

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Historically, feminism started as a philosophical movement in the United States of America and the United Kingdom in the 18th century. It is however, a relatively recent movement in Nigeria. However, feminist scholars from these parts of the globe down to Nigeria are unanimous in their informed opinions that women living in Nigeria, where patriarchy holds sway, have some injustices to contend with on a daily basis. These injustices are exemplified by various acts of inhuman treatments against women such as oppression, suppression, subjugation, marginalisation, denied opportunities and privileges, and so on. Feminism therefore, is generally regarded as a movement that is vehemently committed to confronting patriarchy and challenging the existing status quo with a view to bringing about desired changes in the subordinate position in which the Nigerian woman finds herself in the society. It is also regarded as a movement that is committed to promoting equality between men and women with regards to social, economic and political considerations or opportunities.

Feminism is however, regarded as a controversial movement that is interpreted and sometimes misinterpreted by scholars of different regions of the world mainly because of the bifurcation of feminist ideology which has also affected the feminist agenda in different regions of the world. Despite its multiplications and based on numerous available literatures from different authorities on feminism, it may be broadly divided into two: conservative and radical feminism. To the radical and separatist feminist, it is an aspiration towards a female-dominated society. Radical feminism is committed to ensuring a radical re-ordering of the society to ensure that “the stereotypical idea of man’s superiority over woman was punctured” (Nwabueze,144). To the

radical feminist, society is fundamentally a patriarchy in which men dominate and oppress women. The goal of radical feminism therefore, is to ensure that patriarchy is abolished in order to liberate the female folk from an unjust society hence radical feminism as a movement is committed to challenging existing social norms and institutions. Unfortunately, the radical feminist agenda is generally regarded as the dominant feminist agenda because of its strict opposition to patriarchy and aspiration towards enthronement of matriarchy. Radical feminism which is based on Western ideology of total dismantling of patriarchy is separatist, militarist in nature and therefore, seeks a total abandonment of men by women.

The conservative or liberal feminism is Nigerian in orientation and application. To the conservative feminist scholar, feminism is all about equality between men and women in terms of economic, political and socio-cultural opportunities. Feminism in Africa is viewed by many as too “Western and too radical” (Utoh-Ezeajugh, 140). It is therefore, obvious that Western feminism is considered “inappropriate and ineffective in solving problems of gender discrimination in the African social sphere. Concepts which are more culture-specific and address women’s concerns from a supposed African perspective are womanism, black feminism and motherism” (Utoh-Ezeajugh, 140). Hence, concepts like womanism, motherism, Stiwanism and so on, provide strong and incontrovertible indicators that these groups of feminists have achieved a paradigm shift that tilts Nigerian feminist agenda towards the conservative feminist agenda of gender equality rather than the radical feminist agenda of female domination.

Therefore, **Nigerian feminist agenda** is mainly about restructuring patriarchal institutions to favour gender equality. Thus, the desired Nigerian feminist agenda is conditioned by genderism hence major feminist movements like Stiwanism are committed to this agenda. Their goal is to put in place mores and cultural institutions that favour gender equality. Nigerian feminist agenda

is committed to emergent economic and political hierarchy that can redistribute power and redefine one dimensional value sharing theories that subjugate the female folk. Nigerian feminist agenda therefore differs from the Western radical feminist agenda which champions a female-dominated matriarchal society. Nigerian feminist agenda is a product of revolutionary dynamism occasioned by cultural, economic and political changes in the African continent. Though scholars argue that women in traditional Nigerian societies were not subjugated and therefore, enjoyed equal rights and freedom with men, there are ample and incontrovertible evidences of male domination and oppressive practices against women from the primordial era till today. Skepticism characterises the notion that colonialism improved the status of women. However, the eradication of obnoxious and oppressive practices as well as the introduction of Western education which a few women benefitted from initially strongly indicate that changes motivated by the colonial encounter, to a reasonable extent, enhanced gender equality in Nigeria, and by extension, in Africa.

Revolutionary changes that followed post-colonial Africa also opened new horizons for Nigerian feminist playwrights who now realised that they can no longer swallow hook, line and sinker, the separatist and radical feminist agenda of Western feminism. These changes redefined and set new agenda for different feminist groups within Nigeria and the entire African continent. Incidentally, this trend leads to the proliferation of Nigerian feminist agenda. By definition, agenda simply means all the things that have been listed, outlined or considered to be done, solved or achieved by individuals, a group of individuals or organisations. It would therefore, appear to mean that the goal of Nigerian and indeed African feminists is to evolve agenda that embodies the efforts or agitations of women and those who empathize with the womenfolk to critically examine the factors that make the subordinate position of women in the society

persist. It therefore, follows that the task of ensuring the emancipation of the womenfolk from the shackles of slavery and bondage forms a major item on the agenda of the Nigerian feminist. Hence, major aspects of Nigerian feminist agenda are equal rights, equal opportunities and same treatment under the laws of the land and cultural norms of the people.

The realisation of Nigerian feminist agenda requires tactics, strategisation and conscientisation. Hence Nigerian feminists write books, journal articles, make public speeches and organise rallies as avenues towards accomplishing the Nigerian feminist agenda. Drama and theatre also remain strong instruments that have helped to sustain and will still enhance the realisation of an acceptable Nigerian feminist agenda that champions gender equality. Despite obvious Western influence over Nigerian feminist dramatists, Western and Nigerian feminist agenda differ. It can be said that first generation Nigerian playwrights like John Pepper Clark, Ola Rotimi and many others who have written plays that focus on the liberation of women may have been influenced or inspired by great classical plays like Aristophane's *Lysistrata* and modern plays like August Strindberg's *The Father and Comrades*, and so on. However, a number of contemporary Nigerian playwrights using drama and theatre as useful tools in the on-going efforts at women's liberation show this paradigm shift from the separatist and radical Western feminist agenda.

Emeka Emelobe states that:

In Nigeria many people have canvassed against the stereotype against women... Women such as Moremi, Emotan, Queen Amina, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Madam Tinubu, Margaret Ekpo, Emma Brown and Hajia Sawaba among others, and activities such as the Aba and Opobo Women Riots contributed to women emancipation. As a result... Tess Onwueme, Stella Oyedepo, Julie Okoh, Irene Salami, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Mabel Ewrierhoma and others... have excelled in highlighting the problems faced by women. These writers have taken the task of inbounding women from many centuries of slavery... which has been inflicted upon them by culture (531).

This struggle can be said to be motivated mainly by the generalised and jaundiced opinion or view that the society holds of women. This is amply highlighted in the selected plays for the study. From the traditional society till date, the society tends to view and regard women as being possessed with the spirit of evil and witchcraft, as killers of their husbands to inherit their wealth, as prostitutes and so on. This is even so in other climes such as in the Arabian part of the world.

In his commentary on Arab literature for instance, Nawal El Saadawi states that:

Tolstoy, with his towering literary talent and his denunciation of the evils of feudal and bourgeois Russian society, when speaking of women found nothing better to say than: 'Woman is the instrument of the devil. In most of her states she is stupid. But Satan lends her his head when she acts under his orders'. (520)

Going further, Saadawi opines that Arab literature is "littered with the image of the she-devil, possessed of many faces". This literary pundit throws more light on the image of women which Arab literature portrays thus:

Sometimes when you look at her, you feel as though you are in the company of a playful child opening its innocent eyes with all the simplicity, astonishment and naivete of spontaneous nature, without artifice or deceit. Then, after a while, you look at her again, maybe on the same day, only to find yourself faced by an old and cunning creature who has exhausted her life in the daily practice of conspiracy hatched against other women and men. She laughs and presents to you a face that is meant for nothing else but passion. Then she laughs once more—maybe just a few moments later—and you are in the presence of a mind imbued with humour, and an intelligence sharp with sarcasm, a mind which is that of philosophers, and wits which belong only to those who have the experience of a long embattled life. (521)

According to Soheir El Kalamawi's classic, *A Thousand and One Nights* as cited by Saadawi,

Woman continues to appear on the scene as a capricious vamp, a playful and beautiful slave, a she-devil imbued with cunning and capable of a thousand artifices, an explosive danger versed in all the arts of deceptions and conspiracy, a seductive mistress captivating in her passion. She is as positive and dynamic as Satan and his evil spirits... *A Thousand and One Nights* throbs with hundreds of these captivating women creatures who use magic and sorcery to reach their lovers. Women cast a spell on their husbands so that they cease to be obstacles blocking the path of their desires. It is interesting to note that in this book, sorcery is the monopoly of these seductive beings versed in the secrets of conspiracy,

intent on getting to where they wish to be... Thus the book has painted an image of women, with its own intrinsic logic and therefore, its own peculiar system of rituals, that serves to maintain and reinforce the image handed down from the past... Deceit, cunning and conspiracy in *A Thousand and One Nights* are invariably associated with women. (521)

In traditional Nigerian societies as portrayed in the literary works of some Nigerian playwrights, the unfair picture painted of women by the larger society as evil and incapable of contributing meaningfully to the development of the society appears to be a recurrent motif. Highlighting and decrying the jaundiced opinion that the society holds of the Nigerian woman, Mabel Ekwierhoma makes reference to the works of some Nigerian male literary giants when she states that:

There is evidence to show how male playwrights have coloured women in dark political light, as in Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* in which women feature only in Oba Danlola's harem, and in a club owned by Segi, Kongi's former mistress. Segi's political nature is hardly developed within the play. Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* does not show Mosadiwin in active spheres. His *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* portrays Egbakhavbokun as politically inactive as Mosadiwin. J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* and *Ozidi* present women who are burdened with taboos, stigmas and evil supernatural qualities instead of being forceful political characters... In Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon*, Iyalode of the Farmer's Revolt regards women's role in the revolt as a source of mere entertainment. Jolomi in this play comes to full realization only when it is too late that she has been used as a tool for the achievement of Moniran's political ends. (60)

This is however contradicted by historical evidence of great Nigerian women who fought for and contributed immeasurably to efforts geared towards the emancipation of the society, especially during the colonial era when such women mustered the courage to confront the colonialists and those perceived to be oppressors of the people. Undoubtedly, this age-long perception of women as evil led the likes of Queen Amina of Zauzau of the 16th century, Queen Moremi of Ile-Ife and Queen Idia of the great Benin Kingdom to agitate and fight for equality between men and women. It is this new frontier of breaking the jinx of male domination that defines the new

Nigerian feminist agenda. The old order which Canice Nwosu draws attention to must give way for the new order. According to Nwosu:

The root of male dominance over the female dates back to traditional societies as reflected in legends, myths, traditions, folklores and cultural practices in most communities in Nigeria and Africa at large. Therefore, since man is traditionally invested with the exercise of power and authority over women and children, he becomes a colossus governed by dictatorial tendencies. Thus despite obvious women liberationist movements, the subordinate role of women seems to persist, probably because most cultures of the world portray her as a companion to the man. The definition of this companionship in most cultures connotes the role of a helper. (166)

The various opinions of researchers on the subject-matter of feminism reveal that there are several or rather, different types of feminism. Utoh-Ezeajugh lists some of the different types of feminism as “radical feminism, accommodationist feminism, humanist feminism, womanist feminism and motherist feminism” (140). Therefore, some feminists hold the opinion that feminism in Africa and indeed in Nigeria is a confused movement especially as the approaches or strategies for achieving Nigerian feminist agenda appear to be an admixture of both radical and conservative ideologies. According to Akachi Ezeigbo, “in whatever form or manner feminism displays or disguises itself, what is constant in all of its shades is the determination of every group to uplift womanhood and strive towards liberating and emancipating women” (2). Therefore, the central item on the agenda of Nigerian feminists is no doubt, addressing the issues of Nigerian women’s marginalisation, oppression and dehumanisation especially in rural parts of the Nigerian society. However, matriarchy cannot replace patriarchy. Thus, the platform that will make the realisation of Nigerian feminist agenda possible is a feminist ideology that champions gender equality. Though feminism differs from genderism, there is a thin dividing line between the two. Moreover, Nigerian feminist playwrights’ ideologies are highly influenced by genderism, especially gender equality. These ideologies require conscientisation and

sensitisation among genders. Drama is a suitable medium for championing Nigerian feminist agenda. Alex Asigbo and Emeka Nwosu opine that:

Drama remains a most apposite medium for the dismantling of specious ideals. This is because of the palpable nature of drama and its capacity to discursively and systematically deconstruct positions through arguments and dramatization of the bathos and pathos in situations. The feminist agenda remains a most passionate subject not only for committed feminists and pretenders, but also for those who see “feminism as a revolt in paradise”. (222)

They maintain that:

Feminism in all its shapes and permutations is sometimes concerned with emancipating women from the supposed shackles of oppression, giving women a place in the scheme of things and generally mainstreaming them especially into decision making and policy formulation positions. (222)

It is also on record that these different versions of feminism share almost the same features. Traditionally, feminists view society as being categorised into different social groups and in their opinion, the division is basically between men and women. Feminist sociologists hold unanimous opinion or view that the society is characterised by exploitation and oppression. They therefore, view and interpret the exploitation and marginalisation of women by men as constant features of Nigerian women’s daily existence in the society. This view is at variance with the opinion of Marxists that the division in the society is the outcome of the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. Michael Haralambos, Martin Holborn, Steve Chapman and Stephen Moore state that:

Many feminists characterise contemporary society as patriarchal; that is, men dominate them... Feminists have argued that men have most of the power in families; that they tend to be employed in better-paid and higher-status jobs than women, and that they tend to monopolise positions of political power. The ultimate aim of these types of feminism is to end men’s domination and to rid society of the exploitation of women...(13)

According to Alison Jaggar as cited by Ben Due Iyav:

...Feminism has always existed. Certainly, as long as women have been subordinated; they have resisted that subordination. Sometimes, the resistance has been collective and conscious; at other times, it has been solitary and only half conscious as when women have sought escape from their socially prescribed roles through illness, drug and alcohol addiction, and even madness. Despite the continuity of women's resistance, however, only within the last two or three hundred years has a visible and widespread feminist movement emerged that has attempted to struggle in an organised way against women's oppression. (251)

Earlier in his opinion, Iyav had stated that feminism as a world-wide movement actually started mainly as a result of gender activists' desire and determination to react appropriately to the marginalisation, oppression and subjugation of women. He states that:

Feminism is a world-wide social movement that has been in existence since the beginning of civilisation. In a more organised way, the movement started due to the need of women (and men) who are gender activists to respond to what they considered as undue victimisation of women by reason of their gender. It is a movement that fights all bottlenecks that are against the general progress of women in societies. Tradition is one aspect of society which feminists see as a major impediment to their growth and so, they attack it vigorously. (251)

Historically, men and women lived peacefully close to nature in rural farming settlements during the pre-modern era. As at then, the gender roles of men and women, boys and girls, were clearly defined. The women were saddled with performing domestic chores, bearing children and so on while men undertook physically taxing or demanding tasks such as farming, hunting, providing shelter and generally fending for their families. In this era, women did not seek to compete with men in any way. However, evolved ideologies, one of which is feminism, also emerged as a reaction to the perceived oppression, unjust laws, oppressive and harmful practices that the society metes out to the womenfolk in 20th century Nigeria. Citing Udengwu Ngozi, Nwagbo Pat Obi states that:

There is always a sort of war of the sexes and ... since it began in the late 18th century, feminism has never pretended over its coverage of a range of ideologies and theories which pay special attention to women's rights and their position in the society. And as a campaign for complete social, economic and political equality between men and women, it is based on experiences of gender roles and relations... Feminism should be understood as a movement based on the recognition of and the fight against the marginalization of female gender in the society... (70)

Gender in Nigeria and in Africa in general, is generally viewed from two perspectives of male and female. The world has, however, gone beyond this traditional gender definition for it has come to be known and accepted that gender is no longer determined biologically on the physical sexual characteristics of a man or woman. It is rather socially constructed to shape how societies in Nigeria are organized in a manner that ensures that women are relegated to the background. Furthermore, experiments on gender modifications as well as researches on gender definitions have yielded results in transgender studies; producing as the case may be: asexual, bisexual and homosexual who are neither males nor females. According to Canice Nwosu:

...Africa is still struggling to deconstruct her negative taboos and cultural practices especially, those targeted at women and children. It is a truism that pros and cons surrounding the deconstruction of those taboos generate gender issues that either reinforce or debunk the stereotype identity of women or the chauvinistic personality of men. Thus, there is no gainsaying that the major hurdle facing African feminist agenda is how to refigure these taboos put in place by men. (5)

According to Osita Ezenwanebe, feminism is a 20th century literary movement that examines the place of women in art and life. She states that:

The history of feminism is that of female opposition to patriarchy as enshrined in the culture of the people. A feminist perspective in drama challenges dominant concepts about women and exposes the various ways in which women are oppressed, suppressed and marginalized, and their consequent quest for emancipation. (17)

The major concern of Nigerian feminism as a philosophical movement is to advocate for, seek, preach and promote equality between men and women with regards to socio-economic and

political considerations or opportunities. Its emergence can be traced to the age-long belief that women were regarded and treated as being unequal and inferior to men. Hence, its insistence that the glaring gender imbalance must be redressed. The subjugation and prejudiced treatment of women in Nigeria are exemplified, according to Emeka Nwabueze, by the “exclusion of women from education, ownership of property, economic independence and political participation”(141). Chimamanda Adichie contends that the subjective definition of what is expected of a male child and what roles a female child plays is partly responsible for the subordinate position of the female folk in the society. Adichie therefore, advises that a girl child should be taught that the concept of “gender roles is absolute non-sense. Do not ever tell her that she should do or not do something because you are a girl” (3). Adichie goes further to pinpoint culture as one of the factors that enforces women’s subjugation by the way the society culturally determines what a male child and a girl child should be individually. Going further to use the way toys are arranged by gender even on the shelves in super stores to analyze her contention, Adichie states that:

I looked at the toy section, also arranged by gender. Toys for boys are mostly active, and involve some sort of ‘doing’-trainers, cars-and toys for girls are mostly ‘passive’ and are overwhelmingly dolls. I was struck by how early our culture starts to form the ideas of what a boy should be and what a girl should be. (3)

Language has been identified as one of the instruments of oppression and suppression which the society employs to ensure the continued domination of women. Ezenwanebe, quotes Spender who contends in his book entitled *Man-Made Language* that linguistically, “... women were made not to be seen or heard and hence completely silenced” (18). Spender’s confident assertion may have been given a boost by Aristotle’s earlier opinion expressed in his *Poetics* as cited by Nwabueze that “women were inferior to men and should therefore, be seen, not heard” (141).Nwabueze goes further to opine that “even in religion, the superiority of men over women

was preached with dexterity. It is therefore, not surprising that the earliest form of feminism focused on the achievement of equal status for women and men” (141). In today’s religious circles, women are still being made to occupy the backseat. Perhaps, this is as a result of the teachings of the holy bible, where Nigerians have learnt that men were the original creations of God and that women came later out of their ribs.

The preoccupation of contemporary Nigerian feminists is to ensure that there is equality between men and women rather than entronement of matriarchy. Canice Nwosu and Nicholas Akas explain that Zulu Sofola, in her *Sweet Trap*, provides the two parallel feminist lines that can never meet: the radical and conservative lines. They state that:

Consequently the clash of liberalism and radicalism becomes Sofola’s locomotive engine for this enigmatic paradigm shift that brought enormous influence on African women writers and the African feminist agenda. The conflict makes Mrs Ajala and Mrs Fatima become introspective and change their radical feminist stand. Though initially the duo of Mrs. Ajala and Fatima attempted to influence Mrs. Oyegunle against the male folk, through persuasion the liberationists are able to convince them and suddenly we see them transform to womanists who recognize their natural roles in the society and acknowledge that their husbands deserve respect. (246)

Since the revelation of Sofola’s position, other notable Nigerian playwrights like John Pepper Clark, Ola Rotimi, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Emeka Nwabueze, Barclays Ayakoroma and many others who have lent their weight and support to the feminist movement have continuously refigured the Nigerian feminist agenda with their plays. The possible outcomes of the efforts of these contemporary Nigerian dramatists towards advancing the Nigerian feminist agenda through their plays are their ability to identify and address some of the oppressive practices devised and employed by the male-dominated Nigerian societies to keep women in chains rather than entronement of matriarchy. Augustine Anigala contends that the rights of women expressed through agitations to be recognised and reckoned with by men as equal partners in national

development should be upheld by well-meaning members of the society for several reasons. One of such reasons is that “women are perceived to be less corrupt than men and this will likely result in good governance” (60). Anigala blames the economic and socio-political woes plaguing African nations, including Nigeria, on “... The fraudulent practices of male politicians whose political drive is personal economic empowerment...”(60). In *Nneora*, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh urges women “not to forget their feminine virtues and see themselves as mothers of the world”(np). However, the battle line has been redrawn and the combat zone has gone beyond male and female gender. Hence Nigerian feminists must re-strategise in order to fit into new global fronts. Otherwise, they will be left behind by time.

Nigerian feminist agenda therefore, embodies efforts or agitations of those who empathize with the womenfolk in Nigeria to examine the factors that make the subordinate position of women, persist in the Nigerian society. The agenda embodies the efforts of Nigerian feminists to evolve strategies that will promote the realisation of Nigerian feminist agenda. On the other hand, Nigerian feminism which tilts towards genderism is committed to promoting gender equality. This is evident in its commitment as a movement to bridging the gap of inequality between men and women. Nigerian feminist theory therefore, aims at enforcing women’s empowerment, self-actualization and liberation.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Various opinions of researchers on the subject-matter of feminism reveal that there are different types of feminism hence some feminist scholars are of the opinion that feminism in Africa is a confused movement. This is because the strategies for realising Nigerian feminist agenda appear to be an admixture of radical and conservative feminist ideologies. Therefore, these discordant tunes weaken the realization of an acceptable Nigerian feminist ideology that champions gender

equality. The researcher therefore, attempted to critically examine the proliferation of Nigerian feminist agenda by Nigerian playwrights to ascertain how they have used drama and theatre to address the issue of maltreatment of women in the society. Hence the contributions of first generation Nigerian playwrights like Rotimi and Clark, second generation playwrights like Nwabueze, third generation playwrights like Salami and Ayakoroma and one of the new voices on the scene, Kelechi Ogbonna, to the feminist discourse were examined with a view to establishing whether or not these Nigerian playwrights, irrespective of the generational gaps among them, agree or differ in their opinions on what constitutes a widely accepted Nigerian feminist agenda.

1.3. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to harmonize discordant tunes of Nigerian feminist dramatists and determine what constitutes a generally acceptable Nigerian feminist agenda. Objectives include examining the goals of feminist scholars and various feminist movements in Nigeria which include womanism, motherism, Stiwanism, femalism, black feminism, sexism, battle of sexes, liberal or conservative feminism, radical feminism, and so on and assessing the suitability of their agenda for liberating the female folk from patriarchal domination. Objectives of the study also include assessing the suitability of the radical and conservative approaches and how the selected Nigerian plays of Nwabueze's *The Dragon's Funeral*, Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave*, Salami's *More than Dancing* and Ogbonna's *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub* can achieve gender equality between men and women, rather than entronement of matriarchy, using the media of theatre and drama to effectively sensitize the society.

1.4. Scope of the Study

This study is concerned with how the Nigerian dramatist has used his or her drama to project the feminist agenda in Nigeria. The study therefore, zeros in on Nwabueze's *The Dragon's Funeral*, Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, Ayakroma's *Dance on His Grave*, Salami's *More than Dancing* and Ogbonna's *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub*, thereby x-raying the various ways Nigerian feminists have approached redressing of subjugation of women in the largely patriarchal Nigerian society for the purpose of achieving gender equality.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in the fact that even though the plays that have been used for this study may have been studied by a number of critics, the researcher has however, adopted a new approach to the study of the selected plays: a three tier analysis approach that exposes gender issues from the family level to the community level and to the national level. Secondly, generational categorisation of the selected playwrights helps to show the need to harmonise proliferation of Nigerian feminist agenda. The study is therefore significant to feminist and gender scholars as well as to students because at the end of this study, a generally acceptable Nigerian feminist agenda will emerge through gender equality in the society which is the main thrust of Nigerian feminism. The findings of this research will later be published as book chapters and journal articles as a way of contributing to the body of literature available in the area of dramatic theory and criticism.

1.6. Methodology

The researcher adopted the simple random sampling, the case study and content analysis approaches of the qualitative research method.

The qualitative method uses the instrument of content analysis for analysis of case studies. The simple random sampling helped the researcher to go through many feminist plays, while taking into consideration the generational gaps among the playwrights as well as the proliferation of the feminist agenda in the plays. Thereafter, the researcher selected the ones that are suitable for the study. This approach helped the researcher to select his primary sources of data while content analysis helped in analysing the texts that have been chosen for the study. This involved going through the materials and relating the information gathered from them to the research topic. The researcher used the MLA style of referencing to acknowledge all materials used in the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual Clarifications

i. Feminism

Feminism has been defined or generally regarded as a movement that originally agitated for equality between men and women. The movement emerged around 1790 and began to gain momentum during the French Revolution which lasted from 1789 to 1799. That period in history is noted for its far-reaching social and political upheavals, especially in France. Osita Ezenwanebe states that:

The history of feminism is that of female opposition to patriarchy as enshrined in the culture of the people. A feminist's perspective in drama challenges dominant concepts about women and exposes the various ways in which women are oppressed, suppressed and marginalized. (17)

Again, according to Ezenwanebe as cited by Pat Obi Nwagbo, feminism also represents:

The quest for freedom which informs the women liberation movements in the early 1960s is codified as feminism in literary circles. It is an ideology in art and life which exposes the oppression of women and articulates ways for their freedom. Feminism, at inception is characterized by anger, bitterness and a thirst for revenge. The aim then is to achieve equality through femininity and to bond together in sisterhood to dethrone male supremacy by rearranging the society in favor of women.(73)

In her contribution, Akachi Ezeigbo avers that feminism is an ideology which emerged around the 20th century as a response to the agitations of women and those who empathize with the female folk that “society should recognize claims of women for rights (legal, political, social and economic) equal to those possessed by men” (1). Ezeigbo goes further to state that feminism as a philosophical movement is committed to addressing oppressive laws and practices perpetrated against women in the society. She states that:

It emerged as a response to oppressive and unjust laws and attitudes arrayed against women. These laws ensured that women remained in subservient, dependent and marginalised positions, permanently relegating them to the background. Feminism, in a nutshell, is ideologically designed to liberate and emancipate women worldwide from oppression, ignorance, poverty and self-immolation. (1)

Feminism can also be defined as a social movement that is against the oppression of women by the male-dominated society. It is therefore, a movement that seeks to liberate women from male exploitation. It has also been defined as a modern social movement that promotes specific changes in the legal, social, economic, political and cultural conditions of women. It is an ideology that preaches and promotes opposition to all misogynist ideas, behaviors and conducts. In her contribution to the discourse on feminism, Ngozi Udengwu agrees that it is a movement which recognises that women are marginalised in Nigeria and in line with Talcott Parsons' injunction to modern societies on goal attainment, feminists according to Udengwu's definition, should recognise the urgent need to channel their collective energies towards tackling the injustices that the female folk suffers in the society. Nwagbo Pat Obi cites Udengwu to emphasise that feminism is:

... a set of beliefs and theoretical constructions about the nature of women's oppression and the part that this oppression plays within social reality... Feminism should be understood as a movement based on the recognition of and the fight against the marginalisation of female gender in the society while feminism as an adjective refers to the agents of feminism fighting against female subjugation and oppression... (70-71)

In his contribution, Ben Due Iyav states that:

Feminism was originally a French word. It referred to what, in the 19th Century, was called the women movement. It comprised a diverse collection of groups all aimed at advancing the position of women in the society and invariably improving their conditions of living and status... Feminism promotes equality for men and women alike, in all sectors of the society, including the political, economic, social and general spheres. Around 1970, feminism began to take many forms. Women,

in the first instance, started to organise pockets of resistance against everything that was an impediment to women's development. (251)

According to Chimamanda Adichie, feminism is a movement which supports agitations for the upholding of women's rights. She goes further to state that:

Some people ask, 'why the word, *feminist*? Why not just say you are a believer in human rights or something like that?' Because that would be dishonest. Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general-but to choose to use the vague expression *human rights* is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender. It would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded. It would be a way of denying that the problem of gender targets women. That the problem was not about being human, but specifically about being a female human. For centuries, the world divided human beings into two groups and then proceeded to exclude and oppress one group. It is only fair that the solution to the problem should acknowledge that. (41)

Feminism as a movement or philosophy and feminist theatre are two sides of the same coin.

While feminism is a philosophy that guides women liberation movements, feminist theatre is concerned with showcasing the peculiar experiences of women. In her contribution, Ngozi Udengwu defines feminist theatre as a theatre that is about women. She opines that feminist theatre is:

A forum that enables women to articulate what it feels like to be a woman. They share ideas and stories surrounding their relationship to sexuality, their experiences at workplace and in their families. They also share memories, dreams, hopes and fantasies. Stories for performances are created from these personal and direct experiences of members of the group, hence actions center around such unusual subjects as abortion, beautification of women's bodies to feed male desire; rape, seen as a patriarchal weapon to intimidate and rob women of their right to express their own sexual desire and so on...Feminist theatre is therefore, a theatre about women and womanhood, shared among women to raise the consciousness of women and to give women a voice. (33)

In the opinion of Emeka Nwabueze, feminism is a concept that pays:

Significant attention to women's rights as well as their position in the society. It advocates equality between men and women, especially with regard to political, social and economic considerations. It arises out of the belief that women were considered unequal to men... the earliest form of feminism focused on the achievement of equal status for women and men.(140-141)

In her contribution, Gloria Chukukere stresses the vulnerability of women in the society as a result of the fact that they are made to “function in a society- traditional and modern- where certain role expectations and social taboos counterbalance and often conflict with the search for individual self-expression” (120). On her part, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh observes that “Feminism has advanced...to a movement for dismantling entrenched patriarchal structures that have deprived women of equal rights and opportunities as men. It is a literary as well as a cultural reaction to the excesses of male stereotype” (140).

In her contribution to the discourse on Feminism, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, like other pundits, affirms that women in Nigeria certainly have some injustices to grapple with on a daily basis and that although feminism as a literary and philosophical movement is meant to address the perceived injustices that women in Nigeria suffer, the strategies and methods or approaches employed by Nigerian feminists may differ “even though they do not differ on basic assumptions” (546). She goes further to state that:

Generally, feminism, however, must always have a political and activist spine to its form... For those who say that feminism is not relevant to Africa, can they truthfully say that the African woman is all right in all ... areas of her being and therefore, does not need an ideology that addresses her reality, hopefully and preferably, to ameliorate that reality? When they argue that feminism is foreign, are these opponents able to support the idea that African women or cultures did not have ideologies which propounded or theorized woman’s being and provided avenues and channels for women’s oppositions and resistance to injustice within their societies? Certainly, these channels existed. Are the opponents of feminism willing to argue that indigenous African societies did not have avenues and strategies for correcting gender imbalance and injustice...? Are they saying that African women cannot see their own situations and demand change? (547-548)

This Nigerian feminist takes her contributions to the discourse on feminism further by coming up with the concept of Stiwanism. She states that:

I have ... advocated the word, “Stiwanism” instead of feminism to bypass the combative discourses that ensue whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa... “Stiwa” is my acronym for Social Transformation including Women in Africa. This new term describes my agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitateness or having to constantly define our agenda on the African continent in relation to other feminisms. This new term, “STIWA” allows me to discuss the needs of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social well-being of women... “STIWA” is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa... (549-550)

The socio-cultural and historical realities of women in Africa are, no doubt, constant items in the agenda of Nigerian feminists. Carol Boyce Davies attempts to provide a clearer explanation of the injustices that women suffer in Nigeriawhen she quotes Filomina Steady as having stated that:

Among them, lack of choice in motherhood and marriage, oppression of barren women, genital mutilation, enforced silence and a variety of other forms of oppression intrinsic to various societies which still plague African women’s lives and must inevitably be at the crux of African feminist theory. (562)

Implied in the above definitions of feminism is that it is all about confronting patriarchy; it is all about challenging the existing statusquo with a view to bringing about desired changes in the subjugated and oppressed position that the Nigerian woman has found herself in the society. Such changes are expected to be positive and in the favour of women. The playwrights, whose plays have been chosen for this study advocate freedom for women from all forms of gender discrimination, injustices and biases. The playwrights use the female characters in their plays as champions of the rights and privileges that the Nigerian woman has been denied or deprived of over time, in the society. Essentially, Chimamanda Adichie defines who a feminist is. According to her, “when I looked the word up in the dictionary, it said: *Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes*”(47). She goes further to state that “My own definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, ‘Yes, there’s a problem with gender

as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better. *All of us, women and men, must do better*” (48).

ii. Nigerian Feminism

Nigerian feminism is a movement that tilts towards genderism; it preaches and is devoted to promoting gender equality and human development as a tool for poverty reduction and women’s empowerment. Genderism is therefore, concerned with bridging the gap of inequality between men and women or between males and females. Genderism is concerned with streamlining gender inequality by exploring the diversity in the rights and even talents of both men and women. Nigerian feminist theory therefore aims at enforcing women’s empowerment, self-actualisation and liberation. Several authorities contend that the distinct feature of Nigerian feminism lies in its social and humanistic thrust. The idea of gender equality is highlighted by Chimamanda Adichie when she states that:

A Nigerian acquaintance once asked me if I was worried that men would be intimidated by me. I was not worried at all- it had not even occurred to me to be worried because a man who would be intimidated by me is exactly the kind of man I would have no interest in. (28)

Unlike the Western model of feminism therefore, Nigerian feminism is not combative both in theory and application. Nigerian feminism seeks to promote accommodation between men and women which sociologists define as a term that is used to describe relations between discrete populations and suggests that such groups should find ways of co-existing without losing their defining characteristics. To this end, Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman and Moore, define accommodation as “a process that allows people ‘to live and work on friendly terms’ but it does not ensure that relations will remain harmonious. The groups with less power and status eventually decide that their position is unsatisfactory and they may seek to improve

it...”(167).Accommodation is a complex process of inter-group adjustment. Most often, this process involves some level of competition, conflict and then accommodation.

iii. Gender

In common usage, gender simply means the distinction between females and males on the basis of their distinctive anatomy. Sociological usage is importantly different in the sense that sociologists often use “sex” for the biological differences between women and men and “gender” for the packages of social characteristics that are culturally associated with the sex difference. Gender as a concept in this study broadens feminism. The word, gender is therefore, often used to denote issues or discourses that center on the sexes. Quoting M.H. Abrams, Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu states that:

Gender ...is based on the premise that while sex (a person’s identification as male or female) is determined by anatomy, gender (masculinity or femininity in personality traits and behavior) can be largely independent of anatomy and is a social construction that is diverse, variable and dependent on historical circumstances ... it has an obvious (and sometimes contentious) overlap with feminism, gay studies and lesbian studies. (90)

According to Samuel Olowe, gender means:

The social attributes and opportunities associated with being female and male, and the relationships between men and women or girls and boys, as well as the relations between women/girls and men/boys. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through the socialization process...(62)

It is not in doubt that the understanding of gender can go beyond the ordinary dictionary meaning of “the fact of being either a male or a female” hence Ameh Dennis Akoh states that “in Africa, the field of gender is daily receiving extended attention from scholars, policy makers, experts and all concerned individuals and organisation...For the sociologist, gender...is socially constructed”(155-157).Akor’s position is reinforced by Bolic, G. G. who he cites as having stated that:

We are born beings with sex but gender is something acquired ... Although we are assigned a gender at birth, we must grow into it. We must be 'gendered'-made into gendered being... Either way, we are in constant contact with the attributions based on our gender assignment and under the force of the social processes meant to make us the gender we were assigned. (157)

In her contribution to the on-going discourse on gender, Mabel Ekwierhoma posits that:

Gender represents the roles ascribed to females and males within socio-cultural contexts. The interaction between male and female is considered in different ways in different cultures... Gender is important to us because as a concept, it affords us the opportunity to assess culture as well as roles across behaviors that are considered accepted and expected for women and men. (137)

According to Mu'Azu and Ugoechi as cited by Emeka Aniago, gender is:

... A broad analytical concept. It is linked to social behaviors, which is deemed to be appropriate to masculine and feminine roles in the society. It draws out women's roles and responsibilities in relation to those of men. It is not synonymous with sex, which is a biologically determined characteristic of men and women. Generally, gender is defined as socially constructed roles, relationships and learned behaviors of male or female. (390)

Gender can be said to refer to a range of characteristics that are inextricably linked to as well as differentiating masculinity from femininity. The key point to note in the above explanation of gender by Mu'Azu and Ugoechi is the fact that the concept of gender varies from society to society; in other words, it is a concept, a situation or condition that is socially acquired. Furthermore, experiments on gender modifications as well as researches on gender definitions have yielded results in transgender studies, producing as the case may be, asexual, bisexual, and such other expanded gender terrains covering, gays, lesbianism and transsexual orientations. One of the authorities on transgender studies is Anne Fausto-Sterling. She posits that the existence of more than two sexes- male or female- should be accepted. In her explanation, transgendered people are people who have both male and female characteristics. She cautions against surgeries to modify or alter the genitals of babies. She also stresses that their right to equality and to be

different from either male or female should be recognised and upheld. She states, as cited by Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman and Moore that:

We are moving from an era of sexual dimorphism to one of variety beyond the number two. We inhabit a moment in history when we have the theoretical understanding and practical power to ask a question unheard of before in our culture-“should there be only two sexes?” (103)

Transgender, therefore, refers to a situation where someone’s gender identity or gender expression fails to match his or her assigned sex. Transgender is not basically contingent on sexual orientation hence transgender individuals can be identified as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. The definition of gender can therefore be summarised as:

Of relating to, or designating a person whose identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender roles, but combines or moves between these; people who were assigned a sex, usually at birth and based on their genitals but who feel that this is a false or incomplete description of themselves... A transgender individual may have characteristics that are normally associated with a particular gender and identify elsewhere on the traditional gender continuum or exist outside of it as other gender, gender neutral, gender queer, non-binary or third gender...(Wikipedia)

iv. Patriarchy

Sociologically, patriarchy is regarded as a social organisation that is structured in a manner that ensures the dominance of men over women. It is a system of rule by men which ensures the domination of women by men. Thus we can have the patriarchal family, patriarchal societies or a work setting which is run in a patriarchal manner. Until the late 1960s, the term was used to describe societies characterised or marked by male domination of women. Presently, it carries a clear stigma: patriarchal rule is oppressive against women in patriarchal societies. One of Nigeria’s quintessential academics, Mabel Ewrierhoma, makes an attempt at explaining the term patriarchy. Perhaps her intention is to underline the fact that no one will be discussing feminism if there is no patriarchy as a structure. She states that:

In general, patriarchy is termed the rule, dominance, or authority of the father. Where this rule obtains is an organisational setup in which men regulate or dominate affairs whether they concern them directly or indirectly. This is seen in the form of male supremacy entrenched in social formations, for example, the family, village or community organisations, religion, politics, the economy, the work place, all of which are social spaces... In a patriarchal set up, the word of the father or male elder is law, respected or feared. The patriarch becomes the locus on which other members of the family, especially women and children revolve. (3)

She goes further to cite Gerda Lerner thus:

To Gerda Lerner, two metaphors delimit patriarchy and these are the divine or that which concern Western civilization, and the Aristotelian. In her view, both are metaphors of the devaluation of women. Both constructs she believes, are entrenched in our systems of living and denote that “the subordination of women comes to be seen as ‘natural’ hence it becomes invisible”. She submits finally that “it is this which finally establishes patriarchy firmly as an actuality and as an ideology”. (3)

According to Praise Chidinma Daniel-Inim, patriarchy is a social set-up in which the man wields enormous power and influence. She states that:

In a patriarchal set-up, the man wields the power and the authority that organizes the social structure. He is the authorising force behind the social, political, economic and religious decisions in the society. Thus while the man from childhood is indoctrinated with a superiority complex, the woman is merely treated as inferior to the man... (224)

Going further, Daniel-Inim cites Kynaston as having stated that “patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices through which men oppress and exploit women. It is a system where men are the lords while women are the servants”(224).According to Valerie Bryson as cited by Ewrierhoma,“in a patriarchy, the family is indeed a central part of society’s power structure; as such, it both sustains patriarchal power... and it is itself a source of women’s oppression” (4).

In her contribution, Fatima Bint Ibrahim states that:

Patriarchy has been defined as the recurring decimal that negates the capacity of women to enjoy their rights as stipulated in the governing statutes of state and religion. It is a social construct that defines roles and standards and arrogates power and supremacy only to men... Patriarchy is control and power by the male over the female. It is the rule of the father over the mother as characterized by the male dominating system where the female is a subordinate. (476)

The control as exercised by the menfolk in Nigeria, which the various authorities have referred to in their scholarly contributions to the subject-matter of patriarchy, is clearly derivable from, and driven or sustained by hegemonic tendencies of the male in his uncanny desire to be in charge at all times and play the lord and master over the woman.

v. Matriarchy

Matriarchy has different meanings. It can be referred to as a system of rule by women. It is a social organisation which ensures that descent and inheritance are traceable to the female line. Sociologically, matriarchy is a socially organised system which is based on the principle of mother-rule; it ensures that mothers are at the top of the power structure hence some authorities contend that matriarchy is a system that confers most of the authority and power on women. In such societies, ownership of property is an exclusive right of women. In her contribution to the concept of matriarchy, Fatima Binta Ibrahim identifies matriarchy and patriarchy as socio-political realities that “demarcate and spell out gender roles”. She maintains that:

Matriarchy is the struggle of the female in the unequal class position where she finds herself. This is a means of protecting, on the other hand, the struggle of the female in the unequal class position where she finds herself. This is a means of protecting equity and importance despite her sex. Matriarchy becomes the weapon for female politics in the search for a new identity. (476)

In summary, matriarchy is regarded as a socio-cultural system in which females have a major role to play in the economy, governance and even in socio-cultural institutions, even though most anthropologists contend that there are no true matriarchies in the real sense of female dominance.

vi. Dynamism

In a literary sense, dynamism implies the way or manner people behave or react to a given situation and the strategies initiated to tackle the particular situation with a view to making changes positively. In this context, dynamism can be understood to mean the mechanism or strategies that oppressed Nigerian women have adopted to deal with the oppressive situation that they find themselves in. These strategies include but not limited to protests, demonstrations, revolution and even riots against their oppressors. When applied to the concept of feminism in Nigeria, dynamism is concerned with changes arising out of the development of the society. Dynamism also has to do with how the dynamics of the traditional society, colonial, post-colonial up to the post-modern society have continuously influenced and redefined feminism and the feminist struggle in Nigeria. Dynamism therefore, indicates the various periods and changes that characterise the development and evolution of feminism, especially in Nigeria. These periods of development span the traditional, colonial, post-colonial, modern and post-modern period. It is on record that beginning from the nineteenth century up to early twentieth century, the first wave of feminist movement made its debut on the global scene. The second wave was in the 60s and 70s while the third wave covers the 90s to the present. The periodisation characterises and is responsible for the development or the different evolutionary stages that feminism has undergone and continues to undergo globally, especially in Nigeria.

Feminism in Nigeria is an off-shoot of Western feminism. Nigerian feminism therefore, originated from the Western world. Feminism continued in Nigeria until the colonial era when Nigerian women began to think that Western feminist approach was no longer suitable and therefore, unworkable in Nigeria's, giant of Africa, peculiar socio-cultural setting. It was this shift from the Western feminist approach that led Nigerian feminist scholars to appropriate Alice

Walker's concept of womanism and also come up with other concepts like motherism and Stiwanism which are equally gender friendly. They go further to outline the dynamism or changes that have helped to shape feminism in Nigeria. Citing Emmy Idegu, Nwosu and Akas state that:

Feminism started as movements from the West. Nevertheless, over the years, the experience and reactions thereof have become firm in most developing economies of the World. Because cultures differ such reactions (acceptable and unacceptable) sometimes have colorations of the people's typical experience without, however, undermining the basic and fundamental foundation principles of the movement. (237)

As part of the dynamism that has come to characterise the development of feminism in Nigeria, Nigerian feminist scholars have started to take into cognizance the wind of change blowing across the entire world, particularly in Nigeria where the basic tenets of democracy as a system of governance have begun to develop tap roots.

vii. Revolution

In general usage, revolution which is geared towards bringing about fundamental changes in the society with regards to the redistribution of social, economic and political powers or authorities refers to a process of change involving the mobilisation of a mass social movement towards transforming the society. It is said to have been derived from the Latin word, "revolve", which means to roll back or revolve. Revolution is derived from the verb, revolt. It simply means a protest or resistance against authority. Revolution occurs when a section of the people or population feel marginalised and oppressed and then revolt against their oppressors. However, for revolution to take place there is always a motivating ideology which instigates the oppressed to revolt against their oppressors. Revolutions can be in the form of peaceful protests or violent protests but the truth is that in every historical epoch in the development of mankind, there has been at least one recorded revolution or the other that has taken place to change an oppressive situation or policy. The methods may vary from society to society and from one historical epoch

to the other. The consequences of revolutions include far-reaching changes in culture, economy, traditional, social, economic and even in political institutions. The essence is to reorder the society, a system or an institution.

There are several scholarly debates about what constitutes a revolution. One of the contributors to these debates holds that revolutions could be sudden and violent. Sociologists always cite Alex de Tocqueville as having stated that “revolutions seek not only to establish a new political system but to transform an entire society. Slow but sweeping transformation of the entire society that takes several generations to achieve; such as changes in religion” (Edokobi, Alfred, *np*).

There is also the revolution by osmosis that sociologists talk about. This type of revolution is by nature, a gradual process. An example is the type that is aimed at reviving the economy of a country. Talcott Parsons, a foremost American sociologist, in his Structural-Functionalist theory, views society as a system in a state of equilibrium. He contends that revolutions occur in the society when the society is in a state of disequilibrium as a consequence of the failure of the various institutions in the society to maintain social order. Jo Okome states that:

The word revolt from where the noun revolution is derived ... has always been associated with deviant behavior- a behavioral pattern that ran contrary to the generally accepted standards of society. But in all cases, the word has always attempted to express and forcibly impress an ideological position which threatens to topple the status quo. (347)

The agitations for freedom by women to be recognised and treated as human beings has led authorities like Judith Bardwick as cited by Mabel Ewrierhoma to regard feminism as “an ideology as well as psychological revolution by women in their struggle to define themselves as individuals”(74). No wonder, therefore, that Ewrierhoma holds that:

The ideology of revolt is one of the major concepts that have continued to influence Nigerian theatre for some time now. The idea of revolt is part of the

radical aspect of theatre, prominent in dreams of ideology which highlight Feminist Marxist as well as other socio-political perspectives... The ideology of revolt therefore, represents a stance in social drama which fights and rebels against those ills the people would want to eradicate from the society... (75-76)

Implied in the above opinion expressed by Ekwierhoma is the fact that feminism as an ideology encourages women to use revolution as a vehicle or a tool, if necessary, to resist oppression, marginalisation and subjugation and then eventually cause a change in their situation. In his contribution, Esiaba Irobi explains that revolutions cannot be divorced from violence; they are two sides of the same coin. This is achieved through the voice of ACID, a character in *Hangmen Also Die*. He is a member of the seven-man gang that makes up the Suicide Squad, a group that is committed to confronting corruption with a determination to stamp it out and rid the society of corrupt leaders. Irobi states that:

Revolutions are always based on violence. On bloodshed and terror. Revolutions are never achieved by holding hands and singing “we shall overcome”... Revolutions are never achieved that way because a revolution is not a dinner party, it is not a disco competition, it is not an ideological romance... It is an act of insurrection where one party overthrows the other. It occurs as the accumulated grievances of the common man. It explodes like the gun powder... (26)

On revolutionaries, those involved in carrying out revolutions with the aim of transforming the society, Irobi states that “revolutionaries do not grovel. They topple. They do not grin and laugh, they frown because what they are facing is the slime, the rot, the maggots, the viruses, the nauseating residue of a consumptive society!” (26). According to Nwosu:

Violence subsumes revolution geared towards fundamental social change accomplished through various acts of violence like rebellion, riots denouncing the authority and at times, guerilla warfare. Violence not only interferes, but destroys an undesirable ... system. (18)

Commenting on Rotimi’s spirited efforts at using drama to call for liberation and empowerment of the Nigerian woman in a patriarchal set-up, Anigala states that:

Rotimi does not hide his disgust for the political class who is bereft of creative ideas yet continue to hold the nation captive. Toying with idea of female empowerment in such a set-up, therefore, amount to a tacit call for revolt. Rotimi is however, not unaware of the fact that the male politicians will be unwilling to hand over power on a platter of gold. Therefore, his recipe for a new political arrangement that will empower female politicians is premised on a collective action by the women after casting away the garments of subservience, ignorance and passiveness... The women can exploit the highhandedness, political naivety and dictatorial tendencies characteristic of most male politicians to advantage... (52-53)

Violence can therefore generally be understood to mean any action that is intended to cause death, serious bodily harm or psychological or mental torture to an individual or group of persons. For the purpose of this study, it will be correct to state that violence is an action by a group of oppressed and marginalised people (women) to compel their oppressors and their agents (men) to respect the dignity of womanhood and be responsive to their agitations. It therefore means that coercion, duress, assault, demonstrations and protest marches are all synonymous with violence.

viii. Terrorism

Terrorism refers to the use of violence or the threat of violence to achieve political, social or economic ends. The *International Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Volume Two defines terrorism as “a ... tactic intended to produce intimidation through the use or threatened use of violence. It has become an increasingly common feature of ... disputes at both the domestic and international levels” (1408).

According to Charles Okwuowulu, terrorism can be classified into two categories: domestic and transitional. He states that:

Domestic terrorism comprises acts that are usually conducted by local groups with the aim of overthrowing a government or achieving political advantage... transitional terrorism refers to terrorist acts by persons or groups that are external to the affected state... (149-150)

The protesting women in all the plays that have been chosen for this study can be said to have employed domestic terrorism as the most available tool at their disposal in their protests against oppression. In the plays, the women refuse to do the men's biddings, employing stubbornness as a tool to drive home the points of their agitations.

2.2. Theoretical Framework: Womanism and Motherism

The primary focus of Nigerian feminism is the welfare of women and the girl child. However other burning issues of female subjugation led to fragmentation in Nigerian feminist agenda. Prominent among these issues are inequality and marginalisation of women. Nigerian feminist theories came to limelight to curb these burning issues. They are reactions against the one dimensional status quo. Thus, Nigerian feminism fragmented to suit specific purposes. There is no doubt that Nigerian feminist theories are adaptations and appropriations of western civilization and feminist struggles; but they have captured Nigeria feminist and gender issues. Consequently, Nigerian feminism has brought forth several other theories to drive home the central issue of gender equality. They include: Womanism (Walker 1982), Stiwanism (Ogundipe 1994), Motherism (Nnaemeka 1997) and Negro-feminism (Nnaemeka 1999). Even though these theories have emerged from Nigerian feminism and feminism as a whole, they have contributed to the proliferation of Nigerian feminist agenda.

However, this study is hinged on the theoretical premise of womanism and motherism. The two theories closely align with liberal or conservative feminism and gender equality; in a sense both, unlike core Western feminism, are anti-separatist and anti-combative in approach thereby encouraging women to associate with men in a relationship of equals or partners and not master/servant relationship. Womanism as a feminist movement is associated with Alice Walker, a Black American novelist and poet who was an active voice in the Black feminist movement.

Alice Walker's first conception of womanism can be captured from her definition of who a womanist is. She maintains that a womanist is:

A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility... women's strength... committed to survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health... loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit... Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. (Linda Napikoski, *np*)

It is a movement for the survival of the black race, taking into consideration the ugly experiences of black women hence the much cited phrase credited to Walker that "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" thereby suggesting that womanism is the broad ideological umbrella under which feminism falls. The theory has been adopted by the researcher as it has been understood as a movement that is capable of addressing the woman question from the standpoint of Nigeria's peculiar socio-cultural settings. It therefore, can be rightly said that womanism represents Nigerian women's reaction or response to gender discrimination and oppression. As a movement, womanism seeks to reform patriarchal structures by actively encouraging accommodation and dialogue between men and women as a necessary step towards reconciling both genders and consequently engendering cooperation between the two. It seeks to achieve this by espousing and adopting anti-militarist and anti-separatist approaches while at the same time tackling, arguing vehemently against as well as working towards dismantling socio-cultural roadblocks erected by the society that make it impossible for women in Nigeria to realise their abilities and potentials. Womanism encourages the educational and economic empowerment of women as a way of encouraging them to rise above oppression, marginalisation and other social restrictions. In a further attempt to provide an apt definition of womanism, Walker says, "...it is the lived experience of —women of colour and also bases on the struggle

of the African woman.” (n.p). The relevance of Walker’ womanism gave Nigerian women the impetus to evolve Nigerian womanism. Hence, Nigerian womanism has come to influence Nigerian feminist agenda as well as influencing most Nigerian women playwrights to focus on gender equality in their plays. Thus the difference between Nigerian and Eurocentric feminism is that Eurocentric feminism preaches gender separatism and extremism. They champion the total extinction of men, but Nigerian womanism is against separatism; rather, they believe in gender equality and equity. Theoretical provisions of womanism are similar to those of motherism even though the proponent of the theory, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu symbolises woman in a mother. Acholonu’s thought on motherism, is simply, equal rights for mothers. According to Acholonu: “the traditional role of the African woman has essentially been that of a matriarch and social nurturer. Motherism would refer to an Afrocentric feminist theory: . . . anchored on the matrix of motherhood . . .” (Acholonu, 1995). This is born out of her conviction that a mother has the ability of the woman to nurture a child into adulthood as well as her ability to organise her home. Thus, motherism does not subjugate men but seeks for a level playing ground where the woman will succeed as a mother. Hence, it is an Afro-centric feminist theory hinged on the matrix of a woman as a mother. This concept also gives the woman a central position in Nigerian cosmology as the channel of survival and continuance of race that unite the community.

According to Acholonu, motherism is:

A multi-dimensional theory which involves the dynamics of ordering, recording, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with Mother Nature at all levels of human endeavour. Cooperation with nature is paramount to motherism and the task of the motherist is that of healing and protecting the natural cohesive essence of the family, the child, the society and the environment. Therefore, the motherist must be a humanist, a healer, a co-creator with God and nature: an environmentalist. (111)

As a theoretical framework, motherism is “against the straight-jacket nature of Western feminism which embodies separateness, individualism, violent confrontation and antagonism” (Roseline Yacim,192). To accentuate her explanation of motherism, Yacim goes further to note Acholonu’s stand on the true nature of a motherist. According to Acholonu as cited by Yacim:

The motherist is the man or woman committed to the survival of mother earth as a hologrammatic entity. The weapon of motherism is love, tolerance, service and mutual cooperation of the sexes, not antagonism, aggression, militancy or violent confrontation, as has been the case with radical feminism. (192)

As a movement, motherism embodies or represents the struggles of an oppressed and subjugated group for freedom from oppressive and dehumanising cultural practices that hold the Nigerian woman in captivity. It connotes motherhood, nature and nurture. It seeks to evaluate men and women in a manner that encourages complementarity of the sexes rather than equality or an outright dethronement of patriarchy or enthronement of matriarchy over patriarchy. This complementarity of the sexes is an attempt to create genuine awareness that men should not be seen as rivals to women. It is a movement that seeks a healthy mental disposition that sees men and women as equals or partners.

Unarguably, motherism is a movement that shares with womanism similar values of tolerance, accommodation and mutual cooperation between men and women in the task of ordering, re-ordering and creating the necessary structures that will enable Nigerian women gain freedom from oppressive structures and institutionalised conventions. Both womanism and motherism appear to be communal in their orientation and application and therefore, can be said to be ideologically committed to ensuring that the destiny of an oppressed group in the society is discussed in a meaningful context with a view to changing the status quo and replacing it with a modified system under which the Nigerian society will have no option but to reckon with women as equal partners with men in the collective enterprise of developing the society. The two

theories no doubt, have been appropriated by Nigerian feminists because of the suitability of their feminist ideological viewpoints to the Nigerian feminist agenda. Grace E. Okereke broadly defines African feminism and by extension, Nigerian feminism thus:

African feminism cherishes what is good in tradition but rejects that which diminishes the woman as an individual and as part of the society. In this feminism, motherhood, companionship, mutual growth and interdependence of man and woman in marriage are cherished, but polygamy, male dominance, sexism and patriarchal definition of woman are rejected. (13)

In other words, womanism and motherism rolled into one have given birth to Nigerian feminism, which is concerned with protecting Nigerian womanhood against being bastardised or debased by the society. Contextual analysis of the ideological viewpoints expressed in the selected plays shows that they are strongly supported by both theories. The researcher, therefore, combines womanism and motherism as propounded by Walker and Acholonu to arrive at a theoretical framework for this study.

In adopting the non-militarist, non-combative and non-separatist strategies or approaches which are core tenets of womanism and motherism, the women's heroism in the selected texts lies in their ability and determination to stay committed to their cause, to stay focused and united in their struggles for justice and freedom. Therefore, it can be said that both Walker and Acholonu have through their theories, provided an invincible foothold for the collective ideologies expressed in the selected plays for this study as their ideologies about women's organised struggles against patriarchal domination using the combined tools of tolerance, mutual cooperation and love constitute a common philosophical thread that runs through the selected plays.

2.3. The History of Feminist Movements in Nigeria

The term, women liberation, simply means women's quest or agitation for freedom from oppression and all other forms of maltreatment that they suffer in traditional patriarchal Nigerian societies. The traditional society of most Nigerian tribes recorded tangible activities of women liberationists that were not labeled feminism or genderism but historical facts show that women like Queen Amina made their marks when the values revolved around wars and conquests. However, with the dynamism of revolution colonialism changed the values. Consequently, participation in politics and eradication of obnoxious and oppressive practices against women became priority areas for feminists. It is widely held that feminism emerged from the ashes of women liberation movements in the nineteenth century Europe and America as recorded by feminist historians; the truth is that Nigerian women, have been actively involved in liberation struggles to free the womenfolk from oppression and patriarchal domination, although they did not label their protests feminism or feminist movements. They obviously had idea of radical feminism, womanism, femalism, motherism and such other nomenclatures that are associated with women protests or agitations for freedom from oppression but never organised their agitations under such ideological proliferations that initially derailed the feminist agenda in Nigeria. Though, socio-cultural changes ushered in modern theatre at the threshold of Nigeria's independence and the wave of feminism entered the theatre; dynamism of revolution reveals Nigerian playwrights' inclinations and perception of women revolution. The first generation playwrights do not show proliferation of feminist movements but commit their feminist cause to eradication of oppressive practices against women and getting better treatment, protection and welfare for women and their children, especially female children who, like women, are also vulnerable groups. Changes in women liberation activities and manifestation of proliferation of feminist movements occasioned by changes in the goal of feminists started manifesting in Zulu

Sofola's *Sweet Trap* and Emeka Nwabueze's *The Dragon's Funeral* which contains names like Akugo, Captain Cook, Nwanyeruwa and so on, which are recorded in history as characters who were involved in the protests against the activities and taxation policies, perceived as "anti-women policies" of the colonial government in Eastern Nigeria. But again, this playwright did not make the slightest reference to the fact that the play, *The Dragon's Funeral*, was inspired by the historic "sheroism" of women in Eastern Nigeria which culminated in the riot popularly referred to as Aba women's riots. According to Nwosu for instance, *Hopes of the Living*, is a recreation of the "Odokaraulo saga-the lepers' menace in Ubomiri around 1928" (np). To all intents and purposes, therefore, the various protests such as the Egba and Abeokuta women's protests in 1918, Aba women's riots of 1929 and another Egba and Abeokuta women's protests of 1946/47 led by the legendary Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti, the Enugu coal miners' strike of 1949 and several other pockets of protests and riots in several other parts of the country, were protests championed by women to protest against their oppression, marginalisation and attempts to emasculate them economically by the male dominated colonial government. The protests were staged to effect a change in their situation. So if feminism is about agitations for change in the oppressed women's situation, then the Egba Women's Riots of 1918, Aba Women's Riots of 1929, the second Egba and Abeokuta Women's Riots of 1946 and 1947 as well as the Coal Miners' Strike of 1949, in which women participated actively to bring about positive and enduring changes in the economic situations of their homes, all qualify to be classified as feminist movements or rather, Nigerian feminism.

Women liberationists agitate that women should be allowed to enjoy certain rights, including being allowed to participate in the development of the society. However, tradition and even the Christian religion have not been helpful to the agitations to free women from oppression and

marginalisation. Nigerian traditions advocate that women should be completely subordinate and submissive to men; even in the holy bible women are enjoined to be submissive to and respect their husbands. We see an example of women's total submission to men, for instance, in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* when Sikira addresses her husband, Lejoka-Brown as "my lord" (6) and in Emeka Nwabueze's *The Dragon's Funeral* where Obidie addresses her husband, Chief Okeugo as *Nna-anyi*; literally *Nna-anyi* means our father but it actually indicates the profoundness of the woman's reverence for her husband as her "lord".

In Nigeria, aside from being submissive to their husbands, women take the blame for whatever goes wrong in the society. Even problems concerning child birth are blamed on the woman. For example, a woman who has only female children hardly escapes punishment by either her husband or the society, especially her in-laws, who make her an object of ridicule. The least that such a woman suffers from her husband is being subjected to all kinds of psychological tortures. This is buttressed by the following dialogue between Nneora and Ikenna in Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Nneora: an African Doll's House*:

Nneora: Yes, the scan shows that I am carrying twins.

Ikenna: Oh my God! What a fulfilling Christmas! I am sure they are boys. I feel it in my bones.

Nneora: What if they are not boys?

Ikenna: What do you mean? Don't tell me you are going to give birth to girls again, oh no! ...

Nneora: Ikenna, don't say such things. I am not the one who determines the sex of a baby.

Ikenna: If I am the one who determines the sex, then I am definitely sure I did not give you girls to carry. After all, I am not planning to open a convent. Girls! ... not even one this time around but two... oh no. What have I done to deserve this kind of stigma? (102)

Earlier on page 70 of the play, the playwright has been able to reveal the level of marginalisation, oppression, suppression and degradation that women are subjected to in patriarchal societies yet they continue to take the maltreatment with stoicism. Nneora states that:

“... We have no right to complain and we have no options. We are women and once we marry, we must stay under our men” (70).

Foremost in the earlier agitations by women for liberation in the twentieth century Nigeria was the first recorded Abeokuta women's revolt of May to July, 1918. Described as the most widespread rebellion by women with far-reaching consequences, it was caused by the decision in 1917 of the British colonial authorities to introduce direct taxation on every adult male and female at an average rate of five shillings. The colonial government, however, promised that the revenues collected would be channeled to the provision of basic social amenities such as schools, roads, medical care, court buildings and the general development of rural communities with a view to ensuring the smooth and effective administration of the region. The people of Abeokuta had no confidence and faith in the ability of the colonial administration to use the funds collected from tax judiciously for the provision of the afore-mentioned social amenities. The colonial government on its part, made no further attempts to enlighten the people on the purpose that the new tax policy was meant to serve in improving the living standards of the people with regards to the provision of social amenities. There was a stalemate which later led to widespread protests by women.

Similarly, we had in the twentieth century Nigeria the famous Aba women's riots of 1929. From available literature on the Aba women's protest, it must be noted that it was not organised and executed by only women of Aba. There were women from other parts of old Eastern Nigeria such as from Owerri Province, far away Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Rivers States, including

Opobo. According to Linus Okafor, a historian, “If a riot is to be described by the name of the place it took place most, then these riots ought to be named Opobo Riots because they were more serious in Opobo than in Aba” (384).

To administer the Eastern region, the colonial authorities introduced the Indirect Rule system of administration using warrant chiefs to administer the region for administrative convenience. The direct cause of the riot was the introduction of taxation in Eastern Nigeria by the colonial government. Recorded history has it that in 1927, the colonialists embarked on an assessment of the income of adult males. Although there was no explanation as to the rationale behind the assessment exercise, it was obvious that it was to enable the colonial authorities to raise revenue for effective administration of the region. In 1928, the authorities followed up with the imposition of a poll tax of two and half percent which was based on the estimated incomes of adult males. Although, the tax was a bitter pill for the people to swallow, they nonetheless, reluctantly agreed to pay. Then in 1929 again, the government decided to embark on another income assessment exercise but this time it was to include additional details such as the number of wives, children and even domestic animals that each adult male had. This historic meeting between District Officer or Commissioner in charge of Eastern region then, known as Captain Cook and the warrant chiefs, one of who was known in recorded history as Chief Okugo is captured in Nwabueze’s *The Dragon’s Funeral*. The District Commissioner’s instruction during the meeting with the warrant chiefs on how to go about the new taxation policy is very clear and direct. He states that:

We have stopped cannibalism, twins are no longer thrown away, barren women are no longer sacrificed to the shrine, widows are no longer asked to drink the water with which their husbands were bathed, and ancestral worship is fast giving way to the sophistication of Christianity. You now have roads, not paths, and a new brand of liquor has replaced your ridiculous illicit gin. We have established decent schools where your children are taught how to speak English as well as the

history of Europe and the capital cities of the world. These beautiful things do not come cheap... You must pay for them ... I do not live among you natives, but since you are the representatives of the government in your respective communities, we have to rely on you. I want you to bring to me, as soon as possible, a complete list of all the adults in your community-whether male or female, and a complete listing of their income. Since native income, the type you natives earn, does not appear to have any form of verifiable unification, you should count anything that brings income to both men and women... We shall then worry about classification and actual taxation... (39-40)

And then as if to make sure that the warrant chiefs understand the District Commissioner's instruction clearly, the secretary to the District Commissioner, Nduka explains to them that "*Ndi-Eze*, the District Officer wants you to go and obtain the population of the adults in your communities because both men and women will be taxed to pay for the good things the white man has brought to you" (40).

According to historical accounts, the man saddled with this onerous assignment of income assessment was the warrant chief known as Chief Okugo. While carrying out this assignment, the rumours that the fresh exercise was a prelude to the eventual taxation of women quickly spread round most parts of the region. This prompted women in Aba and other towns in the region to mobilise and embark on "violent demonstrations during which warrant chiefs were molested, native courts burnt down and stores looted" (Okafor, 384). It was also possible that the women in Eastern Nigeria felt that the District Officer and the warrant chiefs were not transparent enough in accounting for how the taxes collected in the past were used.

It will appear to members of the audience who read of the factors that led to the women's protests in *The Dragon's Funeral* that the warrant chiefs paid to stay in office and not necessarily because they were good at their jobs as chiefs or as leaders. While handing out the instruction to the chiefs to go and take a census of adult males and females, Cook confirms the suspicion of members of the audience when he tells the chiefs that "the more money you pay determines the

retention of your warrant (39). This suggests that their continued stay in office as warrant chiefs is premised on their willingness to continue to “settle” the colonial authorities. This is a pointer to the unsavoury practice in present day Nigeria where persons appointed into various positions of authority as Ministers, Commissioners, Chairmen of Boards and Parastatals, Local Government Chairmen, Chairmen of Committees in the National and States’ Houses of Assembly and many others get appointed into these various positions of authority and responsibility based on how much money they can offer to the powers that be whereas those who cannot cough out huge sums of money to buy positions but have the zeal, commitment and the aptitude to serve the people selflessly are denied such opportunities. This is responsible for the culture of mediocrity that has come to characterise public service delivery in Nigeria and is therefore, partly responsible for the country’s stunted development. Okafor goes further to maintain that:

The riots soon spread to Calabar and Opobo divisions where they were so violent that the police under panic, shot into the crowd of women, killing 32 and wounding many others. A Commission of Inquiry set up to look into the causes of the incidents and make recommendations blamed the administration’s officers for the manner in which they handled the riots. The main direct result of the riots was that the Warrant Chief system was discarded. Moreover, the riots caused the collapse of the Indirect Rule system because it was seen to be unworkable in Eastern Nigeria. (384)

Commenting on the Aba women’s riots Toyin Faloba, Mahadi Abdulahi, Martin Uhomoibhi and Ukachukwu Anyanwu state that:

... Open protests followed, particularly in the late 1920s when it was believed that Lugardian system of indirect rule was being utilized for a census that would extend direct taxation to women. This was the background to the well-known Women’s War (erroneously called Aba Women’s Riot) of 1929 in Eastern Nigeria. The Women’s War ended the Warrant Chief system in Eastern Nigeria... (29)

In their contribution to the discourse on the 1929 Aba women's riots and the weapons being deployed by modern day Nigerian feminists in the fight against patriarchy, Teryila Indyer and Joel Avaungwa Fanyam cite Idegu Unuja Emmy who observes that:

In 1929 Nigeria when this conscious, deliberate and well-orchestrated fight by the women was staged, there was nothing close to feminism in most parts of the world, not to talk of Nigeria... before the Nigerian woman was educated enough to comprehend feminist aesthetics, their great grand-mothers had gone far ahead of them... the consciousness to identify injustice against humankind, and particularly, women, can be strongly argued to be inborn; nevertheless awaiting some re-awakening and re-focusing to give it broader and deeper followership. This is where Nigerian female intellectuals, and men who are women-struggle sympathetic come in; so that where the Aba women used natural "weapon" of cassava sticks and the use of coordinated force, women of this generation can be far more acidic in their criticism and struggle, but by the use of the barrel of the pen. (337-338)

The warrant chief system in Eastern Nigeria is recorded by historians as being openly discriminatory against women. Until 1929, women were not allowed to be part of the system not to talk of being allowed to play key and active roles in the colonial administration. Aside from not being allowed to exercise or discharge their indigenous judicial responsibilities, the activities of the Missionaries and European trading firms also ensured the erosion of women's powers under colonialism. This is confirmed by Emeka Nwabueze when he states that:

In Africa, the conception of women as appendages to men was created by western scholars... In most traditional African societies, there were clearly defined divisions of labor based on gender lines. Men were hunters, warriors and cultivators of fields, while women were cooks, with the responsibility of sowing seeds and clearing weeds on the farm already cultivated by the men... The idea of perceiving women as powerless, and who need the protection of men is a myth created by the colonial masters, some of who had little or no knowledge of the traditional African society. The colonial master, rather than making things better for women in the traditional African society, worsened their position. Though patriarchal, African societies practiced patriarchy in different ways. Colonialism caused the imposition of strict European gender definitions in the African societies. The colonial master completely ignored women in the scheme of things and consulted men alone, even on matters where the traditional society permitted a dual consultation of both men and women... (142-143)

The actions of most members of the Native Administrations, especially the warrant chiefs who even had questionable characters, were therefore, inimical to the general interests of women. The warrant chiefs were very exploitative, extortive and dictatorial towards the people. Chief Udoji in Nwadiigwe's *Udoji*, for instance, is a representational image of the type and nature of warrant chiefs who dominated the leadership space in colonial Eastern Nigeria. His brand of leadership style is such that sets agitations, protests, demonstrations and riots as constant features of daily existence in a dangerously semi-literate society like Eastern Nigeria of the colonial era. It was a society that hardly understood the reasons for the presence of foreigners with foreign doctrines, foreign practices and strange ways of doing things on their soil. Chief Udoji is appointed by Mr. Paddler as the warrant chief in charge of Ndiagu. The play portrays him as a corrupt and dictatorial leader. Apart from exploiting his people through arbitrary imposition of taxes and levies, Chief Udoji shows that he is a brutal dictator when as part of his strategies to gag the outspoken elders of Ndiagu, he declares that:

... Henceforth, no village assembly shall take place without my approval. In fact, such assemblies shall be headed by me. The people will mention the issues at stake, we discuss it, then I will consult the Whiteman and then give them feedback... My people are swollen-headed. They need an iron hand to control them... I have the police force round the clock and I will deal with defaulters ruthlessly. I have instructed the police to disrupt any illegal assembly... (53-54)

The character and nature of colonialism are vividly painted by Florence Stratton who Emeka Nwabueze cites as having stated that colonialism was:

A patriarchal order, sexist as well as racist in its ideology and practices. What these studies (of feminism under colonialism) indicate is that women's position relative to men deteriorated under colonialism. Under colonialism, then, African women were subject to interlocking forms of oppression: to the racism of colonialism and to indigenous and foreign structures of male domination. (143)

Commenting on the role of the religion and western education brought to Nigeria by the colonial masters in the subjugation of women, Nwabueze states that:

The religion brought by the colonial masters also helped to entrench the idea of women occupying a secondary position in the minds of Africans. From the teaching of the Holy Writ, Africans learnt that man was the initial creation of God and that the woman came later. And she was created from the man's ribs. Apart from the theory of origin, some other passages in the Holy Writ teach that man is the master of the woman. When the Moslem religion came to Africa, it also taught the supremacy of man over woman. Though both Christian and Moslem doctrines propound that a man must love his wife... the fact remains that his wife must obey him. Man is therefore portrayed as the greater authority, and the image created was that of a benevolent dictator... It was in education that the concept of gender distinction was laid bare. Formal education was a major contributor to the rise of feminism in Africa.(144)

In *Hangmen Also Die*, Irobi raises leadership questions. The play reveals the leadership class as being corrupt, exploitative and oppressive, just as the warrant chiefs in Nwadigwé's *Udoji*. It is the corrupt and exploitative activities of the leadership class against the masses, with women being the most affected because they are in the subject class, that has led to the emergence of a group of seven militant young men, known as the Suicide Squad, who are poised to correct the various forms of injustices that the entire Niger-Delta region is being subjected to. They are determined to confront corrupt leaders represented by Chief Erekosima, the corrupt Commissioner for Local Government, Rural Development and Chieftaincy Affairs of Izon State. Chief Erekosima is the primary target of the Squad because he diverts the money released by the Federal Government to compensate the people for their farmlands destroyed by oil spillage to taking a chieftaincy title as the Amatemesi 1 of Izon State. The playwright uses the encouraging and inspiring role played by Tamara, a female character in the play to underline the roles women play either as a group of female activists or as lone activists to ensure that positive and life-transforming changes are enthroned in the society. She is the whistle-blowing feminist activist who has the courage to expose the criminal activities of the likes of Chief Erekosima to the Squad. She states that:

.... But there is a man in my local government area, a commissioner for that matter, Chief Erekosima by name, who is being crowned the Amatemeso 1 of Izon State today. This man is a distinguished thief. He confiscated our money. Stole our 3 million naira... 3 million naira compensation money which the Federal Government gave to the citizens of Izon State, to balm our minds against the crude oil spillage which has ravaged our farms and wrecked our lives. This man seized it and is using it to crown himself today.(58)

Acting on this information from Tamara, the Squad storms the venue of the coronation ceremony, disrupts the ceremony, abducts Chief Erekosima to their hideout in a bush clearing, tortures him and eventually executes him. By so doing, the Squad sends out a clear signal to the audience that any form of injustice against the suffering masses by any one, especially members of the privileged class, will not be tolerated. The Squad is interested in enthroning a just society. However, it must be noted that Tamara is the one who is qualified to take the credit for the success recorded by the Squad in their efforts to sanitise and ensure a just society for all; she musters the courage to challenge the Squad to stand up and jointly tackle the hydra-headed evil of corruption that is the main cause of backwardness in Nigeria. Her challenging words of encouragement fuel the determination of the Squad to change the society using Chief Erokosima as an example. She states that:

I am challenging you. All of you. Prove to me you are the Suicide Squad. Dimeari, this is the kind of cause your father fought and almost died for. The kind of cause he would have been happy to die for. But look at you, look at you and the despicable vegetables you join. Cocoyam stems who cannot strike a blow for the poor, for the wretched of the earth. Cowards... Here is a battle. A battle of the dispossessed versus the self-possessed. Between the haves and the have-nots. Between the landless and the landlords. Prove your mettle, prove to me you are the warriors you claim to be. Prove to me you are not eunuchs. Or are you eunuchs? Power prostitutes? Destitutes? Cowards? Bullies? Empty barrels? ... Young men, remember your seventy-year-old grandmother who still farms before she eats; remember also your poverty-stricken people... (65)

The role played by Tamara is closely related to or typical of the role played by Miriam, Moses' sister in biblical times in actualising God's agenda for the liberation of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. There are other instances where women have undertaken dangerous adventures on behalf of an oppressed people, where men have failed with distinction to play the role of messiahs. Again, Christian Chukwudozie Ekwunife states that:

In the course of man's evolution of communal existence, it has been realized that some women have distinguished themselves, either by undertaking perilous missions or adventures on behalf of the rest of the community or by possessing special powers which place them either at the head of men or at par with them. Cases in point include Miriam, Moses' sister who was blessed with the gift of prophecy and Deborah the judge, who was also a prophetess ... and the legendary Joan of Arc, the Amazons, Qurrat Ul Ayn, a great warrior who later died a martyr in Iran; Benazir Bhutto and Golden Meir- former Prime Ministers of Pakistan and Israel, respectively. There are also examples in Nigeria's development history, namely, Queen Amina of Zazzau, Queen Idia of Bini Kingdom, Moremi of Ife, Madam Tinubu of Lagos, and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti who mobilized the Egba women in Abeokuta against perceived victimization by a tyrannical and hegemonic ruler who they ultimately drove into exile. Another remarkable incident of women uprising in Nigeria is the Aba Women's riot of 1929. The women confronted the colonial masters' guns to register their revolt against colonial government's injustice and inhuman treatment of the colonized people of Nigeria, even though it is generally rumoured that the immediate cause of the riot was the introduction of women taxation. The instances cited above are representative of women who have moved from their hitherto "traditional roles" to other fields ostensibly reserved for the males in the past.(106)

In their determination to protect their selfhood from being continuously undermined by the male-dominated colonial institutions and structures, women reacted in various ways to the injustice and abuses meted out to them. Petitions, boycotts, market closures, peaceful and sometimes violent protest marches, songs and dances to ridicule and denounce colonialism and everything that it stood for were some of the effective tools that they used to resist attempts by the colonial authorities and agents of colonialism in Nigeria, otherwise known as the warrant chiefs, to continuously oppress and marginalise them. As the demonstrations gathered momentum, the women became emboldened, more courageous and aggressive to the point of attacking and

looting European owned stores and banks. When this continued, the colonial authorities, displayed absolute disregard for the lives of the protesting women and called in the colonial police force that fired gunshots that felled the protesting women in their hundreds.

Apart from being compelled to reverse the tax policy that caused the riots and the clipping of the powers of the warrant chiefs, the colonial authorities, assisted by their Nigerian acolytes, launched a massive manhunt to hunt down the surviving women activists who participated in the riot. One of the few lucky survivors was the mother of the late General Phillip Effiong, the Chief of General Staff of the Biafran Armed Forces. Her name was Elizabeth Effiong. It is recorded in Effiong's book (entitled *Nigeria and Biafra: My Story*) that:

His father, the late Ete John Effiong Essien, was a joints man by trade while his mother, the late Elizabeth Ekandem Effiong Essien, was a trader and farmer. The Effiong Essien family ended up in Ikot Ekpene after Ete John moved his household from Aba to Ikot Ekpene in 1929. This was in a bid to avoid victimization against his wife who had participated in the legendary Aba Women's Riot of that same year.(412)

The major towns and cities in Eastern Nigeria where the 1929 riots raged were in different parts of Owerri province including Isu, Azumini, Asa, Umuaru, Amuzukwu, Onicha, Nguru, Owerinta, Mbawsi, Okpuala-Ngor and of course, Aba, among others. Towns in the Calabar province where the riots spread to included Utu Etim Ekpo, Abak, Ikot Ekpene, Uyo, Opobo, Itu, among others. There were also reported cases of pockets of mass revolts against the colonial government in other parts of the country including Warri province which comprised the Urhobo, Isoko, Ijaw, Kwale and many other towns in the Igbo speaking area of the Southern region about this period following the success of the women's protests in Aba and its surrounding cities.

Apart from the 1918 Abeokuta and the 1929 Aba women's protests over various shades of injustices meted out to them by the male-dominated colonial administration, another women's protest that shook the colonial government to its foundations was the 1946 Abeokuta/Egba

Women's uprising led by the legendary Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti, a teacher, a tireless and typical feminist activist in the mold of Koko in Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* and Alaere in Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave*. Ransom-Kuti mobilised and led the women of Egbaland to resist arbitrary taxation by the colonial government.

It is recorded that some of the methods employed by the colonialists to force women to comply with the new taxation policy were crude and degrading. The women were beaten up, while majority of them and their households received worse treatments from the colonial authorities and their agents such as subjecting families to thorough searching of their homes, perhaps in the hope of discovering or even planting incriminating materials on them which the authorities could use to punish the actors and their families; the idea being to intimidate them and render them voiceless.

In response or rather, as a reaction to this disturbing turn of events, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti founded the Abeokuta Women's Union, a pressure group that was purposely intended to provide a common umbrella and platform for aggrieved women to resist their oppressors. The Union had an estimated membership of about twenty thousand women.

When the molestation of women by the colonial administration in the region continued, the union mobilised its members and staged anti-climax protests with consequences of the protest reverberating across the length and breadth of Abeokuta and its surrounding areas. Some of the demonstrations held right outside the palace of Oba Ademola II, the Royal Father and the Alake of Egba land at the time. He was perceived as an agent of the colonial powers who connived with strangers to exploit, oppress and suppress his own people who he was divinely called to be their leader. As usual, the colonial administration let loose its police force on the protesting women; using every available weapon, which included teargas, in its arsenal, to attempt to quell the

protests and disperse the protesting women but the women held their ground and in the end, in 1949, the Monarch of Egbaland, Oba Ademola, was forced to abdicate the throne.

These protests were some of the earliest campaigns launched by women against some of the harsh policies of the colonial government in their struggles to put an end to the oppression and marginalisation of women by the colonial administration and its Nigerian agents. The protesting women's staying power lay in their being true to themselves, nurtured by their sense of justice and their collective determination to ensure the success of their revolt against the oppressive and exploitative colonial forces. This collective determination displayed by these women sprang from their conviction that with commitment, will-power and focus propelled by a strong sense of dignity and justice, their victory over anti-women forces represented by the colonialists and arrowheads of patriarchy serving as agents in the colonial administration, was certain. It must be noted that with the high level of illiteracy in that era, only a handful of them were educated and therefore, they had no platform to engage the colonialists diplomatically, either at home or abroad, to table their grievances.

The famous Enugu coal miners' protest or strike which took place in 1949 in Enugu, Eastern Nigeria was organised by the coal miners to protest and express their grievances against certain harsh and unfavourable economic policies of the Colliery management. The protest would probably have flopped if it did not receive the total and active support of market women who saw the need to join forces with the miners to confront the colonial authorities with a view to enthroning change and reducing the levels of pain and deprivations caused for families by the system through its stringent socio-economic policies. Again, Okafor states that:

The Miners believed that the management intentionally held up their salary arrears; this belief was encouraged and sensationalized by the national press. As a result of this belief which could not be proved to be true, the coal miners started a sit-down-strike registering their presence in the mines but refusing to do any

work. Consequently, the government ordered the removal of explosives from the mines so that the enraged miners would not use them to cause havoc. However, the miners themselves were fearful at the possibility of the government shutting up the mines when the explosives were removed. Therefore, the miners and aroused market women carried sticks and machetes with which to prevent the evacuation of the explosives. The police lost their composure and so fired their rifles into the crowd, killing 21 miners and wounding 51 others... (392)

Like the Aba Women's Riot, the colonial administration displayed absolute disregard for the sanctity of human life by inviting the colonial police force to put down the miners' protest with the use of force. However, the decision of the colonialists to use force could be said to be in line with its "pacification policy". The pacification policy of the colonial government according to Toyin Falola, Abdullahi Mahadi, Martin Uhomoibhi and Ukachukwu Anyanwu, refers to "the colonial administration's term for the military and police operations which she carried out against Nigerians"(2).

It is the humble opinion of this researcher that just as Nwabueze has recorded and revealed in *The Dragon's Funeral*, the riots embarked upon by Nigerian women from Egba to Abeokuta to Aba and other parts of the country in the colonial era, were caused by the rumoured decision of the colonial government to tax women equally as heavily as men were taxed. This has given rise to the moral question as to whether it was proper to subject women to stringent tax policies, considering the fact that women in that time and age were restricted by the patriarchal societies they lived in from engaging in commercially viable ventures. The society thought that it was all right for women to only take charge of and mind their assigned domestic responsibilities which mainly included cooking for their husbands and children, washing their men's clothes, making babies and breast feeding them. They therefore were out rightly denied opportunities to engage in commercial ventures. To tax both men and women equally, was therefore viewed as an act of injustice against the women. It was a step by the male-dominated colonial administration to

further emasculate and disempower women thereby rendering them voiceless. Modern economists would have penciled down the colonial government's decision to tax them as a complete negation of the basic tenets of equity and convenience which form part of Adam Smith's canon or principle of taxation.

The canon of equity in taxation according to Adam Smith and as explained by Adejare Olayiwola Lawal stipulates that "tax should be levied on citizens on the basis of equity in proportion to their respective abilities and revenues which they enjoy under the protection of the State" while the canon of convenience holds that "every tax should be levied in such a manner and at such a time that it affords the maximum of convenience to the tax payer" (238). In other words, tax payers like the impoverished, oppressed, marginalised, rural and uneducated Nigerian women of the colonial era should not be made to forgo their little purchasing power and forced to make unnecessary sacrifices at the time of payment of tax.

The tension that this policy generated started on a low key from the family level to the communal level before it eventually escalated to the point of confrontation between the women and the colonial government and its Nigerian male agents like Chief Okugo (one of the warrant chiefs appointed by the District Officer then, known as Captain Cook). The Alake of Egbaland, Oba Ademola II, was also one of such agents.

It is sad that no historical accounts recognise Nigerian female activists for their roles in efforts to bring about the emancipation of the black woman. Rather, recorded accounts recognise Western feminists as the trailblazers in feminist movements or activism. This researcher is of the opinion that the unequalled contributions of Nigerian women like Elizabeth Effiong, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and other unsung "sheroes" in Nigeria's feminist struggles should grace the same space with Western feminists like Mercy Otis Warren of the United States of America, Abigail

Adams and Emma Willard who campaigned vigorously for the rights of women, whenever historical accounts of feminist movements are given.

There are other protests organised and successfully executed by Nigerian women in recent years. For instance, in July 2002, some women from Ugborodo, Niger Delta, in their hundreds staged a protest against Chevron Texaco over the polluting of their environment through the oil exploration activities of the multi-national oil company. The Ugborodo community had over the years, become one of the geese laying the golden eggs which provide appreciable percentage of Nigeria's crude oil but with nothing to show for it except squalor characterised by the absence of modern social amenities, such as modern markets, poor medical facilities, deplorable roads, pollution of their environment, and so on. This was the pitiable situation that members of the community found themselves in until their courageous women decided to confront the management of the oil company. The protesting women, adopting the tactics of the Aba Women of 1929 and threatening to strip totally naked, sacked the workers of the company and locked up the premises. They latched on to the successful picketing of the oil facility to make a number of demands which included that the company should provide employment for their youths, build schools, provide electricity, good roads, portable water and health facilities. Taking into consideration the possibility that members of other communities could be encouraged by the Ugborodo women's protest to stage a similar protest and sack staff of the company, thereby crippling the fortunes of the company, the management decided to meet the women's demands. In an online article entitled *History and Results of the Power of Women in Civil Protests*, Chioma Dike states that:

The threat of or actual removal of clothing by Southeastern Nigerian women was part of a long, local history of articulating deeply held grievances and effecting change through women's embodied demonstration. The most famous of these incidents took place in November and December, 1929 when a remarkable series

of demonstrations, protests, risings and riots involving tens of thousands of Igbo and Ibibio-speaking-women took place throughout Southeastern Nigeria. (np)

Earlier in 2014, when a group of Chibok girls numbering about two hundred and seventy-six were kidnapped from their school by the vicious and dreaded terrorist group known as *Boko Haram*, Nigeria's former Education Minister and presently, the World Bank Vice President for Africa, Oby Ezekwesili, using the platform of a campaign group known as Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) led other women and a few men to protest over the unfortunate incident. Ezekwesili and her fellow women launched their protests in front of television cameras in Abuja, Nigeria's seat of power and in social media platforms with the caption, "Bring Back Our Girls". They first of all converged in Abuja for the protest before organising similar protests around the world in mainly Nigerian embassies in London, Washington D.C. and other major capital cities of foreign countries. The First Lady of the United States of America then, Mrs. Michel Obama was reported to have participated in the United States protest. The protesters dressed mainly in red, adopted the strategy of holding a daily sit out on a designated venue in Abuja to press for the release of the girls. They kept up the advocacy until the militant group began to yield to mounting pressures and consequently began to set the girls free in batches. Thus by the end of 2015, the first batch of fifty-seven girls regained their freedom from *Boko Haram* captivity. Then in May 2016, one of the girls known as Amina Ali was found in Abuja after she obviously escaped from her captors. Later on in October of 2016, another batch of twenty-one lucky girls regained their freedom from captivity. On May 7, 2017 another set of eighty-two lucky girls was set free by the terrorist gang. The release of the eighty-two lucky girls was believed to be the outcome of the sustained advocacy launched by the determined "Bring Back Our Girls" group and series of negotiations for their release between the Federal Government and the terror group. Thus in a period of two and half years, a total of one hundred and sixty-one out of two hundred and

seventy-six girls reportedly abducted by *Boko Haram* were released from the camp of the deadly and dreaded terror group.

In February 2018, suspected members of *Boko Haram* struck again but this time, in Dapchi, Yobe State where one hundred and ten girls were reportedly abducted from Government Girls' Science School, Dapchi. But thirty days after the abduction, on March 21, 2018, the Islamic militant group returned one hundred and five of the girls while five of them were reported to have died in their captivity. It was also reported that the insurgents returned the girls without a ransom being paid on them by the Federal Government. However, stories making the rounds have it that just like in the case of the Chibok girls, *Boko Haram* came under intense pressure from several campaign groups including Oby Ezekwesili's "Bring Back Our Girls" group, who were determined to ensure that the Dapchi girls regained their freedom from captivity.

The dynamism of the various revolutions, protests or agitations for change by Nigerian women can also be defined or explained in terms of the changes in the strategies of the protesting women who successfully changed from militant confrontations as adopted by the Aba, Egba, Abeokuta and Ugborodo protesting women to peaceful demonstration strategies exemplified by sit outs in strategic locations such as in front of Nigeria's embassies in World capital cities. Sustained advocacy which is a major tool for effective sensitisation was extensively adopted by members of "Bring Back Our Girls" group. The protesting members of "Bring Back Our Girls" achieved a certain commendable level of success without necessarily resorting to violent confrontations but rather by adopting non-militarist and non-separatist approaches which womanism and motherism as core Nigerian feminist ideologies espouse, represent and seek to promote. The dynamism is shaped or defined by the evolutionary changes that Nigeria has undergone between 1918 and the

present, up to 2018 hence the strategies adopted by the protesting women in 2018 is far different from the 1918 strategies.

2.4. Cultural Challenges and Women Liberation in Nigeria

The plays that have been chosen for this study, Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, Ayakroma's *Dance on His Grave*, Nwabueze's *The Dragon's Funeral*, Salami's *More than Dancing* and Ogbonna's *The Tamarisk...*, as well as other plays and literature consulted during this research work point to the fact that women in Nigeria have always been marginalised and oppressed because of certain negative cultural practices that have been put in place, favoured and nurtured by the combined forces of history, custom, religion, culture and tradition that are all patriarchally determined. Patriarchy as a social system is believed to have derived its origin from the Greek word, "patriarkhia" or "patriarkhes." Historically, it is believed to have come into existence around 1555 to 1565. It connotes male norms and standards of governance. Recorded history has it that it was officially used in the 1630s as a system of government by fathers and elderly male members of the society. Patriarchy can therefore be regarded as a potent symbol of male superiority over women for the society accepts the man's words and standards as the standard norms in the society. The six plays chosen for this study reflect numerous instances of attempts by male members of the Nigerian society to show that they are superior to the women folk. According to Praise Chidinma Daniel-Inim, in a patriarchal set-up:

The man wields the power and the authority that organise the social structure. He is the authorising force behind the social, political, economic and religious decisions in the society. Thus while the man from childhood is indoctrinated with a superiority complex, the woman is merely treated as inferior to the man... (224)

The above opinion explains why the male child is encouraged to aspire to greater professionalism and take up greater "masculine" responsibilities while the female child is

groomed to believe that her place in the society is primarily in the kitchen of the man, hence she grows up to depend on him believing that it is all right to be his puppet and do his biddings. Okoro, a character in Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, taunts women when he states that "Women have no rights-no special rights that I know of ..." (20). It is the superiority complex stance of male chauvinists like Okoro that is mainly responsible for the "oppressor-oppressed" kind of relationship between the men and women in the society.

The world is considered a man's world. The holy bible and even the koran make us understand that God created the woman to be a help mate to the man and therefore, this automatically makes her subordinate to the man. According to Emeka Nwabueze:

The religion brought by the colonial masters also helped to entrench this idea of women occupying a secondary position in the mind of Africans. From the teachings of the Holy Writ, Africans learnt that man was the initial creation of God and that the woman came later. She was created from the man's rib... some other passages in the Holy Writ teach that man is the master of woman. When the Moslem religion came to Africa, it also taught the supremacy of man over woman. Though both Christian and Moslem doctrines propound that a man must love his wife (as he loves his neighbor), the fact remains that his wife must obey him. Man is, therefore, portrayed as the greater authority, and the image created was that of a benevolent dictator.(144)

The average Nigerian male consequently believes that it must remain so and does everything possible to ensure that the status quo does not change. Teryila Indyer and Joel Fanyam are in agreement that women have suffered a lot of injustices in patriarchal societies. They state that:

...the rights of women in our society over the years, have been impounded by men. This is based on a liberal thinking of men that women are naturally or biologically inferior to them and that the essential differences between men and women are ordained by God. Therefore, the women should be contented with their role as a labourer in the house, bearing children and taking charge of the kitchen. This development has a lot of implications on women where the rights that belong to them as human beings are denied completely by the dictates of tradition created and supervised by the men.(337)

Women liberation has remained a contemporaneous literary concept throughout the world, even though it varies from culture to culture. There are many culture-oriented oppressive practices in Nigeria of today that contribute to the various ways that women are debased and subjugated in patriarchal societies. According to Emma Ebo:

The subordination of women has actually exposed them to difficult obnoxious practices meted out to them in the name of culture and tradition. There are cases of African cultural practices, like widowhood rites in certain parts of Igbo land in the South East, female genital mutilation or rites in Yoruba land in the West, the kule or bashiga system in Hausa land in the North... The 'Purdah' system, also known as 'Bashiga' is common amongst the Hausas of Northern Nigeria. The Purdah system, for instance, prevents Hausa women and young girls of puberty age from going out unescorted and getting involved in public life and activities. Widowhood rites in Igbo land portray situations where women are subjected to certain cultural practices that strip them of any rights. Sometimes, they are treated like animals, subjected to do unprintable things. These cultural and religious practices at times lead to abuse of womanhood, child labour, child abuse and even child marriage. (238)

Going further, Ebo states that:

Women liberation, though froth with controversies, has been accepted by contemporary governments the world over as an agenda that must be achieved. It has been acknowledged that women are important in the society and hence their liberation and empowerment are enshrined in the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). (238)

In his attempt to further underscore how germane the topical issue of women's liberation from socially and culturally endorsed oppressive practices has become, Ebo goes further to cite Patrick

K. Uchendu as having stated that:

Men cannot claim exclusive right to shape the future of our world. It is time for them to accept the challenge and share with women in decision-making process. It is high time to acknowledge that the denial of women's rights and opportunities is at the root of our developmental problems and socio-economic ills... The most underdeveloped of all human resources are women. (238)

In some communities in this age and time, like in Northern Nigeria, for instance, some women are not allowed to vote during elections. This is an infringement on their fundamental civic

rights. In some other communities, women are to be “seen not heard”. They are only good for the men and the larger society as “baby-making factories, housewives and house helps” hence they are kept in their homes without education. The implication is that in such communities, where women are denied access to formal education, they become complacent and never get to worry about their plight, believing just as it is the case in Julie Okoh’s *Edewede* that “oppressive cultural practices, including circumcision, are part of our tradition...” (3). Even though in most cases it is very clear that such so-called cultural practices are naturally retrogressive and oppressive and therefore, add no value to their lives.

Women in some parts of Nigeria, especially in the rural areas of the country are still in bondage because of obsolete and oppressive culture-oriented practices. It is therefore, imperative that women liberationists should concentrate on tackling and eradicating these practices. This should be one of the items on their agenda.

2.5. Nigerian Feminism and Theatre of Commitment

Essentially, there is a close relationship between Nigerian feminism, a movement that is obsessed with efforts to change the situation of women in Nigeria, and theatre of commitment. Theatre of commitment is a theatre that is geared towards positive change in the society. It is committed to a positive transformation of the society for the good of all. The theatre is a medium through which human experiences are reflected and interpreted. It mirrors events and happenings in the society, purposely to conscientise and to enlighten while at the same time, entertaining the audience. John Hodgson defines the theatre thus “the theatre is a force contributing to man’s spiritual well-being and as a means of helping society in understanding or facing some of its problems and burning issues...” (116). In his contribution, Robert Cohen states that:

The theatre has its roots in social, political and intellectual revolutions. It reflects to a certain degree, the confusions of our times but it has also struggled to clarify and to illuminate, to document and explore human destiny in a complex and uneasy universe (242).

In the literary sense, commitment means devotion to a cause, philosophy or doctrine, the willingness to work hard and give your energy and time to a cause or an activity. Tony A.P. Cowie, gives a more detailed explanation of commitment when he states that it is:

... a devotion to a cause, a continuing obligation ... the state of intellectual and emotional adherence to some political, social or religious theory or action or practice... state of being dedicated or devoted to something ... the conscious linking of works of literature and art. (197)

When related to the theatre, the theatre of commitment is the kind of play or drama that attempts to spur people to action, the kind of action that ushers in social change for a better society. The theatre of commitment is therefore, a veritable tool for positive transformation of the society.

In his attempt to draw a positive correlation between the theatre of commitment and community or popular theatre which is also a variant of theatre that is committed to change, Gbilekaa states that:

... popular theatre is a theatre of conscientisation. It aims at awakening the consciousness of the rural folks to understand the societal configurations as well as to have faith in themselves as vectors of change. In Africa, countries like Botswana, Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, Cameroun and Nigeria are involved in popular theatre projects. As a poly-functional theatre, community or popular theatre is a theatre of pedagogy, liberation and revolution... (iv)

Ahmed Yerima quotes Ronald Harwood as having emphasised that “the theatre became the medium through which life’s tensions were mercilessly exposed” (47). In the same breath, Yerima also quotes Athol Fugard as having stated that “... the theatre is a weapon for fighting social injustice” (58). In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong ‘O and Micere Githat Mugo “... Good theatre is that which is on the side of the people, that which without masking mistakes and

weaknesses, gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggles for total liberation” (vi-vii).

The essence of commitment in the theatre is simply for effective communication for without it the playwright will be ineffective and would have failed to make any impact in the society. This is why theatre of commitment can also be referred to as social criticism. Hence Nigerian feminist discourse provides strong indicators that feminist playwrights utilise these commitment potentials of both the literary drama and popular theatre for radicalising the subjugated position of women in Nigeria. Even though the Nigerian feminist agenda is yet to be fully accomplished, feminist theatre through commitment has achieved better protection for women. According to Canice Nwosu, “...A new dawn has come to herald the wind of change. Oppression and subjugation begat revolt and violence. Therefore, the theatre must create the requisite awareness needed for a change...” (Theatre Experience, 45)

In her contribution, Mabel Ewrierhoma cites Ngugi wa Thiong’O as having stated that:

Literature cannot escape from the power structure that shapes our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense... political struggle in the society. What he can choose is one or the other side... the side of the people or the side of those social forces... that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. (56)

This Nigerian playwright goes further to explain that the salient point to take away from Ngugi wa Thiong’O’s assertion include the fact that:

Politics would always concern the people as well as influence their actions and vice versa as long as literature remains pivotal to a people’s existence. It could also be adduced from opening statement that Ngugi recommends people’s politics-that of the mass of the society made up of women and men and so is genderless. This is a politics of all and for all, where no man or woman is shut out. What this means is that the writer in politics could settle for a human balance in the portrayal of the involvement in politics... without underplaying one group to the detriment of the other. (57)

Nigerian playwrights are known to have used the theatre to condemn social ills such as oppression, marginalisation, drug abuse, human trafficking, kidnapping, corruption and the failure of the Nigerian government in virtually all sectors, leading to what sociologists refer to as ritualised deprivation. In this breath, therefore, the theatre is without doubt, an essential instrument for social reconstruction. It will, therefore, be correct to assert that the theatre of commitment is inextricably linked to Nigerian feminism for both are concerned with making positive changes in the society for the good of the oppressed and subjugated members of the society.

CHAPTER THREE

NIGERIAN FEMINIST AGENDA AND THE DYNAMISM OF FEMINIST REVOLUTION IN NWABUEZE'S *THE DRAGON'S FUNERAL*, ROTIMI'S *OUR HUSBAND HAS GONE MAD AGAIN* AND CLARK'S *THE WIVES' REVOLT*

3.1 Background Information on Emeka Nwabueze, Ola Rotimi and John Pepper Clark

Though Emeka Nwabueze is the youngest of the first generation playwrights who by age falls within the second generation, his play captures aptly tradition and colonial issues and therefore, fits into the first era. A foremost Nigerian playwright, Nwabueze hails from Awka in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Born on 13th September, 1952, he had his primary education at St. Patrick's School, Awka between 1958 and 1965 while between 1966 and 1971, he was at Zik's College, Onitsha, for his secondary education. He enrolled for his under graduate programme at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, from 1971 to 1975. He was also at various times in Eastern Michigan University and Bowling Green State University, United States of America for his graduate studies. He has had stints as a lecturer in Kano State Institute for Higher Education, Bowling Green State University, Ohio, United States of America and in the Department of English and Dramatic Arts, University of Nigeria where he was appointed a Professor of Dramatic Arts in 1996. He was also a visiting International Professor, Randolph-Macon Women's College, Lynchburg, United States of America, from 1998 to 1999. His published works include *The Dragon's Funeral*, *A Parliament of Vultures*, *Echoes of Madness*, *Heroes of Conscience*, *Spokesman for the Oracle*, *Fate of a Maiden*, *When the Arrow Rebounds*, *The Polemics of Dramatic Texts*, *Studies in Dramatic Literature*, *Visions and Revisions*, among others.

The dominant motif in *The Dragon's Funeral* is women's struggles for liberation from oppression, marginalisation and other forms of social injustice. The play is set in colonial Nigeria; it is a social drama which tells the story of political maneuvering, gender imbalance, oppression and social conflicts. It x-rays agitations and civil protests by a segment of the population in a colonial Nigerian society who feels oppressed and marginalised, against the colonial authorities who make the laws but enforce the laws through their cronies who go by the brand name of warrant chiefs. The play highlights the controversial issue of whether it is right or improper to tax women as heavily as the men are taxed. The immediate cause of the women's revolution is the decision of the colonial authorities to impose tax on women alongside men. Having made up his mind, the District Officer, known as Captain Cook, convenes a meeting with the warrant chiefs. During the meeting, he directs them to commence without delay, an official counting of the people, both men and women. The census exercise is meant to be a prelude to the full implementation of the government's tax policy. Emeruwa, a classroom teacher, is saddled with the onerous task of carrying out this exercise but he becomes the first casualty of the protesting women as he gets man-handled by Adaugo and her fellow protesting women. The next victim, after Emeruwa, is Chief Okeugo otherwise, the Dragon, who gets dethroned.

The women's revolt, according to the story as narrated by Ekwedike, referred to as the village griot, is championed by Adaugo, who leads the entire women of Ngwaland to revolt against the obnoxious and repressive policies of the colonial government perceived to be anti-women. These policies which include but not limited to imposition of tax on women, are perceived as a further attempt by the male-dominated colonial government and the patriarchal Ngwa Community to ensure the continued emasculation of women economically and by so doing, cause severe hardship in households.

In Movement One of the play, women are seen gathering in the Orié market ground to discuss and take a firm stand against the rampaging forces of colonialism and its agents including the warrant chiefs appointed by the colonial authorities. One of the qualities of a good and dynamic leader as portrayed by the playwright is self-confidence. Adugo as a leader of her fellow women exhibits this quality in addition to having poise, vision and the ability to use the appropriate language during the campaign against the authorities as the situation demands. She also demonstrates her ability to instill the same quality of self-confidence in her followers. These qualities add colour and sophistication to the dynamism of the women's revolution and its eventual success at frustrating the harsh and oppressive policies of the government.

Emmanuel Gladstone Olawole Rotimi, popularly known as and called Ola Rotimi, was born on April 13, 1933 in Sapele, in the present day Delta State of Nigeria. He attended the prestigious Methodist Boys High School, Lagos from 1952 to 1957. He attended the Boston University, United States of America where he studied Drama. Thereafter, he obtained the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Degree from the Yale University, after which he came back to Nigeria in 1966. During his academic sojourn in the United States, he met and married French-Canadian artist known as Hazel.

Back home in Nigeria, Rotimi was employed as a Research Fellow in the Institute of African Studies, University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. He later left Ife for the University of Port-Harcourt and was the Head of Department of Theatre Arts. Due to his productivity in dramatic arts, he was promoted to the enviable rank of a Professor. He later returned to the Dramatic Arts Department of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife where he made waves as a playwright, director, actor and teacher. Rotimi's sun set on August 31st, 2000, at the age of sixty-two (62) years. It is noteworthy that he spent a great part of his life advancing

drama and theatre in Nigeria. His written and published plays include *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, *Kurumi*, *Hopes of the Living Dead*, *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, *Holding Talks and Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, published in 1977. *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* is one of the foremost attempts at feminist drama by a Nigerian playwright.

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again is a post-colonial play which dwells on women's liberation and empowerment. It tells the story of an ex-military officer of the rank of Major, known as Lejoka-Brown. He decides to dabble into politics which he understands as the easiest means to self-enrichment or rather to partake in the "national chin chin". One of his problems, however, is that he lacks the basic ideas of how to play politics in Nigeria as he relies heavily on his military training and experience to conduct his "surprise and attack" campaign hoping that such tactics and maneuvers will automatically earn him victory at the polls. Aside from this problem, Lejoka-Brown is also confronted with the problem of handling his three wives, especially the educated, urbane and sophisticated Liza. He inherited the docile Mama Rashida from his deceased brother. Then there is Sikira who he marries because her mother is the President of the National Union of Nigerian Market Women and in his warped calculations, the market women's votes mean automatic electoral victory for him. There is Liza, the United States of America trained medical doctor who Lejoka-Brown met and married while fighting in the Congo. Liza, who is completely unaware that Lejoka-Brown has two other wives, decides to join her husband in Nigeria after her medical studies only to meet two other co-wives in the house. However, Lejoka-Brown's plans to conceal the fact that he has two other wives get frustrated with the arrival of Liza in the country earlier than scheduled.

The play throws up issues about gender equality. This is made possible with the arrival of the educated and liberated Liza Lejoka-Brown in the country. She turns out to be an embodiment of feminist activism. The playwright uses her to make it clear to the audience that the equality of human beings irrespective of their gender is the way to go and not the prevalent general ideology, especially within the political class, that espouses male superiority over women. Liza and the other two women eventually form an unexpected but strong alliance in their determination and attempt to break the tradition of male hegemony in the society.

John Pepper Clark Bekederemo hails from the Ijaw ethnic region in the present day Delta State. He was born in 1933. He attended the Native Administration School at Okrika and Otughievwan, both in the Western Niger Delta. For his secondary education, the young Clark proceeded to the prestigious Government College, Ughelli, in Delta State. He attended the prestigious Nigeria's premier University, the University College, Ibadan now known as University of Ibadan where he studied English as a Government and State scholar.

At Government College, Ughelli, Clark was said to have successfully carved a niche for himself as a voracious reader of every available English literature title in the school's library. He was also famous for sports. At Ibadan, he edited the Students' Union magazine known as *The Beacon*. He later became the founding editor of *The Horn*, the poetry journal at University College, Ibadan. *The Horn* was reputed to be instrumental to the launching of modern Nigerian poetry in English.

Upon graduation from Ibadan, Clark took up an appointment as an Information Officer at the Western Nigeria Ministry of Information, Ibadan. He also had a brief stint at the Express Group of Newspapers in Lagos as Features Editor and Editorial Writer. From the Express, Clark proceeded to Princeton in the United States of America, as a Parvin Fellow. It was at Princeton

that he wrote *The Masquerade*, a sequel to *Song of A goat*. He also wrote *The Raft* and *America their America*, his account of that year abroad. He returned to Nigeria in 1963 to a career in the academia as a Research Fellow in the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. From Ibadan, he moved to the University of Lagos in 1965 where he rose to the position of Head of the English Department and Professor of English. He retired voluntarily from the services of the University of Lagos in 1980 as Professor of English.

A distinguished poet and playwright, Clark has published several plays which include *Songs of a Goat*, *Masquerade*, *The Raft*, *The Wives' Revolt* and the trilogy known as the *Bikora Plays* comprising *The Boat*, *The Return Home* and *Full Circle*; *Ozidi*, and *America their America*. His published volume of poetry includes *A Reed in the Tide*, *Casualties*, *A Decade of Tongues*, *State of the Union*, among others.

The Wives' Revolt is a post-colonial play which captures the oil boom era in Nigeria. It also dwells on equality between men and women. Set in a rural patriarchal Nigerian community known as Erhuwaren in the Urhobo speaking area of the present day Delta State, it is a play that exposes the various ways that women suffer marginalisation in patriarchal societies like Nigeria. The play opens with the women of the community protesting against the unfair and lopsided sharing formula contrived and adopted by men of the community to share the money given to the entire members of the community by an oil company operating in the region. The men came up with the sharing formula without due consultation with the women. Okoro, a character in the play who this researcher considers as the arrowhead of the patriarchal system in Erhuwaren, arrogantly announces to the audience that “the sum was shared out in three equal parts, one going to the elders... the second to the men in all their age groups and the third...to the women” (1).

The women consider the sharing formula not fair enough and feel that it is a calculated attempt as is customary, by men to shortchange them. Apart from the lopsided sharing formula, another reason for the women's revolt is the law passed by men forbidding women from owning and keeping goats. The male lawmakers have no cogent reasons for this retrogressive legislation except the untenable excuse that it has been discovered that goats are possessed with the spirit of witchcraft to wreak havoc in the community. However, the same law does not ban men from confiscating, keeping, rearing and even cooking the women's goats as meals. This law by men appears to be blind to the fact that some men in the community are keeping and rearing pigs that are even more destructive than goats. This is the height of injustice. This also portrays patriarchy as an unjust system.

In their protest march, the women migrate to an enemy territory known as Eyara, crippling economic, social and domestic activities in their families and in the entire community while the protest lasted. At Eyara, they get infected with a deadly sexually transmitted disease which eventually becomes a major cross that men of Erhuwaren ought to bear as punishment for their insensitivity and brutality towards women.

3.2 Dynamism of Feminist Revolution in *The Dragon's Funeral, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *The Wives' Revolt*

Feminist scholars hold men accountable for the plight of women in patriarchal societies hence the themes or agenda of feminist drama and theatre are dedicated to addressing the injustices characterised by oppression, suppression, marginalisation and subjugation which the society unleashes on women in Nigeria. This is why earlier forms or waves of feminism tended to champion the overthrow of patriarchy and its replacement with matriarchy.

In the selected plays for this study, however, the playwrights clearly expose various oppressive and exploitative practices that the society perpetrates against women which the women oppose and revolt against in their attempts to enthrone change. The selected playwrights obviously view the establishment of an egalitarian system through a feminist approach that is African in nature, orientation and application as the solution to the maltreatment of women in Nigeria. This Nigerian feminist approach entails restructuring or re-organising patriarchal structures in Nigeria that tend to relegate women to the background and replacing such structures with fair and just ones that espouse the tenets of socialism where men and women are on the same social pedestal; structures that are devoid of class inequality and all manner of class struggles between men and women and without the usual master-servant relationship between both genders as proposed by womanism and motherism which are mainstream feminist ideologies that preach gender equality. The class struggles between men and women are as a result of the tendency of the exploiter class to continue to exploit and dominate the exploited or subject-class: the women. This makes confrontations between men and women in patriarchal societies of the plays inevitable. The Nigerian feminist agenda, therefore, is committed to changing an existing order that is clearly against the interests of women but in so doing, there must be conscious efforts to appreciate the classes and values that are constantly struggling for a new order or a new society in a cosmology that houses male-propelled Nigerian culture. Thus for the future of women to be secured with the female gender being accorded some level of respect and recognition as equal partners to men they must take cognizance of this cosmopolitan view of life. The plays, *The Dragon's Funeral*, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *The Wives' Revolt* aptly depict the pitiable situation that women find themselves in patriarchal societies like Nigeria. In a tangible manner, the playwrights raise very salient and crucial questions as to how fairly or otherwise, the society

treats women, thereby portraying patriarchy as a social system that is exploitative, insensitive and unkind to the womenfolk.

In *The Dragon's Funeral*, the bone of contention which is the primary cause of the women's revolution, has to do with the controversial issue of whether or not it is proper for the colonial government to tax women and if at all, whether they should be taxed as heavily as men are taxed. This is in the light of the fact that in Nigeria, which is largely patriarchal, women, over the years, have not been allowed to have equal economic opportunities with men. In agrarian communities therefore, in rural parts of Nigeria, women are not permitted or encouraged to plant yams, for instance, which is regarded as the "king of all farm crops". In fact in some cultures, it is a taboo for women to plant yams. They seem to be traditionally restricted to planting only less revenue-yielding crops like cassava, maize, cocoyam, melon, which are crops that are considered as only befitting women. Where men cultivate yam of different species, at harvest times, their wives are only allowed to touch the number of tubers of yam that their husbands hand over to them. Thus women are only allowed to sell less "significant" farm produce like melon, cocoyam, pepper, and so on and this means less income for them than men who sell their yams at cutthroat prices because yams are as costly as gold, being regarded as the king of all farm produce. This therefore, means more money in the pockets of men than women. Therefore, to tax men and women equally can be interpreted as a complete negation of Adam Smith's canon of taxation which projects equity and convenience as some of its basic tenets.

The canon of equity in taxation according to Smith as explained by Olayiwola Adejare Lawal holds that "tax should be levied on citizens on the basis of equity in proportion to their respective abilities and revenues which they enjoy under the protection of the State" while the canon of convenience holds that "every tax should be levied in such a manner and at such a time that it

affords to the maximum of convenience to the tax payer” (238). In other words, a taxation policy must be convenient for the payer as the tax payer is made to forgo his or her purchasing power and makes a sacrifice at the time of payment of tax.

The tension, which the playwright describes as “dust in the air”, that the tax policy and the decision of the colonial government to implement it generate initially starts on a low key at the family level, then gradually escalates to the communal level until it assumes a national scale and eventually erupts into a confrontation between the marginalised women and the colonial government and its agents who are warrant chiefs appointed from among the community members.

In the opening of the play, women are seen in Movement One, gathered in the Orié market ground to discuss and take a decision against the rampaging forces of colonialism which are bent on inflicting pains of hunger on households through its stringent tax policies. These policies are perceived as being targeted against women and therefore, understood to be a further attempt by the government and the society to emasculate women economically. While addressing her fellow women, Aداوگو, the women’s leader states that:

Women of my ancestral land, there is dust in the air. Evil men have enveloped our land. The name of that evil, that dust is government. We have heard different rumors about what government is doing and even intends to do. Our husbands have heard it; our children have heard it; even the trees of our land have heard it. The serene atmosphere of this village will soon be disrupted by the strangers in our midst who call themselves government. If we go to the market, it is government; if we cough, it is government. Women of Ngwaland, shall we escape into the ant-hole because of government? ... we have heard that there will be a new policy where women would be taxed by that dreadful monster called government ... They have taken everything we have. What do we have left? ... They take the best of our land, they have castrated our husbands, now they want to turn their attention to us, women, simply because our men have been completely intimidated... (18)

The women's leader's description of the government as "evil and the dust" in the air aptly points to the extent of disenchantment, dissatisfaction and disillusionment that the people feel towards the government as a result of its harsh policies. The speaker also alludes to the fact that men have failed to muster the courage to oppose the government's policies because in the opinion of the women, they have been "castrated" and become "completely intimidated" (18). It is possible that there would have been a few of them that would have stood up to speak up for women if the situation was different. The speaker has also succeeded in informing the audience that there is no formal channel of communication to enlighten the public about government policies. Rather, the people get to learn of government's policies and decisions through the grapevine. This is even characteristic of present day Nigerian governments at all levels. It shows that governments, even from the colonial times to the present haven't really had regard for the feelings of the people. It has therefore, been the lot of the Nigerian people over several decades to be treated with disdain by their leaders in government.

The protesting women make it clear to the audience that their planned protest or revolt is borne out of their determination to put an end to the oppressive policies and practices of government which most times worsen the women's situation as they are most often at the receiving end of negative effects of most policies of government. Adaugo states that:

We shall not allow ourselves to be harassed unnecessarily. I have heard that in their own country women are highly respected. But when they come here, they treat us like ash that must be dissipated for the next meal to come. Shall we allow ourselves to be treated like ash? (19)

She goes further to give specific reasons for the planned revolt by women thus:

My sisters, we shall not allow ourselves to be taxed. We shall resist any attempt to harass us. We shall put things in order. Our quiet land has turned into fracas fire. It has become a place where strangers milk people without any more scruples or conscience. And our men look on weakly and do nothing. We should not be afraid to fight. The earthworm has neither knife nor a hoe but it pierces the earth with its stomach. We must resist the government. And if they come after us, we must fight back! (19)

Having stated their determination to fight for their rights they decide to draw up their rules of engagement with the authorities while adopting accommodation and cooperation with the menfolk. Their strategy is not to directly confront patriarchy headlong as it were. Aduro informs the audience that:

Now, I want to make one thing clear to all of you ... our aim is not to fight our husbands. Our aim is not to confront men unnecessarily, even if they are strangers. Our aim is not to show that we are indispensable to men. In executing our action, we should ensure that we don't fail in our duties as wives, as daughters, as mothers, as the epitome of peace in our community. Our aim is to fight injustice, to fight for our rights, to fight for our children. As women, we have to do what we feel is right, even if men try to stop us. (24)

The above statement coming from a gender activist and a woman leader, underscores how prepared Nigerian women are to consciously avoid a head-on confrontation with patriarchy even in their struggles to liberate themselves from social restrictions and injustices. In this instance, they can be said to have adopted the twin tools of womanism and motherism which are the pillars upon which the dynamism of the women's revolution rests.

The women have been able to show that by avoiding direct confrontation with the menfolk in the course of their protests against perceived injustice, one sometimes has to stoop in order to conquer. The playwright goes further to highlight Nigerian feminist agenda of the protesting women by emphasising through the voice of Ikodie, one of the leading female characters, that

the series of meetings convened by women are not targeted at men and therefore, have “nothing to do with seeking equality with men ... but empowering women to take care of their own affairs in a world that is not prepared to protect them” (52). The above statement made by Ikodie portrays Nigerian women as a group of people who, in spite of the oppressed situation they find themselves are determined to uphold womanism and motherism as mainstream feminist ideologies that is committed to promoting gender equality. This is evident from the statements of the women leaders that their husbands who ought to protect them but have failed to do so remain their crowns and therefore, they will not do anything that will threaten the men’s positions as heads of families nor give an indication that they want to take over the position of men in the society. The statement, however, reveals how vulnerable women have become in a typical African patriarchal society such as Nigeria. With this revelation, therefore, the audience has come to realise that women constitute a group that can be referred to as an endangered species in Nigeria; a group that faces the grim possibility of being rendered voiceless by patriarchally determined traditions and oppressive cultural practices unless they stand up to fight for their rights and protect their womanhood.

The meek and gentle nature of Nigerian women which enables them to address their husbands in a placating manner even in the face of deliberate provocation from their husbands come to the fore when Dike, Ikodie’s husband tries to forcefully stop her from attending meetings convened by her fellow women. This is revealed in the following dialogue:

DIKE: No! The place of women is in the home. It is the duty of men who know better to decide for the women. This idea of women holding their own meeting without moderation by men will destroy this community.

IKODIE: You men believe you are strong. No one argues against that. But why are you always afraid of women holding their own meetings?

DIKE: Because they will not know the limits of their sense; because they will destroy the structure of the system; because it is not their duty to do so; because no sane person will engage in an action forbidden by his ancestors...

IKODIE: I just can't understand your fears. Have I not been doing my duties effectively as wife and mother? In fact I was the person who questioned the action of the women during the meeting. I even swore not to be part of it. But after listening to the women who know better than me, my foolishness began to stare me in the face... (53)

The argument lingers on to the point where Dike orders that his wife, Ikodie, "will never attend that meeting again" (53). The playwright reveals through the last statement by Ikodie how the Nigerian woman has never failed to support her husband and the entire family. This revelation goes to underscore the caring and passionate nature of women. In spite of the ill treatment that the society metes out to them in different forms through various structures such as patriarchy put in place by men, who see women as inferior, as revealed by Dike, women still endeavor to regard their husbands as heads of households whose opinions on issues must be sought and taken into consideration even when there is tension everywhere in the society. The playwright also reminds men that in spite of their acclaimed physical strength, they have not been able to muster the courage to resist the anti-people's policies of the colonial government and protect their wives and children against oppression and exploitation from the rampaging forces of colonialism. In a way, therefore, the revelation that comes from Ikodie's statement shows that men of Ngwa may have been willful partners of the colonial government in implementing its exploitative policies against the entire people. Ikodie states that:

Look at the whole town. There is no peace, there is fear everywhere, and you men do nothing about it. And you call yourselves men. You cancel your meetings any time because government wants you to work for him. You abandon farm work and your children suffer the pains of hunger. How can you call yourself a man when there's no food in the house, when there's no peace in your community? (55)

The “sheroism” of Ikodie and her fellow women is hinged on their collective ability to remain themselves, focused and determined during the heady period of the revolution and their struggle for liberation. The playwright specifically holds the society responsible for the hard times that women are passing through, occasioned by the government’s harsh policies. Ikoonia, one of the leading female characters informs the audience that “it is the way we are treated by our men that gave the government the impetus to impose labour on us. They think we are mere commodities” (63). The above statement by Ikoonia reveals that most Nigerian marriages are characterized by attempts by patriarchs to uphold only their own selfish interests, not minding how their wives feel, believing that they are the heads of households and therefore, their wives must accept things the way they are and force themselves to live by the standards of their husbands, for it is only commodities that do not have feelings or emotions and therefore, can be used and tossed around the way their owners deem fit.

During the struggle for justice and liberation, Adaugo and her fellow women prove to be very resourceful and tactful. This aspect of their resourcefulness draws from their ability to mobilise other women from outside their community. This is perhaps because they realise that they will achieve their aim faster and more effectively if the revolution is allowed to assume a national outlook by allowing it to spread as far and widely as possible. Historically, no protest has recorded any huge success if it is confined within a tiny group or a locality. Even protests by the Nigerian Labour Congress are effective if other unions are involved and encouraged to support the Labour Union. This may have been the driving philosophy behind the decision of the Adaugo-led women group to encourage women from other communities like Okrika to participate in the protest. That way, the protest is no longer localized and the colonial authorities will feel the heat kicked up by the protest more quickly. Nwugo affirms this when she states that:

It's time to go, Adaugo. Some women will be coming from Okrika to see me. They will come with my husband's sister, Ogbenyealu. When they come I will bring them to you so you can talk to them. They all want to organize the women of their neighborhood as well. (64)

The women are determined to succeed hence they are very careful to avoid a direct confrontation or rather, a head on collision with their husbands because it will spell disaster for the struggle if they have to fight different wars from different fronts at the same time. Adaugo states earlier on that:

... There is one thing I want to make clear to you so you can tell the women of your neighborhood. We are not fighting our men... Our confrontation is with the government. Every woman should discharge her duties in the usual manner. No woman should resist her normal chores. We don't want our men to think that we are trying to overthrow them. They're already looking for reasons to confront us. But they won't succeed.(63)

It can be deduced from the above statement that the Nigerian woman is more interested in enthroning change in the way society treats them rather than dethroning patriarchy. It can also be deduced that they are all for a peaceful coexistence with men. However, in their attempt to justify their crusade for a change, they make an attempt to define what they are passing through in the society. They charge the society with cruelty towards women specifically. Hence, the women's leader, Adaugo defines cruelty thus:

Cruelty occurs when a person deliberately inflicts suffering on another and relishes it, especially when he considers the person less advantaged than himself. Only cruel people take delight in inflicting suffering on another for its own sake. Look at what the government is doing to us. They confiscate our land, they impose their administration on us, and now they want to tax us when we don't even have enough to eat or feed our children. They have pushed us to the wall and there's no going back. (64)

The playwright's portrayal of government or the society as cruel towards women aptly captures the situation of women in present day Nigeria where households have been exposed to the pains of hunger because the economy is so poor that men can no longer effectively support and sustain their families due to poor remuneration or outright unemployment. Even working class women too are not able to adequately support their families because their earning power has been drastically weakened by all kinds of bogus policies put in place by government that do not directly impact on the lives of the people positively. If workers are not been taxed disproportionately and arbitrarily, they are made to pay a certain amount of money from their salaries, deducted at source, to fund certain policies of government that they end up not enjoying the services. The "free" maternal health care policies of most governments in present day Nigeria for instance are bogus and not free in the real sense of it hence such policies are perceived by the people as having been designed to fleece workers of certain percentages of their hard earned salaries on a monthly basis. At the end of the month, the workers find dismayingly, that their take home pay cannot really take them home. Meanwhile, some indolent government officials somewhere are smiling to their banks, feeding fat on the sweat of the suffering workers. These government officials are mostly unqualified political office holders with all sorts of ridiculous official designations. Therefore, just like the warrant chiefs, they connive with their principals in government to cart away millions of our common wealth to foreign private bank accounts thus afflicting the people with avoidable excruciating hard times. The result is that just like in Nwabueze's *The Dragon's Funeral*, most households in the society are badly hit and impoverished. The most affected are mostly women who are forced to devise other means of surviving, including engaging in all sorts of social vices which include prostitution, in order to support and sustain their households. They are not proud of it but the cruel system has made it

so. Ikodie has earlier alluded to the cruelty of the system and the hardship that households go through when she taunts her husband thus “look at the whole town. There’s no peace, there’s fear everywhere... you cancel your meeting anytime because government wants you to work for him... your children suffer the pains of hunger. How can you call yourself a man when there’s no food in the house? (55). According to Uche-Chimere Nwaozuzu, “Adaugo lampoons the colonial officials and their local collaborators, like Nduka, for daring to inflict more hardships and sufferings on the people” (308).

There are sterling qualities which any leader must possess. One of these qualities is self-confidence. Another is patience. Adaugo as a leader exhibits these qualities in addition to having poise and vision, even though she does not have the benefits of formal Western education. According to Nwaozuzu, she shows a complete “understanding of the dynamics of the skewed relationship between the rulers and the ruled, between the colonial government and the colonized people” (307). This quality enables her to lead her fellow women to successfully revolt against society’s unceasing attempts to oppress women.

The first major casualty of this revolt is Emeruwa who, while carrying out Chief Okeugo’s directive to count the people as a prelude to the full implementation of the government’s tax policy, gets man-handled by the protesting women led by Adaugo. Having dealt with Emeruwa to their satisfaction, they collectively go for Chief Okeugo, otherwise, known as the Dragon. By this time, Chief Okeugo has fled to seek refuge in the District Officer’s residence. At the residence of the District Officer, Adaugo, still in the company of her fellow women announces to the audience that “our role as women is to cleanse the society of pollution. Whether the pollution was caused by our husbands or children or even strangers, does not matter” (73). However, one of the domestic staff of the District Officer known as Nduka attempts to plead with the women to

“please calm down” but Adaugo states loudly and boldly that “we want the white man... we shall not leave here until he shows respect to the opinion of women” (73). Therefore, the Adaugo-led protesting women take Nduka’s assurances that the white man has sacked Chief Okeugo and that they should “take my word for it...” with a pinch of salt. Hence she retorts of behalf of the other women that “we are not going to take any man’s word for it any longer. Not even that of the District Officer. When a person is stung by an ant, he becomes wiser” (75). Adaugo however, reiterates the peaceful nature of women when she states that “we are peaceful people. We could have liked to deal with him, but we can take another route to achieve our aim. His cap constitutes his authority. Send us his cap to celebrate his funeral. That is the only thing that will bring peace in this land” (75). In the stage direction, the playwright goes further to throw more light on the outcome of the women’s protest:

Nduka exits. The women continue to sing war songs. Nwugo raises her voice and begins an eulogy in celebration of Okeugo’s apparent overthrow. The women join in unison. Nduka emerges with Okeugo’s chieftaincy cap as well as his staff of office. Adaugo takes the staff of office and breaks it across her knee. The women shout in ecstasy. They then pounce on the cap and tear it to shreds. They tie all of them together and begin a funeral procession. (75)

Obviously encouraged and emboldened by the success of their protest which has resulted in the dethronement of Chief Okeugo, the protesting women push forward more conditions and demands. Adaugo states emphatically that “it is time to face the white man” (75). In unison they chant “Away with oppression. Away with taxation” (76). Adaugo states that:

Listen to us. Our people say that the main cause of murder should be traced to the blacksmith who made the murder weapon. The oppression of women must stop... Now tell the District Officer to come out here. Tell him that women want him to come out of that house he built from our resources and labor. Unless he comes out, we shall be constrained to go in there and meet him. Am I stating the opinion of women? (76)

However, Nduka makes attempts to persuade them to change their decision to meet with the white man by pleading that the District Officer cannot come out to meet with them because “he is sick”. He however, assures them(women) that whatever demands they have to make will be “favourably considered”, citing the handing over of the Dragon’s cap and staff of office as an indication that the District Officer is willing to meet the protesting women’s demands. But the women are resolute in pushing through their demands. Adaugo, the ever intelligent, resilient and resourceful leader in her response to Nduka’s pleas, maintains that:

We are simple people but not simpletons. Our cause is not yet fulfilled. We know the difference between victory and success. Go back and tell the District Officer to declare in writing that women will never be taxed, that the counting of people and farm products should stop immediately. Tell him to write down that forced labor should stop, and that women should be consulted before any decision affecting them is concluded. Let him write them down so we can preserve it as an agreement between the government and us. (77)

Thereafter, according to the stage direction:

Nduka exits. The women resume their war songs, dancing in front of the Lodge...Nduka emerges with a white sheet of paper and raise it high for the women to see. Adaugo snatches the paper from him, raises it high for the women whom rush to touch it. (77)

The statement of victory made by Adaugo that follows the presentation of the agreement between the District Officer and the women crowns the success of the revolution. She states that “it is a woman that gave birth to a Chief” (77). This statement underlines the peaceful and accommodating nature of women and how magnanimous they can be even in victory. Taking non-militarist posture is one weapon that women are known to deploy in crisis situations and it works for them almost every time. In the case of the women of Ngwaland, this non-militarist approach can be said to be the dynamism that drives their revolution to a successful and victorious end. Otherwise, nothing stops Adaugo and her fellow women from making more

arrogant and haughty statements like we find in the case of Okoro in Clark's *The Wives Revolt* from the beginning. The statement however signals an end to male chauvinism and the likelihood that henceforth, there will be a peaceful co-existence between men and women, with no further attempts by the society to continue to intimidate and oppress women who are the sources of life by virtue of the fact that every man or woman was given birth to by a woman. Without them therefore, there is no human existence. The fall or dethronement of Chief Okeugo marks the total collapse of the anti-people's policies of the male-dominated colonial government.

In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Rotimi presents polygamy as one of the cultural practices which patriarchal societies use as an instrument of oppression against women. It has therefore, become one of the oppressive practices against women in Nigeria that they seek to be liberated from.

The play presents Liza as a strong-willed and focused woman who demonstrates a strong resentment against polygamy. Educated and intelligent, she can be described as an embodiment of hope for the voiceless, illiterate and timid Nigerian woman. The moment that she steps into Lejoka-Brown's house, her supposed matrimonial home, and finds herself coming face to face with the grim possibility of having to contend with two other women as co-wives over her husband, especially with the rancour and antagonism that characterise polygamous marriages, she sounds it loudly and very clearly that:

...I cannot and will never surrender my person to be devoured in this blatantly decadent, third-rate domestic circus! Nor will I condescend to sharing the same monster of a husband with that ... that...smutty, ill-bred, foul-mouthed, uncouth, mangy, grossly ribald, whipper-snapper of a chipmunk! (26-27)

In Nigeria, culture and tradition favour polygamy as a form of marriage. Liza is a Westerner and with her Western education and background, polygamy means women subjugation and oppression and is therefore, unacceptable to her. Contrary to her views, polygamy is only a type

of marriage in Africa or specifically, Nigerian tradition and culture where co-wives co-exist peacefully without complaints. Rotimi uses Liza's character to symbolise encroachment of Western feminism. Interestingly, Rotimi remains within ideological confines of Nigerian feminism as Liza mobilises her fellow women for political participation and possible empowerment so that they can enjoy equal status with men. The implication of polygamy for the Nigerian woman is that women are not allowed to complain when their husbands decide to marry as many wives as he wishes to marry. Any woman who has the audacity to complain is branded an enemy of progress who is set on a collision course with the culture of her people with devastating consequences for her. Society sees such a woman as a selfish and domineering woman who wants to be in charge and dictate to her husband how he must live. But the playwright through the conscientisation activities of a Western woman-Liza, offers Nigerian women who find themselves in Liza's shoes a possible route to freedom out of this cultural bondage. This possible route is revealed to the audience when Liza pointedly informs Lejoka-Brown about her independence and states that "... If you dare meddle in my affairs ... I will be constrained to take what might be an impetuous decision. In which case, you will have to bear full responsibility for the consequences of that impetuosity" (41-42).

She explains, when prodded by her husband, that one of such decisions that will likely help her and her fellow oppressed women to regain their freedom out of servitude is "immediate divorce proceedings... The grounds are ample and valid breach of faith; extreme mental cruelty; incompatibility; adultery; gross negligence of ... (42). The salient lesson underscored by the playwright in the confrontation between Lejoka-Brown and Liza is that women need to be enlightened, they need to be educated to be able to know the steps to take that will lead to their liberation from oppression. Without knowledge, which they say is power, Liza will not know that

she has the God-given right to take an “impetuous decision” and that divorce is an option for women who are in oppressive marital relationships.

Going further on the dynamism of feminist revolution, Rotimi in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* attempts to expose the unrelenting attempts by the society to keep women in a perpetual state of subjugation by x-raying the uncanny tendency of Nigerian male politicians to manipulate the electorates, starting from their families, especially their wives, in order to win elections, at all costs. The play presents politics as another potent weapon that men use to oppress women and keep them disempowered. This is because, in their opinion, politics is not a game that women can play. They also see politics as an investment and an avenue to their individual aggrandisement and enrichment rather than a call to render selfless service to the people. Lejoka-Brown, a character in the play reveals this warped line of thinking of male politicians when he states that:

Are you there? Politics is the thing now in Nigeria, mate. You want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop life? – No, no- you want to chop a big slice of the National cake? - Na politics... I said to my party boys... once we get elected to the top, *wallahi*, we shall stuff ourselves with huge mouthfuls of the National chin-chin... (4)

The play reveals the man to be a thin god who must be worshipped and adored by his wives who he treats as slaves. Lejoka-Brown is the boss. He must be worshipped; his wives and servants must do his biddings with no rights to question his orders at all. Lejoka-Brown uses politics and tradition as platforms to stamp his authority. Under his roof, women have no rights at all. Sikira, one of his wives, expresses the frustration of women who are in a similar situation as hers when she laments that “In this house? A slave that is what I am. Did he marry me because he loves me or because of his crazy politics? What do I care whether he wins politics or not? Shame indeed” (15).

The above lamentation reveals how unlucky women in traditional settings have been and how badly they are treated as slaves even by their husbands. In such traditional settings, they must live in servitude to their husbands who are their lords and masters. The following dialogue paints a vivid picture of master-servant relationship between Lejoka-Brown and his wives:

Lejoka-Brown: ...Sikira!

Sikira: ...Sah!

Lejoka-Brown: ... Where's Sikira that answered "shaann" just now, na?

Sikira: Here I am my –

Lejoka-Brown: Towel, towel-get me a towel... Sikira!

Sikira: (*Offstage*) Coming my lord.(6)

Rotimi also attempts to create class consciousness among the women. Sikira refers to Liza as Miss World in scene II. This reference to Liza as Miss World points to the issue of sophistication on account of the fact that Liza is educated up to the university level and therefore, there is inferiority complex arising from Sikira's lack of formal Western education. Initially, this generates class struggle between Liza and Sikira at the family level, which leads to Liza initially mistaking Sikira for a house maid. Sikira too, in her attempt to establish her position as a legally married wife to Lejoka-Brown, under native law and custom, stresses that she deserves to be accorded some respect as the "senior" wife in the house. Sikira states that "... by native law and custom, I hold a senior place in this house" (25). But Liza displays class and poise and refuses to be drawn into a physical combat with Sikira. It is noteworthy that Liza's ability to exercise self-control in the face of provocation eventually helps to douse the conflict in the home and proves to be the uniting factor that leads the women to develop the bond, the solidarity that they need as

a tool to advance their collective interest in the face of tyrannical and dictatorial tendencies of the male dominated Nigerian society.

A soldier-turned politician, conservative Lejoka-Brown believes that his word should be law especially in his household and in political cycles. But Liza, highly educated, exposed and enlightened Kenyan lady, is not cowed by the rigid and domineering tendencies of Lejoka-Brown. She eventually turns out to be the Moses that would liberate her fellow women from bondage, using protest as a tool. For instance, when he comes up with a dress code for his wives, Sikira and Mama Rashida are too timid to resist his orders. But Liza refuses to be intimidated. Sikira acknowledges this when she refers to Liza thus: “You are a strong woman, with strong, strong heart. Sometimes I wish I, too, had your kind of strong, strong heart, so I could tell our husband to go to hell!” (53)

The build up to women’s revolution in the play at the family level actually starts with Lejoka-Brown’s lack of transparency with his wives as a family man. He is the type that believes that he can always force his decisions down the throats of his wives and it will stay that way. As far as he is concerned, he does not have to explain his reasons for taking certain decisions. And they are not entitled to any explanations either. He is very empirical in his approach to issues. Liza reveals the profound heartache that Lejoka-Brown has inflicted on her when she confides in Sikira that:

... he *lied* to me. At least, you knew he had two other women before you married him. But me... He didn’t tell me anything. When I walked into this house three weeks ago, I took you for a housemaid and thought Mama Rashida was a washer-woman or something... (*Losing control*), well, it all goes to prove that Mr. Rahman Lejoka-Brown does not have any respect whatsoever for my feelings. Why, I believe a woman must try to be loving, loyal wife and all that. On the other hand, the husband must try to show some respect for the wife. After all, when we boil it down, men and women are all created equal... (54)

The playwright opens the eyes of the audience to the divide that exists among Westerner women over feminism (radical and conservative feminism). Liza's position on feminism, unlike some other Western women, fits into womanism and motherism. Hence, she does not preach lesbianism, same sex marriage, single parentage but like conservative feminists, especially the Nigerian feminist, preaches that a woman deserves some respect from her husband because men and women are equal before God. Liza therefore, begins to show resentment against Lejoka-Brown's highhandedness when she starts to protest openly against his rules, including how his wives should dress both at home and in public by not only dressing as she pleases, but by making similar skimpy dresses for Sikira to put on as well as by gradually expanding the mentality of women through feminist conscientisation. Liza is able to make them learn that men and women are born equal. Lejoka-Brown on the other hand is not deterred by Liza's efforts at conscientising women. He therefore, goes ahead to list rules that his wives, including Liza, must abide by. He states that:

First and foremost! You must see to it that all areas around, above and below your shoulders are well covered up from now on. No more short knickers, and no more... tight, tight, tight trousers that show all your... your... Geography! Furthermore... Cigarette smoking will have to stop now! And last of all, starting from this night, I want to see you act as my wife. That's all! (58-59)

It is the feminist conscientisation that Sikira receives from Liza that emboldens her to, for the first time stand up to her husband in protest. This is revealed in the following dialogue:

Lejoka-Brown: ... Now, woman you do just as I say quick or I'll tear off that half-peeled banana from the rest of your body!

Sikira: Do as you say, do as you say! It is always do as you say. Always command, command, command! Why don't you show some respect and let me do as I want, just once! (Lejoka-Brown is bewildered by this sudden, unwonted boldness. He scowls accusingly at Liza, then turns again to Sikira)

Lejoka-Brown: For the last time, sister, let your feet take you into your room before thunder rumbles down your throat!

Sikira: (*tearfully*) What am I in this house, anyway?

Lejoka-Brown: Go on!

Sikira: Am I a slave?

Lejoka-Brown: You heard me!

Sikira: Or a housewife?

Lejoka-Brown: (*berserk*). You are one of the crazy headaches I've been crazy enough to get into my crazy head! Now get out of here!

Sikira:(*to Liza*). You heard that? (*to Lejoka-Brown, backing away*). All right, all right! I will. I will get out of here. (*Rushes toward the rear door, stops, pokes her head round, and coos*) Men and women are created equal! (57)

Under Liza's tutelage, women move from their agitations for the eradication of obnoxious practices against the female folk to women empowerment. This is evident in Mama Rashida, whose humility borders on docility, but who gradually begins to imbibe the basic principles of demand and supply and by extension as a result of the tutelage she receives from Liza which has helped to broaden her mental horizon. This enables her to expand her poultry business, become economically independent of her husband and prove to male chauvinists like Lejoka-Brown that money making is not an exclusive preserve of the male gender!

Furthermore, the playwright uses Mustapher's visit to Lejoka-Brown's residence to highlight the "prison" mentality that the society imposes on women in some parts of Nigeria. Mama Rashida and Sikira must cover their faces with veils like masquerades before opening the door to attend to male visitors to their home. The audience is made to see where the women kneel down all through the duration of Mustapher's visit to discuss with him. This is revealed in a stage direction: *Mama Rashida and Sikira kneel down on the sheepskin on the floor of the living*

room(16). Both women even address him as “my Lord”! (17). These are all attempts by Rotimi to show the extent to which womanhood has been debased in Nigeria: that women do not have equal status with the men. It is unthinkable, for instance, that even an ordinary school boy of secondary school will kneel down to discuss with an older man simply because it is “traditional” to do so. This is the situation until Liza, an embodiment of feminist activism emerges on the scene to begin the gradual process of dismantling the male hegemony otherwise, patriarchy.

This is achieved during a final showdown between Lejoka-Brown and Liza. The fight between the two helps to demystify the Lejoka-Brown hegemony before the other two women. Perhaps, they would never have believed or imagined let alone, witnessed it that a woman like them is able to resist their “lord” and master. The playwright paints a vivid picture of the fight in a stage direction:

... Spanks her on the buttocks, and hops back. Maddened by this teasing, Liza again lurches more desperately after Lejoka-Brown, striking blindly with the broom. One wallop gets Lejoka-Brown full on the thigh, forcing him to retreat through the rear door into the back yard, hotly pursued by Liza. At this point, we see Mama Rashida approaching. On her head is the basket cage housing some live chickens. Simultaneously, Sikira rushes in from rear of house. On her head is a large trunk box. She hastens across the living-room, kicks door open, and bolts out, almost bumping into Mama Rashida. (59)

The outcome of the confrontation launched by Liza against patriarchal domination of women helps to encourage Sikira to take the bold step of moving out of her matrimonial home, which is the beginning of her liberation from servitude, back to her mother’s place from where she is able to launch a successful political career. It is Sikira’s successful shot at politics that brings Lejoka-Brown down to his knees and his political ambition to an inglorious end.

It will be proper to state that but for Liza’s emergence on the scene, the women in the lives of the likes of Lejoka-Brown would have continued to suffer degradation, abuse, maltreatment, deprivation, oppression and suppression with uncommon stoicism and without the minutest

courage to complain not to talk of putting up a resistance and revolting against their oppressors. The conflict in the play is resolved at the end of the play when Sikira emerges as the presidential candidate of the National Party. Of course in this position, she has become liberated and will not likely condescend to continue as one of the wives of Lejoka-Brown. Then, Mama Rashida has decided to relocate to Abule-Oja to start the process of expanding her poultry business. With the two women out of the way, obviously by divine providence, Lejoka-Brown decides to settle down to serious marital life with Liza. He states his resolve to make it up to Liza:

Lejoka-Brown: Are you there... Elizabeth, I'm really very sorry for everything that has happened. I'll go back to the cocoa business. No more monkey politics for me. But first, I'll build you the clinic I promised. On this very land. I'll make sacrifice to my fathers, and then break down this old house. I'll build a new one on its soil. Three stories. You'll use two for the clinic, and we'll live in peace on the top floor.(75)

It therefore can be said that Rotimi created the character, Liza to be the principal architect of the process that is expected to ensure the liberation of the womenfolk. Liza adopts various strategies towards achieving her agenda of liberating her fellow women. The strategies include verbal protests, conscientisation of her fellow women with the aim of changing their mentality and directly confronting and engaging their oppressor in a physical fight. These strategies adopted by Liza are some of the instances of the dynamism of the Nigerian feminist revolution for they indicate the stages of evolution or changes that the society has undergone and is undergoing from the traditional where women are mainly docile and are restricted by tradition and cultures of the male-propelled society to raise their voices in protest against their husbands to the modern era where women have become conscientised and emboldened to stand up to men in protection of their rights.

In *The Wives' Revolt*, the playwright exposes very effectively the exploitation, marginalisation, oppression and other forms of injustices that women suffer in patriarchal societies. In other

words, the play examines the various ways that the Nigerian society treats women unfairly as well as how the injustices that women suffer serve as catalysts for their revolts in their desire to enthrone change and extract a fair treatment from the society.

The play is set in a patriarchal Nigerian community known as Erhuwaren in the Urhobo speaking area of the present day Delta State. From the beginning of the play the audience is made to observe the master-servant kind of relationship between men and women. The women are not reckoned with and are obviously not consulted nor their opinions sought when important community affairs or matters are tabled for discussion for decisions to be taken on such matters.

The play opens with women protesting against the unfair and lopsided sharing formula adopted by the men in sharing the money given to the community by the Oil Company operating in the community. The sharing formula was contrived by the men in their council of meeting without due consultation with the women. Okoro, a character in the play, who this researcher considers as a die-hard apostle of the patriarchal system in Erhuwaren Community, informs the audience in an arrogant manner that:

Erhuwaren! Erhuwaren! Descendants of Udumede and Meghwere ... open your ears wide that you may hear well. It is the matter of the money sent by the oil company operating on our land. The amount is known to all. This sum, after due debate in the town hall, has been shared out in three equal parts, one going to the elders of the town, the second to the men in all their age groups, and the third, by no means the least, to the women, also in all their age grades. A most fair and equitable settlement you will never find in any other society; near or far... (1)

The women who appear to have bottled up many past cases of ill treatments from the male members of Erhuwaren community consider the sharing formula not fair enough and feel short-changed. They therefore consider the recent one of the lopsided sharing of the money from the Oil Company a pill too bitter for them to swallow hence their decision to stage a protest until the situation is redressed. The idea is to reverse the socially-endorsed system that has enabled men to

ride roughshod over them at the slightest opportunity. Ideally, in an equitable system, elders and men ought to be categorised as belonging to one group, being all men but patriarchy cannot be said to be an equitable system. Alternatively, since we have “elders of the town” who are men and “men in all their age groups”, there should have been elderly women and then women in all their age groups too. Or in the alternative, the money should have been shared equally into two between men and women considering the fact that the population of any community from creation is made up of only two genders: men and women. But to categorise the population of a community into three groups of elderly men, men in all their age grades and women for the purpose of sharing money is indicative of the greedy nature of the black man who will capitalise on every available opportunity to shortchange women. This goes further to underscore the argument of feminists that patriarchy is a social system that is structured in a manner that only men are favoured at the expense of women by ensuring that women are marginalised, made to suffer deprivations and compelled to live and abide by standards set by men. Okoro confirms the logic of Nigerian feminists who feel this way when he states that:

However, our womenfolk led by a few reckless ones, fed up with doing simple duties for their husbands and children as befits good housewives, are repudiating this fair and reasonable distribution of the money, demanding that it should have been divided into two equal parts, one going to them and the other to the men, the elders being in their opinion, all male. In pursuit of their claims, which we declare are not only preposterous but in complete violation of our ancient custom and law, they have refused ...to perform their civic duties and responsibilities... (1)

The playwright successfully enlightens chauvinistic male audience that women are not property that they can possess or robots that can be manipulated at will. The play therefore, conscientises women that they possess the inalienable right to protest against oppressive practices that the society metes out to them. This is highlighted when Okoro taunts Koko his wife, as a pauper who

possesses nothing under his roof, except the ones he bought for her. Okoro states that “I bought you all your fine dresses, all your gold trinkets, not to mention all the pots, pans, plates...” (51)

In this attempt to intimidate women by the likes of Okoro who one can rightly refer to as an arrowhead of patriarchy, the playwright encourages women to cry out in protest against intimidation. In contemporary Nigeria, men have been known to throw their wives out of their matrimonial homes penniless and without any of their property to go away with except most times, the clothes they have on at that moment. But, Koko exercises and exhibits the inalienable rights of women to protest or revolt against acts of injustice or maltreatments by the society when she responds appropriately to Okoro’s taunts and states that:

Oh no! You aren’t going to get your way just like that. I’ve been married to you for fifteen years and for all that time, I haven’t just kept house for you. I haven’t just reared children for you. Oh, no, I have labored all those years by your side in your trade, carrying and fetching at your beck and call, all manner of load, even when I was heavy with child with another at my breast. I have sat from morning till night in your shop coping with your customers, enduring spit and abuse when you sold them your shoddy wares. Oh, yes, every penny that you have parleyed into a pound to cram your purse, I’ve haggled more than half of it till my tongue grew sore between my teeth. So do you think, having enjoyed me, a maid of fresh solid parts sent to you as a prize, you can throw me aside, now my shoulders are sagging as are my breasts in service of you and your children? (52)

The playwright uses Koko’s character to symbolise a new dawn in feminist agitations in a rural patriarchal Nigerian society. The reactions of Okoro and Idama at Koko’s riposte over her husband’s taunts reveal the effect of her unexpected vehement expression of displeasure at the way women are maltreated in patriarchal societies. This is revealed in the stage direction as stated by the playwright that “both men are so taken by surprise...” (52). Secondly, this instructively shows that patriarchal domination of women has subsisted till recent times partly because women have been too timid and therefore, have always lacked the courage to speak out against oppression and other forms of injustices that the male-dominated society metes out to

them. More importantly, the above statement from Koko successfully exposes haughty men who brag about their achievements in their attempt to intimidate and humiliate their wives at the slightest opportunity, that most women have at some point or the other made some personal sacrifices as Koko has pointed out and played some supportive roles in the lives of their husbands to help them succeed in their endeavours.

Another decision by men that causes a split in the community is the law banning women from rearing goats. There is no reason for this retrogressive legislation by men except for the untenable excuse that goats are possessed with the spirits of witchcraft to wreak havoc in the community. Meanwhile, the same law passed by men forbidding women from rearing and keeping goats does not apply to men who keep and rear not only goats but pigs that are even more destructive than goats. The same goats that men like Okoro have proclaimed unclean are being sold and slaughtered to cook as meals by Okoro! According to Chidi Nwankwo and Greg Mbajiorgu:

The law banning women from rearing goats in town is also a conscious effort to emasculate and marginalize them economically and socially. Patriarchal need to dominate women and ensure man's total control of the economic system enforces a vicious cycle... (151)

It is very clear that conservatives like Okoro and Idama are engaged in high-handed conspiracy against women by upholding a tradition that impoverishes and disempowers the women folk. The idea is obviously to intimidate them, render them timid and passive and then impress it on them that they are trapped in a master-slave type of relationship with men. There is also the element of blackmail against women. They are branded witches. Okoro states that:

Our good women, not content with creating this condition of stench that hits the nose like a cockroach flying in your face, have taken to harassing the community by all sorts of unpatriotic practices, some even assuming by power of witchcraft, the insidious forms and shapes of goats to terrorise honest, clean-living citizens of our peace-loving town... (2)

There is no woman that will be happy to be branded a witch. She will naturally react against any or such attempts to smear her image. For this grave accusation alone, the women of Erhuwaren have enough grounds to feel unloved, oppressed, suppressed and endangered. This baseless accusation of being witches is an added pain in their asses. However, this researcher wonders what else Okoro is other than a retrogressive, greedy arrow-head of an unpopular patriarchal system that is only designed and structured to subject the female folk to different shades of injustices including economic exploitation. Okoro is not portrayed as possessing any spiritual powers of clairvoyance to be able to detect the presence of witches. The element of economic exploitation as one of the compelling reasons for the unpopular legislation is evident in Okoro's statement to Idama. He states:

What is it man? Can't you see I am busy securing my catch? Nine goats in all I caught single-handed this morning under our bill of attainder against all offenders. I've slaughtered one already to cook myself a meal...By the way, how many of the creatures did you impound? (17)

At Idama's response of "none", Okoro's next statement reveals him as a dishonest arrow-head of patriarchy whose stock-in-trade is to exploit women and enrich himself at their expense. His reply to Idama's answer of "none" is "Not even one? Are you saying you deliberately shut this golden gate thrown open for you to walk into wealth? (17).

The play also portrays Okoro as a male chauvinist who holds the opinion that women lack unity, a very vital ingredient that they need to be able to wage a sustained fight against an oppressive system. He also perceives them as lacking the intellectual capacity or aptitude, with no clear-cut agenda to challenge customs and traditional practices that debase their selfhood thereby denying them a sense of self-determination. Okoro states that:

I don't see what you women can do. You cannot even speak with one voice on any matter at any time. We saw a good display of your unity today at the

assembly, didn't we? All you do is buzz about an issue like a swarm of houseflies unable to move a little object in the way that ants in all their mute state do so well with ease.(11)

Okoro does not stop at this. He argues further that a woman should give up her God-given rights and perhaps live in perpetual servitude to the man. He maintains that:

Women have no rights that I know of, they bestow their gifts on whom they like, run their households as they deem fit, and to crown it all, they dispute rights with our mothers in their own ambition to change us. So what special rights do they want? (20)

When Idama, Okoro's friend reminds him that women play very important roles in the family such as cooking for their husbands and children, washing their clothes, bearing children and therefore are human enough to assert their rights, Okoro maintains that the woman's position in the home is inconsequential. Yet the same Okoro finds it extremely difficult to light a fire to cook a meal when challenged by that necessity. However, to the shock of every man in the community, the women prove to be very determined, united and resourceful in their revolts against injustice. They also appear conscious of the necessity to keep within the tenets of womanism and motherism as the playwright highlights when she tells Okoro that "nobody is going to fight you... That will be giving you license to stay out" (11). Again, Chidi Nwankwo and Greg Mbajiogu highlight the resourcefulness displayed by the women during their revolt. They state that "Their heroism lies in being themselves, a realisation of self and an exploration of woman's selfhood" (154).

The pyrrhic victory achieved by the women at the end of the revolt is used by the playwright to conscientise the audience, especially women, that if they possess the will-power, demonstrate discipline and unity of purpose, their chances of collectively doing away with obsolete and oppressive practices that hold them captive are very bright. The outcome of the women's revolt is captured in Okoro's announcement when he states that "... it makes my heart sweet ... to

announce that with immediate effect... the obnoxious law banning all manner of goats from our city and anywhere near its precincts, is hereby revoked” (58). He also goes ahead to announce that women and all those who lost one herd of goat or an entire herd will be compensated adequately, adding that “... no award is too much for this singular set of women, who in fearless opposition to an unjust law staged a walk-out on all their men, bringing life to a standstill, not even sparing their children” (59). Earlier on page 58 of the play, Okoro had admitted that the men goofed by applying the laws that only men have contrived. He states that:

The unfortunate incidents of the last few days have shown how an idea meant for the common good, if not debated in public and adopted by consensus can give rise to dissension and create havoc in a community right down to the family level, even to the nuclear unit of one man, one wife. (58)

The duo of Nwankwo and Mbajiorgu note that the “play ends on a note of optimism as the strands of contradictions are reconciled with Okoro’s reclamation” (155).

The technique of character polarisation between the men and women of Erhuwaren Community is used in the play to introduce class struggle between both genders. And the women prove to be united, courageous, determined, strategic and resourceful while challenging the status quo with a view to bringing to an end patriarchal domination and brutality in the community. Perhaps, the audience is made to have inkling of how determined the women of Erhuwaren have become in their genuine desire to enthrone change through revolution against oppression which they suffer from the society when Koko tells her husband to “wait and see. You beat a child and you say he should not cry. Oh you wait and see” (11). Again, Nwankwo and Mbajiorgu state that:

The dominant motif in *Our Wives’ Revolt* is self-realization, justice and freedom. The women’s action vindicates the feminist argument that women are in danger from their male counterparts in a patriarchal society. Clark polarizes the men driven by their chauvinism and the women motivated by an enduring sense of truth and justice. The reconciliation at the end of the play is a metaphor depicting the development and transformation of states of consciousness. (154)

The issues raised in the play border on acts of injustice against women. The men feel that the sharing formula that they have contrived without the women is all right and should be acceptable to all as in their thinking, the money has been fairly shared; that it is also all right and should be acceptable to all, including women, who the society feels have no rights to own property. But to the women these are infringements on their rights, particularly the men's attempt to limit the population of the community to just three categories of elders, men and women. This is a pill that is too bitter for them to swallow and therefore, unacceptable to them. They embark on the revolt which Okoro refers to as a "walk out". At the end of the play, it dawns on die-hard apostles of patriarchy that the Nigerian woman is not a puppet to be manipulated.

3.3 Diversity of Contradictions in *The Dragon's Funeral, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *The Wives' Revolt*

A lot of contradictions exist in *The Dragon's Funeral, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *The Wives' Revolt*. These contradictions fuel the women's protests or revolts in their quest for liberation as well as help to bring out and underscore the dynamism that characterises the struggles for justice by the women folk.

In *The Dragon's Funeral*, the colonial administration is revealed to be imposing taxes and levies arbitrarily on the people, in spite of their willingness to offer services whenever the District Officer and his appointed warrant chiefs call for such services. With time, the people begin to realise that the warrant chiefs are conniving with the District Officer to exploit them through imposition of levies and taxes. The people however, bear the pains of being constantly exploited through arbitrary imposition of levies with equanimity until rumours of proposed new tax policies that will also apply to women start to circulate. The women react because they obviously do not have equal economic opportunities with men and therefore, the new tax policy is interpreted as a

further ploy by the male-dominated colonial administration to continue to subject them and their households to economic exploitation. Aduago states that:

They have taken everything we have. What do we have left? They conscript us to build their roads, and do all kinds of manual labor for them. They take the best of our land, they have castrated our husbands, and now, they want to turn their attention to us, women... Our quiet land has turned into fracas fire. It has become a place where strangers milk people without any moral scruples or conscience. And our men look weakly and do nothing. We should not be afraid to fight... (19)

It is very obvious from Aduago's statement above that the economic interests of the colonial government are in conflict with those of the masses, especially women who have always been happy to offer their services in the form of labour as part of their contributions to the smooth running of the colonial government, probably free of charges or at highly subsidised rates. In spite of their readiness to provide these services the government still goes ahead to devise other strategies to exploit them. That is the contradiction that helps to propel the women to revolt against the government.

Aduago like every other good leader that is committed to bringing about an enduring change in the society is presented as she is making frantic efforts to sensitise her fellow women during a meeting with them on why they have to fight for their rights by revolting against the oppressive policies of the male-dominated colonial government which include the proposed tax policy that is intended to apply equally to both men and women. This is revealed in the following dialogue between her and women of Ngwaland:

Aduago: Women of my ancestral land, there is dust in the air. Evil men have enveloped our land. The name of that evil, that dust is government. We have heard different rumors about what government is doing and even what it intends to do. Our husbands have heard it, our children have heard it, even the trees in our

land have heard it. The serene atmosphere of this village will soon be disrupted by the strangers in our midst who call themselves government. If we go to the market, it is government, if we cough, it is government. Women of Ngwaland, shall we escape into the ant-hole because of government?

Women: (*Shouting their approbation*) Nooo!!

Adaugo: Then my sisters, we should grab our future both hands. Information is an indispensable tool for anyone who wants to change the lot of his community. We have heard that there will be a new policy where women would be taxed by that dreadful monster called government. How can a stranger come into our midst and pour sand into our eyes? They have taken everything we have... (18)

The same women are portrayed as the meeting progresses, as being reluctant to stand up and fight for their rights in spite of the feminist conscientisation efforts of Adaugo. One wonders therefore, why they urge her on with shouts of approval for every question she asks in her attempts to drive home her crusading messages only for some of them to begin to exhibit signs of reluctance to act decisively. For instance, Akueke and Ikodie are two women who think that it is completely wrong or even an aberration for women to disobey their husbands. In Akueke's attempt to counter Mgbokwo's earlier expressed determination that "we shall fight anyone that blocks our way. We shall fight our husbands if they refuse to listen to us..." (20). Akueke states that "I have one question to which I want an answer before I make up my mind. You said that we shall fight everybody, including our husbands. Who will save us if things become difficult for us?" (20).

However, Nwugo, one of the women present at the meeting appears to be in support of the planned protest hence she is quick to inform the audience that "there is no going back. We don't need any savior. Our determination will be our guide. We do not need our men to save us. Which men are you referring to? People who urinate in their loin cloth as soon as the white man opens his mouth..." (20).

Another instance of contradiction in *The Dragon's Funeral* which helps to bring out the dynamism that characterises the women's struggles against oppression is the District Officer's directive to the warrant chiefs to embark on the census of households in the community without taking into consideration the peculiar socio-cultural background of the people. Igwe Okeugo, the Dragon speaks on the looming confusion during a meeting with the other chiefs when he states that:

Our people say that when a new illness comes into a community, a new medicine is used to cure it. Since we were made chiefs under the warrant of the colonial administration, we've never been asked to count people or to disclose the strength of their farm yield or the number of palm trees on their land. If we ignore the implication of this instruction, we shall one day be asked to narrate how often we visit our wives at night. (47)

In his contribution towards resolving the confusion thrown up by the District Officer's instruction, Chief Okeosisi cautions that "we can carry out every instruction of the District Officer but we shouldn't count our people or disclose the strength of their farms" (47). In his concluding opinion, Chief Okeosisi states that " We shouldn't count everybody. We should tell the white man that it is a violation of our culture. When the evil plotter beats his drum for the downfall of an innocent person, the gods will not allow the drum to sound" (49). The meeting of the chiefs ends in confusion without them being able to find answers or possible alternatives on how to carry out the District Officer's assignment of counting the people. But it is obvious that the resultant stalemate from the confusion created by the District Officer's directive on the census of the people is responsible for the fuel that ignites the women's revolution.

In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Rotimi is able to bring out many contradictory ideas which can be said to be responsible for the plethora of struggles for survival by the oppressed women in the societies of the play who have reasons to feel that the male-dominated society has not been fair to them. The women practically grapple with unfair treatments and other acts of

injustices on daily bases in patriarchal societies, such as Nigeria. The impact of strained relationships between men, represented by Lejoka-Brown and women represented by Liza, Sikira and Mama Rashida, wives of Lejoka-Brown, in the play thickens the climate of conflicts in the society. When the opinions, interests and ambitions of one group stand in opposition to those of members of another group, there are bound to be agitations, struggles, conflicts and ultimately, revolutions which could be peaceful, nonviolent or a combination of both before we finally have a resolution of the conflicts.

The interests or ambitions of Lejoka-Brown, a representative of the patriarchal system, as portrayed by the playwright are in conflict with those of the womenfolk. One of the glaring contradictions is that firstly, Lejoka-Brown has two other women in his life which he makes efforts to conceal from Liza whereas, Liza comes back from Overseas to join her husband with high hopes of living with him in a harmonious monogamous marriage. One of the ways he intends to hide his other two wives from Liza is his plan to rent a separate apartment away from his house where he intends to live with Liza when she eventually arrives in the country from Overseas. But by a sudden twist of fate, Liza arrives earlier than scheduled. On arrival, she discovers to her shock, that her husband has been deceiving her all along. This breeds conflicts between them and makes her hold Lejoka-Brown in contempt. She laments that: “when I, Elizabeth Tayanta, married you in the Congo, I had the impression that I was entering into a union with you alone and you with me” (39). Lejoka-Brown may be comfortable with polygamy as a form of marriage but it is obviously not a welcome arrangement to Liza. This is a major cause of conflict as a result of the clash of interests between Liza and Lejoka-Brown and is therefore, enough grounds for conflict between them. The playwright has also successfully portrayed polygamy as a weapon that the society has armed the man with to enslave women. For

Lejoka-Brown is portrayed in the play to be feeling on top of the world as the man in control of three women, one of them, a well-educated and qualified medical doctor.

Secondly, politics ideally should be basically for the rendering of selfless services to the masses. But there is a contradiction here because Lejoka-Brown sees politics as an avenue to enrich himself and his cronies. This is affirmed by his statement that: "... you want to chop life? No, no, you want to chop a big slice of the national cake? Na politics"(4).He is so mentally enslaved by his love for politics and lust for power that he neglects his duties to his wives, especially young Sikira who feels uncared for; unloved and neglected. She complains to Liza that "Not only is the master in love... madly in love with politics, he breathes politics, he washes his mouth every morning with politics, he sleeps with politics and dreams of... At night deep in the middle of the night, the master grabs his pillow in his sleep, holding it high above his head like a flag... (23). From Sikira's statement, Lejoka-Brown is engrossed in politics to the point of obsession and that is not what will please Sikira or indeed any other woman. This is one instance where Lejoka-Brown's interest is shown to be in conflict with the interest of his wife.

The play also presents Lejoka-Brown as an unrepentant male chauvinist and a hard-core traditionalist. He believes that traditionally, women should be regarded as slaves and treated as such. To him, women should have no say even in domestic matters. They must therefore live in complete servitude with absolutely no freedom to as much as choose what to wear. Under Lejoka-Brown's roof, the women must wear only clothes that are approved by him. Even in the presence of guests, Sikira, a wife, is made to run errands like a common house help and sadly, with abuses from Lejoka-Brown trailing her everywhere in the house.

There are women in Nigeria of today who have found themselves in Sikira's shoes. Like Sikira's marriage, theirs are marriages that are contracted based on what their husbands stand to benefit

from their families. Such husbands like Lejoka-Brown are not interested in meeting the emotional needs of their unlucky wives. It is the maltreatment that women in such unions go through that has made Sikira to critically review her own situation and then conclude that she is nothing to Lejoka-Brown but a slave! She states that “in this house? A slave that is what I am. Did he marry me because he loves me or because of his crazy politics?” (15). When a marriage is contracted based on the selfish interests of one party, there are bound to be some conflicts or opposition at some point because one of the parties in the union is perpetually unhappy as a result of the emotional barrenness arising from continuous conflict of interests that characterises such a marriage.

Furthermore, before Liza’s success at giving the women some lessons on how to stand up for their rights which eventually lead to the formation of a strong bond among the three of them, the playwright attempts to introduce the theme of class consciousness. Liza is presented as a classy, sophisticated and educated woman. Her utterances and reactions to issues portray her as someone who is liberated, with an independent mind. Sikira and Mama Rashida are uneducated and therefore lack class and sophistication. The class differences are the initial cause of conflicts between Liza and Sikira to the point that Sikira suffers from paranoia. Expressing how insecure she feels, Sikira queries thus: “Will our husband care for me now that Miss World is coming here?”(15). However, Liza refuses to allow the tension between her and Sikira to erupt into an open confrontation. She is careful enough to avoid allowing herself to be provoked to the point of being drawn into a fight with her (Sikira). The women eventually team up to jointly confront their common adversary: patriarchy represented by Lejoka-Brown.

There are other areas in the society of the play where a clash of interests between men and women is present which the playwright has made attempts to highlight. Lejoka-Brown shows a determination to sustain the atmosphere of slavery or servitude that he has created in his home.

As part of his strategy to keep women subjugated, he hands out to them a long list of rules that they must abide by. One of such rules is the type of dress they must wear under his roof. He calls it leading them “back to the path of righteousness” (58). But they are adults and so it is an abuse of their fundamental rights if they are not allowed to decide the type of clothes to wear. He states that:

First and foremost, you must see to it that all areas around, above and below your shoulders are well covered up from now on. No more short knickers, and no more... tight, tight, tight trousers that show all your... your Geography! Furthermore, cigarette smoking will have to stop-now. And last of all, starting from this night, I want to see you act as my wife. That's all. (58-59)

However, with the coming of Liza, Lejoka-Brown's attempts at perpetuating or sustaining this atmosphere of slavery suffers a severe setback as she succeeds in halting Lejoka-Brown in his tracks. She achieves this feat by bringing the slavish atmosphere that he has entrenched to an end. It must be stated for the benefits of die-hard patriarchy, that women are also human beings who have come to understand that just like men; they too have some fundamental inalienable rights that they must uphold, otherwise they become endangered species. Any attempts on the part of men to curtail these rights are bound to meet with stiff oppositions from the womenfolk. Earlier on, Sikira who has started to receive some tutorials from Liza on how to assert her rights suddenly begins to muster the courage to counter or rebuff Lejoka-Brown's orders. For instance, when Lejoka-Brown orders her to “go take the rag off” (56), she gives an angry riposte thus: “Do as you say, do as you say! It is always do as you say. Always command, command, command! Why don't you show some respect and let me do as I want, just once!” (57).

Earlier on, Sikira has learnt from Liza that there must be:

Freedom for housewives,
Freedom for all women,
Yes, everywhere, there must be freedom...
Freedom for mothers,
Freedom for housemaids,
Yes in every home, there must be freedom. (55)

This has become one of her freedom songs which she chants to the hearing of Lejoka-Brown. However, in spite of the growing opposition and the brewing revolution, Lejoka-Brown makes conscious efforts at keeping a firm grip on his household but his efforts fail to yield the desired or expected results. According to Anigala:

Her (Sikira's) taunt on the equality of men and women jolts Lejoka-Brown. Believing that Sikira's brainwave is Liza's handwork, he decides to teach her a lesson. He decided to restore law and order in his house which he claims have been disrupted by his indulgence of Liza's immoral behavior. He however, underrates Liza for she fights back. Sikira, on her part, deliberately misrepresents him and capitalizes on the opportunity to pack out of the house, claiming that "our husband has gone mad again". Her audacity and courage to leave arise from a new mindset developed from the human rights lessons she has been receiving from Liza. To Lejoka-Brown's chagrin, Sikira leaves, as his domestic and political lives disintegrate. (58)

It is at this point that he realises that he has actually lost control of his wives. The sequence of events in the play actually depicts the dynamism that feminist agitators in Nigeria have brought to bear on their strategies of achieving Nigerian feminist agenda.

In *The Wives' Revolt*, just as it is in Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Clark successfully brings out many contradictory or opposing ideas between the men and women in the society of the play. These opposing ideas revealed by the playwright are some of the factors responsible for the conflicts which in turn have given rise to feminist revolutions or struggles for liberation and justice for women in patriarchal societies like Nigeria.

The play dramatises the various shades of injustices that women suffer in the society. Unlike in traditional era when women swallowed or accepted whatever the men dished out to them without questions, the women of Erhuwaren who are wives and even mothers of the men of that community refuse to allow themselves to be intimidated and marginalised any more by their husbands and sons. By their decision to collectively demand justice and fair treatment from the society, the women appear to be sending out clear signals that the era of master-slave kind of relationship between them and men is over.

There are three main characters in the play. This makes the story very interesting and easy to follow right from the beginning. Okoro is presented in the play as a perfect image of male chauvinism and misogyny as well as an unrepentant arrow-head of the patriarchal system in Nigeria. Koko his wife cuts the picture of an invincible, dynamic and resourceful leader of her fellow women. She proves to be a tactful, resilient and patient leader. Idama, Okoro's intimate friend, represents the human conscience that struggles to strike equilibrium between the insatiable longing of men to satisfy themselves at the expense of the womenfolk and how to do so without offending anyone.

The money given to the community by an oil company prospecting for oil in the region is shared out into three equal parts: one part goes to the elders of the town, the other part goes to the men and the last part is for the women. The women consider the sharing formula unfair because the elders and men of the community are all male members of the community. That means that the money ought to be shared into two main equal parts. One part to all male members of the community while the second part will go to all female members of the community or into four parts of elderly men and elderly women and then men and women in all their age groups. But the men stick to their guns, insisting that the most equitable sharing formula has been adopted in

sharing the money. The men go ahead to dismiss the agitations of the women on the matter with a wave of the hand. Okoro tells the audience that the protesting women are “led by a few reckless ones, fed up with doing simple duties for their husbands and children as befits good housewives...”(1). The women feel short-changed and consequently embark on a protest march. The ensuing confusion is as a result of the contradictions arising from a clash of interests between the men of Erhuwaren and the women of that community simply because the society does not feel that it is appropriate to take women into confidence in certain sensitive issues of general interest that affect the entire population. By that singular sharing formula, Okoro and all male members of the society who have come together to agree that the population of the town should be divided into three segments or categories are responsible for the feminist protest that engulfs the community. According to Jo Okome:

It must be noted that the women are not complaining about their assigned positions in the home; not even about being counted out of the socially related decision-making process. What the women are saying is that what the men have done is unacceptable. Being an elder does not turn one into a gender, most especially when the elders under consideration here are all male. After all, there also exist in all societies, female elders. The condition of being male or female is very definite about what the issue of gender is all about...(351)

The rumblings emanating from the lopsided sharing formula erupt into a full-blown protest when the men resort to blackmailing the women by reporting to the elders’ council that the women have resorted to possessing goats in the community with the spirit of witchcraft to torment the community. This report propels the council of elders to pass a law banning rearing of goats in the community. But this legislation is mired in contradictions in the sense that the same law that bans or prohibits women from rearing goats does not forbid men from keeping, selling or even slaughtering and cooking some of the goats that have been confiscated from the women as meals. Secondly is the fact that if indeed it is true that goats owned by the women of Erhuwaren are

possessed with the spirit of witchcraft or “provide refuge for forces of evil”, do Okoro and his fellow men who are taking over the goats that are said to be possessed with witchcraft from the women have the powers to cleanse the goats and cast the spirit of witchcraft out of the goats? Thirdly, do the men possess the spiritual powers of clairvoyance to be able to detect the presence of witchcraft? These are some unresolved arguments or contentions that no doubt convince every member of the audience that patriarchy is not fair by every stretch of the imagination, to women. The law enacted by men of Erhuwaren should apply to every member of the community, whether male or female, elderly or young. Nwankwo and Mbagiorgu contend further that “from the beginning of the play, we see that women in *The Wives’ Revolt* are already caught in the contradiction of a master-slave relation with the men. The women’s opinion is not sought for nor are the women respected” (151). The playwright has used the biased application of the law on rearing and keeping of goats against women to further highlight the extent of gender inequality and oppression in the society with women being at the receiving end of such unjust and obsolete practices. In a system that champions gender equality, there should not be a discriminatory application of laws. In other words, laws should apply equally to or be binding on every member of the society.

The men of Erhuwaren do not consider women as human beings with normal intelligence quotient to reckon with. And for this reason, they expect that women have no business trying to meddle in the task of running the affairs of the community not to talk of contesting the laws passed by men of the community. Okoro particularly feels that women lack the intellectual capacity and unity to challenge customs and traditions that dehumanise them. He states that:

I don’t see what you women can do. You cannot even speak with one voice on any one matter at any time. We saw a good display of your unity today at the assembly, didn’t we? All you can do is buzz about an issue like a swarm of house-

flies, unable to move a little object in the way that ants in their mute state do so well with ease. (11)

Meanwhile, the women see themselves as complete human beings with inalienable rights hence they show a determination to resist further attempts by men to continue to treat them disrespectfully as second class citizens. This is another major contradiction generated by Okoro and his fellow men who consider women less human.

According to Nwankwo and Mbajiorgu, Okoro's thinking is that "the woman should be forced to negate her rights and denied the full potential of self-hood"(153). This opinion is informed by Okoro's statement that "women have no rights-no special rights that I know of" (26).

The women are motivated by a strong sense of self-worth, commitment and the determination to seek justice with a view to correcting the acts of injustice that they have suffered in the past from the male-dominated society. The men, on the other hand, are driven by blind ego and chauvinism. Again, Nwankwo and Mbajiorgu state that "at the end of the play, a moral balance is achieved with the reconciliation of the contradictions. Our emotions, according to Twentyman... 'may be immaterial but have material actions' (154).

CHAPTER FOUR

NIGERIAN FEMINIST AGENDA AND THE DYNAMISM OF FEMINIST REVOLUTION IN AYAKOROMA'S *DANCE ON HIS GRAVE*, SALAMI'S *MORE THAN DANCING* AND OGBONNA'S *THE TAMARISK: A HEALING SHRUB*

4.1. Background Information on Barclays Ayakoroma, Irene Salami and Kelechi Ogbonna

Ideologically, Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma does not belong to the same generation with Rotimi and Clark but his work places him ideologically with the first generation playwrights whose plays preach gender equality and conservative feminism. Hewas born on February 13, 1956 in Angiama town, Sagbama in present day Bayelsa State. He attended CMS Primary School, Bolou-Angiama between 1962 and 1967, Local Authority School, Agbarho, Delta State, between 1969 and 1973. For his University education, Ayakoroma attended the Universities of Calabar and Ibadan. He bagged his doctorate degree in Theatre Arts from the University of Port Harcourt.

He had stints at J.P. Clark's PEC Repertory Theatre, Lagos (1985), Rivers State Television between 1986 and 1992, Department of Theatre Arts, University of Port Harcourt. He has also served as the Executive Director, Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture (2000). He is presently the Executive Secretary, National Institute for Cultural Orientation, (NICO), Abuja. He was a Visiting Senior Lecturer, Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State. His published works include *A Matter of Honour*, *A Chance to Survive and Other Plays*, *Castles in the Air*, *Once Upon a Dream*, *A Scare for Life* and *Dance*

on his Grave. Dance on his Grave, written from a feminist perspective, can be described as Ayakoroma's first conscious effort at promoting equal rights for women with men.

Dance on His Grave treats or explores the themes of women's subjugation and marginalisation in a patriarchal Nigeria society known as Tori-Ama and the extent that marginalised women can go to liberate themselves from slavery and other shades of injustices that the society subjects them to. It is set in a rural community known as Tori-Ama, an Ijaw community in present day Niger-Delta region of the country. The traditional ruler or King of the community is known as King Olotu. His actions and utterances portray him as a die-hard male chauvinist. He is fondly referred to as the Akpobirisi. His wife, who is also the Queen or first lady of Tori-Ama is known as Alaere. King Olotu and his wife, Alaere, are presented in the play as leaders of two separate factions in the community. The King is the leader of men in their terrifying ambition to keep women perpetually suppressed while Alaere is the determined and resourceful leader of women in their fierce struggles for survival under the unbearable weight of patriarchy.

The play opens to reveal that there is trouble in Tori-Ama as a result of the rash decision of a young lady from the community to elope with a young man from a nearby enemy community, known as Angiama. It is for this reason that the two communities warm up for a military showdown. Queen Alaere and her fellow women of Tori-Ama, fearful that their sons will be sacrificed in a senseless war for an ordinary woman who has decided to seek happiness and fulfillment in the name of love in the arms of a young man from another community, decide that the opportunity to challenge the menfolk who make all decisions that affect their lives and those of their children has presented itself. Alaere leads her fellow women of Toru-Ama to protest vehemently against the various forms of maltreatment, marginalisation, abuse, oppression and suppression that they suffer from the men of the community. The protest launched by the women

of Toru-Ama, led by Alaere, though ended in extreme circumstances, its goal is still similar to the goals of feminist struggles in *The Dragon's Funeral*, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *The Wives' Revolt*, conceived and executed by women to place them on the same pedestal with men while at the same extracting some measures of respect for themselves from the society.

Irene Salami was born on 1st January, 1958. She attended the University of Jos from where she bagged the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Theatre Arts in 1980. She had her Masters and Doctorate Degrees in Theatre Arts in 1983 and 1991 from the University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, respectively. Salami had a Post-Doctoral Fellowship from the University of Los Angeles, California, United States of America between 2004 and 2005. Her publications include "The Place of Folktales in Education (1995); Political Struggles of Women in Ancient Benin (2001). Her published plays include *Plays for Junior (an anthology of nine plays)* *Emotan: A Benin Heroine; The Queen Sisters (Ubi and Ewere)* and *More Than Dancing*. Salami is presently a lecturer at the University of Jos where she has also served as the Head of Department of Theatre Arts. Widely referred to as a gender activist, Salami has also served as the national vice-president of the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA).

The play, *More than Dancing*, is about women's agitation or struggle to define their position in Nigeria's political arena with regards to appointments and election into political offices or positions. The purpose of this agitation which can be categorised as a revolution is for feminists to take a stand against the marginalisation and other various forms of injustices that women suffer from male politicians and power brokers thereby limiting them from realising or crystallising their leadership potentials. It is a play that projects psychological and intellectual revolution. In all, there is a struggle and agitation for a change in the pitiable situation that the society is considered to have relegated women to.

The play reveals that the usual role assigned to women during political functions in contemporary Nigeria is singing and dancing to entertain their male counterparts. The same roles are reserved for female members of the ruling political party in the play, known as the United People's Liberation Party. At the end of it all, they are given wrappers, bags of rice and salt, cartons of Maggi cubes and tin tomatoes to share among themselves. But one day, the women led by the leader of the women's wing of the party, known as Madam Bisi, come to the painful realisation that women have been relegated to the background overtime and that it is possible for them to play more vital roles in the party and in the larger society other than dancing to entertain men during social and political functions.

In the opening of the play, members of the audience are ushered into a mini convention of the party. The sitting arrangement reveals an evidence of marginalisation and gender inequality against female members of the party. While male members are seen occupying the top rows of seats, the female members are seated on the lower rows. The convention starts with women performing their usual dancing to entertain the audience. Madam Bisi steps into the dancing arena and yells at the drummer to stop beating the drums and women to stop dancing. She informs her fellow women and the entire audience that they can actually play more vital roles other than dancing.

Kelechi Ogbonahails from Nnentu Village in Aba South Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria. She is a playwright, actress, director and a performer. She studied Theatre Arts at the University of Calabar. She also holds a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education and a Doctorate in Theatre Studies and Performance Theory from the Imo State University. She has written several poems, short stories and journal articles. She has also published a number of works which include *The Brink* (1997), *The Stinker* (2004), *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub* (2015), among

others. She is presently a lecturer in Theatre Arts at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Nigeria.

The play, *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub*, is about “the regenerative power of womanhood”. The play opens with the narrator expressing nostalgic memories of the pleasant experience of communal life that is gradually going into extinction. The narrator states that “my eyes have seen better pictures than the harassment that now dims my vision” (14). Recalling how interesting life has been, he reminds the audience of how he used to eat the best of *fufu* and *egusi* soup instead of the “concoctions” that people now eat as food.

The play is set in Ama-Ukwu, Eastern Nigeria; it reveals Chikere, the heroine in the play, as the priestess and a devoted follower of the Grove, the sacred shrine in Ama-Ukwu. Chikere is portrayed in the play as the spiritual leader of the Sisters of Light. She is also revealed to the audience as having been married to Thomas, who however, passes on after being obviously struck dead by the gods because the priestess of the Grove is not expected or permitted to get married to a mere mortal. While grieving over the death of her heartthrob, Chikere decides to stop performing her duties as the priestess of the Grove. Perhaps, it is the pain of losing the only man that she has ever loved that is responsible for that decision. She therefore, absconds from her duty post after she has successfully “uprooted the heart of the Grove and set the shrine on fire” (21). Consequently, the Igwe is persuaded by the likes of Ajuonu, who is revealed in the play to be a very mischievous character who believes that women should not have an equally fair treatment with men, to banish her from the kingdom of Umuobasi-Ano. The Igwe also forbids anyone to even “mention her name in this land anymore” (22). The play treats the themes of lack of unity among women, polygamy and infidelity against women by men, religion and

spiritualism. The playwright highlights polygamy as one of the instruments of oppression that patriarchal societies use to keep women subjugated.

4.2. The Dynamism of Feminist Revolution in *Dance on His Grave, More than Dancing* and *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub*

The dominant motif in *Dance on His Grave, More than Dancing* and *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub* is women's struggles for liberation from oppression, dehumanisation, marginalisation and other forms of injustices that the society metes out to them in Nigeria.

In *Dance on His Grave* Ayakoroma presents King Olotu as a strong-willed traditional ruler who believes that women have nothing useful to offer in the task of administering his Kingdom. He therefore does not see the need to consult them in matters of state affairs. When he and his cabinet members take the decision to wage war against Angiama, they fail to take into consideration the fact that the able-bodied men that they plan to send to wage war against Angiama are also sons of their wives and so, women who are the mothers of the soldiers are agitating that they ought to be consulted before taking the decision to send their sons into battle with Angiama. The king and his male-dominated cabinet obviously have failed to consider the dire consequences of such a costly enterprise. But Alaere, in her attempt to convince her fellow women on the need to team up to correct certain situations and secure their future and even that of their daughters in the Kingdom, informs her fellow women that "we are fighting a common cause for us women" (33). As a way of encouraging them not to give up on the struggle for their freedom, Alaere states that:

If any woman does not like her freedom; if there is any woman that wants to play second fiddle to a man forever, if there is any that wants to remain a slave, to be only in the kitchen, look after the children alone, and not sit at table with her husband; and if there is any woman who likes to have her sons killed in a senseless war; let her do otherwise. And may it be good for her! Have I spoken the minds of all the women of Toru-Ama? (33)

In Movement Two of the play, Alaere is the first woman to take the bold step to confront her husband who is also the King. The implication is that the King being the symbol of patriarchy in the Kingdom as the principal custodian of the traditions of Toru-Ama as well as the head or leader of all the men of Toru-Ama, means that a message passed to the King will definitely get to the ears of all the other men. In confronting King Olotu, she puts forward her demand which is also the demand of the entire women of Toru-Ama. Alaere states that "... let me tell you, if you want peace in this house, you have to restore peace in the land. Call off the proposed invasion of Angiama! We suffered a terrible loss the last time and we don't want this face saving attempt on flimsy excuses" (39).

On page 40 of the play, Alaere hands out further caveats to King Olotu. She maintains that:

Yes! And we women are not going to sit back, fold our arms, and see our sons die in the prime of their lives... I have spoken. We want to be recognized; and no more wars in the land! If you refuse with those chiefs of yours, we will have our own war in this house! (40)

Like all die-hard patriarchs, King Olotu may want to maintain a tough mien just to give the impression that he is not a weakling and therefore, cannot buckle under pressure from a woman but the truth is that Alaere's threat of a domestic war has had an effect on him. The playwright states in the stage direction that "*She storms out. King Olotu is speechless. He goes to sit down on his throne, pensive...*" (40). This shows that no matter how tough and heartless men who are arrow-heads of patriarchy in the society may appear to be, if women muster the courage to

confront them, the toughness they exhibit will very likely begin to develop cracks and eventually collapse.

The play also treats the theme of struggle for justice by the women of Toru-Ama. It opens to reveal women gathered in their different age groups in the market square to deliberate on the various acts of injustice, marginalisation, oppression and suppression that are meted out to them by the society. Alaere, wife of the King of Toru-Ama known as Olotu addresses the women and in the process, reveals to the audience how the male-dominated society has been unfair to the womenfolk over the years in some aspects. She states unequivocally that:

You are all witnesses to what has been happening in this land. Women are relegated to the background in the affairs of the land. The last time the big white man came here, he sat down with his big white woman by his side. He even waited until she had sat down before he sat down. You all saw it! After talking to his book man, he always consulted her before addressing our people. He respected her and treated her like an egg that should not be allowed to fall to the ground. But what do we have in this land? We are no better than slaves! (23)

Alaere goes on to highlight other aspects or instances of marginalisation that women suffer in the society. She states that “As I was saying, I am not thinking of ruling this land; but the question is: should we not be consulted even in matters concerning our children and us? Are we only to raise children and prepare meals for our husbands? Wash their clothes...?” (24).

The women also decry polygamy which they view as an unjust practice against women. Alaere further states that “From now on, no woman shall allow her husband to marry a second wife! ... For those of us who are unlucky already, we shall carry on with our burden. They want us to be married to one man at a time while they spread their tentacles” (25).

The women declare their determination to “act” just as Alaere urges them to stay united and display maturity to be able to effectively launch their planned revolutionary campaigns against patriarchy and consequently weaken the hegemony exercised by the menfolk over women in the

Nigerian society. She suggests and explains how they can use the weapon of stubbornness to confront the men folk until women assume their rightful place in the scheme of things. She states that:

We fight them with stubbornness!... I repeat ... stubbornness! If they say come here... Uhm uhm! Go there... Uhm uhm! Pick up the child... Uhm uhm! Prepare food for me... Uhm uhm! If he touches the loose end of your wrapper... Leave me alone! If he wants to force himself inside you, you close your legs, *Kpaaam!* (30-31)

The women's decision to adopt stubbornness as a weapon of revolution to press home their demands can be explained by Sagoe's philosophy of *Voidancy*. Explaining the *Voidancy* philosophy, Hakeem Bello states that its purpose is "... To achieve social, psychological and spiritual cleansing of the society; there is a need for the destruction or purgation of evils so that the birth of good or renewal of society can be reflected..." (148)

According to Bello the main thrust of the *Voidancy* philosophy is the conclusion that the weapon of stubbornness employed by the women of Toru-Ama in confronting their oppressors "is not a movement of protest but it protests. It is non-revolutionary but it revolts" (148-149). In Situation Two of the play, the playwright dispels every doubt in the minds of the audience as to the fact that the men of Toru-Ama regard their wives as nonentities who cannot make any meaningful contribution to the development of the community. This is revealed when Olotu states thus:

Women! Well, the world is changing. Women want to put on thinking caps too, eh? Well, they would all grow bald-headed too... oh yes. They want to act like men... Tell all my chiefs that we will see them before the hens go to roost tomorrow. (36)

The above statement by Olotu amply reveals how lowly Nigerian women are rated in the minds of the men folk. But Alaere, proves to be a determined leader who encourages her fellow women to reject and resist, in its entirety, attempts by men to continue to dominate and keep them in a

state of perpetual subjugation. In the first confrontation that she has with King Olotu, she was unequivocal in telling the King and his fellow men that women “want a voice! We want adequate representation...” (38). But the King’s impulsive response to her demands is to tell her to “stop making fun of state affairs. You think these matters are for egg-heads? (39). To underline his authority, King Olotu roars at his wife thus:

Enough of this foul talk! ... Now if I hear any more rubbish from you, I will tell you that I married you in this house! And until I take you back to your father’s house, you will act as my wife and do what I say! I repeat! You will do what I say in this palace! And before the hens go to roost, which will not be too long, I want my meal. (39)

The actual revolt begins when Alaere reacts in like manner to her husband’s outburst and retorts that “... If you want to eat, go and prepare your meal!” (39). She then goes further to proclaim a number of conditions which women expect the King and indeed every male member of the community to fulfill for peace to reign in the land. She states that “... let me tell you, if you want peace in this house, you have to restore peace in the land. Call off the proposed invasion of Angiama! We suffered a terrible loss the first time and we don’t want this face saving attempt on flimsy excuses” (39).

The men of Toru-Ama, like in every other patriarchal society feel that they are the captains in-charge of the ships in their families. This means therefore, that their wives are not expected or permitted to have a say in matters that border on the welfare of even their own children. The crises that this stand of the men generates also threaten to consume the community. In the palace, King Olotu unilaterally decides that Beke, his only child will leave for the city to acquire formal education. But Alaere, the Queen, objects to her husband’s decision. This generates heated arguments between them as revealed in following dialogue:

Alaere: What has your Highness decided on the matter of Beke?

Olotu: ... That matter is closed. I have made up my mind, as you know. She is to live in the city. She leaves in three market weeks' time.

Alaere: Really?

Olotu: Yes. As the father, I have to decide the way my child should be brought up.

Alaere: And the mother has no say in the matter at all?

Olotu: None whatsoever. If you have a say, then it means there are two masters or captains in this house. (43-44)

The use of the expressions, “as the father” and “my daughter” brings home to the audience the stark and disturbing reality of how easily women in Nigeria are dispossessed of their belongings, even children. We see cases of where women are thrown out of their matrimonial homes for whatever reasons by their husbands with just the clothes they have on. It is perhaps the frustration that comes with attempts by men to shut women out in crucial issues affecting their families, thereby denying them a sense of belonging that provokes Alaere to imply that Olotu may not be the biological father of Beke and therefore, has no rights to take unilateral decisions about her future. Olotu’s reaction is to attempt to strangle her. But she screams for help and the household comes to her rescue. Olotu in releasing her from his grip threatens that: “I realise that one of us must go under in this struggle” (53). Alaere retorts in like manner and threatens thus: “Naturally! The power of a woman, and I shall use it to bring you under restraint! ...you wait. We shall see. (54). In the heat of the crisis in the palace, other chiefs in the community show up

in the palace to inform the audience that they are also grappling with one form of revolt or the other from their wives. Chief Apodi and Biriala complain thus:

Apodi: ... I have not taken any food since yesterday evening! Even that crab who does not know her right from her left refused to do anything for me. Come here... uhm uhm!

Biriala: ... It is the same in my house. Can you beat that? Even my youngest wife refused to sleep with me... (55)

At this point, Chiefs Mowei, Osima and Atuaba confirm that the entire community is in crisis. Chief Mowei admits that "... the war is in our houses... The problem is that we all have wars in our families. Our wives are plotting against us." (56). Chief Atuaba corroborates this when he states that "...my wives have been giving me hell... what I have been going through is terrible..." (57). King Olotu describes the women's revolt as "the rain that has befallen all houses" (58). However, after weighing and debating the situation in the entire community with his Chiefs, the Chiefs unanimously agree that the women should be ignored. The Chiefs' decision is endorsed by King Olotu who urges that "everyone should be prepared; if we allow these women to intimidate us, they will shit on our heads. And I, King Olotu ... the Akpobirisi, will not live to see a woman turn things upside down in this land while I rule" (61).

Thereafter, the men of Toru Ama resolve never to succumb to women. They therefore, begin to devise strategies on how to quell the women's revolt. In Movement Six, the women obviously spurred on by what sociologists refer to as a combination of outrage and hope which have never failed to provide a strong motivation for social movements and a sense that something can be achieved from such movements also resolve to continue the struggle. Alaere states that:

So we will continue. Remember, no cooking for them, no washing of their clothes, or fetching them water to bathe, and no sleeping with them. You have to realize that our greatest weapon is between our legs... when we bring them down to our feet, we shall decide how they are going to serve us. Have I spoken the mind of every woman? (66)

The women's resolve to continue the struggle may have been given a boost by the combined emotions of outrage and the hope of emerging victorious over men in the struggle. According to

Haralambos et al:

Social movements need a combination of outrage and hope. Fear inhibits the development of protest movements, particularly fear of repression... and the repression often becomes very real. Indeed, many protests involving the occupation of public space have been violently suppressed. However, this very suppression can create outrage and this outrage helps to overcome fear. A further requirement for these movements is the existence of hope; that is, a belief that it is genuinely possible to change networks of power and therefore, society... (1021)

The men are rudely shocked to discover that the women are not giving up the struggle but are determined to continue to fight until they claim their rightful place in the society. The men's ultimate reaction of beating "sense into their heads", which is a complete negation of Newton's third law of motion that there is an equal and opposite reaction to every action, appears to have fueled the revolt rather than crushing it as anticipated. To advance their strategy of crushing the revolt, Olotu asks Odibo to distribute the canes which he had earlier sent Odibo to go and buy, to the men with an instruction to use the canes to beat the women in order to subdue them and put an end to their rebellion. Olotu states that:

We are going to tell our wives that we are men. (*Odibo comes in with the bundles of canes*) Yes... they are canes. I am giving one to each one of you. This night, we are all going to sleep with our wives by the first cockcrow. If they refuse us entry, the canes will do their work. If we break their will, their unity will be broken. Do not stop until they plead for mercy. For those with many wives, by the time you finish with one, the most stubborn one, the others will pledge their unreserved loyalty. Odibo give one to each person... Now, go my people; go and fight this war in the families. (79)

The above statement portrays patriarchy as an unfair system that encourages Nigerian men to view their wives and indeed women generally as their slaves! It also shows that in patriarchy, love is not a factor in marriages. The men simply pay lip-service to the institution of marriage which is absolutely characterised by emotional barrenness. It is hard to believe that a normal man will decide to purchase canes to whip his wife like a slave. In other climes and in these times, such an act will be viewed as an act of barbarism and therefore, an aberration.

The men of Toru-Ama eventually succeed in crushing the women's revolt physically with the use of force administered with the canes but the psychological struggle continues which eventually ends in favour of the women folk. Alaere successfully humiliates Olotu and with his death comes the defeat of patriarchy for he is the symbol of male dominance of the womenfolk. She achieves this victory by first creating doubts in the mind of Olotu as to the fact that he may not be the biological father of Beke and therefore has no right to take decisions about her future without her input. The emotional wound that she inflicts on Olotu is deepened when she responds sarcastically to Olotu's plea for mercy to free his mind of suspicions that she has been an adulterous wife. She states that:

The heart I have is for my daughter. You have lived your life. You can cry blood if you like; but if you are not careful, I will hasten your removal from the throne ... just by spreading word that you are going mad. Since a mad man cannot rule the land, I will rally round the women to make my daughter the custodian of the throne as the Queen. (84-85)

The King's daughter, Beke, turns the knife in the wound when she tells her father that "I hate you! You are not my father! (86). The climax is when Olotu admits defeat and states that:

Leave her! I have no child. I have no child! My people... I started a war in my family and now I know that it will be my ruin. Yes! ... Now I realize that women are our mothers and it is our duty to obey and respect them. I have nothing to live for now. A husband no more... and a father no more, as I have been rejected by

my ... only daughter or one whom I thought to be my daughter... Gods of our land, my ancestors, I have nothing to live for now... I have to find solace in silence. (87)

The death of Olotu brings about reconciliation and the contending issues are finally resolved. This brings to an end the struggle between the men and women in the society of the play in favour of women. In his reaction to the situation in the community, Chief Apodi, one of the arrow-heads of patriarchy, alludes to the resolution of the contending issues and an end to the conflict between male and female members of the community when he announces to the audience that "... If we knew that this war would have consumed our king, we wouldn't have waged it. We have...lost the war" (89). And to women he says "...You want to have a voice. Now you have got the result" (89).

The play, *More than Dancing* is concerned with women's agitations or struggles to define their position in the scheme of things, especially in Nigeria's political turf. It dwells on equality between men and women at the national level. This is with regards to appointments and election of women into political offices or positions rather than only dancing to entertain male members of the audience whenever the occasion presents itself, especially during political rallies. It is a play that attempts to sensitise women to wake up to the reality of the fact that they can actually do "more than dancing". The purpose of this sensitisation campaign is to put an end to the marginalisation that women suffer from Nigeria's male-dominated society and patriarchally-determined culture. Feminist agitators in their crusade blame Nigerian male-oriented culture as being responsible for the failure of women to attain or realise their leadership potentials in full. The play is rooted in and concerned with psychological as well as intellectual revolution in the attempt to ensure that the struggle or agitation for change by the women folk is realised.

The usual roles assigned to women in Nigeria during political functions are singing and dancing to entertain male politicians. The same roles are reserved for female members of the ruling political party in the play known as the United People's Liberation Party. What they get as rewards at the end are wrappers, bags of rice and salt, cartons of Maggi cubes and tomatoes to share among themselves. But one day, the women, led by the leader of the women's wing of the party, known as Madam Bisi, realise quite painfully that over time, women have been relegated to the background and that they can indeed play more vital roles in the party and in the larger society other than singing and dancing.

In the opening of the play, the audience is ushered into a mini-convention of the party where the sitting arrangement reveals some levels of marginalisation and gender inequality and discrimination against female members of the party. The male members are seated on the top rows of seats while the female members are seated on the lower rows of seats behind male party members. The convention starts with women performing their usual dancing to entertain the audience. Madam Bisi steps into the dancing arena and yells at the drummer to stop beating the drums and instructs her fellow women to stop dancing. She informs them that they can actually be assigned more important and crucial roles to perform other than dancing as constitutionally, they are expected to be equal partners with men in the task of nation building. Maintaining her stand, Madam Bisi orders women to:

Stop the drumming! Stop dancing! Stop immediately. Stop Isay!!! Enough of the dancing! Enough is enough!! Year in, year out, primaries hold and party elections go, all we do is dance. Is dancing all that we can do? Is that all we are meant for? Looking at the entire dancing troupes, how many men do you see? The men have since stopped dancing. Look at the high table... how many women do you see up there? The seats are filled with men. Where are the women? Where are the women, I ask? Look at us ... dancing and collecting two bags of rice, one bag of salt, one carton of Maggi cubes and two wrappers to be shared among thirty five women! Women, these are distractions... meant to keep us in a subordinate

position. United People's Liberation Party is a party for men, dominated by men, safeguarded by men. Men are chairpersons, secretaries, vice chairpersons, treasurers... and so on. They are members of board of trustees... We are supposed to be a United People's Liberation Party; the liberation is for only men, not women. Yet, when it is time for election, women are mobilized to vote. We are only good for dancing and voting... (2)

In the above statement the playwright has been able to reveal to the audience that even within the party structure, women are subjected to varying degrees of discrimination as all positions within the party hierarchy are occupied by men. This, no doubt, is to ensure that they continue to call the shots and determine the direction the party and governance will go in the society while women are made to remain on the fringes in the scheme of things within the party and in the larger society. The women's leader, armed with this knowledge and revelation, goes further to enjoin women to go back to their homes and think about their future. Madam Bisi emphatically states that:

I will have none of this. Go back to your homes. Think about your future, Think about the future of your daughters. For how long must we be denied our constitutional rights? For how long must we continue dancing? We must wake up from our complacency. We must wake up from our slumber. No more dancing. Go back home! You must realise that it is your fundamental human right to participate in governance. This is a democratic dispensation. Democracy is for all. It is for women as much as it is for men. Women are equal partners with men in governance... (2)

However, the male members of the party make an attempt to counter Madam Bisi's contentions when Madu, a senior male member of the party aggressively reacts by asking "Madam Bisi, who do you think you are that you disperse the dance troupes that our party has funded? What do you think you are doing? Mr. Chairman sir, Madam Bisi should be called to order" (2). Madu's reaction can be interpreted as an indication of the unrelenting attempt by the male-dominated society to continue to suppress and stifle female voices irrespective of the relevance of their points of arguments. In furtherance of their suppression agenda, the male members make more

spirited attempts to discourage women from aspiring to higher positions of responsibility by reminding them that “politics costs money”. Sani states on behalf of his fellow male politicians that:

Madam Bisi, you have gotten the whole story mixed up. Don't give these women wrong impressions. Nobody has ever said women cannot rule. The stage is empty; it is set for any actor who wills to go on it and act. Leadership is for all. Whosoever is willing can rule, male or female. But remember politics costs money. (3)

However, attempts by Sani and his fellow male politicians to discourage women from aspiring to elective positions within and outside the party fail to yield the desired results. It is obvious that the society and its male politicians have the agenda to continue to keep women on the fringes, far away from the scheme of things. This is the situation in present-day Nigeria where female politicians are mere spectators and are not encouraged by the system and the society to play the role of active participants. In her riposte to Sani's statement, Ebele, one of the top female members of the United People's Liberation Party, states that: “Alhaji, enough of that. You can no longer scare us with that. It is already a time-worn tale. We have heard it over and over again. Money is no longer a barrier to us. We are equal to the task”(3).The playwright uses Sani's referenceto “money-politics” to illustrate the color and brand of politics that Nigerian politicians play. This explains why politicians in Nigeria cannot stop dipping their hands into the public till to embezzle money. This is why corruption is assuming alarmingly different dimensions on a daily basis and those involved in governance continue to perceive politics as an avenue to corruptly enrich themselves, their friends and families, hence in their warped understanding, politics is a do or die game. Just like Sani, Nigerian male politicians make every possible move to propagate patriarchal domination and “money-politics” in order to discourage women, who are often times, less wealthy and less rugged for the brand of politics played in Nigeria, from

playing active politics. But Alero, another top female member of the party is quick to encourage her fellow women not to be faint-hearted, reminding men that “if we had the opportunities you’ve had, of course, we would have had money. However, politics does not have to cost so much money. A good electoral education will teach the people that virtue is better than price” (3). But the arrow-head of patriarchal domination within the political turf, Sani still insists that women “are not ripe enough to lead. Your time has not come. Wait for your time. Don’t jump the gun” (3). But Nona, responding, states emphatically that:

What an insult! How long does it take to mature for leadership? Yet we call ourselves United People’s Liberation Party! Liberated indeed! Look here Alhaji Sani, we cannot talk of a liberated party until our women are emancipated from all forms of oppression. We cannot say we are a democratic party until people see in practical terms a radical turn around in the conditions of women generally and that they have been empowered to have access to all aspects of governance as equal partners with other members of the society. (4)

The cynical and sarcastic response from Femi, a male politician of the same ilk with Sani, to Nona’s statement is a mere “Really? Is that so?” (4). However, another male politician known as Hakeem, who obviously sympathises with the women folk, reacts to Femi’s statement and states that: “It is so”. He goes further to urge women to “back up your words with actions. Let us see a demonstration of this new consciousness in practical terms”(4). This encouraging statement coming from a male member of the political party signals a bright future for Nigerian feminists in the pursuit of their agenda of women liberation. It is a fact that most men exhibit or allow chauvinistic tendencies to overshadow their sense of reasoning, but there are still men who can boldly speak up for women, even at the risk of being branded “women wrappers”, “mummy’s boys” or weaklings. However, some male members of the United People’s Liberation Party, like Madu, Sonsare and Balat still hold tenaciously to their age-long belief that it is not yet time for women to aspire to elective offices through the ballot paper. The male politicians express their

individual opinions and what steps they will take if Nona eventually emerges president. This is revealed in the following dialogue:

Sani: Why do you bother yourself? Who will give the presidential ticket to a woman? In this country? *Wa la hi ta la hi*, the day a woman becomes president of the Federal Republic, I will cross over to Chad. A woman will not rule me, Allah forbid.

Madu: *Tufiakwa*, I will swim to Equitorial Guinea.

Sonsare: I will run 880 to Cameroun. (38)

The dialogue above underscores the deep-seated misogynistic attitude of the society towards women. It shows how difficult it will be for Nigeria's male-dominated political space to accommodate and give female politicians a chance or the opportunity to showcase and exercise their leadership potentials. The vehemence with which the above utterances are made and the sheer weight of the words amply indicate that men and the society will go to any length to frustrate ambitious Nigerian female politicians. Balat, a male politician confirms the hurdles that await female political office aspirants when he states that:

We have been discussing irrelevances. We came here to map out strategies on how to destabilise the women and nip off their budding ambition. All we have succeeded in doing is allowing Hakeem distract us. Whether we like it or not, we have to realise that women have become open-eyed. They can no longer be fooled like before. Bags of salt and cartons of Maggi can no longer do the magic as in the past. The spirit of Beijing is firing them on. (39)

The above statement is a portrayal of the undercover scheming that characterises the game called politics in Nigeria where political parties rely on their structures to confer undue advantages on men over women, especially prior to and during party primaries which enables male politicians to always pick up the various party tickets at the end of party primaries. However, Hakeem the only sane and vocal male politician who, through his utterances in defence of women has proved

to be a conscience of the political class in Nigeria and has also demonstrated that he is in sympathy with women, is heard by the audience before now as he reminds his fellow men that:

Whether we like it or not, women are the custodians of the destiny of mankind. The destiny of mankind lies in the laps of women. The success of most great men in the world today, is traceable to the inspiration, encouragement or motivation they received from their mothers in their early days or their wives later in life. (38)

In his contribution, Jeta, a male politician, opines that it is risky for the society to underestimate women. He maintains that:

It seems you don't know women very well. When women are serious about anything, they invest in it with their entire mind and their strength. They swear to an oath. Go and study carefully the 1929 Women's Revolt, then you will know that women are good strategists and tacticians. (40)

However, the arguments and discussions on how to stop the women continue among the male politicians until the female members of the party conduct their primaries and Professor Nona Odaro emerges as the female presidential flag bearer. Her emergence throws the men into panic and confusion. This is confirmed by Balat when he states that:

You see why I am suspicious of these women is that; they have chosen an *acada* woman. Professor Nona may be calm but she is very intelligent. You cannot easily manipulate her. She is the daughter of a one-time political giant in this country. So, she is politically aligned... to show that these women are serious and that they know what they are doing, Nona's running mate is a man. Guess who? ... Mr. Dandaura, the gubernatorial aspirant. He is very rich; he was in the foreign service for a long time. He made his political his mark in the political arena of the early eighties. (40)

Another male politician, known as Sani, confirms the fears expressed by Balat when he states that "...I am beginning to see that these women are not as foolish as we think. So Dandaura has abandoned his gubernatorial dream for these senseless women. There is more to it than we can see" (41).

There are two obvious factors that have thrown the male members of the party into confusion and panic. The first factor is the intimidating credentials of Nona as an intelligent academic who has obviously always proved to be a tough nut to crack. So her personality is a strong factor that cannot be overlooked. Secondly are the experience, wealth and astuteness of her running mate. These are indicators of the dynamism arising from the resourcefulness of women when they choose to pursue a cause.

The men however, conduct their own primaries and Alhaji Bawa emerges as the presidential candidate. The stage is therefore set for an electoral contest involving a man and a woman into the single office of the president. As earlier pointed out, as part of the dynamics that have come to characterise women's campaign strategy to get to the top, they go a step ahead of men to pick a man as Nona's running mate known as Mr. Dandaura who they succeed in convincing and prevailing on to jettison his gubernatorial ambition. This deft political move is proof that it is risky and improper to underestimate women.

However, prior to the final decision to choose a female politician to run for the office of the president on the platform of the United People's Liberation Party and the eventual emergence of Nona as the female presidential candidate of the party, Nona uses the opportunity of a meeting of women to frown at the suggestion of some women like Alero that "Left to me, I would suggest that we form an all-female party and leave UPLP for them" (9). It is possible that that suggestion is viewed as being capable of further deepening the division already plaguing the party. She uses the opportunity to explain that in line with the shared values of tolerance, accommodation and cooperation between men and women which motherism and womanism preach, women do not intend and are not ready to override men in Nigeria; they are only agitating for an end to all

forms of gender inequality, oppression and discrimination against the womenfolk in the society.

Therefore in her reaction to Alero's suggestion, Nona explains to the audience that:

God forbid! Nigeria is a country made up of men and women. Our reason for desiring to rule is not because we want to install a government that is anti-men. No! We believe in equality and equity. People will get what they deserve because they qualify for it not because of their sex. Our government will be a human faced one where no woman or man is oppressed. We will work to leave a legacy that will last through the ages. (9)

Another top female politician, known as Bisi, concurs with Nona's opinion when she states that:

That is the spirit my people. I am happy you understand my point. I dream of a party where nobody is oppressed. We cannot complain of oppression and continue to perpetuate it. My dream for us as women in this party is equality of access and freedom from discrimination and a better party for all. (9)

The lesson to note in the statements of both women above is that the playwright may have used both characters to underline and advance the core tenet of the concepts of motherism and womanism which form the theoretical framework on which this research work is hinged and the fact that Nigerian feminism generally stands for accommodation and strongly supports genderism hence it is said to be anti-separatist, unlike core Western feminism.

The playwright strives to enlighten and encourage women that there is light at the end of the tunnel for them in their struggle against injustices in the society. This is achieved through the voice of Hakeem, a top male politician, and perhaps to the chagrin of the menfolk, he has been one sane, unbiased male politician who has always held the objective opinion that the society has not been fair to women. He has therefore, been very consistent in upbraiding the society and his fellow men who have failed to see the need to genuinely work towards reshaping the system so that both men and women will have equal opportunities to realise their potentials in the task of national development. He therefore, makes an earlier bold attempt to caution the society and

persuade its male members to give women a chance and even accord them total support in their collective aspirations. He states that:

...If policy decisions and laws are made for the benefit of all members of the society, the extent to which government body is able to carry everybody along will be determined by the degree to which its decisions will be appropriate and meet the needs of the entire nation. You see, my friends, the proper representation of women and the inclusion of their perspective into the decision-making process will inevitably lead to solutions that are viable and satisfy a broader range of society. (36)

The vocal Hakeem goes further to state in a blunt manner that:

Patriarchy, subordination of women and the deep-rooted belief that public affairs are reserved for men and that social contract is about the relationship between men and government and not citizens, come together to exclude women not withstanding constitutional rights and democracy. (36)

The playwright has used the media of drama and theatre to highlight the roadblocks or huddles that female politicians must contend with both within and outside party platforms. She however, strives to give women hope by enlightening them that there are some progressive-minded men who do not hold tenaciously on to the jaundiced opinion of the society that women should not be allowed to attain certain heights or aspire to higher positions of authority and responsibility in the society. Such outspoken men in the society represented by Hakeem are very few in number and stand the risk of being overshadowed by the conservative ones, who most times are in greater number, when the argument is basically about giving women a chance. In the following dialogue, it is just Hakeem's lone, sane voice against Sani's, Madu's and those of others like Terna and Balat combined. Hakeem as usual, is on the side of women while the others, expectedly, are against the inclusion of women in the scheme of things. This is revealed in the dialogue below:

Hakeem: ... You know that women have difficulties and will continue to face them in entering institutions of governance. Political parties fail to nominate them as candidates and the electorate, which is greatly influenced by gender stereotypes in the society, ends up voting for men.

Madu: Is that our fault?

Hakeem: Well ... there is something we can do to bring about a change. Democracy falls within the realm of politics and this is often male-dominated and is therefore, not women-friendly. You see, in democracy, the points of view of the different groups must be considered in formulating any policy. Democracy must include the opinions and perceptions of men as well as women...

Sani: So what views do women have that their husbands, sons or brothers cannot express?

Hakeem: Are they women? Do they understand women's concerns? You see, Alhaji, to conceptualize the issues which will affect citizens' lives without taking into account the situations, perspectives and realities of everybody, irrespective of sex is no longer tenable in this dawn of the twenty-first century. Taking into cognizance the gendered perspective and involving women and men in decision-making process is a hallmark of any genuine democratic framework. This is why, democracy, by definition, cannot afford to be gender-blind. It must strive to achieve equality and representation of women and men in any decision-making process.(38)

The playwright uses the dialogue to remind male-dominated societies that time has come for them to do away with insensitivity that borders on gender discrimination and jettison gender-blindness with a view to embracing a more progressive system that is gender-friendly and structured in such a manner that every member of the society, irrespective of gender, is given the opportunity to contribute and deliver his or her quota towards national development. She also however, succeeds in using the dialogue above to reveal the deep-seated ill feelings nursed by die-hard patriarchy who work hard to uphold society's belief that no one other than men should be supported to take shots at some of the highest offices such as the offices of the president and governors. On the other hand, it is hoped or believed that women have learnt from the dialogue that it is not yet dawn in their struggles against marginalisation and other forms of socially-endorsed injustices. This knowledge is borne out of the fact that men, in their utterances and

actions have never given the impression that they are willing to let go and accept that the time for a change in the status quo has come as advised by progressives like Hakeem. Alhaji Sani derogatorily refers to women as hens and emphasises that:

... The world is a man's world. We control the destinies of nations, the destinies of men and women. We are the cock and they are the hens. Remember that when the cock crows everyone is up on his feet... if crowing is easy, let them crow. For all her intelligence, no woman can rule our country... (38)

The above statement by Sani is supported by Balat's statement that efforts should be concentrated and channeled towards destabilising women with the ultimate goal of frustrating or nipping their ambitions in the bud. The audience is therefore, made to learn that society has consciously been working against efforts to achieve political emancipation and empowerment for the Nigerian woman. One of the weaknesses in the nature of women that the society has continued to exploit to render women voiceless and powerless is the seeming lack of unity of purpose among women but there is a hidden side to the nature of a determined group of women who are united by a common cause that the society has failed to reckon with. Jeta reveals this hidden nature when he cautions his fellow men that: "it seems you don't know women very well. When women are serious about anything, they invest in it with their entire mind and their strength... (40).

The playwright, however, encourages women to take up the challenge of putting up a fight to claim their rightful place in the society. She emphasises the fact that they need to empower themselves to enable them possess the financial muscle to be able to withstand or stand up to men or even stop them in their tracks. This advice is rendered by Mama Nigeria. She states that:

Look for ways to empower your women economically and in formal education. When that happens, they will be confident enough to face or team up with the men. Continue to fight for liberty and political equality. This commitment must be renewed and preserved by each generation of Nigerian women. (87)

The play ends on a note of victory for the womenfolk as Professor Nona Odaro, having successfully picked up the presidential ticket of the United People's Liberation Party, surmounts all roadblocks erected in her path by the society to record a landslide victory over men at the presidential polls.

The play, *The Tamarisk: The Healing Shrub*, unlike most plays, starts from the beginning to explore the theme of disunity among women which it reveals to be the major sour point that the society uses to discredit and hamstring women in their struggles for liberation from "socio-culturally endorsed oppression and subjugation". The general consensus or belief is that women lack unity which makes it difficult for them to fight for a common cause. This belief is one factor that the society exploits to ensure that women are kept in disarray and therefore, unable to speak with one voice on matters of concern to them. Unlike other playwrights, the audience can decipher conscientious attempts by the playwright to patch up the cracks in the ranks of women as a way of encouraging them to see the need to be united in a strong bond of sisterhood. The play therefore, encourages women to build a network of strong bond that puts them in a position to stand up to and challenge the maltreatment that the society metes out to them. The playwright reveals this through the voice of Chikere who obviously is dismayed that her previous attempts at uniting her fellow women have not yielded the desired results. She queries a Passerby thus: "My sister I no vex at all. My question is why are we women quarreling with ourselves?"(55). The issue of disunity among women has been a major factor. This has, perhaps, been responsible for the failure of the various women movements to record any meaningful achievements or significant milestones in their agitations for a change and calls for recognition

by the society as equal partners to men in national development. The 1995 Beijing Fourth World Women's Conference was said to have collapsed mainly on account of the failure of the female delegates to that conference to present a common and united front on matters of concern to women. Therefore, Chikere uses the opportunity she has to interact with a Passerby who is obviously a woman in order to encourage the womenfolk to equip themselves with the right values to be able to achieve the change that they all desire. This is revealed in a further dialogue between her and the Passerby:

Passerby: Ah! Ah! Ah!... Eh, Every time, President, Governor, Minister, even Chairman, na woman sopus dey occupy all the position eh, time don reach wey women suppose they occupy some of those positions now. I want go women council meeting o!

Chikere: Eeeeh? So na who go give us women those positions?

Paaserby: Na the men now!

Chikere: ... So men will just hand over those positions to you simply because they are married to you? Or is it not high time we equipped ourselves with the right values?

Passerby: Na the tin wey we wan talk for today's meeting be dat. Yes now, abi dem no go compensate us? (55)

The playwright uses the opportunity of the interaction between Chikere and the Passerby to remind women that the society will only reckon with them if they work hard like some exemplary Nigerian women have done. Through the voice of Chikere, it is revealed that complacency is one major factor that women must do away with. Hence in her response to the Passerby's request that men should compensate women for years of neglect, subjugation, oppression, suppression and marginalisation, Chikere queries the female audience thus:

... For what now? For being their chamber maid? ... Who empowered people like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Dora Akunyili, Hajija Gambo Sawaba, Senator Chris Anyanwu, Queen Amina of Zau Zau, Ndy Okereke-Onyiuke, Margaret Ekpo, Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti and Margaret Thatcher? Have you not seen that women who work hard position themselves for good? Was the Aba Women's Protest not a natural reaction from African women? (56)

The playwright also attempts to expose the various other ways that the society oppresses and marginalises women. The play reveals that some of the injustices that women contend with in the society include plotting of their downfall by some conservative male members of the society. This is probably borne out of some inexplicably uncanny desires of some male chauvinists to ensure that women do not excel or succeed in any tasks that are thrust on them. This may be because they do not see anything good in whatever a woman does. Ajuonu is portrayed in the play as a die-hard arrow-head of patriarchy. He feels that women should not be allowed to occupy certain positions of relevance where they can wield some levels of authority. Ajuonu is thus revealed to be plotting the downfall of Chikere from her position as the priestess of the Grove. Part of his strategy is to persuade Chikere to step down from that position. When this strategy appears not to be succeeding, Ajuonu convinces the Igwe to banish Chikere and lay a curse on her as the Lost Bride. Consequently, the Igwe forbids any one to even mention her name in Ama-Ukwu! The question is: if Chikere was a man and a priest of the Grove, would the Igwe have easily taken the steps that he has taken against her? Again, would it have been easy for Ajuonu to scheme and execute his evil plots against a fellow man and go scot-free? It is possible that Ajuonu is succeeding in his plot against Chikere because, as a woman, Chikere will not be allowed to sit with men in their council of elders' meeting where the decision to remove and strip her of her powers as a priestess will be taken. This is one case of marginalisation that women suffer in the society. The following dialogue further reveals the evil machinations of Ajuonu against Chikere:

Chilaka: What is your problem, Ajuonu? Are you such an insensitive brat that you do not understand that the shrine of the Grove needs a Priestess?

Ajuonu: And I ask you, Mr. Sensitive, why must it be a Priestess?

Nwokekauba: ... Ajuonu, ever since the existence of the Grove, when has it been said that a man served as a priest?

Ajuonu: (*Seriously, but non-chalant*) Story begins in one day. We are men, we can re-write history.

Chilaka: Hai! Little wonder, the alacrity at which you persuaded the Igwe to pronounce curses on The Lost Bride forbidding each one to mention her name. (69)

The job of a priestess cannot be said to be financially rewarding. The researcher therefore, wonders what the attraction might be for Ajuonu, an elder in the society, to want to dethrone a serving priestess and probably take her place as the priest of the Grove if not for the uncanny desires of some men to ensure that women are relegated to the background and made to remain there. That Ajuonu has earlier persuaded the Igwe to pronounce a curse on Chikere, forbidding anyone to mention her name, as revealed by Chilaka shows that the male-dominated Nigeria society is only interested in the downfall of women. Again, that Ajuonu himself has told the audience that “We are men, we can re-write history” shows that the destiny of women is socially and patriarchally determined. In other words, patriarchy as a social structure is responsible for the plight of women in the society. However, the likes of Chilaka must be commended for speaking out at times against attempts by the society to continue to treat women unjustly. He is consistent in opposing Ajuonu. In his response to Ajuonu’s suggestion that Chikere should be replaced, he retorts thus: “Never! The Grove has categorically spoken through the emissaries sent to Igwenga that ... this girl will serve until her transition” (70). Finally, after much argument Ajuonu was prevailed upon by Chilaka and Nwokekauba to revoke the curse placed on Chikere to enable her return to her job as the priestess of the Grove. Chilaka states that: “Yes, with words

of mouth you will lift the curse and at her return she will undergo purification” (71). Nwokekauba is also of the opinion that Chikere should be recalled. He informs the audience that “we are a family of priests and priestesses. Ajuonu please recall the Lost Bride”(71). Ajuonu heeds the wise counsel of Chilaka and Nwokekauba as he pronounces that:

Today, we the men of the clan of Nwokekauba standing before the unseen God do hereby revoke the curses placed on you, Chikere, the priestess of the Grove. Henceforth, she shall be addressed with respect as Chikere, Her Majesty, the priestess of the Grove ... We, the Nwokekauba’s family, servants of the Grove, we call you forth from the four pillars of the earth, Chikere Nwokekauba! Come home! (72)

The fate of Chikere aptly reflects the plight of Nigerian women who have found themselves in one position of authority or the other. Historically, no Nigerian woman who by providence, had occupied an exalted office such as the Office of the Deputy Governor of a State or Speaker of a State Legislature or House of Representatives, has ever been lucky enough to get to the end of her tenure of office. Some pundits are likely going to argue that Nigerian women like Dora Akwunyili of blessed memory and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala were not forced out of office but the hard truth is that this researcher is of the opinion that they count among the lucky few. However, at the height of Dora Akwunyili’s fight against fake and substandard drugs, there were several attempts made by drug barons on her life as the then NAFDAC boss. For others like Patricia Ette, former speaker of Nigeria’s House of Representatives, it can be argued that circumstances or factors leading to their exit are debatable but the truth about Ette is that she was not allowed to get to the end of her tenure as she was impeached or rather, removed in controversial circumstances. This puts a question mark on how ready the society is to embrace on-going campaigns for a balanced representation of both genders in governance.

The playwright also identifies polygamy as a potent weapon that the society uses to enslave women to ensure that they remain voiceless and subservient to men. Chief Arinze Odimnaka is portrayed in the play as a very wealthy man. He propagates the Nigerian tradition that encourages and allows a man to have as many wives as he can by proposing to marry Juliet as a second wife. In Situation 6, Ekaete, his first wife, is revealed as she reports to her two friends, Chikere and Nkechi, all of who are her fellow members of the Sisters of Light that “my husband is taking a new wife!” (37). Although Chikere makes an attempt to trivialise Odimnaka’s decision to take a second wife by reminding the audience that “there has always been an assistant somewhere, it is just that right now she wishes to change the nomenclature of a Miss to a Mrs...” (38), Nkechi has earlier described it as an attempt by “one lousy girl somewhere to snatch away her plate of food, her emotional investment, her retirement benefit and lifetime security!” (37). However, Ekaete is willing to accept a situation where her husband “has a girlfriend outside, but let him not marry another woman...” (39). In their bid to help their friend, Chikere and Nkechi decide to go with Ekaete to meet with the Pastor of the church where the wedding has been scheduled to take place. The Pastor happens to be the husband of their friend, Favour, who is also a member of the Sisters of Light.

In Situation 7 before the arrival of the trio of Chikere, Nkechi and Ekaete at the Pastor’s residence, Favour is revealed as she argues with her husband and pleads with him not to wed Chief Odimnaka and Juliet but the Pastor is bent on helping Chief Odimnaka to perpetuate this tradition that has helped randy male members of the society to keep women enslaved. This is revealed in the dialogue between the Pastor and Favour:

Pastor: Woman, leave me alone. What is wrong with you? What is your business if Chief Odumnaka marries ten wives...?

Favour: You are a man of God; you should eschew all manner of evil...

Pastor: Shut up! The tithe paid by Chief Odumnaka to the Church of God monthly is worth more than a Commissioner's Security vote! If marrying a second wife is what will keep him in my Church, then I will help him do so!

Favour: Is that why you should beat me as if I am a punching bag? What have I done?

Pastor: What have you not done? What rights have you to question me?

Favour: I am your wife and must advise you against...

Pastor: Against what? It is my prerogative to decide what happens in my Church!

Favour: That is not the point... I am a human being; I have equal right to feel...

Pastor: You have no right whatsoever to feel anything... I am the man here ...(42)

The play successfully exposes the horror that some marriages in Nigeria have become. Firstly, most men turn their wives into punching bags at the slightest provocation or opportunity. Even men of God are not exempted. Secondly, most housewives have no say and are made to understand that they are not permitted to question their husbands' actions or decisions and that their opinions on issues do not count and are therefore, not welcome. The Pastor has just said so by reminding his wife that "I am the man here" (42). The play also reveals that male members of the society endorse and view philandering even among married men as a normal way of life and are therefore, not bothered about how much their wives suffer emotionally and mentally. In other words, the emotional torture that such wives go through does not bother them.

However, having arrived at Favour's residence, the three ladies, (Chikere, Nkechi and Ekaete) are updated on the attempt that Favour has made to dissuade her husband from wedding Chief Odumnaka and Juliet. This earns her a sound beating and she urges the audience to "...take a look at my face and see my husband's five fingers; because I asked him not to wed your husband and

Juliet” (45). Convinced that dialoguing with the Pastor will not yield the desired result, the three Sisters decide to adopt a spiritual means to stop the wedding. Transcending from the physical to a spiritual realm, Chikere leads in the prayer. The three members of the Sisters of Light state that:

Chikere: ... Women, we are specially gifted! The son of man said “Do not cast your pearls before swine”. If we women are only obsessed with fashion and marriage, we are indeed miserable! But Ekaete by the grace of our creator, heaven will hear us (*Amen*), earth must obey (*Amen*), for as children of nature, we shall flourish in whatsoever that is good (*Amen*) *Ekaete is dazed and confused as they drag her inside the circle. The Sisterhood stands with their glasses together as they declare*)

Chikere: I am Earth and Water, an inexplicable complexity

Nkechi: I am Air

Favour: And I, Fire! Our tradition is to love and keep our hearts clean. (*They all stand; in a circle holding hands as they chorus, but in the centre stands Ekaete*) To tell each other the truth no matter how it hurts. To respect each other’s choice and above all, to be our sisters and brothers keeper, so help us OUR GOD.

Chikere: (*Resolute as she declares*) We express our sincere desire that Chief Arinze Odumnaka will return to his wife, Ekaete Odumnaka. How it will happen, we do not know.

All: We express our desire!
 We express our desire!
 We express our desire!
 So be it! (53)

The playwright states in the stage direction on page 53 that “a halo of light glows around them transfixing them into a magical ring, and glows into a dimness”.

The playwright has successfully shown that women should be quick to recognise the fact that apart from physical protests to cause a change in the pitiable situation that the society has consigned them to, they can as well adopt spiritual approach in solving the problems of injustice

and oppression that confront them. That is where the dynamism of their collective revolution hangs on as captured in *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub*.

4.3. Strands of Convergence and Divergence in the Selected Plays

The three plays under study in this chapter all have a meeting point or rather points of convergence. In other words, they all have some things in common. For instance, they all highlight the much talked about lack of unity among women which many Nigerian feminist scholars opine is responsible for the failure of women to speak with one voice on any issues of common interest to them. The plays also highlight ceaseless attempts by male members of the society to capitalise on and exploit this sour point in order to keep women in disarray. This is due to their uncanny desire to ensure that women are not able to team up to fight for their rights. Similarly, the plays also have some features that differentiate them from each other. These differences can be referred to as strands of divergence in the plays.

The plays identify and attempt to address the difficulties encountered by the various women leaders in bringing the women together and getting them to understand or appreciate the fact that it will be in their collective interest to confront their oppressors and deal with society's relentless efforts to keep the women folk in a subordinate position in the society.

In *Dance on His Grave*, Alaere is revealed to be having a difficult time convincing some of her fellow women who think that it is not proper for them to fight for their rights simply because they want to avoid being misunderstood as fighting their husbands or rubbing shoulders with men. This is in spite of the fact that Alaere has made efforts to explain to them in her opening remarks during the women's meeting at the village square that "I am not thinking of ruling this land; but the question is: should we not be consulted even in matters concerning our children and us?" (24). It is at this point that one of the women identified as 1st Woman suggests a change in

position during conjugal exercises between them and their husbands as a way of getting their husbands to reckon with them in most communal and family affairs or matters. But the tendency of women to easily pick quarrels with each other during such meetings rears its head when the 2nd Woman retorts that “I think there is madness in your head” (26). This angers the 1st Woman who threatens to “teach this daughter of a nobody a lesson she’ll never forget” (26). The altercations continue and threaten to erupt into a physical fight between 1st and 2nd Women until Alaere, who by this time is obviously exasperated at the immaturity and unruly conduct of women during such meetings to discuss serious and important matters of concern to them states that:

I do not know where to start. This exhibition of uncontrollable anger is a disgrace to the womenfolk. We have shown that we cannot control ourselves. If we can't do that, we cannot control others. *It is the heedless hen that turns her back to the wind.*(27)

One of the women present at the meeting, known as Erebu equally expresses disappointment at the inability of her fellow women to unite and fight for their rights. She states that “I am very much disappointed that we have been chirping like sunbirds and quarreling over frivolities. You see how the Amanananau is bowed down with grief? We caused it!” (28). She goes further to narrate the story of the white egret who declined to assume the position of the king of the birds’ kingdom. She goes ahead to remind her fellow women that Alaere “did not refuse to assume her role when the lot fell on her” (28). In concluding her narrative, she asks them if Alaere should regret her decision to lead them.

However, the emergence of an elderly woman from the gathering identified as 5th Woman helps to douse the tension generated by the quarrels. In her attempt to ensure that the aim of the meeting is not defeated by avoidable and unnecessary bickering, she reminds them of the difficult and daunting task ahead. She states that:

... I have seen more days than most of you, if not all. The word is caution... *it is a fool that does not recognize the strength of the enemy*. Now, Toru-Ama is set for another war with Angiama! This gathering will go a long way in restoring peace in this land. We are tired of war! Of bloodshed! Hunger! Thirst! We women have to do something! The time is now! Have I spoken the mind of everyone? ... If we do not act now, our problems will continue and our daughters will suffer. On behalf of the good women of Toru-Ama, I apologise for our rudeness. Forgive us... (29)

The elderly woman's address works like magic on the frayed nerves of the bickering women and the meeting continues as normalcy is restored. But Alaere's statement thereafter points out to women the foolishness of bickering among themselves when they gather to discuss how to tackle serious challenges, such as patriarchal domination, confronting them. She categorically states that "... I have been silent all this while, wondering what the men would be thinking if they saw and heard what happened here. If we feel we can take care of the affairs of the land, we have to show maturity in our gathering..." (30). She goes further to advocate stubbornness as a weapon of protest that they can apply to get men to listen to them. But sensing that not all the women will faithfully and willingly apply this tool as suggested, 1st Woman suggests oath taking to compel compliance but Alaere counters her immediately and emphatically states that:

No! No oaths at all! *The thing that happens in the house of dogs, happens also in the house of goats*. If any woman does not like her freedom; if there is any woman that wants to play second fiddle to a man forever; if there is any that wants to remain a slave, to be only in the kitchen, look after the children alone, and not sit at table with her husband; and if there is any woman who likes to have her sons killed in a senseless war; let her do otherwise. And may it be good for her! Have I spoken the minds of all the women of Toru-Ama? (33)

In *More than Dancing*, it is revealed that dissension among women whenever they come together to discuss and decide on how to deal with any issue that is a source of concern or headache to them is a major challenge that they must surmount in order to make progress in their quest for a change in the way the society treats them. In Movement Two of the play, a meeting of the women is convened to hold in Bisi's house. The purpose of the meeting is obviously to discuss

and agree on how to extract a fair deal from male members of the party who have vehemently and consistently kept women on the sideline, away from the scheme of things. At the opening of the meeting, Nona states that:

... this spirit of male dominance, this attitude of “stay in your place, you have no say in this”; “you have no contribution to make”, “you have no sense anyway” has pervaded our society for centuries and it is that same spirit that still has hold on our party. (10)

In her contribution during the meeting, Aisha seeks to know what can be done to correct the situation. She enquires from her fellow women thus: “What do we do then? We can’t allow things to go on this way. We cannot continue to allow ourselves to be excluded. We must do something. We must do something now or remain marginalised forever” (10).

The meeting is obviously progressing in the direction that is appealing to the principal conveners. Nona for instance, expresses satisfaction at the comments of her fellow women. She states that: “Now you are talking. Yes, indeed, now is the time to take action. We must be bold and strong yet not confrontational. Our exclusion from the political space is preventing us from living in the fullness of what God created us to be” (11).

Again the women are moved by Nona’s statement. It is obvious that the part about not being allowed to live in the “fullness of what God has created them to be” must have made the greatest impact on them for Bisi tries to recall the exploits of many great women in recorded history and their contributions towards the liberation of the entire society. She states that: “Yes, that is true, don’t forget that in the past many women in history accomplished great things; displayed exceptional skill and talent; stood up against oppression, injustice and contributed much to the society” (11).

It is at this point that the voices of dissension among the women begin to express their discouraging opinions. This is revealed in the following dialogue:

Ejura: But times have changed. Now, it is difficult for any woman to stick out her head.

Bisi: In that case, we should be prepared to be sidelined forever. For any group of people to move ahead, they must be prepared to pay a price.

Minika: *Dat one go hard oo.* We are women under authority. Must we break our homes simply because we want political liberty?

Garos: What is difficult there? Have our husbands broken up their homes because they are engaged in political activities? If your home is fragile, please return home and handle it with care. Those of us who are willing will move on. (11)

These banterers are enough to charge the atmosphere, especially Garos' reference to a fellow woman's private life and home, to the extent that quarrels that may result in fist cuffs break out thereby producing the possibility of the aim of convening the meeting being defeated. But Nona, spurred on by her determination to achieve the aim of the meeting is not discouraged by the disagreement among her fellow women. She goes ahead to address them with a tone of finality: "As women, we have to decide on what we want. Majority of women have not been allowed to develop their unique personalities, potentials and gifts fully in order for them to enrich their own lives, all because of these restrictions" (11).

In spite of Nona's painstaking efforts to unite her fellow women, they still find it difficult to accept that unless they are united and stay focused, it is impossible for them to forge ahead. Boma makes efforts to remind them that "I feel we ought to present our own presidential candidate as Madam Ebele suggested earlier" (11). The choice of who will be the party's female presidential flag bearer throws up another round of arguments among the women. They all have their choices based on such primeval factors as ethnic background, educational qualifications,

eloquence in the use of the English Language, level of exposure and so on. This is revealed in the following dialogue:

Alero: I suggest we choose someone from the Niger Delta because their resources finance our country.

Ebele: No, I suggest we choose someone from the Eastern region. We are very industrious and resourceful.

Azira: The North is endowed with seasoned administrators; they will produce a better leader.

Ejura: Middle Belt has been known to produce military rulers in the past. They have the experience. I suggest we take someone from there. (12)

The playwright may have decided to use above dialogue to reveal that ethnic politics is a major threat to unity in this country, even among women who ought to know better. The choice of a candidate as revealed in the above dialogue is induced by ethnic consideration of what each region is known for. Even when order is finally restored and the choice of candidates has been narrowed down to Nona Odaro and Aisha Gambo, the arguments still continue with some arguing that Nona would have been the preferred candidate but for the fact that she speaks “too much grammar” (13). These are unnecessary arguments generated by such mundane factors like how long each of the candidates has been a member of the party with some arguing that “Aisha has been with us longer than Nona” (13). These avoidable and unnecessary arguments continue to the extent that the process of choosing a candidate almost becomes marred by the unnecessary debates. However, before the women’s decision to nominate Nona Odaro and Aisha Gambo, Aisha cautions her fellow women thus:

Enough of all this chattering. What nonsense? Do we want to fall prey to men’s games by playing politics based on ethnic sentiments? We are contesting because we are dissatisfied with their political machinery but now we are doing exactly the same thing. (12)

However, eventually, the women are able to unanimously choose Aisha but in what looks like a deft political move, Aisha declines and instead, nominates Nona who she sincerely feels “is a better candidate, not on her educational background but on her person and on what she stands for... I hereby step down for Prof. Ononaghosa Odaro” (15). It is possible that Aisha may have compared herself and Nona, in terms of their educational and social standing, considered the mood of the nation or that of women in this case and then come to the laudable conclusion that it will always be better if we put collective interests first before our personal interests. In other words, sacrificing her personal interests or ambition to enable a fellow woman step into hopefully lead the party to victory will expectedly be to the benefit of all of the womenfolk. Nigeria will be a better place if our politicians decide to be selfless and conduct themselves in the manner that Aisha has done in the laudable spirit of “politics of compromise”. The fact is that even Nigerian male politicians ought to make up their minds to begin to work towards accommodating women in the scheme of things by mobilising support for female candidates of political parties who they objectively believe can serve and contribute to the country’s development. This is in the light of the fact that wind of change has started to blow across the globe in the direction of giving the women folk equal opportunities as the men folk.

In *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub*, Ogbonna highlights the major challenge of disunity among women which accounts for their numerous failures to speak out the way a united group of people when faced by a common challenge should. It is a very thorny issue. Even among members of *Umu Ada* in the larger society of Eastern Nigeria, for instance, the story is the same. Several scholars and writers have therefore, continued to cite the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Women’s Conference which eventually ended up in a monumental fiasco as a classical example of the outcome of the inability of women to stay united and confront their common enemies. Chikere,

the priestess of the Grove has had to enquire from a Passerby as to “why are we women quarreling with ourselves?” (55).

There is also the issue of the failure of women to rally round and support their fellow women when the need arises. This also borders on lack of unity among them. Chikere as a priestess is deemed to occupy a position of responsibility in the society. As a priestess, she is not expected to be involved with a man emotionally or in an amorous relationship. But Njoku approaches her, expressing or proclaiming his undying love for her. Chikere is conscious of her position in the society and the position of the gods on the issue of a love affair between her and any man and so, she makes conscious efforts to discourage Njoku, knowing fully well that love is a very strong emotion that can impede her from actively playing the roles expected of her as a priestess of the Grove if it is encouraged to develop. It is expected that her closest friends, Nkechi and Favour ought to give her their maximum support in her decision not to allow Njoku’s profuse expressions of love overwhelm her. But her friends fail to see reasons why Chikere, a full-blown woman should not allow herself to experience the pleasures of falling in love with a man. This is revealed in the following dialogue:

Nkechi: Chikere, may I remind you that you were first delivered of your mother as a female before the gods chose you! You are never complete without the other half...

Chikere: And if that other half is not human? And if from the womb I was ordained to be this way? Granted, we are all halves, male or female is immaterial!

Favour: Then you should have been a hermaphrodite! Look at Thomas, he was genuinely in love with you, all you needed do was to appeal on his behalf... now.

Njoku is here, give him a chance. These are the problems you solve for others, why can’t you appeal for yourself... for how long do you want to dwell in this lost brideship? (74)

However, Chikere is not swayed by her friends' attempts at persuading her to consider Njoku's advances. On an emphatic note, she states that:

Far be it from me to listen to a man whose desire is a potent weapon to destroy me... as for me, I will not listen to a man ... that Njoku of a man makes me weak. His presence is a potent weapon of destruction. I do not want him anywhere near me. (74)

It is true that these three friends are not quarreling but the truth is that they have come to disagree among themselves and therefore, have different opinions on the subject matter of Njoku's love advances to Chikere. The playwright may have subtly highlighted this aspect of lack of unity among women in order to caution them on the need to cooperate with one another and support their fellow women for they are better off as one united group.

The issue of polygamy as an instrument of oppression that the society uses to subdue women still thrives in the society. In *Dance on His Grave*, Ayakoroma presents women as being unhappy with the practice. Alaere states that "from now on, no woman shall allow her husband to marry a second wife! For those of us who are unlucky already, we shall carry on with our burden. They want us to be married to one man at a time while they spread their tentacles" (25). However, in *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub* Ogbonna reveals that polygamy still subsists in the society because women have not come together to vehemently oppose the practice. This is exemplified by their willingness to accept marriage proposals from their fellow women's husbands. The hidden message from the playwright is that women should be their sisters' or fellow women's keepers. Juliet should not have agreed to Chief Odimnaka's marriage proposal. It therefore goes without contradiction that if women are able to unite against the practice of polygamy which has been identified as an instrument of oppression that the society uses against them, the society will have no option but to do away with the practice which many progressive-minded individuals

now consider obsolete. Even Nwabueze emphasises the essence of unity of purpose among women in *The Dragon's Funeral* when Adaugo reminds her fellow women that "...our strength lies in our determination to stay together, to fight together and to die together if the need arises" (21).

The playwrights may have brought out the sour point of lack of unity among women in order to enlighten them that when they bicker and refuse or fail to present a common and united front whenever they have serious issues confronting them to deal with, they fuel the society's and their oppressors' drive towards ensuring their continued marginalisation and oppression. The playwrights have also highlighted the lack of unity among women caused most times by timidity, most times arising from various forms of injustices that they suffer from the society, to emphasise what organisers of women's protests all over the world go through to mobilise them (women). It is therefore, possible that great mobilisers and organisers of women's protests in recorded history like Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti and others who organised and mobilised women to participate in the famous Aba Women's Riot must have experienced even worse difficulties in organising them (women) for the protests given the fact that this was a period in Nigeria's history that there were only very few educated Nigerians, especially women and organising a group of uneducated women must have been a daunting task for the organisers. Emeka Ojukwu would have described such a gathering to sensitise a group of largely uneducated women as "... a gathering of the deaf, demanding a great deal of shouting, a great deal of gesticulation and a great deal of repetition; a dialogue which, despite all efforts, often ends in a misunderstanding- a most frustrating dialogue" (xi).

In such a gathering, however, there must be some straight-forward women, the easy to predict type. It is either they are for or they are against. There must also be the cunning type who will

pretend that they are one hundred percent in support of the cause only to balk at the idea of participating in protests when the time for action comes. It therefore, takes patience, resilience, resourcefulness and intelligence for a leader to survive the ordeal.

The other common feature that runs through the three plays is that all the women leaders are very patient, they are resourceful, resilient, intelligent, persuasive and articulate speakers who know how and when to use the right words to effectively drive home their points. They all show a common determination to succeed and bring to an end the perceived acts of injustices against women. From the beginning of the struggle, they all show a profound knowledge and understanding of what they are fighting for. From the beginning too, they have clear-cut strategies on how to achieve the aim of the revolution. For instance, realising that some of the women may misunderstand the revolution to be an opportunity to confront men or their husbands or that the motive behind the planned revolution may be misinterpreted, the women leaders take the pains to explain that they are not fighting men or their husbands but rather that the main agenda of the revolution staged by them is to enthrone change in the society; the kind of change that will make the male-dominated society recognise them as equal partners in development. It is instructive to note that the women's leaders- Alaere in *Dance on His Grave*, Madam Bisi in *More than Dancing* and Chikere in *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub* have proved to be tough gender activists. They present the image of knowledgeable, selfless, dedicated and determined leaders who are able to wield enormous powers and influence over those they lead. More importantly, that is an indication of the goodwill and loyalty that they enjoy from their fellow women who constitute their followers.

In *Dance on His Grave* for instance, Alaere informs King Olotu that “we only want our rightful place in the affairs of the land... we want adequate representation...” (38). She also spells out

very lucidly, the other issues under contention. First is for king Olotu and his cabinet to “call off the proposed invasion of Angiama” (39); secondly is that the women desire to be allowed to have a say on issues concerning them and their children. In *More than Dancing*, Salami equally clearly spells out the real essence of the women’s protest. This is achieved through the voice of Nona when she states that:

... Nigeria is a country made up of men and women. Our reason for desiring to rule is not because we want to install a government that is anti-men. No! We believe in equality and equity. People will get what they deserve because they qualify for it not because of their sex. Our government will be a human faced one where no woman or man is oppressed... (9)

In *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub*, Ogbonna calls for change and reminds the society that the ultimate and herculean task of transforming the society rests on its members. This is achieved through the voice of the Narrator who states that:

My people, the noble task to better our society rests on all of us. Our desire, greed, and quest for power and material well-being have left us shallow and empty. While we are greedy for gain we trample on the gods not minding whose ox is gored. We are the society that needs to be changed or expunged. We are the people who have rejected ourselves. We can only change things from within. Now the people of Umuobasi-Ano are willing for change, let us join them in the celebration of the new dawn. (82)

The three playwrights have been able to reveal that women are agitating for freedom from oppression, not because they want to be equals with men; they only wish that the society should stop infringing on their rights and even taking those rights away from them completely. For instance, in *Dance on His Grave*, Alaere states very clearly that “I am not thinking of ruling this land” (24). Salami in *More than Dancing*, through the voice of Jeta, reveals that “The women have always said that they are not in competition with us but that men and women should complement one another” (41). The women’s utterances have always revealed their deep understanding of what conservative or Nigerian feminism stands for; which is that it is anti-

separatist and is not in support of the enthronement of matriarchy and the dethronement of patriarchy.

Although, researchers and scholars when writing about the injustices that women are subjected to often euphemistically blame the society for the abuse or debasement of womanhood rather than directly heaping the blame on men. However, the playwrights have been able to show that men are responsible for the plight of women in the society for patriarchy is obviously structured in such a way that men are the society and vice versa. According to the plays, men's utterances amply reveal to the audience that they feel that women should always submit totally to them. Therefore, to achieve this, every effort is geared towards ensuring that they remain subjugated and subdued. In *Dance on His Grave*, this is revealed through the voice of King Olotu when he commands his wife thus:

Now woman, stop making fun of state affairs. You think these matters are for egg-heads? Enough of this foul talk! They say *if you play with a puppy, it shows your nakedness to the world*. Now, if I hear any more rubbish from you, I will tell you that I married you in this house! And until I take you back to your father's house, you will act as my wife and do what I say. I repeat! You will do what I say in this palace! ... (39)

The king's outburst above is his reaction to a harmless request from Alaere, his wife, that she be treated with some level of affection and be allowed to sit beside her husband, the king as the first step towards ensuring that women are adequately represented in the palace. Certainly, women have never been present in meetings where important and crucial decisions are taken. It is still during all-male meetings that such counter-productive or retrogressive decisions to wage a war against a neighbouring community known as Angiama over the decision of a full-fledged adult female to elope with a young man from Angiama in search of conjugal bliss are taken. Taking into consideration the peaceful nature of women, decisions that will only end up bringing sorrow

and agony to families such as waging wars against neighbouring communities unnecessarily will never sail through because such a costly enterprise will never receive their endorsement. Even the mere suggestion of a change in position during conjugal exercise where the woman is allowed to be on top of the man is vehemently opposed by another woman who refers to such a change as an “abomination” just to underscore the unwillingness of women to cause or support drastic changes that are capable of causing serious problems in their homes. They are careful not to give men cause to think that they are about to take over the running of the affairs of the society from them because from their utterances too, that is not one of the items on their agenda.

In *More than Dancing*, the playwright reveals how far the male-dominated society has gone to keep women oppressed. This is revealed through the voice of Sani and other male politicians of his ilk in a dialogue between them and Hakeem. Hakeem is just one of the very few men who are in support of on-going efforts to ensure that society stops debasing womanhood. They state that:

Hakeem: Whether we like it or not, women are the custodians of the destiny of mankind. The destiny of mankind lies in the laps of women. The success of most great men in the world today, is traceable to the inspiration, encouragement or motivation they received from their mothers in their early days or their wives later in life.

Sani: Which woman? Which inspiration? On how to cook? Women are not as smart as you think. This world is a man’s world. We control the destinies of nations, the destinies of men and of women. We are the cocks and they are the hens. Remember that when the cock crows everyone is up on his feet.(38)

The playwright reveals the misogynistic nature of man when Sani compares women with a cock and challenges them to “crow if crowing is easy” (38). Madu is also portrayed as a very irresponsible male politician when he attempts to ridicule the reproductive role that nature has bestowed on women by stating that when it is time for Nona as a president to appear before the

senate to present and defend the budget, she will likely go into labor. This is a very irresponsible thing to say about women. Madu has forgotten that menstruation is part of women's reproduction cycle as designed by God. If women cease to menstruate society will simply go into extinction. Hence this researcher is wondering if men with such warped thought-lines like Madu's actually came to this world through women. Do they have mothers or they dropped from the sky; do they have sisters, daughters and wives? In spite of the challenges of coping with such nature's demands like menstruation and childbirth, there are nursing mothers who have occupied and still occupy positions of responsibility and still successfully discharge the responsibilities that their offices demand of them excellently. In the same vein, there are men who have been in positions of responsibility and have failed woefully in their duties. Yet they do not menstruate nor have babies to nurse. They have been bogged down from doing their duties creditably by either ill health or serious mental disorder like kleptomania in office!

The playwright, just like Ayakoroma has done in *Dance on His Grave*, has successfully exposed the jaundiced opinion of men against women and this goes to show the driving philosophy behind men's unrelenting attempts to continue to subdue women. The reflection of how lowly men rate women mentally is contained in Olotu's attempt to further degrade womanhood when he describes their meeting as a "gathering of hens" (36). That a respected traditional ruler will compare a meeting of human beings with that of animals is the worst example of attempts by the society to continue to debase womanhood. The same King parodies the gathering of women further when he queries thus "... What are they going to say there? Women! Well, the world is changing. Women want to put on thinking caps too, eh? Well, they would all grow bald-headed too" (36). This is an indication of how patriarchy has been structured to reduce women to nonentities who do not have the mental capacity to tell their right from their left.

In Ogbonna's *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub* the role that men play to ensure that women remain subdued is revealed to the audience. During a meeting among Chilaka, Nwokekauba and Ajuonu to discuss the future of the Grove, Ajuonu canvasses that Chikere the priestess of the Grove has to be replaced by a man who will serve as a priest. When reminded by Nwokeuba that "ever since the existence of the Grove, when has it been said that a man served as a priest" (68), Ajuonu's response is that "Story begins in one day. We are men, we can re-write history" (68). This confession by Ajuonu is an affirmation of how men have systematically and gradually, over time, structured the society in such a way that only men determine how the society is run. This is to ensure that social institutions remain the way men have planned and decided that they should be. The liberation of women from practices that hold them captive and oppressed in the society is a common undisputable philosophical thread that runs through the selected plays in this section.

However, there are few **strands of divergence** that distinguish the plays from each other. For instance, Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave* is about struggles for power and authority between men and women of Toru-Ama. The women of Toru-Ama feeling oppressed and marginalised like women in the other plays who are equally oppressed, decide to fight to take their rightful place in the scheme of things. But unlike the strategies of women in the other plays, the strategy they decide to adopt in engaging the men in their revolt against oppression is the weapon of stubbornness. The weapon of stubbornness is intended to ground the community until King Olotu and his cabinet members listen to their agitations. Going by the explanation of Alaere, this weapon of stubbornness means that no woman is expected to perform any domestic activities which include washing clothes and plates, cooking and even warming her husband's bed. This is a very diplomatic strategy which ought to 'peacefully' achieve the desired results for women who obviously must have realised that it will be futile to engage men frontally especially taking

into consideration how unreasonable black men can be when the argument is about patriarchy and how to accommodate women in the scheme of things. It is therefore a social commentary on gender emancipation and the conflicts that change crusades or messages generate in the process of resisting an unpopular policy. Unlike the other two plays, the men of Toru-Ama feel that their positions as men and heads of families are under threat by women and therefore, decide to put down the women's revolt by "flogging some sense into the women's heads". In executing their violent strategy of nipping the women's revolt in the bud, Olotu states that:

A man must be a man. Yes! And a man must have some pride... We are going to tell our wives that we are men. (*Odibo comes in with the bundles of canes. The men are surprised.*) Yes... they are canes. I am giving one to each one of you. This night, we are all going to sleep with our wives by the first cockcrow. If they refuse us entry, the canes will do their work. If we break their will, their unity will be broken. Do not stop until they plead for mercy. For those with many wives, by the time you finish with one, the most stubborn one, the others will pledge their undeserved loyalty. Odibo, give one to each person. (*He does so. Some ask for fat ones, or more as the case may be.*) Now, go my people; go and fight this war in families. (79)

The decision by Olotu and his fellow men to adopt a violent strategy to quell the women's revolt instead of dialogue is an eloquent indication of how insensitive Nigerian men are to the feelings of women. It is possible that the men would have achieved their aim of bringing their wives under restraint without resorting to violence to the extent of distributing canes to "flog sense into their heads".

In *More than Dancing* the women are obviously comfortable with the use of the intellect as the soul of their planned revolution to usher in change. *More than Dancing* is also a social drama which reflects the intrigues that characterise politics in male-dominated third world countries like Nigeria. It is a play that encourages men to see the urgent need to pull the breaks on their march towards their unrelenting attempts to keep women perpetually oppressed and subjugated. It can

therefore be regarded as a propagandist play with the target to persuade men to give women a chance. To achieve this target requires a great deal of repetition and emphasis on the excruciating pains of marginalisation that women go through in a patriarchal structure. The tools of repetition and emphasis are very potent weapons in communication if success must be achieved in the crusading enterprise. The playwright has therefore, shown that like legal pundits, playwrights at times have to also rely on the use of verbose but meaningful words as effective tools to convey their messages to members of the audience.

On the other hand, *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub* is a socio-cultural play that calls on the society to do away with as well as permanently dismantle cultural structures that hold women captive and impinge on their rights to freedom of equality. In the play, women depend on spiritualism or the use of spiritual powers to tackle the socially-endorsed problems that confront them on a daily basis in Nigeria. This is one feature that distinguishes *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub* from the other two plays.

The different methods adopted by women in the selected plays to deal with their problems underscore the dynamism of their revolution. They have all proved to be very resourceful and tactful to the shock and chagrin of the male-propelled and dominated Nigerian society.

The presence of the village square as venue for their meeting is one feature that distinguishes *Dance on His Grave* from the other two plays. The essence of the choice of the village square as venue for the historical meeting is to further underscore the importance of the square in the lives of rural people as a major rallying point for them when they have issues of serious concern to discuss. It is possible that in that era in the historical development of Nigeria, if the meeting was scheduled to take place in any other place other than the village square, not many women would

attend. It is therefore proper to commend Alaere for being such a strategic planner, a consummate leader and motivator of women.

In *More than Dancing*, the meeting where the crucial decision to back up their words with actions and demonstrate the new consciousness in practical terms by nominating a female presidential candidate to run against any male candidate from the same party is held in Madam Bisi's house. During the meeting all the women present pledge their support and loyalty to their bold and courageous leader for taking a bold and positive step in the right direction by telling men to their faces that it is no longer fashionable to continually keep women on the fringes in the scheme of things. Taking into consideration the fact that the play is about a more modern era in Nigeria's political history and also taking cognizance of the caliber and sophistication of the female characters, it probably would not have been ideal to hold the meeting in a market place or in a village square. As has become the practice in Nigeria, subsequent meetings can be held in the market on a market day to sensitize a greater number of women irrespective of class. Madam Bisi is also a consummate leader and motivator of women but times and circumstances have dictated the venue of the first crucial meeting. If the circumstances or times were different, it is possible that a market place or the party's secretariat would have been where to hold such meetings.

In *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub*, the first "chance" gathering of women where polygamy is revealed to be one of the weapons that society uses to keep women subjugated, takes place in a salon. In this venue, Juliet who Chief Odinnaka has proposed to take as a second wife unknowingly discloses this vital information to Ekaete, the Chief's legally married wife. The salon is portrayed in the play as a place of gossip where both falsehood and truth are peddled and disclosed. It is therefore, an important informal information center where secret plans of men

against women are revealed. The next venue for the meeting of women in the play is *The Shrine Shop* owned by Chikere. That is where Nkechi, Ekaete and Chikere, all, members of the Sisters of Light, with Chikere as the head or leader, meet to discuss Ekaete's plight. The final meeting place for women to discuss their common nightmare is in Favour's house, another member of the Sisters of Light who is married to a pastor. During the meeting Favour discloses to the audience that her husband's demonstration of love for her "is a façade... Sometimes, we wear costumes and masks..." (44). This statement gives the impression that even women who are married to pastors are also subjected to one form of abuse or the other. Therefore, the women take a firm decision to stop Chief Odumnaka and Juliet in their tracks through spiritual means. The prayer is conducted below:

Chikere: I am Earth and Water, an inexplicable complexity.

Nkechi: I am Air.

Favour: And I, Fire! Our tradition is to love and keep our hearts clean...

Chikere: (*Resolute as she declares*) We express our sincere desire that Chief Arinze Odumnaka will return to his wife, Ekaete Odumnaka. How it will Happen, we do not know.

All: We express our desire!
 We express our desire!
 We express our desire!
 So be it! (53)

The various places of meetings in the selected plays underline the fact that the three plays were written in different periods, even though the playwrights are unanimous in identifying the indisputable fact that women have some injustices bordering on marginalisation, oppression and subjugation to contend with in the society. The playwrights also unanimously call on women to wake up, detest and jettison timidity, demonstrate their determination to confront their

oppressors, get prepared to walk into limelight and occupy a position of recognition and relevance in the society.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of Findings

In depth analysis of the plays reveals various socially endorsed oppressive practices that debase womanhood in Nigeria. The selected plays show that women need liberation from such oppressive practices which hold them captive. However, the playwrights reveal various ways or methods that could be adopted for the emancipation of the Nigerian woman who does not have a say on issues concerning her own life and like the proverbial goat which bites when pushed to the wall, the oppressed women resort to different revolutionary means to cause a change in their situation.

The study reveals that the first generation playwrights have been able to use drama and theatre to demonstrate that most oppressive practices that debase and disempower women are socially endorsed and that drama and theatre are useful tools for the emancipation, empowerment and ultimate liberation of women in Nigeria. Therefore, there is need for a cultural re-orientation to ensure that both male and female members of the society are regarded and treated as equals. Women should no longer be made to suffer one form of injustice or the other by the society in the guise of upholding tradition and for the untenable excuse that women are inferior to men simply because they belong to the female gender. The playwrights have adopted drama and theatre as useful platforms to advocate that women should therefore, no longer be seen and treated as inferior beings to men but rather, there should be a peaceful co-existence between both genders.

The playwrights, irrespective of generational gaps among them, have been able to demonstrate the proliferation of feminist agenda. The plays also emphasise the need for women empowerment, self-actualisation and the need to encourage political participation at all levels. Incidentally, discordant tunes entered Nigerian feminism as the clash of radical and conservative feminists produce different feminist ideological conceptions like womanism, motherism, femalism and Stiwanism. However, womanism and motherism which are Nigerian adaptations of feminism dissociate themselves from the excesses of the core Western feminists, some of who advocate a total abandonment of men by women.

However, the researcher, following the re-occurrence of gender equality as a common denominator in most of the feminist ideological conceptions in Nigeria affirms that gender equality should be the central focus of Nigerian feminist agenda. Therefore, Nigerian liberationist movements should direct their efforts and energies towards the eradication of oppressive practices against women. Men appear to have also failed in politics as highlighted, for instance, in Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and Salami's *More than Dancing*. The playwrights have therefore, successfully passed a message to the female folk that it is possible for them to jettison their gabs of subservience and grab the reins of power and governance. Therefore, the society should encourage women to move in and grab the opportunity to justify the popular maxim that "what a man can do, a woman can do better". Men tend to isolate women in politics but Salami has been able to reveal that women are ready and working towards cooperating with men as partners in progress to build a stronger and prosperous Nigerian society.

This researcher is of the opinion that the society should be magnanimous enough to put legislations in place that will give backing to women empowerment to enable them contribute meaningfully to matters that are beneficial to Nigeria and mankind generally. Since the girl-child

will grow up to be a woman, her rights should be protected and upheld from the beginning to enable her grow up freely and develop an independent mind as she grows up without having to hide behind a man when she becomes a full-grown woman.

The plays have been used to teach the audience that to achieve the desired result, patience, dialogue and diplomacy are very vital tools that women can employ while fighting for liberation in order to enthrone a dynamic and an egalitarian society where there is no form of subjugation and where awards or rewards are on individual merit, irrespective of gender. The playwrights have highlighted the fact that women are only agitating for gender equality between them and men. They are not aiming at dethroning patriarchy and enthroning matriarchy.

The dynamism of feminist revolution in the push towards realising or advancing the Nigerian feminist agenda is defined by the strategies adopted by the protesting women in all the selected plays. From outright protest march and public demonstrations embarked upon by women to press home their demands for a change in the inhumane ways that the society treats them as portrayed in Nwabueze's *The Dragon's Funeral*, Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave*, to political and intellectual as well as spiritual revolutions as portrayed in Salami's *More than Dancing* and Ogbonna's *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub*. The dynamism of the feminist revolution is also defined by the fact that the plays were written at different era in the development of Nigeria even though they all identify and address the common themes of oppression and marginalisation of women in Nigeria. It is also proper to state that the different levels of the protest: from the family to communal up to the national levels also instructively define the dynamism of the protests or the revolution for at these different levels, the playwrights strive to expose the different shades of injustices that women are subjected to, the various socially endorsed methods of meting out these injustices to

them as well as the different management skills and resourcefulness deployed by the women's leaders in ensuring that the purpose of the protests are achieved.

5.2. Recommendations

The plays analysed for the study symbolise feminist struggles against acts of inhuman treatments and the need to liberate the women folk from such inhuman treatments and gender oppression which the society unleashes on women in the name of cultures and traditions. It is instructive to note that these cultures and traditions do not have the input of women in the first place as they are patriarchally determined. The researcher therefore recommends that the feminist agenda championed by Nigerian conservative playwrights should be the acceptable Nigerian feminist agenda.

The researcher recommends that to achieve a generally acceptable Nigerian feminist agenda, Nigerian feminist playwrights should continue to use the media of theatre and drama to encourage women and liberation crusaders to continue their struggle for ultimate freedom for the womenfolk from various acts of inhuman treatment such as oppression and marginalisation which women are subjected to in the society. The idea is to achieve gender equality between men and women in the society where there will be equal opportunities, equal rights and same treatment for everyone under the laws of the land and cultural norms of the people. Through the medium of the theatre, the society can be sensitised to realise that women constitute an important segment of the population and can therefore, contribute meaningfully or positively to on-going efforts to change the socio-political direction of the Nigeria. The best possible way to achieve this task is to use their plays to sensitise and mobilise the critical stakeholders on this issue-men, women, youth organisations, the government agencies, and even lawmakers. This researcher also

believes that legislations will greatly help to enforce women's liberation. Nigerian feminist playwrights should therefore, continue to explore ways of using the media of theatre and drama to achieve an acceptable Nigerian feminist agenda that champions gender equality between men and women. This way, the image of the theatre generally as a seriously inclined medium of change rather than an entertainment medium will be enhanced.

5.3. Conclusion

From the analysis of the plays: *The Dragon's Funeral*, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, *The Wives' Revolt*, *Dance on His Grave*, *More than Dancing* and *The Tamarisk: A Healing Shrub*, it is obvious that the maltreatment of women by the same society that they are its "custodians" and in whose "laps lies its destiny", will continue to throw up agitations, protests, demonstrations and revolutions by women in their quest for the realisation of Nigerian feminist agenda. The plays symbolise feminist struggles and desire to bring about the liberation of women from acts of inhuman treatment and gender oppression that the society metes out to them in the name of culture and tradition. It is instructive to note that these cultures and traditions do not have the input of women in the first place as they are patriarchally determined. The rationale behind the liberation enterprise therefore, is to give women a new lease of life; to give them a sense of belonging as equal partners to men in the development of the society. But the playwrights appear to have realised that Nigerian feminist agenda can mainly be realised by first arousing the oppressed Nigerian woman to action by highlighting through the media of theatre and drama, the ignominies that they go through on a daily basis in different forms and shades in the male-dominated society that they live in. The women's revolution is a signal that every oppressed woman has the right to revolt irrespective of social status and there is always a deciding moment

when every oppressed woman has to confront her oppressors and wrestle with them in her search for social justice.

The male-dominated Nigerian society has continued to explore every opportunity to treat women as inferior to men and deny them their basic rights, such as right to freedom of association, right to even decide the type of clothes to wear, and so on. Even their inalienable rights to life cannot be said to be guaranteed as the unfriendly society they live in can under the guise of promoting or upholding certain traditional practices most times infringe on their rights to life. In all, the women, according to the plays, have borne the various acts of injustices with uncommon stoicism, but just like the proverbial crocodile that is usually patient and tolerant but bites fatally when it has to, they resort to agitations, protests, demonstrations and revolts as the instruments of confrontation which they can use to dismantle oppressive patriarchal structures. The idea is not to take over the running of the society and their families or to lord it over the menfolk but to get men to appreciate and understand the fact that no gender is superior or inferior to the other and therefore, equal treatment of every member of the society irrespective of gender should be espoused or encouraged and upheld at all times. Sociologists call it androgyny.

The term, androgyny is a sociological concept which desires and preaches the eradication of gender differences; or at least that gender differences should be reduced to the barest minimum. In a state of androgyny, men and women are not significantly different because it is believed that the differences between the masculine and feminine genders are socially constructed. If these socially constructed differences are removed, then equality between men and women is possible and can then follow.

Drama is a tool for conscientisation, liberation and change. The playwrights whose works have been studied in this research have used the medium of drama to portray the real image of the Nigerian male as misogynistic and chauvinistic, regarding women as inconsequential beings with no rights at all except the ones that are patriarchally determined and handed down to them and so they must be dictated to and handled like children. In most traditional communities in Nigeria, women and children are almost of the status hence Nwosu states that "... within various communities in Nigeria, the fate and destiny of these two important social groups are determined by the cupidity of the chauvinistic man..." (40).

The playwrights on the other hand using the same medium have been able to portray women as being very patient and respectful to the point of docility, to the extent that they see and regard their husbands as "lord" or "*nna anyi*"- our father. Perhaps, they hope that by so doing, the society will have compassion on them and treat them more humanely but the playwrights have however, shown that this is not the case. However, through the conscientisation of drama, the agitations and protests championed by Nigerian feminists in their determination to realise an acceptable Nigerian feminist agenda, the male-dominated society has begun to recognise and appreciate the fact that there is need for equality between men and women as partners in the development of the society. In politics, Nigeria has Obiageli Ezekwesili, a renowned Chartered Accountant. She has served as Nigeria's Minister of Education and Solid Minerals. She earned for herself, the sobriquet of "Madam Due Process" during her brief stint as the pioneer head of the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit otherwise known as the Due Process Unit. She is also the lead campaigner for the Bring Back Our Girls group. We also have Justice Aloma Mariam Mukhtar, who is Nigeria's first female judge to be elevated to the Supreme Court. Nigeria's Oyo State had Monsurat Sunmonu as its first female speaker of the State's House of

Assembly. She later moved to the Upper Chamber of the National Assembly on the platform of the ruling All Progressive Congress, representing Oyo Central Senatorial District following her victory at the polls in March, 2015. In Taraba State, Aisha Alhassan was the first Nigerian female politician that came close to being the first female elected governor of any State in Nigeria. She is nicknamed “mama Taraba” by her supporters for her political exploits and for being able to carve a niche for herself as a political force to reckon with. We have Remi Sonaiya, a Nigerian female academic, who contested for the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the platform of KOWA. At the helm of affairs of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, was Farida Waziri who has not stopped being in the news because the agency she headed is Nigeria’s main anti-corruption agency. The list is not too long.

It has been demonstrated in the plays, especially in Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and Salami’s *More than Dancing* that education is the foundation and major tool that can uplift women and improve their status. Without education, Liza Lejoka-Brown will not know her right from her left and will probably live in a state of servitude just like Mama Rashida and Sikira. Liza is presented as a woman with a liberated mind because of her level of education and this makes it difficult for Lejoka-Brown to keep her in a subjugated situation. She is able to conscientise the other two women towards making them realise that women have inalienable rights and are equal, not inferior to men. Salami also succeeds in underscoring the importance of education when Nona is presented as being capable of running for the office of the President of the Country against the male candidate of the United People’s Liberation Party. But for education one wonders if Nona and her fellow women would have been able to stand up to the male members of her party who act like bulls not to talk of wrestling power from them.

The interplay between reality and fiction is very intriguing. The roles of women in politics and other sectors in Nigeria are still at best very peripheral. Apart from active female politicians like Latifat Okunnu who occupied the position of substantive Chairman of the defunct National Republican Convention (NRC). We have also had a few female politicians who were deputy governors in their States, like Kofo Bucknor-Akerele of Lagos State. In Obasanjo's civilian administration, there was Patricia Olubunmi Etteh who was the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Her tenure was short-lived and she was removed in controversial circumstances. Some political analysts have opined that beginning from the elections of 1999 up to February 2019, there have been clear evidences of gender bias in favour of men. In the 1999 elections, for instance, only three women made it to the senate out of a total number of one hundred and nine (109) Senators. In the House of Representatives, we had only twelve women who won elections into the lower chamber of the National Assembly out of three hundred and sixty (360) of the total number of members of the House. The story is as dismal at the State and Local Government levels. In the February 2019 elections, the story is also not too encouraging as only very few women, made up of six Senators and thirteen (13) House of Representatives members got elected as female lawmakers in the Ninth National Assembly that was inaugurated in June 2019. Many reasons or factors are no doubt, responsible for the low number of elected female members into political offices, especially in the Legislature but the most cogent is gender discrimination or bias against women. Most political parties are known to evolve guidelines in every election year for prospective aspirants. Such guidelines are always clearly against the interests and ambitions of female politicians. For example, some parties request for non-refundable deposits that run into millions of naira which some of the female aspirants find difficult to fulfill while political meetings are almost always scheduled to hold at night. Given the peculiar cultural environment

in which we operate night meetings almost on a daily basis are disincentives for any woman who has self-respect. There is also a glaring preference for male political candidates by the male-dominated political parties in Nigeria. If we must include women in mainstream political and governing processes, therefore, dealing with and correcting these issues are very important and urgently too. But perhaps, much more important is the fact that the society must view gender balance as a universal challenge which must be tackled with all sincerity and seriousness. We have obviously gone beyond the era of lip-service. It is, however, hoped that very soon, things will significantly improve in favour of women. This is because Nigerian feminists are not giving up until Nigerian feminist agenda of gender equality is realised. Mama Nigeria, a female character in Salami's *More than Dancing*, captures aptly the reality of the determination of Nigerian feminists to keep pushing when she cautions Nigerian women to be mindful of the fact that "no one will throw the gates of leadership open for you to drive in unrestricted. You have to work hard at getting the right keys to open the Iron Gate or you may have to break in... You have to keep fighting until you succeed" (86).

In conclusion, therefore, women should heed Mama Nigeria's advice and endeavor to sustain the fight for their rights. They should look beyond social restrictions or inhibitions if they must succeed in their agitations for equality with the menfolk. Finally, the society should see agitations by Nigerian feminists for women's liberation as a noble cause and encourage active participation by both genders in order to make for a better and well organised society that is competition-driven. Oppressive practices that subjugate women should be done away with and positive and progressive practices established to enhance or promote gender equality in the society.

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