalization from the sample that is being studied.

3.2 Sampling Technique

This study adopts a simple random sampling technique, accommodating a homogeneous sampling. This technique enables the researcher to identify a sample whose structure or nature shares similar characteristics or traits that need to be studied. The main goal of simple random sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are useful to the study, which will enable the researcher to either prove his assumptions right or wrong.

3.3 Population and Sample

The population of the study is made up of selected Igbo male and female- authored plays. Using the womanist theory as a framework, many Igbo plays were read, out of which six were selected as samples. Out of these selected sample Igbo plays, three were written by male authors while the other three were written by female writers. The Igbo plays written by male and female- authors include:

- | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|
| 1. <i>Nwata Rie Awq</i> , (1980), G. O. Onyekawu | } | Male - Authored |
| 2. <i>Obidiya</i> , (1983), E. Akoma. | | |
| 3. <i>Okwe Agbaala</i> , (1991), I. U. Nwadike | | |
| 1. <i>The Onye Metere</i> ,(2002), A.N.Okediadi | } | Female Authored |
| 2. Obidiebube, J. I. (2007) <i>Qnqdx Ugo</i> | | |
| 3. Obidiebube, J. I. (2009) <i>Akp[r[Richie Xzq</i>
(O Were Anya Zie Ozi) | | |

3.4 Procedure for Data Collection

The research is library and internet based. As such, the researcher read many Igbo drama books and other related literature. This exposed her to the texts that relate to the topic under study. The researcher observes that much works have not been done by female writers in the area of Igbo drama. She however, strove to get the few available ones so as to enable her carry out the study. Six books made up of Igbo male and female authored plays as outlined in the population and sample were selected for the study.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The Igbo plays selected for this study were read and analyzed by the use of womanist approach. In each case, the summary of the play was given and the portrayal of the female major characters in the play is presented. Moreover, aspects of Igbo cultural practices and patriarchal structures that influence the portrayal of female characters were also examined. In addition, the information gathered from other literatures such as encyclopedia, journals, conference papers and the internet were duly analyzed and applied to the study. Finally,

postulations or claims, recommendations and conclusions were made based on the facts and points contained in the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 ANALYSES OF DATA

This chapter is devoted to the analyses of the data. The data is drawn from the selected Igbo plays. These plays are as follows:

1. *Nwata Rie Awo* (1980), G.O. Onyekaonwu
2. *Obidiya* (1983), E. Akoma
3. *Okwe Agbaala* (1991), I.U.Nwadike
4. *Ihe Onye Metere* (2002), A.N.Okediadi
5. *Onodu Ugo* (2007) } J.I.Obidiebube
6. *Akpiri Richie Uzo* (O Were Anya Zie Ozi)

4.1 The Portrayals of Female Major Characters in the Selected Igbo Male-Authored Plays

Here the researcher attempts the synopsis and the explication of the male-authored plays.

4.1.1. Analysis of *Nwata Rie Awọ*:

The first text, *Nwata Rie Awo* (1980) by Onyekaonwu is a drama that criticizes the unruly behaviour of men and women who are careless over the issues of marriage. In this drama, when Awọ emerged victorious over Akatosi in wrestling, the girl, Obioma, fell in love with him for his wonderful performance. Obioma was so carried away that she eloped with Awọ. She abandoned Anene, the man that came to marry her. But Awọ did not love Obioma but his parents pressurized him into marrying her.

Soon, Obioma became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl. But, Awọ who hated Obioma with passion went about telling his friends that Obioma just ran to him, but he has no

affection for her. He told them that his parents compelled him to marry her. Instead of giving birth to a boy as his first child; she gave birth to a baby girl. Consequently, Awọrọ cunningly arranged for Obiọma and her daughter to be sent out of their family house. As if that were not enough, he also organized for their kidnap and later sold them into slavery. Later, Awọrọ stayed for fifteen years living carelessly without marrying another wife.

As time went on, Obiọma`s daughter sold into slavery with her mother was purchased by a blacksmith who came from his town, Utonkom with his family. Ọdınchefu (Awọrọ`s sold daughter) who is now a grown-up girl, is a baby sitter for the blacksmith`s family who have come to Amangwu, Awọrọ`s town to reside, and do his smithing work. So when Awọrọ decided to marry another wife after fifteen years, mistakenly, he married Ọdınchefu , his daughter from Obiọma his first wife. They lived for five years but they did not get even a child. In addition to the challenge of childlessness, Ọdınchefu also began to be seriously sick. These two challenging problems made Awọrọ to seek for the help of a native doctor to find out the secret behind their problems.

The native doctor told Awọrọ that before doing anything that, he, Awọrọ, will first of all go and look for his former wife, Obiọma, whom he arranged and sold into slavery and bring her back. The native doctor told him where he will find her and what he will do that will enable him to find her. He assured Awọrọ that if he obeys his instructions that a lot of good things that will bring joy will happen to him and his family. However, the native doctor seriously warned him that an event of sorrow will also occur along the line.

Locating Obiọma and bringing her back took Awọrọ a period of one year. When Obiọma returned, various joyous incidents started happening to Awọrọ and his family just as the native doctor said. As a result of all these joyous incidents, Awọrọ decided to throw a

party to celebrate them. He invited many people to the party. In the midst of this celebration, Obioma and Qdunche fu discovered that they are mother and child and at the same time, co-wives. When this happened, the mother and child began to cry. Their crying attracted the attention of the numerous invitees who now discovered what happened. They condemned the act and said that it is an abomination. As a result, they deserted the party. The whole celebration ended abruptly. Aworo did not know what to do. He was confused and embarrassed. As a result of the ugly situation in which Aworo found himself, he used his matchet and kill himself. Thus the story in this Igbo play is sounding a warning to everybody that it is a disaster to live a careless life as it leads to disgrace and destruction.

The explication of the story in Onyekaonwu's (1980) *Nwata Rie Awo* shows that there are instances of negative portrayal of the female major character in the play. Obioma, who is the female major character was portrayed in the play as a victim of male subjugation in a traditional patriarchal society.

In the first place, Obioma was present in the drama as an irresponsible woman who can easily be carried away by things that are irrelevant. Obioma was presented as a woman that did not have self control. Just because Aworo emerged victorious in a wrestling context with Akatosi of Amaudele, Obioma abandoned Anene, her suitor. She packed her belongings and went to live with Aworo after the wrestling. She neglected the Igbo culture as it affects marriage. She refused to follow the due process of marriage. Obviously she suffered for her carelessness. As a woman Obioma had no self control. This was shown by Onyekaonwu (1980:33-34) as she exposed her attitude of lack of self control and that of being easily carried away when she was conversing with Ekemma, her friend. Hence she says:

...Ekemma, o putara na mu amaghi ihe kwesiri m? ka m gwa gi, ke mgbe m jiri huchaa ike Aworo kpara unyaahu amakwaghi m ebe m no. Q bu

Awọrọ kwes [r [ilu m. Obi m na-achosi ya ike. Obi na-atuwa m ma m cheta Anene tumad [n'ije a o na-akwado ibia be anyi taa. Agaghi m adi ndu luo Anene – Nwa qkxkq, nwa uchicha, nwa mbe, n'ebe Awọrọ no. Tufia! ngworo mmadu agaghi alu m. Q bx Awọrọ ga-alu m [ya ewedata olu ala] Aga m agbalakwu ya n'abali taa, ya ka m siri ka m bia gwa gi.

Translation:

...Ekemma, does it mean that I don't know what befits me? Let me tell you, since yesterday I saw Awọrọ's victorious performance in wrestling, I lost control of myself. It is Awọrọ that is suitable to marry me. My heart desires him seriously. My heart is breaking if I remember Anene, especially for his preparing to come to our house today. I will not live and marry Anene. He is a chick, a cockroach, very little thing to compare with Awọrọ, God forbid. A cripple cannot marry me (she lowered her voice) I will run to him tonight. That is what I have come to tell you.

The above excerpt shows that Obioma was portrayed as irresponsible human being. She had no respect for her parents. She did not even care to know how her parents will feel when she ran to live with Awọrọ. Obioma was also portrayed as a woman that is a disgrace to womanhood. Her attitude shows that women are "cheap article". The above excerpt also shows that Anene has been coming to marry her. But because of her carelessness she decided to reject Anene who might be her God- sent husband. Obioma was also presented in the play as a woman who had no respect for cultural heritage of her people. As far as African/Igbo culture is concerned, it is an abomination for a woman to run to a man and start to live with him as husband and wife.

Obioma was presented as having rejected many suitors that have been coming to marry her as this extract below shows:

...Obioma { s[r[g[n[? ikwetachaa na mbx Ugbu
a, igbawa oso. Q bx ka { jxkwa Anene ka i
siri jx nd[qzq? { na-aw[ara?. Nwa efurefu
d[ka g[(p.35)

Translation:

...Obioma what did you say? After accepting at first time, now you abscond. You want to reject Anene the way you rejected others? Are you mad? Stupid child like you. (p. 35)

Obioma was portrayed as displaying highest level of irresponsible attitude as one observes in this extract that she has been rejecting many men that have been coming to marry her. She now prefers to run to Awoṛo who did not indicate that he has interest in her. Obioma's decision to run to Awoṛo was only based on the fact that Awoṛo performed well in a wrestling context. What a stupid act. This is a pointer to the negative representation of women in Igbo male-authored plays.

Obioma who was portrayed as a careless woman really suffered for her careless behaviour. Within a short time, Awoṛo, the so called husband started to maltreat her in various ways because there is no genuine love in their marriage. This is revealed in the excerpt below:

...Onye ka i na-aju? Egbe piapukwa gi onu ebe ahu. { hukwara mgbe i jiri chowa igbu m, ugbu a nkata ga-ekpugide gi bu onye aghugho. Ubochi niile bu nke onye ohi, otu ubochi bu nke onye nwe ihe. Q biara egbu m ga-egbu onwe ya. Ihe i na-ago aputala ihe taa. { ga-ejizi isi gi buru ya. (Awoṛo agbagaa todo Obioma aka n'akpiri) { ga-anwu taa, i ga-anwu taa, taa ka i ga-ahu, i ga-eririri nri a taa.

Translation:

...Who are you asking? Thunder break your mouth there. See how you have been looking for a way to kill me since. Now you are victim of your evil plan. Every day is for the thief, but one day is for the owner of the house. Whomever that wishes to kill me will kill him/herself. Your evil plan has been revealed today. You will bear the consequence of it (Awoṛo rushed to Obioma and held her

glottis). You will die today, you will die today, today you will see.
You must eat this food today.

One observes that Obioma was portrayed as using diabolic means against her husband, Aworo. That is to say that she lacks godliness. It is people that lack godliness that usually resort to diabolic means in tackling their problems. In this regard, Obioma is presented in this excerpt as applying such to attract the love of her husband since Obioma is the one that initiated the marriage, it is believed that she has to use diabolic means to sustain the marriage since the husband, Aworo has no natural love for Obioma right from the beginning of the relationship. Obioma was presented as forcing herself on Aworo as she just ran to his house and begin to live with him. This will serve as a lesson to the present day women who think that they can force themselves on men to marry them through diabolic means.

It is not in doubt that Aworo has no love for Obioma. He did not mince words in expressing his disgust when Obioma's father was asking him whether two of them have agreed to marry. Aworo was answering the questions reluctantly when Obioma's father asked Aworo if two of them have agreed to marry themselves. The whole thing boiled down on the fact that Obioma was negatively portrayed as an irresponsible and careless woman who forced herself on a man that did not actually love her. Lack of love in any marriage is a disaster. It can lead to murder. In the present play under study, one observes that Aworo is all out to do whatever is within his reach to make sure that his wife, Obioma vanished from his sight. Elsewhere in the play, he gave a fringe reason that instead of giving birth to a boy as his first child, that Obioma gave birth to a girl as if giving birth to a girl first is an abomination. The issue is that where there is no genuine love in any relation particularly in marriage, fault

finding will be the order of the day. No wonder it is said that “love covers a multitude of sin”. Where there is no genuine love, hatred takes over. And hatred goes with fault finding.

4.1.2 Analysis of *Obidiya*

The next text under consideration is Akoma’s (1973) *Obidiya*, an Igbo drama that exposes the problems of covetousness and land dispute that confront people in Igbo society. In this play, there is a long standing land dispute between Oriaku and Onuma. Oriaku is an affluent man and so he wants to use his social status to intimidate Onuma who is just a younger person and average human being as far as social standing is concerned. Actually, the land that is the bone of contention belongs to Onuma. As such, he insisted that Oriaku will not have the land. Eventually, the land dispute metamorphosed into a court case. *Obidiya*, Onuma’s wife also maintained that Oriaku will not take the land that belongs to them. Later on, Onuma emerged victorious in the case.

The play also shows how *Obidiya*, Onuma’s wife, faces the challenge of childlessness. This challenge of childlessness always keeps *Obidiya* unhappy but the husband, Onuma, always consoles her, reminding her that children only come from God. Onuma told his wife that he has handed their case over to God.

Since the court case on the land dispute ended in favour of Onuma, Oriaku began to organize a way to destroy Onuma. As he opines to show the magistrate that there is a court that is greater than their own. In view of this, Oriaku organized hired killers to kill Onuma. He explained to them that Onuma insulted him by winning in the court case against him over a land. He explained to them that the issue has cost him his sleep and his joy. And as such the only thing that can appease him is to destroy Onuma. The hired killers asked Oriaku how he

wanted it; whether it will be by way of instalmental killing or immediate one. He told them that it will be automatic and instant killing to be sure that Qnūma is no longer existing.

As a result of the choice Oriaku made, the hired killers demanded the money that will be paid to them. Oriaku paid the said amount immediately. The evil contractors now negotiate how best they will get Qnūma. They made several suggestions as to how to arrest Qnūma and kill him without being detected by the police. Eventually, they decided to go to his house on Eke Market day when the wife, Obidiya, will be in the market. So on one Eke market day as Obidiya went to the market and Qnūma had just finished bathing and was combing his hair in his house, the hired killers came and arrested him. They tied his mouth, strangle him and carried his corpse away. They later buried him by the side of the village stream.

So, when the wife, Obidiya came back from the market late in the evening, she expected the husband to come out to welcome her the usual way but to no avail. She walked into the house calling on the husband and wondering why he did not come out. Later Obidiya saw blood and pieces of his husband's cloth on the ground of their compound, she understood immediately that Qnūma had been attacked and killed in connection with the land dispute with Oriaku, their kinsman.

Obviously, Obidiya was so destabilized. She lamented that her life was useless without her husband, Qnūma. She mourned and grieved over the death of her husband. She wept for the loss. She noted that his death was a real loss in her life and a painful one. She lamented seriously that she has no child, no parents and now, the husband, Qnūma, who was her only source of comfort was forcefully taken away from her to be seen no more.

Later Obidiya, now a widow, went to see their king called "Onye Nwe Ala" (the owner of the land) and explained to him what had befallen her. He condoled with her and

advised her to leave everything to God. But Obidiya said that she must avenge the death of her husband. The Chief made frantic effort to convince her to forget about the issue of revenge but she insisted that nothing would stop her from carrying out her wish.

Following Obidiya's decision to decisively deal with those that killed her husband, she went to see Akakaka, the native doctor. Akakaka, the medicine man revealed to Obidiya everything pertaining to those that killed the husband. He informed her that their action emanated from the land dispute. The native doctor even went to the extent of conjuring the spirit of Qnūma and his voice spoke to Obidiya about everything pertaining to his death. The voice told her how he (Qnūma) was combing his hair in their house after having his bath and a group of four men rushed him and tied his mouth with his cloth and broke his neck and carried his corpse and buried him by the side of the village stream.

After receiving the information concerning the murder of her husband, Obidiya insisted that she must make sure that the entire family of the culprit vanished from the earth. In view of this, she gave Akakaka the assignment of annihilating the entire family of the culprit and paid for all the money and all other things involved in the destructive contract. After a short while, Oriaku died and his children began to die one after the other. Oriaku's brother, Ugwumba, and Gogo his servant, were sent to go to an oracle and find out what killed Oriaku. They were told that he had been involved in a lot of evil acts. They were told that he masterminded the killing of Qnūma; and that he had a group of people that were stealing and killing people for him. In consequence of this, the village members decided that Oriaku would not be buried at home. He would be buried in evil forest because of his evil deeds. This shows that the evil that men do lives after them.

The explication of the story in *Obidiya* (1983) by Akoma shows that the female major character of the play, Obidiya, was portrayed negatively. She was presented as childless and this challenge made her worried and unhappy always. This is because in the traditional African society, the woman's major function revolves around the family. These include her responsibilities as mother, wife and home administrator. The role of the mother is considered vital as it is through her that the lineage is perpetuated. A woman's importance and stability in her husband's home are judged by the degree of her fertility, especially her ability to bear male children. If she is childless, she is considered a failure in her primary duty and often suffers considerably as a result. That is why Obidiya felt so bad for being childless, because she knew what it means in her society. Despite the fact that her husband, Onuma, advised her to stop boardering herself since the gift of children is from God; she still went on lamenting and grieving.

However, Onuma who seemed to have a different spirit continued to calm his wife down. Thus he said as follows:

...Onye gaara egbu onwe ya maka enwegh[nwa bx
mx onwe m. Nwoke pxtara xwa, lxq nwaany[,
na-enwegh[nwa, [ma obi agagh[na-atq ya
xtq. Ebugaara m Chineke ihe niile n'ekpere.
Otu q mas[r[Chi. Ewepxla m uche m. Chima,
ogechi ka mma; otu q mas[r[Chi. { na-eche
echiche a, [na-eme ka obi m na-alq mmiri.
Chi na-enye nwa. A nagh[azxta ya n'ah[a,
onye ike eketagh[ya. { ga-agba mbq mechie
oke echiche, [ma cheta qzq. Achqgh[m ka
any[nwee ihe any[na-achqgh[. (pp. 12-13)

Translation:

...It is me that should be killing myself because of childlessness. A man that married in this life and failed to get a child is always unhappy. I have committed everything to God in prayer. Let the will of God be done. I have removed my mind from it. God knows. God's time is the best. As God wishes. If you continue to think,

you are making me to be upset. God gives children. It cannot be bought from the market. It is not by might. You will try and stop too much thinking before it leads to another problem. I don't want us to get what we do not desire. (pp. 12-13)

Upon all these words of encouragement, Obidiya still saw herself as a failure as long as she was childless by the way she was presented in the play.

In addition, Obidiya was portrayed as a stubborn woman. The author of the play portrayed Obidiya as a woman whom once she has taken a stand, nobody will ever change it. One observes this when Oriaku used hired killers to destroy Onuma, Obidiya's husband. When Obidiya went to inform the king of their land of what happened to her husband, the man obviously sympathised with her. She told the man of her intentions to avenge her husband. The king advised her to forget all about the issue of revenge as revenge usually has adverse consequences for both parties involved in the case. Thus the king advised Obidiya and she insisted on her own opinion as follows:

Nke mere eme emechaala. Xzq ahx [chqrq [ga
anagh[aba uru. Onye ihu d[na njq ah[a,
onye azx d[kwa na njq ah[a. Ghara. Ghara
iwe. Dede iwe di egwu... Agagh[m ekwe. Ya
brrx mmehie, ka any[mee ya otu mgbe. Xbqch[
ikpe, any[niile apxta ikpe n'ihu Chineke
zaa ajxjx. Ya brrx mkpqrq ka q txa any[
niile otu mgbe (pp. 34-35)

Translation:

What happen had happened. What you intend to do is never profitable. Both will be at lost. Forgive. Stop being angry. Dear, anger is dangerous... I will not agree. If it is sin, let us sin together. On the day of judgment, all of us will stand before God and answer question. If it means imprisonment, let all of us be imprisoned together (pp. 34-35).

With all these instances, one observes that the playwright presented Obidiya as a stubborn woman who can never be convinced to drop her ideas. The examination of the above excerpt shows that Obidiya is ready to face any consequence which her intended retaliation of the killing of her husband might fetch her. She even posits that even if it means going to prison, that she is ready to face it.

Another point worthy of note in the negative portrayal of Obidiya in the play is that at her critical period she resorted to the ‘diabolical’ help of Akakaka, the medicine man instead of praying to God to take control of the situation.

As Obidiya insisted on revenging for the death of her husband, she consulted Akakaka, the medicine man to help her. She paid the money and all other things he demanded. Akakaka then helped Obidiya to find out who killed her husband. As she knew the person, she demanded that the entire family of the man that is behind the death of her husband be terminated. Hence Obidiya says:

Agbara, q bxx na xnx emechimaa kpamkpam ezi
na xlq onye ahx ziri nd[mmadx ka ha gbuo di
m, xnx were akx ya niile, m ga-eji kwa
mgbudu akwa na ewu kelee xnx (p. 48).

Translation:

‘Agbara’ (name of a goddess), if you completely close down the family of the person that hired those who killed my husband, you will take over his entire wealth. In addition, I will use a piece of cloth and goat to appreciate you (p. 48).

An analysis of the above statements shows that Obidiya believed in Agbara goddess and also believes that it can fight her battles. Akakaka hired the same group of hired killers employed by Oriaku to kill Onuma to fight Oriaku through the instrumentality of Agbara. As a result, Oriaku eventually died followed by the death of his children including Chima Oriaku

who was a third year medical student in Oklohoma University, America. Oriaku will not be buried at home. He has to be buried in the evil forest following his evil works and coupled by the fact that he was killed by Agbara. Hence, Obidiya actually achieved her desire.

However, the playwright presented her negatively as a stubborn woman that is also childless. In addition she is living a dirty life of resorting to diabolic means in solving her problems instead of depending on God.

4.1.3 Analysis of *Okwe Agbaala*:

The next text, Nwadike's (1991) *Okwe Agbaala* is a drama that satirizes the high rate of corruption and moral decadence in schools especially in tertiary institutions. In the play, University of Obinozara represents the present day universities. In that university, there are students and lecturers just as it is in the present day. The female student, Chinyere, in this drama represents the female students who just go to the university to waste their time. Chinyere offers herself to her lecturer, Dr. Emezina. Dr. Emezina in turn gives her the question paper before the examination. Dr. Emezina represents the irresponsible lecturers in the universities who do not maintain their integrity. He victimizes a male student, Ozuruigbo, because he sees him in Chinyere's house.

The female student, Chinyere shows that she is ready to do anything provided the examination questions will be given to her. She went to Dr. Emezina's office for the purpose of getting the question papers. Initially, Dr. Emezina wanted to maintain his integrity as a lecturer, but Chinyere mounted pressure on him and manipulated him to the level he could not resist. Chinyere, the female student was so desperate to get the question papers for their coming examination. Chinyere told Dr. Emezina that she is ready to do whatever he wanted

her to do provided he will give her the question papers. She recommended that they go to 'Hotel de Jeneral Isi Ewu' to have nice time; and they eventually went there.

On the examination day, Dr. Emezina takes Ozuruigbo's registration number and at last fails him in his final degree examination. Ozuruigbo petitions to the senate of the university which makes recommendations. This is taken to the law court and the Chief Magistrate passes judgement. Obviously, in the judgement, as our people say, "ebu gbara isi kotere ya". Chinyere's result is cancelled and she is thrown out of the university. The lecturer, Dr. Emezina's appointment is terminated. Ozuruigbo's paper is re-marked and he passes because the Igbo rightly say that "anagh[ahapx ike nyxrx ahxrx gaa kee isi qkpa". That is to say that one will not exonerate the offender and punish the innocent person. Each of the lovers is punished adequately. There is a clear case of boomerang as it happens to wicked people in real life situation in this present time.

The explication of the story in *Okwe Agbaala* (1991) shows that the female major character in the play, Chinyere, was negatively presented. She was a student with a wrong mind-set. Her wrong mind-set manifested by the way she talks and in her song. She seems to misunderstand the concept of womanhood. Thus she exposes her wrong mind-set when she was singing in her room as follows:

Ama m s[ukwu wx ego
Mx ewere nke m agba bongo
Ama m s[ukwu wx ego o o
Ama m s[ukwu wx ego
Mx ewere nke m agba koso
Ama m s[ukwu wx ego o o
Ama m s[ukwu wx ego
Mx ewere nke m agba apiriko
Ama m s[ukwu wx ego o o
Ama m s[ukwu wx ego
Mx ewere nke m eme 'iko'
Ama m s[ukwu wx ego o o o (p.3)

Translation:

I don't know that waist is money
And i was playing with my own
I don't know that waist is money
I don't know that waist is money
I use my own to play
I don't know that waist is money o o
I don't know that waist is money
I use my own to play
I don't know that waist is money o o

An examination of this song excerpt (p.3) shows that Chinyere sang out of her own understanding that she can use her body as a woman to get what she wanted. Chinyere is ignorant of the word of God in 1Corinthians 6:15 which says:

Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.

That is actually where her problem lies. As a student in the university, Chinyere believes that there is no need to stress herself in studying hard to pass her examination. She thought that she can always use her body to manipulate her lecturers and pass her courses. Obviously, that is exactly what she did to one of her male lecturers, Dr. Emezina, who became a victim of circumstance as his appointment as university lecturer was terminated.

The author of the play, *Okwe Agbaala*, portrays Chinyere as a way-ward lady who is always eager to submit her body to any man in order to achieve her desire. As their semester examination is fast approaching, she finds it difficult to settle down to read and prepare herself for the examination. Time without number in the play, she lamented that she cannot understand what she is reading. As a result she resorts to looking for an alternative to make sure that she passes her degree examination even without studying. Thus Chinyere says,

...xmx nwoke!

Xmx nwoke!
 Any[bx xmx nwaany[
 Maara ihe any[ji arata unu
 Q bx na-a s[gh[na
 Mgbe nwa ewu ga-añx nne ya ara,
 O gbuo ikpere n'ala,
 Onye chqrq [rata nnekwu
 Ya site n'xr[qm ya?
 Dkt. Emezina,
 Ama m ihe mx na g[
 Ga-aga
 Q rakata ahx,
 E wepxta m ihe m jiri kwxx (p. 10).

Translation:

...men!
 Men!
 We women
 Know what we use to lure you
 Is it not said that
 When an ewe wants to suck the breast of the mother,
 He kneels down
 Whoever that wants to lure a hen
 Let him start with her chicks
 Dr. Emezina
 I know what I will
 Do to you
 At worst,
 I bring out what gives me power (p. 10)

A look at the above excerpt shows the extent to which Chinyere is ready to go in manipulating men in order to achieve her desire. Having assured herself that she is a “go-getter”, she went to Dr. Emezina’s office to manipulate him so as to make him release the question papers to her. Chinyere assured herself that she knows how to lure men and get them do whatever she wanted. In the present situation, she points out specifically that at worst she will submit her body to Dr. Emezina in order to get the question papers. Actually when Chinyere gets to the lecturer’s office, she tried as much as possible to get Dr. Emezina attend to her request. Initially Dr. Emezina resisted the temptation. He tried to call Chinyere to order,

but his resistance did not go far. This is because she went on to pressurize him just like the way Delilah did to Samson in Judges 16 (authorized King James version 1986:409-411). Thus she says as follows:

Bikonu, Dqk (q dagide ya na-esusu ya qnx)
Ama m na I ji nwaany[
Ma onye nwere ji
Na-erikwa ji onye qzq
Onye rikata ofe egusi,
O ritxkwanx ofe qgbqng
Dqk, biko
Bikoz[nx
Wedakwanx obi
Obi g[q bxd[nkume? (p. 22)

Translation:

Please Doc (leaning on him and kissing him)
I know that you are married
But he who has yam
Still eats another person's yam
He that eats egusi soup
Can still eat ogbono soup
Doc, please
Please! Please
Cool down your heart
Is your heart a stone? (p. 22)

[The above excerpt shows how Chinyere was pleading with Dr. Emezina: thereby persuading him to give her the question papers. The words Chinyere used to lure Dr. Emezina into giving her the question papers shows that she has a way-ward tendency. She is a shameless person for her to be using the words in the above extract while talking to her lecturer. She was therefore portrayed as an unruly person who can be vulgar no matter whoever she is talking to. Chinyere is indeed a shameless person that is why she was able to speak to the lecturer the way she did.]

Comment [N1]:

Comment [N2]:

Another instance of negative portrayal of the female major character of the drama, Chinyere, is where she asked Dr. Emezina, her lecturer to go with her to her house for pleasure. She was presented as an irresponsible student who does not respect her elders. When Dr. Emezina rejected her offer because her room-mate might come in in the process, Chinyere further suggested that they go to Hotel De Jeneral Isi Ewu. This unguarded sexual outburst presents Chinyere as a very corrupt lady as the excerpt asserts:

...E nwere ihe o mere?
Ngwanx, bute moto
Ka any[gbada na
Hotel de Jeneral Isi Ewu
Ebe ahx q d[kwa mma?

Translation:

...Does it matter?
Now, bring the car
Let us go to
Hotel de Jeneral Isi Ewu
Is that place good?

From every indication, the author of the play portrayed Chinyere as someone who lacks good moral up-bringing. She talks carelessly and shamelessly too. She offers to kiss her male elderly lecturer without any remorse. That shows how irresponsibly Chinyere was presented to be. She lacks self-control as a woman.

In addition, in studying the portrayal of the female major character in the play, one observes that Chinyere was presented as a student who depends on examination malpractice for her to pass her examination. That is to say that she is not a serious student. After series of manipulation she carried out on her lecturer, Dr. Emezina, she eventually got the question paper. Chinyere wrote the examination in her house and put the answer script in her breast and comes to the examination hall. While the examination was going on, she brought out the

answer script where she answered the questions from her breast and returned back the script she was given in the hall into her breast. After sometime she went and submitted the examination script she wrote in her room before the expiration of the examination time.

When the result came out, Chinyere manifested her irresponsible attitude. Instead of keeping quiet after seeing her result, she manifested her stupidity by saying as follows:

...Okwe agbaala o!
Fqstx klas
Biitie m mx elee!
(Chilie aka elu, na-agba egwu, nd[qzq ana-ana ya
n' aka)

Translation:

...The result is out!
First class
Defeat me and let me see!
(Raise up her hands, dancing. Other students were shaking her hands and hailing her)

One expects that Chinyere, knowing fully well that her first class was not on merit will have kept quiet. But the above excerpt shows that the reverse was the case. When she saw her result, she attracted the attention of other students by passing the above comments and demonstrating by way of celebrating her “academic excellence”. That is the highest level of deception because she is aware that the first class is not out of her personal effort. Obviously, her first class is through examination malpractice.

When she call the attention of other students despite the fact that some students are hailing her, others are busy asking questions as to how did Chinyere came out in first class honours. Some students began to tell all forms of stories with regards to Chinyere’s “wonderful” performance. Along the line, the intelligent male student, Ozuruigbo, discovered

that he failed the degree examination. He felt so bad because he knew that the lecturer, Dr. Emezina purposely failed him as an act of victimization.

In view of this, Ozuruigbo wrote a protest letter to the university senate. The senate looked into the case and discovered that there were irregularities in Dr. Emezina's examination and compilation of results. It was discovered that Dr. Emezina gave Chinyere the question paper before the examination. That was how she made her first class she has been celebrating.

As a result of all these irregularities, the university senate referred the case to the court. Both Chinyere and Dr. Emezina were severely punished. In the first place, the Chief Justice addressed Chinyere as follows:

N'ebe nwada Chinyere no; Achqpxtara m na q
bx onye Nk[ta rachara anya, onye oji ukwu
akpa ego chqchaara ebe q ga-aga, q bxx na
mahadum ebe q nq na-ere ah[a q kpqware. Onye
d[etu a bx ihe ihere nye nd[mxx ya na nd[
na-etolite etolite. Onye na-anyaghar[akpa
ukwu na-achq nd[q ga-esukpu na ya. Onye d[
etu a etosigh[ituwe ugwu mmxta maka na ugwu
d[otu a ga-ad[ka oge e wepxtara iji asa
ezi ahx (Chief Jqstis agbachie nk[t[nwa
oge, bido kxwa mkp[s[akwxkwq n'eze ya. Q
txghar[a, chee ihu n'ebe Dr. Emezina nq were
kwuo...)

Translation:

...For Chinyere, I discovered she is irresponsible, she uses her body to make money. She sees university as where she will go to make money, where she is selling herself. A child like this is a disgrace to the parents and the youths. A person that is carrying big bag about looking for those she will force into it. A person like this is not qualified to be honoured with a certificate because such honour will be like a time devoted to bath a pig. (Chief Justice maintains silence for a little while and begins to hit biro on his teeth. He turned, facing where Dr. Emezina is, he begins to speak...)

The above excerpt shows that Chinyere was negatively presented in the play. Just like the Chief Justice opines, she was portrayed as a prostitute in the play by virtue of what she says.

In the final analysis, the Chief Justice sentenced Dr. Emezina, the lecturer who failed to maintain his integrity to two years imprisonment with hard labour. His university appointment as a lecturer was terminated. Turning to Chinyere, the Chief justice posits as follows:

N'ebe ukwu na-eri ego bx Chinyere nq, ana m etikwa iwu ka a kagbue ule digrii ya, ma chxq ya na mahadum kpamkpam. N'ebe nwa okorob[a bx Ozuruigbo nq, ana m akpqku nd[na-ach[mahadum ka ha lebaghar[a anya n' akwxkwq ule ya, b[a nye ya qkwa ruuru ya n'ule digrii ahx, (Mkpqtx wee daa ebe niile. Police ana-eti 'qda', 'qda' ma mkpxtx aka d[. N'oge a, onye police adqkpxrx Dkt. Emezina na-apx...)

Translation:

For the way-ward Chinyere, I command that her degree examination be cancelled and she will also be expelled entirely from the university. For the young man, Ozuruigbo, I am calling on the university management to re-examine his examination script and then award him his real grade. (Noise overtook the whole place. The police kept on calling people to order to stop the noise, but to no avail. In the course of this, the police started dragging out Dr. Emezina...)

The whole play shows that Chinyere was negatively presented. She has nothing good to show. One observes that both Chinyere and her lecturer man friend, Dr. Emezina, suffered severe punishment for their unruly behaviour. While the male student, Ozuruigbo, whom Dr. Emezina purposely failed was vindicated. Chinyere, the protagonist in the play, who represents female students that go to university to act as instrument in the hand of the devil

will learn necessary lesson from Chinyere and be serious with their studies in the university. Failing to do so will amount to facing similar punishment as meted out to Chinyere in Nwadike's *Okwe Agbaala*.

4.2 Portrayals of Women in Igbo Female-Authored Plays

The plays the researcher will analyse here were all written by female playwrights. It is necessary to select this data in order to find out whether female playwrights have different relationships with the female major characters in Igbo plays.

4.2.1 Analysis of *Ihe Onye Metere*

The explication of the story in Okediadi's (2002) *Ihe Onye Metere* also exposes Igbo female playwrights positive portrayal of the female major character in the play. In the play, the artist presents Ahūdiya, the wife of Ogonnaya and the female major character as a woman that is enjoying the right to participate in joint decision-making on issues affecting her in the family. There is no domination of the female gender by the male which is the common thing in patriarchal society.

In the play, one observes that Ahūdiya has the privilege to call her husband and remind him of sharing their inherited property with his brother, Okezie, to enable her know the one that actually belongs to them to avoid unnecessary encroachment. Thus Ahūdiya says as follows:

Ezi di m, m hxx n'anya! Q d[ihe m chqrq
ichetara g[. Ihe ahx bx ihe gbasara ike ihe nna
unu. Kedx ihe bx na mgbe qbxla m gara n'ala nke
a ka m were ihe ubi a na-achx m qkpa ede n'ala.
Xbqch[a ka m gara ghqrq ube m na-aracha n'ofe
mgbala, nwanne g[nwoke na nwunye ya etikpo m
mkpu ma s[kwa m ab[az[na n'ube ahx qzq ghqrq
ube. { s[na otu a ka m ga-esi bere n'elu n'xlq
a...? (p. 4)

Translation:

My good and beloved husband, there is something I want to remind you of. That thing concerns the inheritance from your father. Why is it that any time I go to harvest from the farm land they chase me away. The other day I went to pluck pears I wanted to lick, your brother and his wife started shouting at me. And they warned me never to come to pluck the pear again. Do you mean that is how I will be unsettled in this family...? (p. 4)

Obviously, her husband, Ogbonnaya welcomes her idea, but advises her to exercise patience; that the issue of land is a sensitive one and so must be handled with caution.

The playwright also presents Okezie and Chinyere's family. The writer presents Chinyere as a caring woman. While she was about going to the market, she observes that her husband Okezie is not happy. She asks her husband why he is sighing; whether his brother, Ogbonnaya has provoked him. However, Okezie explains to his wife, Chinyere, how Ogbonnaya demands that he wants them to share their inherited property. Chinyere advises him to take the matter easy to avoid regrets as land issue is usually sensitive. Okezie as a matter of fact expresses disgust over the words of his wife without being violent. Just unlike what obtains in a patriarchal society where such words of caution will definitely fetch the woman many rounds of dirty slaps from the husband.

Further in this play, the playwright presents Ahūdiya as a caring wife. She had a dream, and informs her husband. The dream was supposed to act as a veritable instrument to deliver her husband from the calamity that was awaiting him. But Ogbonnaya did not take it seriously. Rather, he just made a jest of the bad dream due to lack of spiritual knowledge. As a result, he died later. The playwright presents Ogbonnaya's wife as a wise and responsible woman. When her husband died, she was able to co-ordinate the family property. As a result,

the children grew up to become good, wise and knowledgeable children that are useful to their family and to society.

Moreover, the writer portrays Ahūdiya as a faithful and loving wife. Immediately after the death of her husband, Ogbonnaya, Okezie his brother wants to take over the place of Ogbonnaya, but Ahūdiya refused due to the true love she had for her husband when he was alive. One observes this true love by the long period she kept on mourning her husband. The extract below from the play depicts the level of Ahūdiya's mourning over the death of her husband.

...Qnwx nna ha ekwegh[apx ha apx n'obi. Mgbe niile any[na-anq na mwute. Xwa nke a m pxtara bx xwa g[n[? Kedx ihe m nq n'xwa emezi ebe di m nwxnahxrx m? Chei Ogbonnaya! Qnwx gburu g[b[a were m. Hei! Q bx ka xwa si ad[? E buru ibu mmadx agagh[ebuli bo ya.

Translation:

...The death of their father is still disturbing them. Every time we are in sorrow. What type of world am I born into? What am I doing in the world now that my husband is no more? Oh! Ogbonnaya. Let the death that killed you come and claim my life. Ah! is it how the world is? One is made to carry the burden/load that surpasses one.

After the death of Ogbonnaya, the peaceful co-existence in the family continues. With good motherly guidance of Ahūdiya, Uchenna, the first son of Ogbonnaya effectively replaces his father and went on playing some of his roles in the family. This is due to the good upbringing Ahūdiya gave her children after the death of the husband and so they grew up to be useful children. Uchenna helps the mother Ahūdiya in co-ordinating the family. This is the contention of womanist theory (which is the basis of this study), a situation whereby all the people, whether male, female and children will have freedom in the family. There is nothing like unnecessary wranglings. One observes that there is no subjugation of the female major

character all through the play. There is gender equity among the people especially the husband and the wife and this makes way for peace in the family. There is no case of husband beating the wife as if she is a house help. The order of the day in the family as contained in this play is good cordial relationship. There is nothing like fighting between husband and wife as used to be the case in patriarchal society where there are numerous traditional cultural practices and oppressions.

4.2.2 Analysis of *Qnqdx Ugo*

The first text under consideration here is Obidiebube's *Qnqdx Ugo*, (2007) which is an Igbo drama that discusses the story of Ngozi Chukwuka, the daughter of Okonkwo Mmaduka and his wife, Chiamaka (Amaka). Ngozi was destined to be great and important right from her mother's womb. Before the birth of Ngozi, the mother, Amaka, stayed for a long period without getting a child. As a result of this challenge, Amaka went to many places so as to solve her problem just as it is customary among the Igbo people. Eventually, the couple was blessed with a girl child, Ngozi.

Ngozi is destined to be important and popular right from her childhood. It is the money that accrued from her scholarship fund and various presents from individuals and government that was used for her training and the other children of her parents in schools. Ngozi was very useful to both her family and her town. Her name from her childhood was associated with success.

As a result of all these inherent ability, strife and jealousy surrounded Ngozi's life. Adaeze even went to consult a native doctor to kill Ngozi but her God did not allow that to happen. The enemies of Ngozi's progress did not allow her to get married. She decided that she will not be stopped by anybody from becoming what God has purposed for her to be in life.

Their mother, Amaka, gave birth to four of them. Out of the four children, they have one male issue called Obiorah. He is a nonentity and has no vision. It is in this hopeless situation that Obiorah was when his parents died. Ngozi did everything she could to make Obiorah a useful human being so as to secure their family lineage. She ensures that he completed his university education. She helped Obiorah to secure a nice job. She also helped him to marry and settle down as a family man.

Later, Ngozi built a house for Obiorah and also bought a piece of land and built her own house where she will live to avoid quarrelling with his brother, Obiorah. The worst thing that happened was when Ngozi brought in Nkechi for the purpose of child adoption. Obiorah, Ngozi's brother lost self control. He did all he could to do away with Nkechi but to no avail. Ngozi's kinsmen supported her idea of owning a child. They encouraged her to ignore Obiorah's view of sending away the child. Obiorah felt so bad because his wish is simply to inherit Ngozi's property.

A great scene and history was created when Ngozi died. Obiorah insisted that Ngozi's corpse will not be buried. But by the grace of God and by the help of Odenigbo I from Ndiagu, (who is the traditional ruler that conferred title on both Ngozi and Obiorah in the past) who came and restored order in the chaotic situation.

Obidiebube's *Onqdx Ugo* (2007) shows that the female protagonist in a drama can be portrayed positively, and not in subordination to the male characters in the play. In the play, Ngozi Okonkwo, the major character was presented by the playwright as a solid and superior woman who is very important and influential in the society. Ngozi is presented to be so wonderful from her childhood. During her student days, she excelled in both education and sports. Ngozi received various presents from government and individuals. All her education was through scholarship. Even her siblings benefitted from Ngozi's scholarship funds. Thus, one of Ngozi's school mates, Agu, notes that Ngozi is always among the winning group. He also posits that all Ngozi's education and that of her siblings are being sponsored by her scholarship funds. Thus Agu supports her good performance by saying;

Nguzi nwa Okonkwọ ga-esonyekwu n'otu nd[ahx
n'ihl na q bx agxba agxnyegh[ugbua. Akwxkwq
niile q na-agx bx 'scholarship' e nyegara ya
ka o ji agx ha. E jikwa ego a na-akwx ya na-
azx mxnne ya nd[qzq n'akwxkwq (pp. 35-36)

Translation:

Nguzi, Okonkwọ's daughter will be among that group because whoever that does not recognize her must be her enemy. All her education was paid for with scholarship funds that were given to her. The money paid to her is also used for paying the tuition of her siblings (pp. 35-36).

The playwright portrays Ngozi so much as a popular person that her friends started to envy her. She outshines her mates in whatever they do both in school system and out of school, that some of them even begin to ask series of questions as to what is the secret behind her tremendous successes in both academics and sports. One of Ngozi's mates, Adaeze, out of jealousy, alleged that her excellence and popularity depend on diabolic means procured by

her father. Adaeze further expressed her anger over the popularity of Ngozi; hence she declares:

The ahx [na-ekwu gbasatara g[. The ahx m
nrx ka m kwenyere na ya (na-ekwu n'obi ya).
Mgbe n'etegh[aka, aga m ama ihe m ga-eme
maka Ngozi Okonkwo ka a nxdebe aha ya. Aha ya
na-ekpuchi aha m na nke nd[qzq (p. 40)

Translation:

What you are saying concerns you. That which I heard, I believe in,
(saying in her mind), in no distant time, I will know what to do
about Ngozi Okonkwo so that people will stop hearing about her.
This is because her name envelops my name and those of other
people. (p. 40).

Ngozi was portrayed as a most blessed person in life that while she was in the university, employment was already waiting for her to complete her education and start work immediately. This is because when she won a scholarship, she was promised that as soon as she finished, she will be given a job. So one observes that Ngozi is presented by the playwright as a person that has colourful destiny. She is a person that is not meant to suffer. She has divine speed in whatever she does. The problem of looking for job after school is not her lot because it is already there waiting for her in Lagos. In that case, Uju, one of Ngozi's school mates reminds others: "Q bx na i chetagh[na mgbe e nyere ya 'scholarship' [gx akwxkwq ruo ebe q chqrq na e kwukwara na q gxchaa ozugbo, q malite qrx? Ugbua q nqz[n'afq nke ikpeazx, e nyela ya qrx na Lagoos]" (p. 41). "Don't you remember that when she was given scholarship to study to whichever level she could, that she was promised that she will start work as soon as she finishes?. Now that she is in the final year, she has been offered an employment in Lagos" (p. 41).

Ngozì is portrayed as a special human being. This manifested clearly when Adaeze, the enemy of her progress went to a native doctor, Ogbunka to destroy her. The native doctor tried to do what Adaeze requested, but he could not. The man discovered that he cannot destroy Ngozì as demanded. After several efforts, Ogbunka, the native doctor remarks as follows:

(malite ime anwans[, mgbe o mechara q gawara ya s[]). Nwa m, [nagh[ahx xzqq ime mmxq. Q bxx na [na-ahx xzq n'ime mmxq, [kara [hx ihe mere ebe a mgbe [kpqrq aha nwata a. Nd[elu igwe kara ya akara. Mmadx apxgh[imetanwu ya ihe qbxla. Qzq ka ibe ya bx na aka ya d[qcha. O nwegh[ihe qjqq qbxla m hxx ya n'aka. Onye qbxla ga-eme ya ihe qjqq ga-aba na nnukwu nsogbu. Onye ahx ga-ebughara ihe dum ahx. Biko ch[r[ego dum [wxsara n'ala ebe a laa n'ihi na anagh[m anyx ns[n'ebe ala ka m ogo. (Adaeze na Ego were bilie laa na mwute) (p. 44-45).

Translation:

(Begins to perform magic. When he finished, he told her), My child, you don't have spiritual insight. If you do, you would have observed what happened here when you called the name of that child. Heavenly beings gave her an identifying mark.. Nobody can harm her in any way. The greatest thing is that, she is innocent. I don't ad-judge her of committing any offence. Whoever that will harm her will be in serious trouble. The evil intended against her will backfire on the person. Please pick all the money you dropped on the floor here and go because I don't dare what is beyond me. (Adaeze and Ego got up and left in sorrow) (pp. 44-45).

Here is another pointer to the fact that the playwright portrayed Ngozì Okonkwò as a child of destiny. The above extract reveals that even Ogbunka, the native doctor, is of the opinion that Ngozì is a special person. He notes that the heavens gave mark of identification to Ngozì and as such, nobody can harm her. The diabolic man even warns Adaeze that has

come to patronize him that whoever attempts to harm Ngozi will have serious problem. For the fact that the native doctor did not want to bring a problem upon himself, he even rejected the money given to him by Adaeze for the purpose of destroying Ngozi.

Furthermore, the playwright presented Ngozi as a lover of God. This manifests when Ngozi began to appreciate God for all the things He has been doing in her life. Ngozi recognized that it is God that made her to be so popular everywhere due to her wonderful performances in sports and in education. Ngozi Okonkwo appreciates the fact that while they have just finished examination and while her mates were waiting for the result, she had already gained an employment in Lagos. She also thanks God that her parents did not spend their money in her education. Rather she is the one that is giving them money through her scholarship funds. Hence Ngozi asserts as follows:

...Any[ka lechara ule, ibe m nq na-eche
rizqltx ugbua ma mx onwe m nqz[na-arx qrx
oyibo. Akwxkwq niile a m gxx, o nweghi nke
nne na nna m tinyere kqbq na ya kama q bx m
na-eweta ego na-enye ha. Chineke, aga m
ekwesiri G[ntzkwas[obi n'ihl na qrx ebube
G[d[egwu na ndx m (p. 46).

Translation:

... We have just finished examination, my mates are now waiting for their results whereas I have secured employment. In all my educational studies, my parents did not spend any money on the tuition of all my studies, rather I got money and gave to them.. God, I will be faithful to you because your works on me are glorious (p. 46).

Ngọzi, in appreciating God for His glorious works in her life, promised to be faithful to God all through her life. That is to say that she was portrayed as a person that fears God and also honours Him.

The playwright also presented Ngọzi as a caring and meticulous person. When their parents died, she took over the challenge of taking care of the family. From time to time, she kept on sending money to Obiọra, her only brother who resides in the village. Although she resides in Lagos, still she goes on asking Obiọra about their portion of land which one of their uncles, Nduka, started claiming after the death of their parents. When Obiọra told her that their kinsmen were looking into the land dispute, she told him to always furnish her with the outcome of their meetings. Ngọzi also married a wife for her brother, and also built a house for him to make sure that their lineage continued.

One observes that in this play, Ngọzi is presented as beautiful, intelligent, hardworking, wealthy and childless because she did not marry due to the activities of the enemies of her progress. Thus, both her stature and tragic dimension are carefully established in the play. In spite of her handicap (no marriage and childlessness), she attains a very high and respectable position in her community. Ngọzi wanted to deal with her handicap of childlessness by adopting a child. But when she informed her brother, Obiọra, he objected to Ngọzi's idea. He posits that adoption is slavery. He notes that slavery has been stopped and so why must she go back to it. He strictly warned his elder sister, Ngọzi who made him what he was that adoption will never take place.

However, the playwright portrayed Ngọzi as someone who cannot be intimidated. Upon all the obstacles of her brother over her idea of adopting a child who can take care of her in old age, she eventually adopted a girl, Nkechi. Obviously, Obiọra's disapproval of the

idea was simply because he wanted to inherit Ngozi's property, including her estates at her death. But in the standpoint of womanist theory which is the basis of this study, their relations supported Ngozi. Their kinsmen posit that Ngozi has every right over her property in the present dispensation. The playwright presents Obiora as a wicked man. He did everything he could to stop Ngozi from carrying out her wish, but that was to no avail. Actually, Obiora wanted to use his position as a man to subjugate his elder sister, Ngozi, but he failed eventually. Later, Nkechi (the adopted child) grew and became a full-grown woman. She inherited Ngozi's properties including her estates.

In addition, Ngozi was portrayed as one who understands the Biblical injunction that says that one's gift makes way for her. Hence she bought many gifts for his uncle, Omenka as one observes from the excerpt below.

... ooo Nna m (wepxta qj[, xtaba, mmanyanya, akwa na ihe nd[qzq na-ad[okenye mma nye Omenka). Nna any[as[m ka m b[a leta g[. Ahxrx m na ahx g[siri ike (p. 85).

Translation:

... yes my father (brings out kolanut, snuff, wine, cloth and other things good for the elders and gives to Omenka). Our father, I have come to see you. I have seen that you are hale and hearty (p. 85).

Following these gifts, Ngozi attracts the love and care of her uncle, Omenka, who is very influential in their community. In consequence to that, Omenka influenced other Ngozi's kinsmen and they all supported her to adopt a child. They generally condemn the wicked attitude of Obiora, Ngozi's brother, and seriously warned him to desist from his wickedness or else they will deal with him.

Also, Obidiebube presents Ngozi as a good mother by the way she was training her daughter, Nkechi. She proved to be a responsible and knowledgeable mother who is worthy of

emulation. She has the wisdom and knowledge of God which enable her to inculcate good moral and societal norms in her daughter as she points out and advised Nkechi:

{ na-agx sekqnd[r[nke atq ugbua. Sitekwa
n'ike nke Chukwu, [ga-aba mahadum mgbe
nad[gh[anya. Q d[mkpa ka [kpachakwuoro
onwe g[anya na ndx. Qtxtx nd[mmadx nq na-
achq onye ha ga-eduhie. Ekwela ka ha duhie
g[. Emerxla onwe g[n'ihl na ahx mmadx bx
xlq nsq Chukwu. Biko gbaa mbq ka [hx na i
mechugh[m ihu n'xzq qbxla.

Translation:

You are now in junior secondary three. By the grace of God, you will soon gain a place in the university. It is very important that you will be careful in this life. Many people are looking for whom they will deceive. Don't allow them to deceive you. Don't defile yourself because your body is the temple of God. Please make sure you don't disgrace me in any way.

This type of advice from a mother is very important. The child will always bear it in mind and will try to abide by it. When the mother teaches the child that good name is very important, the child will always want to preserve the good name (that is, the good name of the family). But the problem in this present dispensation is that mothers do not even bother about good name. Today, many mothers manifest carelessness over everything. They do not care to cultivate and inculcate good morals in their children. They also do not care to give good advice to their children. This is because such mothers are not disciplined. As such, they cannot give what they do not have. This means that moral behaviour is transferable from one person to another. And so the present day mothers have to emulate Ngozi's advice to her daughter, Nkechi as contained in the extract above.

In the play, Ngozi died later after giving her daughter the above advice. Obviously, her daughter will continue to be guided by the mother's advice all through her life even after the

death of her mother. So one observes that it is very vital that mothers learn to be committed and give necessary advice to their children.

The playwright portrayed Ngozi Okonkwo, the major character of the play positively all through the play. The only demerit in Ngozi's life is childlessness. But she did not allow that problem to disturb her and stop her from attaining the position God purposed for her. She was fully established from the beginning of her life till when she died in the play.

The next text, Okediadi's *Ihe Onye Metere* is a drama that criticizes the inordinate ambition of Okezie who killed his brother because of a piece of land that does not actually belong to him. Okezie even still wanted to kill the first son of his late brother, Ogbonnaya but unfortunately, his evil intentions boomeranged against him by the death of his only son. The repercussion did not end there; he equally lost his life because of his greed and wickedness. As it is usually said that the evils that men do live after them.

Actually, Okezie and his brother inherited about four pieces of land from their late father which they were supposed to share. But there is a particular piece of land which their father used in obtaining a loan. He was unable to pay the loan. He wished that his children will pay the loan. Eventually, Ogbonnaya paid the loan and their father told him to take that particular land. Obviously, Okezie knows this truth that surrounds the land but greed and wickedness still led him into disputing it. Okezie's wife, Chinyere, advised him to be careful over the issue of that land to avoid making mistake. Okezie later called his kinsmen. After deliberations, they advised Okezie and Ogbonnaya to settle the dispute over the piece of land between themselves before their next meeting.

Okezie went to his friend, Ezemmiri, who has killed many people through diabolical means. Okezie told him of the land dispute between him and his brother, Ogbonnaya. They

agreed that they will poison Ogbonnaya's drink on one of their meeting days. But before the meeting day, Ahūdiya, Ogbonnaya's wife had a bad dream. She dreamt of a strange and very ugly animal pursuing them and they were running. Along the line, she did not see her husband again as well as the strange animal. After telling him about the dream, her husband, Ogbonnaya, told her that nothing was going to happen to him.

On the occasion of the reception of Ojiekwe's son, Nkemdirim, who returned from abroad after his graduation as a medical doctor, Ezemmiri poisoned Ogbonnaya's wine in line with his earlier arrangement with Okezie. After drinking the poisoned wine, Ogbonnaya developed a stomach upset. Following this poison, Ogbonnaya died. After the burial of Ogbonnaya, Okezie went to meet Ahūdiya, Ogbonnaya's wife who is now a widow. He told her that according to their culture, he will take over to be her husband. But Ahūdiya rejected the idea. He was angry with the reply Ahūdiya gave to him.

Later, Okezie planned to take the life of Uchenna, the son of Ogbonnaya because of that land in dispute. He arranged with the hired killer, Ahaotu and his group to kill Uchenna. Okezie promised them a huge sum of money if they were able to kill Uchenna and dump his corpse inside the Akpakaolu River. Okezie described the physical appearance of Uchenna to the hired killers. He also told them where they will wait for the boy and the time he usually passes.

According to Okezie's description, the hired killers waited for the boy, but they did not see him because he did not pass as usual. As the killers were contemplating to go, they saw a young man coming their way. Actually the young man did not appear like the person described for them. But the hired killers resolved that their concern was to kill somebody according to the term of the contract. So they killed that young man in spite of the fact that he

did not resemble the person described for them. When people who observed the evil work they did started shouting, the hired killers ran away. Later it was discovered that the person they killed is Ahamefula, Okezie's only son. As a result of that, Okezie started crying. As he was crying, Uchenna was coming along with his belongings along the Akpakaolu River. Obviously, Uchenna was confused as to why many people gathered along that way. Little did he know that another person had just been killed instead of him. At the same time Uchenna saw people carrying Ahamefula's corpse to Okezie's house. However, Uchenna and his mother went to sympathize with Okezie who lost his only son because of his greed and wicked attitude.

Eventually, the hired killers came to collect the remaining money. Okezie told them that he will complete the payment later, but they insisted that they must collect their money immediately. Okezie has no choice. Although he was mourning the death of his only son, he paid them their money. There were murmurings everywhere as people understood what actually happened. As a result, people began to go one after the other. Afterwards, Okezie started to regret that it was his friend, Ezemmiri, that deceived him. Later Okezie became sick and he was unconscious and in that critical condition he began to confess the evils he did to people. And afterwards he died. When he died, his stomach swelled up. This indicates that he committed abomination. Chinyere his wife went on crying for the death of her husband. As Ezemmiri, Okezie's friend was going home, thunder storm struck him down, an indication that he also committed abomination.

Obviously, the evils that men do live after them; both Okezie and his friend, Ezemmiri have faced the repercussion of their wickedness. Whoever maltreats the poor and the less privileged must surely face the consequence either sooner or later. Uchenna, the son of

Ogbonnaya and his mother, Ahūdiya, thanked God for how the death organized for them had turned back to the planner.

4.2.3 Analysis of *Akp[r] Richie Xzq (O Were Anya Zie Ozi)*

The next text, Obidiebube's (2009) *Akp[r] Richie Xzq* is a drama which exposes the negative consequence of having love for money more than any other thing. In the drama, because of the love of money, Amadi forced his daughter, Uẏoma, to marry an elderly man she does not love. In spite of the fact that Uẏoma explained to her parents that she is waiting for someone she will like to marry, they forced her to marry Akuebuo. Uẏoma tried to explain to them that the young man, Somtoo, who she met in the university is trying to gather money to come and perform the marriage cultural rites. But they insisted that Uẏoma must marry Akuebuo, who is rich but old. Eventually the marriage was contracted between Uẏoma and Akuebuo.

Following the fact that Uẏoma married Akuebuo outside her wish, she still went on relating with Somtoo, the young man whom she would have preferred to marry. However, people kept on observing what was happening between Uẏoma and Somtoo. Later somebody revealed to Akuebuo what his wife and the young man were doing whenever he travelled abroad for his business trips. This led to serious quarrel between Akuebuo and his wife, Uẏoma. Obviously, when he confronted Uẏoma with the allegation of her infidelity, she denied. Actually, Uẏoma does not want Akuebuo, her husband, to know the truth of what was happening between her and her boy friend, Somtoo. At the same time, she wants her relationship with Somtoo to continue. So in the midst of that confusion, Uẏoma decided to poison the food she prepared for her husband when he came back from one of his business trips. As soon as the man finished eating the poisoned food, he started having serious stomach

upset. He was rushed to a medicine man's house. Along the line, it was discovered that his food was poisoned through the desperate effort of Akuebuo's mother. As a result of the quarrel between Uzoma and her husband, Akuebuo, Uzoma's parents did not get the money they required from Akuebuo.

However, by the special grace of God Akuebuo did not die from the food poisoning. Uzoma insisted that she did not know anything concerning the ill-health of her husband. Afterwards, it was very clear that she intended to kill her husband by poisoning his food as Uzoma was made to swear. Later, Uzoma made open confession as how her boy friend, Somtoo used to visit her in her husband's house and that they usually make love each time he visited in her husband's bedroom. When Akuebuo's kinsmen gathered in respect of the problem in Akuebuo's family, some people were blaming the young man, Somtoo for going to Akuebuo's family house to meet Uzoma. But others noted that all blame should be directed to their wife, Uzoma who usually gives Somtoo information as to when her husband, Akuebuo, had travelled. After series of meetings by the kinsmen to deliberate on the case, they decided that Uzoma will be ordered out of their town, Amaoji.

On the other hand, Akuebuo's kinsmen deliberated on what punishment they will give to the young man who is causing trouble in their brother's marriage. But a more reasonable man among Akuebuo's kinsmen, Ugokwe, opposed their idea of punishing Somtoo. He noted that they had no right to punish the young man, Somtoo, because he was from a different town. As it were, Ugokwe observed that they had no right whatsoever to chase him away from his home town. He explained to them that they only had the right to deal with their daughter, Uzoma, by chasing her away from their town, Amaoji.

Following the decision of Akuebuo's people, the youths were ordered to drag Uzoma to her father's house. When Uzoma got to her father's house, she reminded her parents that the whole problem emanated from their too much love for money. However, she lamented that doing evil is not in her nature, but the unhealthy circumstances in which she was pushed into by her parents has forced her into doing evil. She prayed that God will see her through her tribulations.

Later, the young man, Somtoo, travelled to Overseas. He became very wealthy. On the other hand, Uzoma, who is helpless moved from her village, Amaoji Alaoma to Abuja to reside there. It is not easy for her to secure employment. As a result she was suffering in Abuja. One day, Somtoo unexpectedly met Uzoma at Abuja and they eventually came together and reconciled. On that ground, Somtoo then struggled to see that Uzoma's town people called her back to their town, Amaoji. When he achieved this, he paid Uzoma's bride price, carried wine and they wedded in the church. They began to live together as husband and wife. From the experiences Amadi and Ugodiya had from their daughter, Uzoma's marriage, they learnt that it is not proper to force their daughter into marriage because of the money they hoped to get from the man they wish would get married to their daughter. It is always good to allow love to be the controlling factor in issues of marriage.

Obidiebube's *Akp[r] [Richie Xzq]* also expresses the danger of having too much love for money more than any other thing. In this drama, one observes that the female major character is not subjugated in the play. When Amadi was thinking on the issue of his daughter, Uzoma's marriage, he calls his wife with due respect for them to discuss the issue of their child's marriage (pp. 8-10). Amadi calls the wife and tell her that he wants them to discuss the issue of their daughter's marriage. This shows that the Igbo female playwrights

tend to put their female characters on the same level with the male. Amadi tells his wife that he knows that if he wins her consent in the issue, that he is covered, and that there will be no problem. That is to say that in female plays in family domestic issues men seek the consent of their wives before carrying out whatever they wish to do. Unlike in the male plays where in most cases, women are not allowed to contribute in the discussion of domestic issues that concern them.

In this play, the writer portrays that women play vital roles in the family. Both the husband and the wife maintain cordial relationship. They do things together in their family. They tend to have agreements in whatever they do the family. They talk to each other politely. This is the contention of womanist theory. That men and women have to co-exist peacefully in family and society without wranglings. However, the theory advocates that men will take their position where necessary to express their feelings without being quarrelsome. An instance of the cordial relationship in the family of Amadi and Ugodiya which our today's families need to emulate can be seen in this excerpt where Amadi politely talks to his wife. (p. 11)

...Nwaany[qma ewela iwe na okwu any[erugh[
n'isi, { hxx na enyi m, mx na ya yiri agba
ab[ala. Ka m gaa kwado ka any[zqlie n'oge wee
nwee ike [lqta tupu chi ejie (p. 11).

Translation:

...Nice woman, don't be offended that we didn't conclude our discussion. You can see that my friend I have an appointment with has come. Let me go to enable us come back before night fall (p. 11).

In this drama, the writer portrays Ugodiya, the wife of Amadi as a responsible and meticulous woman who plays her role well in seeing that her husband eats before going out. On the day their inlaw was supposed to come, Ugodiya knows that it is her responsibility to get things set for the occasion. By the time her husband, Amadi, asks her how far she is preparing, she tells him that everything is ready because she is so happy for that day. Thus, Ugodiya says :

...N'eziokwu nna any[, akwadochaala m ihe niile a
ga-eji mee ihe n'ihina obi di m xtq taa (p.
34) .

Translation:

...Truely, our father, I have prepared everything that will be used on
the occasion because I am very happy today (p. 34).

The playwright also presents Ugodiya as a loving and caring wife. She lives up to the expectation of her husband. As a result, her husband Amadi cherishes her and always shows appreciation for the way his wife co-ordinates the family affairs. In fact, the playwright portrays Ugodiya as an industrious and exemplary woman whom other women have to emulate. The playwright presents her as a woman that organizes herself well and this enables her to do the right things at the right time, say the right things at the right time and also be at the right place at the right time. As a result the playwright portrays Amadi's family as an exemplary one where husband and wife co-exist peacefully. And that is the contention of womanist theory which is the basis of this study.

Ugodiya and her husband are living up to their responsibilities. For instance, on the occasion of receiving their inlaw, there are different roles the husband and the wife should

play in order to make the occasion a successful one. The woman knows the areas she is supposed to take care of, such as keeping the whole environment clean, cooking the food they will use and more importantly, instructing Uzoma, their daughter that is getting married, on how to conduct herself. On the other hand, the man, Amadi, also knows the roles he has to play. Thus he takes care of providing the kolanut, drinks and inviting his kinsmen to the marriage ceremony. And that is the gender complementarity which will ensure the natural order of life between man and woman in the family which womanism theory advocates.

In addition, in the play, the writer presents the major character, Uzoma, the daughter of Amadi and Ugodiya as an obedient girl. When her parents want to give her out in marriage to Akuebuo who is a notable wealthy but old man from Alaoma, she politely informs them that she does not want to marry the man. She explains to them that there is a young man, Somtoo, whom she met in the university that she will prefer to marry. Uzoma further explains to the mother that she is so uncomfortable with the marriage arrangement they are making for her with Akuebuo. She says that whenever she remember that marriage negotiation, she feels as if she is already dead. The extract below are Uzoma's words and explanations to her mother.

Nne ihe a bx ihe na-eri m nri n'ahx. Kamgbe ahx ha b[achara, onwe m anagh[atqkwa m xtq, iwe juru m obi. Oge xfqdx, q na-ad[m ka m nwxqla n'xwa a. N'eziokwu, agagh[m ezoro g[ihe qbxla. O teela aka m jiri chqq [txnye g[ya bx azx mana o nwegh[mgbe ohere d[[r[m. O nwere otu nwa amadi nke mx na ya bx ahxgh[ma erighi mgbe m nq n'xlq akwxkwq. O buru m xzq pxta n'xlqakwxkwq tupu m pxta. Q gxr akwxkwq, na-arx qrx ugbu a, mana o nwebeghi ego. O teela aka mu na ya d[wara na mma nke na xfqdx na-eche na mx na ya bx ejima n'ih [hxnanya d[n'etiti any[abxq. Tinyere nke a, any[abxq gbara ndx na o nwegh[onye ga-ahapx ibe ya ma na ndx ma n'qnx. Aha ya bx

Somtoo, nwa Maaz[Ugwunyiri nke ahx be ya d[
na nd[da nd[da Alaqma, n'Amanko, Alaqma be
any[a.

Translation:

Mother, this thing is what has been disturbing my life. Since they came to our house I have no peace within me I am annoyed. At times, I will feel as if I am no longer existing on this earth. Truly, I will hide nothing from you. It is quite a long time I have been wanting to tell you that I am into a relationship, but I have not had the chance. There is a young man that I am so close to when I was in the school. He graduated before me. He is gainfully employed but he is not rich. We have been in this relationship for quite a long time to the extent that some people thought we are twins due to the type of agape love between us. In addition to this, we entered into a covenant that we will not depart from ourselves both in life and at death. His name is Somtoo, the son of Mr. Ugwunyiri whose house is at the steep of Alaqma in Amanuko Alaqma in this our place.

With all these long explanations of Uzoma, one observes that the playwright portrays her as a girl that knows what she wants. Obviously, she knows the type of man she wants to marry. She is not confused about that like some girls are. As a wise and knowledgeable girl, she took her time to politely explain to her mother that she is already engaged to Somtoo, a young man she met in the university. She took her time to let her mother know that she prefers to marry the young man because they are deeply in love. She even went to the extent of telling her that they entered into a covenant relationship in which they agree that they will never separate both in life and in death.

One observes that Uzoma tries her best to stop her parents from involving her in marrying Akuebuo, the wealthy old man. But because their main concern is the man's money, they deny their daughter the freedom of marrying a man of her choice. This denial of freedom is against the contention of womanist theory which is the theoretical framework adopted for this study. The womanists advocate that men, women and children will have freedom in

making vital choices such as marriage. But Uzoma's parents – Amadi and Ugodiya- refused to grant their daughter the freedom in choosing her life partner. They insist that she will marry the man of their choice. Uzoma tries to make her parents to understand that she has the right to marry a man of her choice; that she is not after Akuebuo's money. They try to convince her that the young man, Somtoo, is poor and cannot afford to take good care of her. The reply Uzoma gives to her are as follows in the excerpt below:

Nne, kedx ka m ga-esi lxq onye akxwagh[sleeti. Q jqrq njq nwoke. Nke ka njq bx na q bxz[gh[nwat; ego ka o nwere. Aga m eriwezi sq ego? Ahxgh[m ya n'anya. Mgbe qbxla m chetara nwoke ahx, q d[m ka ala mepee ka m dakpuo. Echegh[m na q ga-adaba ebe q bx na [hxnanya ad[gh[ya. Somtoo ji mma gwu egwu, toruo ihe e ji nwoke eme, gxq akwxkwq, hx m n'anya. A s[kwar[na q nagh[arx ezigbo qrx ugbu a, enwere m olileanya na site n'amxma gqqment[ji ugbu a, q ga-enwetar[r[qrx ma nwekwaa ego. ... M ga-enwe ndidi chere Somtoo n'ihhi na onye ndidi na-eri azz ukpoo. Aga m echeriri ya n'ihhi na q bx qd[m n'obi. Q brrx na m alxgh[ya, agagh[m alx onye qbxla.

Translation:

Mother, how can I marry an illiterate? He is an ugly man. The worst thing is that he is no longer young. It is just that he is wealthy. Will I just be enjoying money? I don't love him. Any time I remember that man I will wish the earth should open for me to sink. I don't think the marriage will be possible since there is no love. Somtoo is so handsome and educated and he also loves me. He also has all that is needed in a man. If he has no reasonable job now, I hope he will eventually secure a job with the government present plan. I will exercise patience and wait for Somtoo for it is said that the patient dog eats the fattest bone. I must wait for him because I love him. If I fail to marry him, I will not marry any other person.

Upon all these utterances and explanations, Uzoma's parents insist that they will give her in marriage to Akuebuo, the old man because they want his money. So as they continue to

pressurize her, being an obedient girl, she allows them to contract the marriage which has no good foundation.

Obviously, the marriage did not last. It eventually collapsed after a very short period. As God might have it, Uzoṃa, who has suffered great tribulations since she was chased away from her village met Somtoo at Abuja after eight years. Later, they come together again. Somtoo met with the parents of Uzoṃa and they officially got married. They later wedded in the church and began to live as husband and wife to the shame of the devil. God blessed their marriage with four children – two boys and two girls.

The playwright presents Uzoṃa as a girl that knows what she wants. She understands the fact that a marriage can only succeed when there is genuine love and not where there is money. Money is always a second factor in the issue of marriage. The writer uses her play to sound a warning to parents who will wish to give out their daughters in marriage on the basis of wealth.

The womanists advocate for freedom for both men, women and children. Thus being aware of that womanist contention of freedom of choice, Uzoṃa insists on marrying a man that is her choice and her parents have no choice other than to allow her at last to marry Somtoo, the young man she prefers.

A thorough examination of the three Igbo female plays shows that women writers do not subjugate their female major characters. They tend to place both male and female characters on the same level. There is no gender discrimination in treating their characters. In addition, the notion that the women are dependent on their husbands is a wrong assertion. From the research carried out, most women not only hold their own, they are astonishingly independent of their husbands. Many of these women are not only wives and mothers but

successful traders who took care of their children and their husbands as well. They are very much aware of their leadership roles in their families as well as in the churches, communities and their local government areas. In the three Igbo female- authored plays, one observes that women were given the right to participate in joint decision making in issues affecting them in the family. The patriarchal traditional inequalities which continue to subordinate African women are completely absent in the three selected Igbo female plays.

Therefore the contention of the researcher in this study, which is also what the womanism theory adopted for this study advocates is that gender equity is a necessary condition for social justice and peace in the family and the nation at large. This gender equity will also be applied in the portrayal of both male and female characters in our literary work. That is to say that a situation where the female protagonists are always given a subordinate positions by male writers are unacceptable. The male authors are hereby reminded that their cultural reality does not obtain everywhere. This knowledge will help them in making some necessary adjustments when writing literary works.

CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY OF DATA

5.1 A Comparative Analyses of the Portrayals of Female Protagonists in the Selected Male and Female Authored Igbo Plays

It is a fact that both male and female playwrights are writing with the same objective of representing reality, one cannot gloss over the fact that differences do exist in the area of their portrayals of their female characters. A critical examination of the selected Igbo plays for this study reveals that male writers present their female characters in subordination to their male counterparts. Out of the six Igbo plays selected, three of them are authored by male writers while the other three are authored by female writers. The research carried out shows that all the male writers of the three Igbo plays portray their female characters as victims of male subjugation in a patriarchal society. Whereas the female writers of the other three Igbo plays portray their female characters as full woman – being who take up their rightful positions in the society. These women are the real power behind the success of their families.

Some male writers have created female characters whose characters and mannerisms are treated with precision and authenticity of detail. Others have however, departed from this to project a certain homogeneity attributable to some basic similarity in men's overall conception of women. In the latter role, female protagonists are made marginal to the play's plot or the plots of the stories while only a few emerge as powerful and credible characters.

On the other hand, the female writers offer a concentrated vision of the female experience. That is to say that the playwright ensures that women play crucial roles in the

unfolding of the plot and in our appreciation of the story. When the female writers put their female characters in important positions, they often display their character in terms of their initiative and dynamism. Also if they operate within the confine of motherhood or working as wives, they display enduring qualities of dignity, dedication and industry. If they act within the urban area, they are usually dynamic and politicized, often transcending the limiting roles which characterize their attributes in male authored literary works.

In addition, the male writers usually portray their female protagonists within the framework of their traditional roles as wife and mother in a patriarchal society. In a patriarchal structure in the words of Chukukere (1995:7), socio-cultural values are so strong that the respect and love which a woman earns is relative to the degree of her adaptation to these roles. For instance, a barren woman is considered a social failure and invites the wrath of her family and society. In some cases, the bone of contention will be a woman's inability to get a male child. In Onyekarwū's (1980) *Nwata Rie Awọ*, which is one of the Igbo plays selected for this study, one of the reasons why Awọ hated his wife, Obioma, so much because she gave birth to a baby girl first instead of a boy. As a result, Awọ hated her to the extent that he sold her and the new born baby into slavery. Of course he eventually paid dearly for that wickedness. That is to say that it is the African socio-cultural values that influence the male writers in their negative portrayal of their female protagonists in their literary works.

Some Nigerian male writers in the words of Nwapa (2007:528) have all in their earlier works played down the powerful role of women. They have in many instances portrayed women negatively in their subordination to men. Some portray their female protagonists as ceaselessly nagging women who make life intolerable for their husbands or

they can present them as being wayward or as manifesting other forms of irresponsible attitudes. For instance, in *Okwe Agbaala*, which is one of the male-authored play, under study, the playwright, Uzoma Inno Nwadike portrayed the protagonist, Chinyere, as a wayward lady who is at the university to use her body as a woman to secure a degree certificate without actually working for it.

On the other hand, the female writers portray their female characters as superior women who hold their own in the society. They present them in a way to show that they are not only wives and mothers but also successful traders who take care of their children and their husbands as well. They try to portray female characters who are very much aware of their leadership roles in their families and society. The female writers in portraying their female characters try to debunk the erroneous concept that husband is the Lord and master and that the woman is nothing but his property. For instance, in Okediadi's *Ihe Onye Metere*, one observes that Ogbonnaya's wife, Ihudiya, has the right to tell her husband to go and meet his brother, Okezie, for them to share their landed property to enable her know the ones that belong to them to avoid unnecessary embarrassment. That is to say that the female writers present their female characters as women that have the right to participate in decision-making in matters that concern them in the family. Unlike the male portrayals of female characters in a patriarchal society, where women are highly subjugated. In this contemporary Africa, Omolara (1981:11) opines that the female writers try to debunk the myths surrounding the African woman and to project a realistic portrayal of her situation in order to correct the imbalance in the portrayal of women.

5.2 An Overview of Male Writer's Imaging of Women in the Selected Plays

There is no doubt that the unsatisfactory appreciation of the significance of women in life has spilled into imaginative literature. Through their own points of view, the majority of male writers often rely on the socio-cultural reality of patriarchal society to portray their female characters in literary works. In patriarchal pre-colonial Africa, (Africa before the advent of European colonialism) there were definite roles women were supposed to play in family and in society. These roles revolve around being wife, mother and then controlling the pestle and the cooking pots. As such, most male writers depend on this narrow scope in imaging women in their works.

In Onyekarwu's *Nwata Rie Awọ*, one observes that one of the reasons Awọ gives why he cannot continue marrying his wife, Obioma, is that she gave birth to a girl as his first child instead of a boy. He also accused her of poisoning his food whereas Awọ is the one that put the poison. The playwright presents Obioma as an irresponsible woman who forced herself on a man simply because he wins in a wrestling contest. As a result of these, he perfectly hated her. He has no regard for her as a wife. Awọ cunningly arranged and his wife, Obioma and her daughter, was ordered out of their house. He even went to the extent of arranging for Obioma and her daughter to be kidnapped and sold into slavery. So this play reveals that Obioma was betrayed and abandoned by her husband simply because she did not give birth to a male child first. The issue here is not a case of barrenness, rather it is the sex of the child which the woman gave birth to that is the bone of contention. From this play, one observes that in the African setting, woman's importance and stability in her husband's home is judged by the degree of her fertility, especially her ability to bear male children.

In the next male play, *Okwe Agbaala*, the fact that the significance of women is unsatisfactorily appreciated by male writers is shown by the creation of female image who is

irresponsible and wayward. In the play, the major character Chinyere, is shown as a woman who is not studious. She does not have time to read her books. She prefers to pass her examination by cheating. The playwright presents Chinyere as a woman who is ready to give out her body to men to get what she wants. Chinyere is also shown as being shameless. Thus she is the one that recommends “Hotel De General” where she will enjoy herself with Dr. Emezina. One therefore, observes that Chinyere was represented as being uncultured and as such she talks carelessly even to her lecturer.

In the third male play, Akoma’s *Obidiya*, one observes the creation of woman’s image who is always unhappy due to her demerit of childlessness. This problem concerns Obidiya. As a result, she is always worried and unhappy. Every effort made by her husband to change her ill feelings proved abortive. This is because of the importance the traditional African society attached to the ability of a woman to bear children especially, sons. When a woman is childless, she is considered a failure.

In the play, the author also created the woman’s image of stubbornness. Obidiya is presented as a woman who is so insistent that when she has taken a stand nobody can dissuade her. When Oriaku used hired killers to kill her husband, Obidiya insisted that she must take a revenge on the people that killed her husband. All the effort made by the king of their land to stop her proved abortive. She told the king that she must fight back; that nothing on earth will stop her. She rather told the king that if her action will amount to sin, that God has to forgive her. Thus the image of woman created in the play, *Obidiya* is that of worrying, unhappiness and stubbornness.

5.3 An Overview of Female Writers Imaging of Women in the Selected Plays

In Okediadi's *Ihe Onye Metere*, the fact that female writers present themselves in creative writing the way they feel they should be portrayed is shown by the creation of female characters who are enjoying the right to participate in joint decision-making on issues affecting them in the family. There is no domination of the female protagonist by the male; just unlike what obtains in the male writers' plays. It is the imagery of the right of women to participate in the family decision-making that gives Ihudiya the wife of Ogonnaya the effrontery to remind the husband of sharing their inherited landed property with his brother, Okezie, to enable her know the ones that belong to them. Most male writers have hitherto concentrated on the creation of positive male images and the creation of negative female images who are wayward, absolutely stubborn or ceaselessly nagging.

Furthermore, in this play, the playwright presents Ihudiya as a caring wife. As a result, when she has a dream concerning her husband, she narrates the dream to him. The dream is supposed to give a clue to his safety from impending calamity that is awaiting him, but he does not take it serious. He just makes jest of the bad dream due to lack of spiritual knowledge. As a result he dies later.

In addition, the playwright portrays Ihudiya as a faithful and loving wife. After the death of her husband, Ogonnaya, Okezie his brother wants to take over the place of Ogonnaya immediately but Ihudiya refuses due to the love she has for her late husband.

Moreover, the playwright portrays Ihudiya as a responsible woman. As a result she was able to uphold her family after the death of her husband. There is a peaceful co-existence in the family. This is the contention of womanist theory; a situation where all people – male, female and children will have freedom and live happily in the family. One observes that there is no subjugation of the female protagonist all through the play.

In the next text, Obidiebube's *Qnqdx Ugo*, the playwright presents the family of Okonkwọ and his wife, Amaka. In this play, the fact that female writers' works are shown by the creation of female images who survive and attain very high and respectable position in their community in spite of their live problems and handicaps is evident. In this play, Amaka, the wife of Okonkwọ suffers from childlessness for many years. Fortunately, her husband, Okonkwọ being a nice man keeps on encouraging her. He did not take to insulting and castigating her like some men usually do.

The play also shows Amaka as a woman that knows her responsibilities in her home. Despite her problem of childlessness, she takes care of the domestic duties in her house like knowing when to cook food for the family. Such domestic duties cannot be taken as part of male subjugation of the female as the white feminist can take it to be. The playwright shows that such domestic assignment is naturally and culturally meant for women no matter their social standing in the family. (pp. 17-21).

Eventually in the play, God blessed Okonkwọ's wife, Amaka with a baby girl called Ngozi. She grows up very rapidly and she was presented as being so intelligent that all her education was on government's scholarship. The playwright portrays Ngozi as a positive female character in the play. She records good and excellent performances in both academics and sports. As such, the writer presents her as a full and complete woman and she provides a role model for the female readership.

In the play, Ngozi, who has lost her parents has no child because she did not marry. Ngozi tried to see that her younger brother, Obiọra, completed his university education and secured a good job. She also helped him to get married. She told her younger brother, Obiọra, her intention of adopting a child. But Obiọra disagrees because as a man, he wanted to inherit

Ngọzi's property; including her estates when she dies. But in the standpoint of womanist theory, their relations support Ngọzi to go on with the adoption because she has every right over her property. The playwright presents Obiora as a wicked man. He did everything he could to stop Ngọzi from carrying out her wish, but to no avail. Ngọzi eventually adopts a baby girl, Nkechi. Obiora insists that Ngọzi will send the child away, but all his efforts proved abortive. Actually, Obiora wants to use his position as a man to intimidate her elder sister, Ngọzi. Eventually Obiora fails because all their relations supported Ngọzi to adopt a child as she wishes. Later, Nkechi (the adopted child) grows and becomes a full fledged woman. She inherited Ngọzi's property.

In the portrayal of the major character, Ngọzi, the artist creates the image of a beautiful, intelligent, hardworking, wealthy and unmarried childless woman. Thus, both her stature and tragic dimension are carefully established in the play. Yet, in spite of Ngọzi's handicap (unmarried and childless), she attained a very high and respectable position in her community. She recorded numerous achievements both in education and sports.

Ngọzi understands the biblical injunction that says that one's gift makes way for her. Hence, she buys many things for her uncle, Omenka (p. 85). Obviously, Ngọzi's gift made way for her. When she informed her uncle, Omenka of her plan to adopt a child, he supports her. He tells her that she has no problem. That she is free to do whatever she wishes to do because things have changed. Women have right to own property and use it as they wish. Her uncle, Omenka, supports her and even takes up the responsibility of explaining Ngọzi's ease to their kinsmen whenever they meet.

The playwright therefore shows that gifts or exchange of gifts are powerful instruments that help all people – male, female and children to co-exist peacefully, communicate and help one another.

From the above discussion, one observes that the playwright creates the image of women that occupy important and respectable positions in spite of the challenges of life. Another important point worthy of note is that there are no instances of gender discrimination in the literary works of Igbo female writers as one observes in this play. Ngozi's uncle, Omenka, disagrees with Obiora's opinion that Ngozi will not adopt a child. He supports Ngozi to go on with her idea; that they are solidly behind her. This is in line with what womanist theory is advocating, freedom for men, women and children, so that they peacefully co-exist in society.

In the next text, *Akp[r]l Richie Xzq* (O Were Anya Zie Ozi), women writer's works are known by the creation of female image who participate in joint decision-making in domestic matters affecting them in the family. One observes that when Amadi was thinking on the issue of his daughter's marriage, he calls the wife, Ugodiya with due respect for the two to discuss the issue of their child's marriage. (pp. 8-10). Amadi calls the wife and tells her that he wants them to discuss the issue of their daughter's marriage. This shows that Igbo female playwrights tend to put their female major characters on the same level with the male. In the play, Amadi told his wife that he knows that if he wins her consent, that he is covered, and that there will be no problem. That is to say that in female plays, in family domestic issues, men seek the consent of their wives before carrying out whatever they wish to do. Unlike in the men's plays, where in most cases, women are not allowed to contribute in the

discussion of domestic issues in the family, they relate things together and talk to each other politely. This is the contention of womanist theory.

Moreover, the fact that women have specific roles to play in the family is shown by the creation of female images who play their roles well in the family. Here, Ugodiya, the wife of Amadi, is presented as playing her roles well in her family. She gets up very early everyday and prepares food for her husband to eat before going out. Also on the day their in-laws are supposed to come, Ugodiya knows that it is her responsibility to get things set for the occasion. By the time her husband, Amadi asks her how far she is preparing, she tells him that everything is ready because she is so happy for that day.

In addition, the fact that women do not embark on unnecessary argument with their husband when they are discussing family issues is portrayed by the creation of female image such as Ugodiya in the play who did not intend to argue with the husband. When Amadi told his wife, Ugodiya that they will give out their daughter, Uzoma in marriage to a man of their choice, Akuebuo as against the choice of their daughter, Ugodiya did not actually like the idea but she agreed to avoid argument which can engender strife and unnecessary tension in their family.

Also, in this play, the fact that women are not subjugated is portrayed by the creation of the images of woman that have freedom of choice. In the play, one observes that Uzoma disagrees with her parents on their choice of giving her out in marriage to Akuebuo who is a wealthy old man from their town, Alaoma. Rather, she prefers to marry Somtoo, who is a young man, whom she met at the university. She made her parents to understand that she has the right to marry a man of her choice; that she is not after Akuebuo's money. They try to convince her that the young man, Somtoo is poor and therefore cannot afford to take good

care of her. However, as they continue to pressurize the girl, she allows them to contract the marriage.

Obviously, the marriage of Uzoma and Akuebuo eventually collapsed after a very short period. After eight years, Uzoma miraculously meets Somtoo at Abuja. They come together again. Somtoo eventually organizes for their marriage with Uzoma's parents. They later get married and wedded in the church and they begin to live happily as husband and wife. God blesses their marriage with four children – two girls and two boys because He ordained their marriage. Thus the playwright presents Uzoma as a girl that knows what she wants. She understands that marriage is not all about money; that marriage can only succeed when there is genuine love. Money is always secondary. The womanists advocate for a family and society where all people have freedom, whether men, women and children. Thus, based on that freedom to make her marital choice, Uzoma insists on marrying a man that is her choice and her parents have no choice other than to allow her at last.

With what one sees in Igbo female plays, and the imagery of women created in the plays, the concept that the husband is the Lord and Master and that the women are nothing but his property is purely erroneous. In addition, the notion that the woman is dependent on her husband is also wrong.

From the research carried out, most women not only hold their own, they are astonishingly independent of their husbands. Many of these women are not only wives and mother but also successful traders who take care of their children and their husbands as well. They are very much aware of their leadership roles in their families, churches as well as in the government sector. In both three Igbo female plays, one observes that women major characters were given the right to participate in joint decision-making on issues affecting them

in the family. Such forces of cultural oppression and patriarchal structures which continue to make African women subordinate to their male counterparts is completely absent in the selected Igbo female-authored plays used for this research. One also observes that the selected plays do not preach radicalism but in their womanist and humanist approach, the playwrights encourage freedom for all people – men, women and children. It also encourages a union based on equality and mutual respect for and from men and women.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 Findings, Implications of the Study, Summary and Conclusion

6.1 Findings

The study reveals that gender issue is pluralistic in nature, and as much as there are males and females in any given society, each sex has its peculiarities, both positive and negative. It was discovered that a humanistic approach is vital in the management of gender pluralism in order to achieve equity, justice and harmony and uphold the rights of women in particular and everybody in general in the society.

The study further observed that gender equity is a necessary condition for social justice and peace in the family and the nation. It is indeed our argument that the disempowering structures of patriarchy which deny women a voice in matters that affect them – education, politics, work, marriage, reproduction and sexuality etc. are largely responsible for the conflict generated in the relationship between the two genders. The consequence is that often, women rebel against the subjugation they suffer and the dehumanization visited upon them by their oppressors as a result of oppressive cultural and patriarchal structures prevalent in the African society. One also observes that female writers have collectively and

individually advocated for the abolition of patriarchal values that subjugate women. They insist on women confronting traditional barriers that hold them down and relegate them to second-class citizenship.

A critical examination of the selected plays shows that incidence of male negative portrayals and subjugation of women protagonists pervades those plays authored by male writers. This could however, largely be attributed to what obtains in the people's culture as well as the prevailing circumstances of the time. Culture, as noted in the study, is a social heritage marked with continuity. Since culture is marked by continuity, what the male writers are perpetuating is the culture that they have inherited from their ancestors.

In Onyekwunwu's *Nwata Rie Awq*, the major character was portrayed negatively as she manifested highest degree of irresponsibility as a woman. However, her actions were occasioned by Igbo culture and prevailing circumstances of the time and the environment in which she found herself. As it were, the story was set at a rural area where the only language a grown-up girl understands is how to get married. People have no business with education as it is now. So the playwright's portrayal of the protagonist, Obioma, was occasioned by the prevailing circumstances of the time and the environment. As Awqrq emerged victorious in the wrestling context, she falls in love with him and runs to his house and begins to live with him as husband and wife as that is what is needed in the rural village as at the time.

In Nwadike's *Okwe Agbaala*, the female protagonist, Chinyere, was negatively portrayed. Chinyere was used by the playwright to satirize the high rate of corruption and moral decadence that is now so prevalent in schools especially in tertiary institutions. As it were, the artist's representation of the protagonist was occasioned by the prevailing circumstance of the environment and when the story in the play was set. The playwright

portrayed Chinyere negatively as he uses her to satirize female students who are wayward; who are not serious with their academic work. The protagonist represents female students who assume that they will use their “bottom power” to acquire university certificate. However, the artist portrayed her as being disappointed at last thereby using her to sound a note of warning to the present day university students. The present day students are by this play encouraged to live up to expectation by taking their academic work serious as that is the only sure way to succeed in examinations.

Also in Akoma’s *Obidiya*, the playwright portrayed the major character, Obidiya, negatively as a childless, stubborn and disobedient woman in the play. The protagonist was presented as childless and this demerit rendered her always worried and unhappy. In the traditional African society, as we have noted elsewhere in this study, a childless woman is regarded as a failure. This is because the major woman’s function revolves around the family. The functions include her responsibilities as mother, wife and home administrator. The role of the mother is considered vital because it is through her that the family lineage is perpetuated. A woman’s importance and stability in her husband’s house depends on the degree of her fertility, especially her ability to bear male children. If she is childless, as the major character, Obidiya, is considered as failure in her primary assignment and often suffers as a result. Hence, Obidiya felt so bad for being childless. She knows what it means in her society. One observes that her negative portrayal in this case was occasioned by cultural reality of the Igbo people of Africa.

The playwright also portrayed Obidiya as being stubborn and disobedient. In Igbo culture, a woman who loses her husband has lost her glory. As such, such a woman will be ready to go to any extent to deal with whoever is responsible for the death of her husband. So

in the case of the major character, Obidiya, her level of insistence on revenging she mounted shows that she is out to go to any extent to deal with the culprit. Thus, Obidiya insisted that she must make sure that all the members of the family of the culprit will be wiped out from the face of the earth. The playwright therefore, used the drama to expose the problems of coveteousness and land dispute that confront people in Igbo society and its deadly implications.

On the other hand, one observes that in the female-authored plays, the women major characters were not portrayed negatively. Moreover, there are no gender discrimination and as such women were not subjugated in the plays. In other words, women were not given subordinate positions in the plays.

Okediadi's *Ihe Onye Metere* exposes Igbo female playwrights's positive portrayal of the female protagonist. In the play, the playwright presents Ihudiya, the wife of Ogbonnaya as a woman that has the privilege of enjoying the right to participate in joint decision-making on issues affecting her in the family. There are no incidences of domination of female gender by the male as it used to be in male-authored plays and in patriarchal society. The playwright also portrayed Ihudiya as a caring wife. She had a negative dream and she told her husband, Ogbonnaya. The dream was supposed to be a veritable instrument to deliver her husband, from impending danger that is awaiting him. But because Ogbonnaya lacked spiritual knowledge, he made jest of the bad dream. As a result, he died later according to the wish of his enemy. One therefore observes that throughout the play, the major character, Ihudiya, was portrayed positively. She was never subjugated or placed in subordinate position to her male counterpart in the play. There is gender equity among people, especially the husband and wife and this makes way for peace and tranquility in the family. There is no case of a husband

beating his wife as if she is a house maid. The order of the day in the family is good cordial relationship. There is nothing like fighting between husband and wife as is the case in patriarchal society where there are numerous traditional cultural practices and oppressions.

In Obidiebube's *Qnqdx Ugo*, the major character, Ngozi Okonkwo, was portrayed positively. Ngozi was represented as a superior and intelligent woman who has recorded numerous achievements both in the areas of education and sports. She was very important and influential in her society. The playwright presented Ngozi as being so wonderful. During her school days, she excelled in both education and sports. As a result, she receives numerous trophies and presents from government and individuals. All her education was through scholarships. Even her siblings' education was sponsored through Ngozi's scholarship funds.

The playwright portrays Ngozi as a famous and popular person that her friends eventually began to be jealous of her. Ngozi was represented in a way that she outshines her mates in whatever they do. The playwright portrayed the protagonist, Ngozi as a blessed person in life right from her childhood. As a result of her bliss, while she was still in the university, an employment was reserved for her so that she would assume duty as soon as she completes her education. One therefore, observes that Ngozi was portrayed by the playwright as a person/woman that has lucky destiny. She is represented as a superior person that is not meant to suffer. She has divine speed in whatever she does. The challenge of unemployment is not her portion because while she was still in the university, employment was already there waiting for her in Lagos.

In addition, the playwright also represented Ngozi as a lover of God. This manifests when Ngozi began to appreciate God for all the good things He has been doing in her life. Ngozi recognizes that it is God that made her to be so popular and influential everywhere due

to her wonderful performances in education and sports. While her mates were waiting for their result, she has already started to work in Lagos.

Moreover, the playwright portrayed Ngozi Okonkwo as a child of destiny. One observes this when even Ogbunka, the native doctor said that Ngozi is a special child. He notes that the hosts of heaven gave mark of identification to Ngozi and as such, nobody whatsoever should harm her. Ngozi was also portrayed as a person that appreciates the goodness of God in her life. She promised to be faithful to God all through her life. One therefore, observes that Ngozi was portrayed positively. Thus she was presented as a beautiful, intelligent, hardworking and wealthy woman in the play.

Finally, in Obidiebube's *Akp[r] Richie Xzq* (O Were Anya Zie Ozi) which is a play that exposes the negative consequences of the love of money, which is the root of all evils, one observes that women are not subjugated. The playwright positively portrays Ugodiya, the wife of Amadi as a woman that has the privilege of partaking in her family decision-making. Ugodiya is also portrayed positively as a responsible and meticulous woman who plays her role well in her family. She was represented in the play as an industrious and exemplary woman whom other women have to emulate. The playwright presents Ugodiya as a woman that organizes herself well and this enables her to do the right things at the right time, say the right things at the right time and also be at the right place at the right time.

The playwright also portrays Ugodiya as a loving and caring wife. She lives up to the expectations of her husband. As a result, her husband, Amadi, cherishes her and always shows appreciation and satisfaction for the way his wife co-ordinates the affairs of the family. The playwright, therefore, portrays Ugodiya's family as an exemplary one where husband and

wife co-exist peacefully without unnecessary wranglings. And that is the contention of womanist theory which is the theoretical framework used for this study.

One therefore observes that many male writers tend to portray female major characters negatively in their literary works from their own points of view. They always tend to place the female characters, especially the major characters in subordinate positions to their male counterparts. That is to say that there are incidences of gender discrimination as it affects portrayals of characters in male- authored plays selected for this study.

On the other hand, female writers tend to portray their female protagonists positively in their literary works. They do not subjugate their female protagonists in their works. There are no incidences of gender discrimination in the selected Igbo female- authored plays used for this study. Rather, the female writers tend to place both their male and female characters in the same position. This is in line with the gender equity which the womanists advocate that it is the only way to maintain and sustain societal justice, peace and harmony in the family and the society at large.

6.2 Implications of the Study

A critical examination of this study shows that negative representation of women protagonists is a veritable tool that encourages women subjugation and gender discrimination. This is as a result of the fact that negative portrayals of female characters tend to place women in subordination to their male counterparts. Most Igbo male writers from their own points of view portray women as victims of male subjugation in a patriarchal society. Igbo male writers should try to create balanced characters. They will endeavour to learn how to create in some cases, full-fledged woman-beings who take up their rightful positions in the society. Such

women will serve as role models for the readers especially students who may tend to emulate them.

In addition, negative portrayals of women in literary works breed hatred and women struggles .It is this underplay of women that brought about feminist agitations. This has over the years led to the popular feminist writings, which are informed by feminist thinking, theory, ideology and philosophy. Feminism is a literary as well as a cultural reaction to the excesses of male stereotype. Feminism as a movement is female centered and lives around the empowerment of the female in a patriarchal society. However, many in Africa see feminism as too Western and too radical, hence the various theories that have emerged as derivatives from mainstream feminist concepts. Therefore, it is obvious that social and cultural factors have rendered Western feminism inappropriate and ineffective in solving problems of gender discrimination in the African social sphere. Over the years, African feminism has been variously defined and named by African women scholars and theorists, thus giving rise to such variants as “womanism”, “femalism”, “stiwanism” and motherism. Womanism theory which was adopted as the framework of this study, as a concept, advocates gender complementarity which would ensure the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.

Another laxity that was discovered in this study is that through their own points of view, the majority of male writers often present their cultural reality as the global cultural reality. Following their cultural reality, the ideal female protagonists created by male writers in literary works often act within the framework of her traditional roles as wife and mother. So strong are these cultural values that the respect and love which a woman earns depends on her adaptation to these roles. For instance, in some cultures, when a woman gives birth,

particularly to a male child, the father will slaughter goat. On the other hand, a barren woman is considered a social failure and invites the wrath of her family and society. Thus, a woman's honour and dignity often consist in her adherence to idealized norms of wife and motherhood. Most male writers therefore always try to represent women based on what obtain in their culture in their literary works because literature transmits the culture of people through the medium of language. They fail to realize that their cultural reality is not the global cultural reality.

Another important point worthy of mention is the issue of gender roles and specifics by which society ascribes different works to be performed by men and women both inside and outside the household. Although gender roles vary from culture to culture, gender issues have been part of every society. From the study, it was discovered that the failure to realize some goals of development programme lies in the truth that planners in our country failed to take into account, the fact that men and women play different roles and thereby have different needs or challenges which should be given due considerations in the development and implementation stage. It was observed that failure to do this has been to a large extent responsible for projects in our country not achieving their goals. However, the study observes that despite their gender identities, gender equity especially in education is a necessary condition for social justice and peace in the family and the nation. The disempowering structures of patriarchy which deny women a voice in matters that affect them such as education, politics, work, marriage, reproduction and sexuality etc. are largely responsible for the conflict generated in the relationship between the two genders. The consequence is that often women rebel against the subjugation they suffer and the dehumanization visited upon them by their oppressors.

Furthermore, the study shows that Igbo female writers do not subjugate their protagonist characters – both male and female. Rather they try to place their female characters in the same position with the males in their literary works. Female writers tend to create positive female protagonists who can serve as role models for the female readers especially, the students who will likely tend to emulate them.

As it were, the women writers always try to portray the women's power in their homes and society. They see their economic importance both as mothers, farmers and traders. They write their literary works that affirm the women, thus challenging the male writers; and debunking their erroneous views about women that led them to portray women negatively in their imaginative literature. By doing this, they create awareness on women's inherent vitality, independence of views, courage, self—confidence, and of course their desire for gain and high social status.

In Nigeria and other countries of Africa, there have been tremendous changes in all facets of life which contribute to the continent-wide awareness and rethinking of women's problems and roles in the society. Recent changes in Nigeria such as economic changes and an emphasis on the education of women have affected men's view about women. That is to say that these changes are affecting both men and women in many ways. As a matter of fact, creative writers are now responding to these changes by recreating meaningfully women's culture and world-view in this age of female awakening and feminist consciousness. Actually, in the three selected Igbo female plays analysed in this study, their authors strove to depict this new vision of women in imaginative literature. A critical study of the three selected female authored plays reveals that the women protagonists are not subjugated. There are no incidences of gender discrimination all through the three plays. Thus, women have started to

redefine themselves; they have started to project themselves in literary works as they feel they should be presented.

6.3 Summary

The patriarchal system and socio-cultural realities of African societies have so entrenched male dominance that it has spilt into imaginative literature. Through their own points of view, majority of male writers often present their own cultural reality as the global cultural reality. Such male authors tend to assume that what obtains in their culture is the ideal thing and as such they allow their cultural reality to manifest in their literary works. As a result, these Igbo male writers always project unbalanced image of African womanhood according to their cultural practices. In the three selected Igbo male authored plays used for this study, one observes that the female protagonists in those three male-authored plays were portrayed negatively. That is to say that they were subjugated. The male writers have portrayed women negatively or in their subordination to men. This is the result of African patriarchal structures and cultural practices that emphasize gender discrimination and oppression which has been in existence over the years. The focus of the Igbo male writers have always been on the prurient negative nature of woman. Thus, often male writers have portrayed their female major characters as ceaselessly nagging women who make life difficult for their husbands or a wayward women who have nothing good to offer their families and society.

In addition, the ideal female created by Igbo male writers acts within the framework of her traditional roles as wife and mother. Obviously, this is because African women in general and Igbo women in particular are subjugated. As a result, they lag behind in many sectors – educationally, technologically, in political participation and occupational composition. They

are also hampered by unfair family planning systems and domestic inequity. As a result of these prevailing circumstances in the society, majority of Igbo male writers do not project an objective image of women; rather they project an image that does not actually reflect the reality of women's role in the society. With such vital roles like that of the sisterhood, 'umuokpu' every woman major character will not be portrayed as victims of male subjugation in a patriarchal society.

Igbo women writers do not subjugate their female major characters in their plays. They try to project an objective imagery of women, an image that actually reflects the reality of women's role in the society. That is, women are not portrayed as victims of male subjugation in patriarchal society. They are portrayed as full woman-beings who take up their rightful positions in the society. The three selected Igbo female- authored plays used for this research, women protagonists played positive roles. They were never represented as victims of male subjugation as was the case in Igbo male- authored plays. For instance, Ngozi Okonkwo in Obidiebube's *Onqdx Ugo* was portrayed as a beautiful, intelligent, hardworking, wealthy and childless woman. Thus, both her stature and tragic dimension are carefully established in the play. Yet, in spite of her handicap (childlessness), she attains a very high and respectable position in her community. All her education were through government scholarship. In fact, her scholarship funds were used in training her siblings. She recorded numerous achievements both in education and sports. Later she adopted a child, Nkechi, who inherited her estate and many other properties.

The role of women in Africa in general and among the Igbo people of Nigeria in particular is crucial for the survival and progress of the race. This is of course, true of all women across the globe, be they black or white. Female writers as the research shows, project

a more balanced image of African womanhood. Igbo male authors in most cases understandably neglect to point out the positive side of womanhood. They tend to capitalize on the negative nature/side of women from their own points of view. Obviously, the role of women is very visible and considerable at home in the three selected Igbo female plays in terms of participating and intervening in their husband's decision-making processes.

In addition, there is no incidence of gender discrimination and oppression in the Igbo plays authored by women. The Igbo female writers tend to place both male and female protagonist characters at the same level. One observes that neither the female nor the male characters is subjugated in their plays.

6.4 Conclusion

As it were, most Igbo male writers have negatively portrayed their female characters especially the protagonists from their own points of view. This has led to the conclusion that there is a difference between African male writers and their female counterparts. This difference springs from the fact that the male writers usually present their patriarchal and cultural structures which emphasized gender discrimination and oppression as the ideal cultural reality. They therefore tend to transmit what obtains in their culture, which is dependent on female subjugation through literature. Hence, they represent their female protagonists negatively as if they are good for nothing.

On the other hand, the Igbo female writers who are part of victims of male subjugation in a patriarchal society strive to use their literary works to debunk the erroneous male portrayals of women as good for nothing. Through their literary works such as the three selected Igbo female plays used for this study, the female writers tried to debunk the notion

that women are dependent on their husbands. They created the women that they not only hold their own, but also the ones that are astonishingly independent of their husbands.

So while most Igbo male writers, like those we studied their plays in this work, failed to see this power base, this strength of women characters, this independence, of theirs', the Igbo female writers like those we studied their plays in this study, tried to use their works to elevate women to their rightful places. Unlike some Igbo male writers, the Igbo female writers tried through their literary works to analyze the women's independent economic position and the power they wield by the mere fact that they control the pestle, mortar and cooking pots.

As a matter of fact, this work joins the womanist contention of Walker (2012:19/4/2014) and Ezeigbo (2001:400-401) to uphold that despite their gender identities, men and women have to co-exist without race and class-based oppression and share the same space and facilities.

6.5 Recommendations

The study recommends that patriarchy, which denotes the system of male rule and authority which encourage female subjugation and other African oppressive cultural practices which emphasize gender discrimination and oppression have to be critically studied. With this critical study, necessary readjustment has to be effected on the disempowering structures of patriarchy which deny women a voice in matters that affect them such as education, politics, work, marriage etc. which are largely responsible for the conflicts that usually arises in the relationship between the two genders. The consequence is that often women rebel against the subjugation they suffer which can be through negative portrayals in literature.

The study also recommends gender equity as a necessary condition for social justice and peace in the family and nation.

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