

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Over four decades down the line, the issue of gender has come to gain prominence in national and international discourse. Prior to this period, the meaning of gender and its applications was limited to its etymological meaning in terms of biological sex of male and female or widely put masculine, feminine and neuter. The third category was used to refer to those who were neither male nor female at birth. No serious attention was given to gender as an issue since it was grammatically used to mean almost the same as biological sex. According to Haig; "...It was uncommon to use the word gender to refer to anything but grammatical categories" (88). Gender then was not thought to have any influence on the behaviour or role of the male or female or intersex and as such was not considered an important issue.

It was not until the debut of the work of John Money in 1955 in which he attempted the distinction of meaning between biological sex and gender as a role that some attention began to be given to gender as an area for further study. Thus in the 1970s the feminist theory found the distinction a fertile ground to distinguish between biological sex and the social construct of gender. According to Shaw and Lee:

Gender, in other words, can be understood as the social organization of sexual difference. Although biological distinctions create female and male humans, society interprets these differences and gives us 'feminine' and 'masculine' people. These adjectives are intentionally placed in quotation marks to emphasize that notions of femininity and masculinity are socially constructed - created by social processes that reflect the various workings of power in society. Therefore these notions are culturally and historically changeable. (107)

Thereafter, gender began to be viewed as an area that has wider connotation than was originally thought of. People began to reason why human beings behave the way they do, whether their actions were as a result of their biological sex or not. People began to wonder whether an individual behaved in a particular way or did a particular job because he was a male or female or whether those actions or job were assigned to him/her by the society. The feminist movement took up the challenge and argued that male and female were created or born equal and that any other attachment to their state of being unequal was as a result of social construction which was sometimes arbitrarily done. Such attachments were usually taken to refer to as gender matters. Such gender matters could be linked to the popular assignment of roles to individuals as either man or woman later in life. Culminating in gendered identity and gender roles. Gender identity can be described as a way a person identifies with a particular group in the society and plays the roles (gender roles) assigned or expected of that group. Thus most societies have groupings for either men or women and each individual is expected to belong to either of them as a result of biological sex of male or female. If you are a female by birth, you belong to the women group and play the roles ascribed to women and if you are a male by birth, you belong to men group and equally play the roles assigned to the group. The third biological sex of neuter (intersex) was not usually recognized in the assignment of gender roles and identity. This gender roles and gender identity is the primary challenge of the feminists as they claim that the word 'woman' was concocted by men to subjugate women and make them a subjective identity. Taifel and Turner maintain that:

According to social identity theory, an important component of the self concept is derived from memberships in social groups and categories; this is demonstrated by group processes and how inter-group relationship impact significantly on individual's self perception and behaviours. (12)

Some Feminist advocates, like Bakare-Yusuf, Nicholas, and Steady are of the opinion that men and women are equal and women are even more important than men. They opine that given equal opportunities, women can do better in any given circumstance but it is the so - called social gender roles that tend to inhibit women from asserting their rights for fear of societal stigma. By gender social roles and gender identity an individual is expected to belong to a particular group and internalize the norms that define the behaviour or conduct of that group.

This grouping is usually done according to the individual's biological sex of being either male or female. Intersex individuals are often left out. They are to belong to either of the two categories of masculine and feminine gender although recent research has shown that some societies are increasingly recognizing the rights and privileges of the intersex. In their opinion, feminists perceive gender social roles as being fashioned by men to maintain their hegemony against women. They contend that the gender roles and gender identity though varied in different societies and culture, still have men dominant ideologies as their basis. They further claim that it is the men that define what attitude and or behaviour in a particular society that could be adjudged appropriate or otherwise. According to Galdas and Johnson:

Globally, communities interpret biological differences between men and women to create a set of social expectations that define the behaviours that are 'appropriate' for men and women and determine men's and women's different access to rights, resources, power in society and health behaviours. (19)

But women activists argue that in assigning the roles, men deliberately assign those roles that are less tedious yet lucrative to themselves while those roles that are tedious and less lucrative are assigned to women. Towing this line, Sheffield affirms that,

Women were still largely relegated to certain scientific fields, such as home science, nursing, and child psychology. Women were also typically given tedious, low-paying jobs and denied opportunities for career advancement. (132)

This perceived imbalance has given rise to various sociological, literary and ideological agitations. As Utoh-Ezeajugh observes:

Feminist postulations hinging on varied ideological conceptions have been espoused by scholars concerned with the empowerment, self-actualisation and self-reclamation of the woman in a male-dominated world. From feminism to femalism, to womanism, to motherism, to black feminism, and humanism, the subjugation of women has taken centre space in literary discourse on gender interactions. (104)

Some scholars have credited the emergency of feminism to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin based on postulations in her book, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. However some other scholars have raised the argument that feminism has its roots in the medieval writings of a French woman, Christine De Pizan, who wrote on the rights and duties of women at that period. Feminism has advanced since then 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. Scholars have made the distinction between radical feminism, accommodationist feminism, humanist feminism, womanist feminism and motherist feminism.

Many in Africa see feminism as too Western and too radical, hence, the various theories that have emerged as derivatives from mainstream feminist concepts. It is obvious that social and cultural factors have rendered Western feminism inappropriate and ineffective in solving problems of gender discrimination in the African social sphere. Concepts which are more culture-specific and address women's concerns from a supposed African perspective are womanism, black feminism and motherism. Womanism is credited to Alice Walker, an American novelist and poet, who later emerged as a prominent voice in the Black feminist

movement. She introduced the word, “womanist,” into feminist discourse in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, which was published in 1983. Many Black women before then had sought to expand the feminism of the Women’s Liberation Movement beyond its concern for the problems of White middle-class women. Walker’s use of the word, “womanist,” is inclusive of Black and White concerns in feminism. Womanism is therefore a feminist term, which reacts to the perceived non-inclusion or representation of Black women’s perspectives in feminist matters. Motherism, a brain-child of Catherine Acholonu, presents “A multi-dimensional theory which involves the dynamics of ordering, re-ordering, creating structures, building and re-building in cooperation with Mother Nature at all levels of human endeavour” (110-111).

Utoh-Ezeajugh maintains that “motherism and womanism share similar values based on tolerance, mutual cooperation, love and service”(108). Feminist scholars generally view social construction of gender roles as the handiwork of men which is usually embedded in patriarchal culture through different systems of norms and beliefs prevalent in such society. These systems of norms and beliefs are usually made in favour of men and as a rule, such norms and beliefs are to be strictly adhered to by all within the given society. As Warnecke puts it “Although the specific nature and degree of these differences vary from one society to the next, they still tend to typically favour men creating an imbalance in power and gender inequalities within most societies” (459).

To these scholars, social gender roles are the primary causes of gender imbalance and not the much - talked about biological sex. To them nobody was born man or woman but male or female or neuter (intersex). Therefore, any other distinction or terminology is as a result of the role assigned to such sex by the particular community or society. As a result one is expected to play the role of the social group one belongs to and behaves as a boy or girl early in life, and

later as a man or woman, husband or wife. These roles are mostly tied to the biological sex of the individual or biological sex perception of the individual as male or female or neuter. Shaw, Susan and Lee, Janet in their article titled “Women’s Studies: Perspectives and Practices” argue that patriarchy is a system where men dominate just because power and authority is vested in the hands of adult men (1). Feminists therefore seek the abolition of any gender social roles that tend to make men superior to women and uphold and encourage the ones that entrench equality of men and women or even recognize women as sometimes having more superior qualities than men. Discussing literary interventions in the gender struggle, Gayle Austin observes that

There is now a growing body of feminist literary criticism of plays. Some of this is first stage “image of women” criticism, which points out patterns in writing by men in which, for example, the female characters suffer or die in order for the male characters to grow or continue on their life journeys. Other, second-stage criticism focuses on patterns in women’s writing such as repressed fears and anger expressed through coded plot lines and character types. Third-stage theory-centred work tends to focus on language itself and the connections or lack thereof between words and reality. (21)

Playwrights such as Tess Onwueme (who can be rightly adjudged a trail-blazer in modern gender presentations in Nigerian drama) and her group collectively and individually advocate for the abolition of patriarchal values that subjugate women. They insist on women confronting traditional barriers that hold them down and relegate them to the position of second-class citizens.

However, Masculinist movements are gradually springing up around the world especially Europe probably to reinforce the age-long gender roles of men’s superiority which, to them seems to be in decline. Men in this group perceive the feminists as overstepping their bounds in society. Therefore, there is need for men to fashion out masculine ideals that could ensure

continuity of the social system and integrate individual men into the community. Gilmore in affirmation to this, states:

As a consequence, masculine ideals both ensure continuity of the social system and integrate individual men into the community. In this paradigm 'manhood scripts' are specific responses to structural conditions (as are the divisions of labour). They are not just personal and psychological but 'codes of belonging...modes of integrating men into their societies'. (224)

Masculinist scholars view feminists as over-bearing in their agitation for equal rights and opportunity and feel that such excesses, if not checkmated, could spell doom for men. Such theorists feel that the feminists movement for equality with men may lead to gender role reversal which may pose danger for humanity- not only men, since women by nature, are feared to be more cruel than men if given the opportunity. Therefore, feminism is perceived as a threat to the survival of patriarchy/masculinity. According to MacInnes, masculinity is "an ideological response to the threat posed to the survival of the patriarchal division of labour by the rise of modernity" (45). These masculinists cry out about the seeming discrimination against men in some societies when it comes to job allocation or employment. They argue that women now earn more salary than their male counterparts in most professions where men prevailed before. According to Tomde Castella, in online analysis of the situation in the United Kingdom:

But the picture may be changing. Last year the Universities and Colleges Admission Service discovered that women aged 22-29 have overtaken men on pay for the first time. And a survey for the Chartered Management Institute found that female managers in their 20^s were earning 2.1% more than their male counterparts. (bbc.com/news...)

Masculinists are also worried at the rate by which some rules are bent or disregarded in order to favour women. They perceive rules made in many countries recently as being in favour of

women thereby giving them some leverage over men. Weldon in agreement to this describes men as “victims” (28). According to this view, women are increasingly occupying top positions in both private and public establishments and men are usually schemed out systematically. This, according to critics of feminism, is because women get employed nowadays because of the influence of feminism and improvement in technology which has rendered employment ‘feminized’. Conceding to this, Jensen, Hagen and Raddy note that;

...the changes associated with the work as a result of improvement in technology mainly affected the working class men who depend on their muscle and strength to showcase masculinity. ‘Feminization of employment’ is a term used to indicate the movement into the labour market in the second half of the twentieth century of increasing numbers of women. (72)

They argue that men’s leadership is divine and not man-made as the feminists want people to believe. These scholars warn against the consequences of role reversal which could put the world into further chaos since it could translate into complete disobedience to divine injunction. According to them, both the two major world religions, affirm the leadership of men over women. In the Holy Bible it is written “For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the Church, and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph.5:23-24)

Masculinists also challenge the assertion by feminists that God created human beings male and female in the beginning. They argue that it was animals that God made male and female in the beginning but in the case of human being, it was only male (Adam) that was created. Female (Eve) was created from the male and named “woman” because she was made from man. So they further argue that the word “man” or “woman” was not just grammatical jargon fashioned by men to subjugate women, but something that derived from the divine creation process.

According to the Holy Bible, Adam was the person who named her 'woman': "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man" (Gen.2:23). So they opine that the word 'woman' was because she was made from man and by nature less than man since she was only a part of man.

The Islamic Holy book- The Holy Quran, also supports the superiority of men over women. According to the Holy Quran, as quoted in Emenyi...39, "Men are the managers of the affairs of women for Allah has preferred in bounty one of them over the other" (Sura 4:3). From the masculinists perspective, and in adherence to the two religions, women's struggle for equality is seen as a challenge to divine injunction which, if not checked, could lead to blasphemy and attract divine punishment. They are of the opinion that the various roles men and women play in every given society were the ones already assigned by God. They argue that God has already given each sex the roles to play by nature and attempts by any group to reverse such can only lead to nature disorder. The argument is that, each sex has its roles and if, these are followed there will be order and subsequently peace and progress (development) in the family, society and the world at large.

Women for example are made by nature to bear children and nurture them up to certain stage of life while men are made to provide for the women and children and keep the house in order (home). Onaolapo agrees with this view but advises women to turn the 'nurturer' role to their advantage by inculcating the gender equality consciousness in their minds. According to her:

Women all over the world are still nurturers of children both male and female particularly in the early years. They have to emphasize the feeling of equality of the gender and give their children (irrespective of sex) a sense of purpose and aspiration. (200)

Scholars arguing in this direction also stress that an African woman's role is primarily to provide sexual satisfaction to her husband and sometimes engage in commercial labour and petty agricultural business. Hammond agrees with this view and consequently states that "an African woman's role is limited to sexual and commercial labour: satisfying the sexual needs of men, working in the fields carrying loads, tending babies and preparing food" (150). Feminist adherents therefore challenge the roles assigned from cradle. They posit that those roles are usually entrenched in the cultural nuances of the society in question and children are made to learn and internalize them for future roles as man or woman husband or wife as the case may be. In this way, women are continually being marginalized since the roles support it because men are always behind the formulation and assignment of roles through dominant ideologies. According to Gramsci, "Ideology is tied to action, and ideologies are judged in terms of their social effects rather than by their truth values" (324). Feminist vanguards therefore challenge the social roles and are no longer contented with them. Despite the fact that some of the roles are in favour of the women in some societies, the feminists still fight or agitate for equality no matter the task. Some societies assign less rigorous tasks or roles to women and exclude them from levies. According to Akwang:

...While gathering food in Ibibio land (and much of southern Nigeria), men gather or plant yams while women plant cocoyam, men split fire wood while the women and children cook the food. Men do the hunting, fishing, climbing trees and other rigorous chores from which women are excluded such as going to war, felling trees... Male children are also trained in feats of valour while the women are prepared, through the Fattening Room such as the Ibibio Mboppo custom, to be good housewives. While men pay taxes or village levies, the women are excluded. (42)

By and large feminist movements have been at the fore front for gender equality while the masculinists adherents repel it. There are other schools of thought that have sprang up to

challenge the excesses of both the feminists movement and the masculinist adherents. Womanism for example is out against the excesses of feminist school of thought and that of the masculinists as well. They seek to enthrone complementarity for both gender since no gender can do it alone. They advocate for women, to always have recourse to their primary role as home keepers while at the same time playing other social roles to complement their men counterparts. They recognize the headship of men but will not advocate for male chauvinism. They want men to also recognize and complement women too. Rodney Johnson in support of this writes “Men, women need to know that they can trust us. The feminist movement notwithstanding, women want a man to lead, and they want to know that he can be trusted” (163).

Indeed, Womanism as a movement is primarily for gender equity. It abhors the Marxist tendencies of the various feminist movements and regard them as extremists. In the same vein the chauvinistic posture of masculinists is under severe attack by those who advocate for African home-grown feminism which will operate from the point of culture specificity. Supporting this view, Arnfred intones:

Thus African thinking of basic concepts, grounded in African experience and local conditions, has a potential benefit not only in Africa but also for feminists elsewhere. Just as the Nigerian workshop participants argued for a ‘home-grown’ African theory, feminists in the West also need to re-think aspects of how to conceptualize women and gender. Theoretical insights that might emerge from African re-thinking could very well be useful also in the West. (88)

Scholars of this view criticize feminist proponents on the ground of being too Eurocentric and not having regard to the cultures and religions of Africa and other less developed countries where such determine the conduct of women and men. They opine that, for peace and progress (development) to thrive in such societies, the role of men must be recognized in relationship with

those of the women since men are made, by nature, to lead. They want the men to remain as leaders while at the same time recognize and treat women as their counterparts with rights and privileges. Davies shares this view and declares “The feminism which is African, and which supports the African female consciousness in literature, is not antagonistic to African men, but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women’s subjugation” (77).

They do not reject the idea of women liberation but what they advocate is for decorum to be applied in the process. Caution seems their watch word in the process of women liberation since such liberation cannot be achieved overnight but by a gradual transformation process. They are not at ease with the way feminists attack men generally as if everything about men is bad. According to womanist or motherist ideology, radical feminism if unchecked, could do more harm than good to the cause of the women. In fact, Alexicon argues that “some voices for gender equality do considerable harm to that cause by the way they generalize and alienate and criticize all men” ([http/www..](http://www..)) Accordingly, Lee observes that

Feminism has also been critiqued as a White, middle class perspective that has no relevance to the lives of women of color. The corollary of this is that women’s studies is about the lives of White, bourgeois young women. This critique is important because throughout the history of the women’s movement there have been examples of both subtle and blatant racism, and White women have been the ones to hold most of the positions of power and authority. Similarly, working-class women have been underrepresented. (17)

From all indications, these various gender movements and postulations have provided raw materials for further inquest into the field. Since the issue of gender has continued to re-echo in every dispensation, there is a compelling need for such issues to be properly studied and treated. Gender was originally thought to be a term that referred to either male or female but with the distinction made out of it and the expansion of such distinction by women activists, the issue has

gained a recognizable dimension that can no longer be ignored. It is also pertinent to note that the issue has come to be linked with human development initiatives and societal progress since women, for instance are of the opinion that development policies affect them differently and therefore their peculiarities when compared to men should be taken note of for even development. This is the idea behind the concept of gender mainstreaming in policy drafts and implementation. Gender has permeated such fields as medicine, sociology, politics, economics, law and so on. Nigerian playwrights are involved in gendered engagements as a platform to engender social transformation for national development. It therefore becomes imperative to undertake this study for purposes of doing a critical analysis of some Nigerian plays with gender undertones with a view to assessing the mode of presentation of gender issues by the playwrights.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The tradition among playwrights to undertake an artistic diagnosis of and curative excursion into their society's social existence has endured overtime. With reference to Nigerian playwrights, such inquisitiveness seems to be validated by the need for these playwrights to become the conscience of the nation with a view to redeem its shattered image so as to adopt global best practices in her development agenda.

Nigerian dramatists have continued to engage issues of societal concern in their writings and these have included issues of gender imbalance. Thus, gender as an issue that was relatively unknown in this part of the world, gradually found its way to the consciousness of the society especially the women folk through the activism of dramatists and creative writers, with the input of women in this regard becoming significant. As a matter of fact, the past forty years or more

have witnessed a flurry of activities in the area of gendered engagements with various postulations or movements cutting across the globe. The ultimate goal of the movements is to challenge masculinity and the patriarchal order so as to enthrone gender equity. This has been the case with the Western society whose culture also lends credence to such moves. However, many Nigerian dramatists do not seem to be bothered by issues of gender inequality and even when they give exposition to such themes, they tend to present them along conventional lines. Although these dramatists draw creative raw materials from existing gender-based issues, they do not make much efforts to “re-write” such issues taking into consideration the contemporary challenges to the country’s development. Thus, the manner in which gender issues are presented by the dramatists come into question and this deserves further investigation.

In the contemplation of Africa’s development after the colonial incursion, some questions have been raised on the validity of gender issues and its various connotations when compared with European tenets. Questions such as, are gender-based arguments able to stem the tide of poverty and unemployment facing Nigeria today? How do gender issues reposition Nigeria for the task of sustainable development in the recession era? These are some of the questions begging for answers. Gender conflict as a phenomenon has created many problems ranging from domestic to public/national problems. Such problems include marital instability, divorce, broken homes, domestic violence, abandoned children, abortion, legal tussles, obnoxious widowhood practices to mention but a few. These problems have contributed significantly to the difficulties and challenges being experienced at domestic, local and national levels, thereby threatening national development. Hence, there is the need to critically re-examine the portrayal of gendered concerns in some selected dramatic texts as a pointer to the national situation.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

Each gender movement has produced its own (mainly Western) interpreters whose discourses, fortunately, have not gone unchallenged by Africans and non Africans alike especially in more recent times. African playwrights have used their creative media to articulate their own points of view on a matter they see as relevant and which may contribute positively to her development. This requires further critical re-appraisal of gender issues, to interrogate the present state of affairs and project into the future. The aim of this research is to investigate the representation and interpretation of gender roles and distinctions by Nigerian female playwrights. The study will interrogate the aim using the following objectives:

To re-examine the dimensions of gender depictions in contemporary Nigerian literary drama using the selected plays as reference points.

To critically evaluate the playwright's approaches to gender relations.

To explore the underlying implications of gender imbalance for development in postcolonial Nigeria especially when being confronted by the challenges of political exclusion, poor leadership, economic recession, hunger, poverty and rising unemployment.

To investigate if the challenges of gender imbalance are likely to aggravate gender conflicts at both domestic and community levels.

1.4 Significance of the study

The ideology that fosters gender bias has exerted a tremendous influence on Nigerian literary drama since the advent of Western education. Playwrights in the country (especially women) have felt the urge to do battle on the subject and place it the way it should be practicable

on the African soil especially with the imbibing of Western ideological postulations and the resultant effects of these activities on the African image and psychology. It is vital for gender issues to take into cognizance the culture and traditions of Africans as they relate to both sexes and interplay in gender politics. At the centre of these peculiarities is the issue of culture which, no doubt, shapes gender discourse. An inclusive and progressive culture therefore stands its own against external pressures, protects its people against exploitation, hunger and disease, and especially provides its people with the tools for qualitative existence along the norms of the moment.

This study therefore, is important because it examines some of the works already done in this field, highlight lapses, fill knowledge gaps and proffer suggestions on the way forward. In this era of globalization, gender discourse in terms of empowerment in Nigeria, should be able to draw from past experiences and project into the future by jettisoning those things in the past that tended to stunt development while exploring emergent trends or paradigms. The gender issue, if properly investigated and harnessed will be a veritable tool for modern African dramatists in their quest to use drama for national development. The study will further help policy makers on gender mainstreaming to strike a balance by understanding the roles of men and women and complementarity.

The study highlights the role and potentials of understanding gender matters without bias and by extension, cultural influences, in the committed struggle for national development. In other words, the study offers pathways to guide emerging playwrights on the creative application of gender issues as assets that can be exploited to achieve human development. A study that evaluates the commitment of dramatists in reshaping the preconceived and biased notion of gender (in) equality and explores how Nigeria could overcome some of her challenges through

the theatre is quite important and urgent. The dynamic problems emanating from gender issues and attendant challenges are germane to family and national development and this also underscores the importance of this study.

1.5 Scope of the study

The social function of the argument about gender issues has become somewhat confused. While some define and treat gender in terms of biological factors, others relate it to sociological or ontological factors. The area has become wider as more critics and free thinkers focus on the subject, hence the need to define the scope of this study.

There are also many dramatic works that relate to the focus of this research but the scope of this study is narrowed to the thematic spheres of gender issues as they concern gender imbalance or inequality with regard to human relations as represented or depicted in contemporary Nigerian drama. Thus Irene Salami's *Sweet Revenge*, Julie Okoh's *Our Wife Forever*, Tess Onwueme's *Shakara, Dance Hall Queen* and Julie Umukoro's *Adam's Family* served as case studies for the study. The case studies were selected based on their thematic relevance and reflection of each dramatist's gender perception as well as and the generational gaps in Nigerian literary drama. The study is limited to modern African literary drama created by women to explore the possible developments and divergent views held by women on gender issues in the past fifteen years.

1.6 Research Methodology

The primary research method adopted for this study is Content Analysis, drawing the main data from the selected plays. Furthermore, books, journals, periodicals, magazines and relevant materials from the Internet and the library were also used as sources of secondary data.

Unpublished materials were also used. In the Content Analysis of the selected plays, the study was guided by the units of analysis which are themes, characters, plot, language, setting, costumes, make –up, dramatic action and allied subtexts inherent in the texts. The selection of the case studies followed a simple random sampling technique to eliminate threats to internal and external validity. The random sampling helped the researcher to select works published within a specified period by different female playwrights covering different generations.

The sampling was primarily guided by the play text’s thematic pre-occupation as related to the research premise with Tess Onwueme and Julie Okoh’s plays representing earlier writings while Umukoro and Irene Salami represent later works on gender. The analysis of data was critically guided by descriptive and interpretative approaches to explore the experiences, actions and expressions of the characters in the play texts. This helped to produce the in-depth information for understanding the dynamics of gender politics in the selected plays in relation to the issues of gender inequality, culture and societal advancement.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Definitions

2.1.1 Gender

According to the World Health Organization, gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men—such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places. To Shaw and Lee:

Gender concerns what it is to be a woman or man in society. Gender involves the way society creates, patterns, and rewards our understandings of femininity and masculinity. In other words, gender can be defined as the way society organizes understandings of sexual difference. (1)

Britannica Encyclopedia also defines gender for students / children as state of being male or female (boy or girl). In all, it is interested in gender as a grammatical term usually adopted by organizations or professionals to distinguish the biological traits or characteristics of a person as either male or female or recently (neuter).

Towing the line of gender definition as “social construct”, Waswakisiang’ani elaborates:

In a broad perspective, gender studies represent a body of debates, which interrogate various ways that identities of masculinity and femininity have influenced patterns of human life. For Africa, Gender Studies embrace a profound intellectual effort to query the diverse ways in which both the African woman and man have been represented through Western dissertations. (9-10)

Cap'n Bullmoose frowns at the use of gender in terms of grammar as a property of nouns and pronouns even by well-meaning organizations to differentiate sex. According to this critic, it is out of ignorance that they do this since gender cuts across biological sex of male or female.

Bullmoose states:

A noun can have one of three genders, masculine, feminine, and neuter. Gender is never male or female, that is sex. The gender of a noun may have little or no relation to the sex of its bearer...even well meaning organizations ask for your gender on applications now, but only out of ignorance. They surely want to know if you are male or female, not whether you enjoy eating butter or prancing on floats in parades. (Urbandictionary.com/comments...)

In essence Bullmoose also agrees that gender is not only grammatical in meaning but encompasses other meanings regarding the roles and identity of gender.

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) also agrees that gender is not determined biologically but by social construct arising from relationships. It includes the individual's self perception and material applications. According to the FAO, gender is defined as:

The relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the process of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution. (3)

The FAO, from the definition, is interested in the roles played by men and women in the family which eventually extends to the larger society. In effect, it is sort of division of labour in which men play their part and women play theirs, and boys and girls equally play theirs. In essence, this definition tilts towards gender roles and not much emphasis on gender identity. FAO further cautions against the use of gender to champion the course of women only. It states that

sometimes gender is misunderstood to refer to women activities and promotion of such, excluding men. It gave the meaning of gender roles as the ‘social definition’ of women and men which vary among different societies and cultures, classes, ages and during different periods in history. It further states that gender specific roles and responsibilities are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions. By and large, the FAO definition of gender in terms of gender role can be ascribed to the Organization’s interest in agricultural production in which men and women play various roles in different societies in accordance with culture.

In sports, gender issues become more problematic with recent discoveries in medical traits of various athletes or competitors. In the past the distinction between men and women was no serious issue since one either belonged to men because he was born a male or belonged to women because she was born a female. But with the increasing awareness and agitation for sexual orientation and gender reformation, it became a problem to classify one’s gender identity. Some athletes or competitors may appear feminine in physique but identify as masculine and therefore play the roles of men. There are others who possess neither male nor female characteristics or those who possess all the attributes of both male and female. Others may possess some male characteristics but still wish to be identified as females or women. In the same manner some may possess some female characteristics but wish to identify as males or men. This no doubt, poses a lot of challenge to sports organizers especially at international level such as Olympics. So, to the lay person in the community, the question, “what is gender?” will sound childish which answer can be given very easy. To the International Olympic Committee, this is not a simple question to answer. According to Aschwanden:

It might sound like the kind of question that college students debate in a liberal arts class. But for the international Olympic Committee, it's a practical question that demands a hard and fast answer. As at previous Olympic Games, athletes competing in Rio de Janeiro will be segregated into women's events and men's events, and that means the IOC needs a way to sort women from men. (fivethirty eight.com/fea...)

From the foregoing, it could be seen that gender issues are much more complicated than seen on the surface. It is no longer accepted in terms of its grammatical usage or in its simple biological definition of being either male or female. It has become wider in scope and has continued to widen. With increased agitation for gender awareness and campaign for gender equality, the die is now cast. Various governments and organizations are now reforming their policies to accommodate this trend which is fast being reckoned in terms of the best practices. In many countries now, one is at liberty to choose the gender to belong to and one is no longer prohibited to play certain roles because of sex barrier. Birke, in her writing earlier, defines gender as:

A term used to exemplify the attributes that a society or culture constitutes as "masculine" or "feminine". Although a person's sex as male or female stands as a biological fact that is identical in any culture, what that specific sex means in reference to a person's gender role as a woman or man in society varies cross culturally according to what things are considered to be masculine or feminine. (320)

To Birke, gender means 'male' or 'female'. She sees gender as one's ability to conform or belong to one sex and play the role assigned to that sex either as man (masculine) or woman (feminine), and that role is assigned by the society through the means of culture. One therefore must belong to either male or female and play the roles as ascribed to that group in which one belongs. There is no place for the third gender (neuter) in this theory (definition) and this has been the challenge in gender definition. This exclusion of people with various sex imbalances has somewhat

contributed in the complications of gender as a subject. This probably, has led to the discovery of many related terms to accommodate this category of sex imbalance individuals such as gender identity, gender fluidity and transgender.

In recent times, gender is often being confused with women's struggle for liberation or equality with men. The term seems usurped by women activists to champion their course at the detriment of other gender disadvantaged people. The use of the term by women activists has become so widespread that it is almost a mantra in every social discourse. This is not surprising because feminists were the main people that popularized the term gender since the appearance of the work of John Money and subsequent feminist movements in the 1970s. Prior to this, there have been moves by ancient scholars like Plato, to challenge subjugation of women by men in many societies. He advocated for the liberalization of education so that women could also participate and gain knowledge. According to Gouldner, it was this "disillusioning experiences with political immorality of both the "right" and "left" which brought Plato "to commit himself to social theory and philosophy"(173-174). Plato probably was not concerned about the condition of women in terms of gender imbalance but on the perceived injustice occasioned by men since men were the ones who have access to education and invariably, knowledge.

In essence, it was the liberalization of education in which women became active participants that enabled them to gain and develop critical knowledge about the happenings around them. In this way they could understand when men pulled a fast one on them, and then challenge it. In all, it was the liberalization of knowledge (education) that boosted gender sensitivity especially on the part of women activists. The acquisition of knowledge through formal education is indispensable in the struggle for gender re-ordering. Feminists still argue that

women are not yet fully represented in western education and that they are being discriminated against. Ozo-Eson laments that:

In contemporary Nigerian society, women are still discriminated against in terms of education. Thus, in most cases the girl child is withdrawn from school and some not even sent to school at all. This is because their education is considered irrelevant as they are considered 'only future housewives'. Other girls are forced into early marriages to elderly men for financial benefits accruing to their parents. Still many others are found hawking goods where they are exposed to sexual abuse, kidnapping, accidents, and other vices. (291)

So far it can be seen that gender has wider range of meanings than what was originally perceived in terms of male or female. The use of the word gender now connotes many things and means different things to different people necessitating a re-reading of its application in dramatic literature. It is in this light that this work deems it fit to consider various definitions / postulations given to the subject with a view to explicating some of the postulations/ definitions in alignment with the focus of this work. *The Free Encyclopedia* defines gender as;

A range of differences between men and women, extending from the biological to the social, at the biological level, men and women are typically distinguished, at the social level, however, the various biological differences necessitate difference in social roles identity, which has been defined as an individual's self conception as being a male or female, as distinguished from actual biological sex. (<https://encyc/gen...>)

Gender therefore includes both the biological differences and all other factors such as social that combine to determine the individual's roles in the society according to the group the individual belongs. It has been highlighted in this work that there is the third gender-neuter, and other identified genders such as Queer gender, but the focus of this study is gender in relation with

men and women, their roles in the society as a group and how these roles impact on the development of that society. Emphasis in this work will be more on feminine (women) and masculine (men) gender as opposed to neuter and transgender, and other identified genders. This is because men and women are more in population in any given society in terms of gender roles and gender identity, and they constitute the reference group in terms of policy formulation and implementation. However the terms and conditions or manner by which the policies are formulated and implemented vary from society to society, and they are the challenge in gender roles. Feminists challenge the roles of Masculinists in many societies where men are at the helm of affairs and often blame them for the underdevelopment of such societies. Scholars of this view argue that even the legal system of the country is also dominated and controlled by men and still operate along patriarchal norms as bequeathed by the colonialists. Affirming to this, Ozo-Eson, citing Alemika observes that:

There is pervasive maleness in the legal system. It is a system infused with sexist values...the judiciary remains overwhelmingly male. Judges have grown up in a patriarchal culture, their attitudes are inevitably shaped by their life experiences and by their positions as beneficiaries of male supremacy...The whole structure of the law-its hierarchical organizations, its combative, adversarial format; and its undeviating bias in favour of rationality over all other values- defines it as a fundamentally patriarchal institution. (296)

Supporting this view further, Faludi in her earlier work, is of the opinion that men continued to dominate power relations and that the old patriarchal order are superficial rather than actual: "Men have not yet given up enough and women must be on their guard against 'male backlash'... In spite of all feminism's achievements, patriarchy is still firmly in place" (Backlash...121).

Masculinists on their part blame women for being responsible for their woes and fear at women being allowed to lead. Hunt reacting to the influence of feminism on masculinity, states that:

This initial fragmentation of a relatively consensual 'manly vision' by popular culture gathered momentum throughout the 1980s and 1990s plunging masculinity into its

deeper, contemporary crisis. Whenever masculinity's 'crisis' actually started, it certainly seems to have been in place by the 1970s and signs of it were everywhere. (73)

Supporting this notion, Talman "indeed" agrees that "men are in crisis, freed of an – male, mission- oriented, nation- bound collected identity" and urged men "to retreat into sentiment, relationships and romance" (4). Also in the same vein, Aitkenhead agrees that feminism has continued to emasculate men and regrets that "men are being encouraged to be more like women" and concludes that the finest beauty of men has been that they did not consider their greatest attribute to be their manicure" (49).

This has been the issue and has necessitated the various gender movements that are springing up across the globe, with feminists (and its challenge –masculinists) at the centre of the agitation. For the purpose of this work, gender is taken to refer to all those social differences arising from the biological distinction of sex which made them male or female, and which combine to determine their roles as man or woman. The social roles of men and women are considered in this work since they constitute the nucleus of what roles each group play in societal development. It is a fact that gender roles and gender identity cut across many areas of human endeavour even in occupations. Some occupations or professions are regarded as masculine (male) and reserved for men while some are the reserve of women. This is obtained in many societies especially in Africa and other less developed countries of the world. The issue of gender then becomes imperative in the discourse for development at any level. Gender issues permeate all cultures but the system of application or operation vary from society to society. There is no universal standard to measure or judge gender roles and identity as conforming or otherwise. What is regarded as male occupation in one society may be regarded as female's

occupation in another society. However, in many cultures of the so called less developed or developing countries, there seem a general agreement on roles assigned by biological factors which should be reserved for men and those to be reserved for women in accordance with their biological traits. By and large, feminists have shown serious disapproval for the use of biological traits to define or relate gender. Garrett in her writing states that:

By 1980, most feminist writings had agreed on using gender only for socio culturally adapted traits. In gender studies the term gender refers to proposed social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities. In this context, gender explicitly excludes reference to biological differences, to focus on cultural differences. (vii)

As stated earlier in this work gender is treated here in relation to both biological and socio - cultural factors that combine to determine the roles and identity an individual plays as man or woman, boy or girl. In this way, an individual could be judged or understood based on the social group which norms and values the individual is expected to comply with. This will help to boost moral standard since no such individual will like to be labeled a deviant. Michael Schwalbe, a social scientist agrees with this view and believes that “society wants to identify and categorize people as soon as we see them. They need to place people into distinct categories to know how we should feel about them” (22-23). This study therefore opines that gender should not be treated in isolation without biological factors consideration since this will aid considerably in categorizing gender roles and identity in more practicable manner.

2.1.2 Literary Drama

Before going deep into the meaning of literary drama as applied in this work, it will be pertinent to give a brief introduction on the two key words “Literary” and “drama” which combine to shape the topic. Literary in most of its definitions deals with the ability to write and

read especially pertaining to languages. It is linked to literature in its wider perspective and also deals with the writer's ability to write well in that particular language applying all the rules and norms governing such. According to Farlex, a formal application of literary has to do with "... of spoken and written languages adhering to traditional standards of correctness and without casual, contracted, and colloquial forms" (wordNet 3.0...) Literary therefore entails one's ability to read and write in a particular language observing all the rules. In another way, literary could refer to ones who are well lettered, ones who are well versed in the art of reading and writing in a language. Literally, when someone is said to be literary or literate, that person becomes associated with being educated or well versed in that language that he / she could read and write in it, and not only the ability to speak or understand it.

Literary in another perspective could refer to someone who is primarily concerned with the rules or formalities pertaining to learning (or usage) of a book or books in literature, sometimes such a person / persons may have little or shallow practical knowledge in that area. According to Houghton, literary (adjectively) is "characterized by a narrow concern for book learning and formal rules, without knowledge or experience of practical matters" (148). Literary has to do with literature and its language. It has connection with bookish matters which nevertheless are concerned with the ability to read and write. It is "characterized by the more formal, balanced, and polished language of literature rather than the formal language of speech" (n.p). Literary therefore is closely related to literature and it is in this context that it is applied in this work. Literature itself has to do with letters. Literarily, literature can refer to a body of letters put together to form meanings and which can be read. The free dictionary defines literature as "The body of written works of a language, period or culture". It also goes further to define it as

“Imaginative or creative writing, especially of recognized artistic value”. Also *The Britannica* defines literature as:

A body of written works. The name has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution (britannica.com/art...).

Literature no doubt deals with written works. It is the body of works or writings put together by literate people or scholars. Those people who can not read and write in any language are therefore, excluded from this field since the scholars or literate persons writing in a particular language, do so for the literate people in that language also. This is because it is those literate people or scholars that can read and understand what the work is all about. The illiterate ones cannot read or understand the content of the work unless it is interpreted or acted in practical terms.

Literature therefore becomes a medium through which scholars express their views on certain issues especially those that concern the larger society. Although literature is primarily defined in terms of written works yet not all written works can pass for literature. It is pertinent to note here also that literature can also refer to a body of written works produced by scholars or researchers in a given field, thus there is medical literature, which gives information on medical matters, there is the Christian literature which goal is to write on Christian doctrines for propagation of the faith, there is the political literature which deals on political matters usually published by governments / political class, and many others. Printed or collected materials on a given subject could also pass for literature. Literature therefore has other meanings but the central point is that it is concerned with literary ability. It is also concerned with language and its application. Even in other fields (as enumerated above) there is language associated with each

field, which is commonly called parlance. The ability to use such parlance or language register well gives that person edge over those who could not. So language and literature are co-related since nothing written could be understood if not in a particular language.

Literature has two major classifications:- fiction and non-fiction. It also has three genres which are poetry, prose and drama. This paper is therefore more interested in literature as a genre, having drama in enclose. Literature or literary works are not often judged on the ground of whether fiction or non-fiction but on the ability to conform to the dictates of the language. According to Eagleton, “Literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech... it uses language in peculiar ways” (-engl5 vr/eagle...). Therefore it is the ability of the author to use a particular language in literature form to pass across his/ her message successfully that matters, and not whether it is a fiction or factual. Literature is useful in so many ways since it reflects societal image and imparts on their conscience the essence of their existence. According to Ayakoroma:

... It makes us think about ourselves and our society; it allows us to enjoy language and beauty; and it reflects on the human condition and can be didactic. It reflects both ideology and changes ideology, just like it follows generic conventions, changing them. Literature is the creation of another world by a writer, a world that we can only see when we read such literary pieces. (3)

It is pertinent to note that Ayakoroma also agrees with the fact that literature and its beauty can only be achieved or assessed through writing and reading. The recent argument about introduction of orality into literature (orature) is out of the focus of this work. This work focuses on literature in its written form with drama as its genre hence the term ‘literary drama’. It is this type of literature (drama) that will endure over time and lend itself to criticism by a wider

spectrum of the societies. The role of literature in promoting peaceful co-existence and subsequently, national development cannot be over emphasized.

Drama as a literary genre that is closely connected with action can be the most suitable tool for the writer with societal transformation at the back of his / her mind. The question, now is what is drama? The word drama could mean many things to different people depending on understanding and the perspective from which it is viewed. To a layman, any action that is beyond ordinary or everyday occurrence could be regarded as drama or dramatic. To such person, a fight in which a renowned figure is involved, is a drama, an accident in which a car over ran someone, could be regarded as dramatic and so many of such related incidences. Drama is sensational in outlook and perception since it does not occur everyday. The origin of drama as a subject could be traced to the Greeks as they perform rituals to their god, Dionysus. According to Crow, “the original meaning of the Greek word ‘drama’- ‘to do’, to act, suggests the nature of the excitement, most of us cannot help being interested in the doings or acts of others’. (a) Drama draws attention and attracts interests since people are naturally curious in nature and want to watch actions as they unfold especially when they happen to others. Going further, Crow defines drama as:

A type of theatrical performance in which the active participants impersonate, that is, pretend to be people, beings or things other than they really are, and through an usually predetermined sequence of physical actions enact a story for the entertainment of an audience. (2)

Utah-Ezeajugh captures the whole essence of drama when she states thus:

We are guided through a maze of proven strategies that ultimately push away the 'us' and bring in the 'other'. We therefore lose our personalities, so as to pick up the personalities of others for some moments, minutes or hours. And within those minutes, or hours, to go on and become who we are not, to carry out the act of impersonation, to put on the personality of another and claim that the personality belongs to the actor putting it on. But then, is that not the whole essence of drama? (4)

Like in some other liberal arts, there is no generally or conventionally agreed definition of drama but there are some basic elements that characterize drama as a course. Drama as used in this work does not refer to a layman's definition or understanding of drama as something done or imitation of action as in real life. This work is interested in drama in its broadest meaning in terms of written composition of actions and events that are meant to be performed on stage before an audience. Dramas that are performed or presented on TV, radio, video, computer and other electronic means are not entirely out of the focus of this work. It is drama performed on stage (live drama) that foregrounds the ones shown as films on electronic devices.

One important aspect of drama is imitation. Although this aspect has been a matter of controversy since some theatre scholars argue that drama does not imitate society or things but present the real image of the society through representation of actions. By this the society is able to see itself and re-assess its stand on certain issues for progress and development. Therefore drama does not only imitate but represent the imitated things in a more logical manner to arouse the conscience of the audience / spectators. In the real sense, drama cannot ward off this aspect of imitation completely because in drama we assume the role of someone or something we are not in order to pass across the message. Since the time of Aristotle, drama has undergone many transformations but the notion of imitation (mimesis) still subsists and continues to be a matter of discourse. It could be recalled that Aristotle in his treatise, *The Poetics*, opined, among other

things, that drama is essentially meant for entertainment through its ability to arouse fear or pity, but failed to accredit drama with the ability to, also instruct and educate people. Ebo describes drama as:

A universal form of art that is popular and literary; it therefore serves its purpose and responds to the yearnings of the audience. The method of dramatic presentation lends itself to believability, where an actor stands before an audience and plays a given character; he makes the people in the audience believe that he is actually that character which he portrays. Through this portrayal of character, he is able to deliver the playwright's message to them- Thus the magic of drama has begun the transformation by which an audience believes for a time that a performer is actually someone else. (562)

Closely related with drama as an art that deals with action or imitation of action as in real life, is the element of imagination or improvisation. This came about as a result of the limitations in the definition of drama as the imitation of action as in real life. If drama is only about imitation of real life actions and representation of such on stage, then it is incomplete and may not accommodate all intended messages because there are real actions that happened but may not be reproduced or represented exactly on stage, for example, murder scene. This is where imagination and improvisation come in. So the argument of naturalists for representation of reality in drama is flawed here. In as much as drama should capture and represent reality, care should be taken on how these are represented to avoid harm or unpleasant consequences. As Aristotle rightly observes in his treatise, what drama imitates are not trivial issues but issues that will help society re-discover itself since drama holds mirror to society. Through that mirror therefore, the way forward for that society could be pointed out. Nwafor describes drama "as an imitative art that is well structured and presented (through a medium) before an audience" (15). This definition may have some variance with theatre which is all encompassing.

Theatre and drama are often used interchangeably but some ranges of dissimilarities abound between the two. Drama is part of theatre. Theatre and the theatrical connote all that come within the play production. It includes the space, music, dance, movement, costume, actors, lighting, audience, the play script, director and all that combine to pass across the message successfully. These variables are referred to as theatre elements. Theatre differs considerably from drama in its application and embodiment of these elements in a particular show. Theatre is defined by Wilson Edwin as “the enactment of a drama onstage before an audience” (2). Effiong Johnson then views drama as “an enactment of an organized experience by actors on stage. The performance of a play on stage” (34).

Theatre therefore encompasses many things including drama. The best of theatre as an art is realized through performance. It is not so much concerned with literary content of the work than its theme. In other words, theatre is mainly concerned on the content, the thematic value rather than the form. It is not solely concerned with the literary aesthetics or the formality of language other than the message the work intends to pass across. The beauty of the work of theatre is in its production and ability to pass across the message to the audience/ spectators successfully. Sokpo in his view, states that:

Theatre is viewed by its practitioners as a mirror of society. Just as the mirror when held before a face reveals the true state of the face, so also the theatre projects the reality of human existence in performance (be it in form of dance, music, and drama). By this function the theatre is able to project the rot and all forms of unacceptable human behaviour that are not only inimical, but also detrimental to the development of society. (593)

That theatre is not mainly concerned with literary aesthetics does not mean that the art of theatre does not require literacy or some level of professionalism. It does but unlike drama which

requires certain standard and characteristics, it can take place in any form and at any place provided the message is put across to the audience / spectators successfully. Thus we have theatre in many forms such as theatre for development (TFD), Community theatre, Guerrilla theatre and so on. By and large, the practice of theatre and drama has undergone through many transformations and the argument has centred on the efficacy of drama/theatre to bring about social transformation.

Dramatists in the old school of thought (the Conservativists) maintain that drama must have all the necessary characteristics especially in terms of formality of language. They were concerned primarily with the use of drama for entertainment purposes and not in its ability to conscientize and transform people. That was why they insisted on the form rather than the content. To them drama should have the beginning, middle, and the end, it should follow the principle of cause and effect, and should be able to arouse emotions / fear which should be purged through the process of catharsis'. This school is for the ruling class who want drama to remain only for their entertainment and for further oppression of their subjects through arousal of emotion and fear and the purgation processes.

On the other hand, the liberal school of thought (which is currently making waves) holds the view that drama should be put in the service of the people by making them aware of themselves and the happenings around them. The 'conscientization' concept was developed by two Latin American scholars; Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal who developed on the 'alienation effect' of Bertolt Brecht in his seminar paper "Epic Theatre". The alienation effect abhors a situation where the audience becomes passive receptor of prepared texts and does not participate in the process. He only sits and watches or spectates instead of involving his senses on the production to know what the play is teaching so as to act in real life those lessons learnt in the

play. The “conscientization drama” (Freire: 4) is of the view that “drama should be developed by the people themselves, for the people and not from the outside to the people” (Boal: ix). To these scholars, drama should be able to conscientize people and make them participate in the affairs of their community and the society at large. They should not only be recipients of the finished products but should be active participants in the process. This school abhors rigid compliance to dramatic format in terms of the conservatists or Art for arts sake which laid emphasis on the beauty of language and production rather than the content / message. Towing this line, Gbileka affirms that:

Theatre aims at influencing peoples’ consciousness and attitudes. Nigerian playwrights aware of predominant social issues of contemporary concern, continue to tackle sensitive issues of national interest. (2)

This concept seems to find succor in theatre as an art which has defiled all the dramatic stereotypes through its eclectic nature. Theatre therefore encompasses drama and the work of drama is realized through the theatrical. In essence, drama is more formal and literarily structured than theatre since it has been the object of criticism right from the time of Plato. That is why scholars focus more on literary drama as a term rather than literary theatre. This does not mean that theatre is not also literary but because of its eclectic nature, it does not lend itself to much literary criticism in terms of aesthetics but on the professional prowess in passing across the message to engender social transformation or whatever that is intended. Dramatic compositions/ writings in modern times tend to combine both the theatrical and dramatic elements, and plays / drama no longer follow the rigidity of primordial drama stereotypes.

Having delved into the meaning through description of the two key words (“Literary” and “Drama”) in this section it is now pertinent to state what literary drama mean in the context of

this study. Literary drama is taken here to refer to drama that is written. It refers to dramatic compositions that are written and meant to be performed on the stage or through any other medium accessible to the audience / spectators especially those written in lingua-franca (English) Language and which have important message for societal transformation/development. Drama that is performed orally or improvised is out of the focus of this work, so also is drama that is written in other languages including vernacular that could not be understood by vast majority of the Nigerian populace while reading, is not of the focus of this study although mention could be made of such where relevant. So, this work looks at literary drama and how it has been used to foster certain societal transformations or otherwise and how it could be applied in that direction if need be.

Literary drama therefore involves ability to write drama in a particular language. It then follows that language is very important in literary discourse and drama can not be an exception, therefore dramatists should strive to write in clear and understandable language. Language no doubt, poses a big challenge to dramatic composition in Africa in written form since most of the works have to be written in borrowed language for wider circulation in terms of readability and understanding. This is not healthy for Africa in terms of the propagation of her culture and this has contributed immensely to the colonial mentality of most African writers including dramatists. African playwrights and Afro -centric scholars with prospective intentions have in different ways demonstrated concern with the importance of language to their cultural liberation efforts. Commenting on this, Ayakoroma states that;

...given the critical role language plays in the life of a people, it becomes imperative to accord it all the attention it deserves in communicating ideas, especially in multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria. The indigenous language, which is one of the most basic and veritable media of communication, is a vehicle that drives culture. A peoples' culture is inseparable from their indigenous language because it is vital in explaining their norms and values, thus aiding in the social, economic and technological advancement of the given society. (5)

Literary dramatists in Africa are therefore cautioned to be apprehensive of this while composing their works. As Achebe laments; "no man can understand another whose language he does not speak, and language here does not mean simply words but a man's entire worldview"(7). In this light, African literary dramatists/playwrights writing on gender matters should take cognizance of this fact while writing for or against gender imbalance or what is currently termed sexism. Culture, propagated mainly through language, should be noted by scholars especially those of African descent while planning their works since culture differs from society to society and does not easily change overnight.

Literary drama in Nigeria could be traced to the pioneering works of the Late Chief Hubert Ogunde. It was the period that ushered in what was known (or still known) as modern drama. It could be noted that prior to this period, drama has existed in the Nigerian society but mainly in oral forms such as folktales, rituals, mimes, and pantomimes, music and dance etc but the Late Ogunde attempted modernizing it through his popular Yoruba Travelling Theatre. According to Bentley, "Modern drama dates back to the middle of 18th century, but in Nigeria, it is generally located around the starting point of Chief Hubert Ogunde's theatre in 1944"(9). Many scholars such as Oyin Ogunba, J.P Clark, Kalu Uka, Yemi Ogunbiyi, Dapo Adelugba, Femi Osofisan, Biodun Jeyifo and Olu Obafemi have made significant contributions in the documentation and reformation of modern theatre practice in Nigeria. Some of these scholars

have made successful attempts at classification of modern theatre in Nigeria. For instance, Clark grouped it into the “Yoruba Folk Opera and the literary, and the Traditional and Literary”(59) while Ogunbiyi classified it into the “Indigenous and the Literary” (44). Theatre in Nigeria has nevertheless, gone through many stages / phases before it arrived at the present stage. Akinwale classified these phases into “the classical phase, the liberal phase, the Protest phase and the popular or community Theatre Phases” (15s). These classifications are not, however, very distinct since they share many elements in theatre tradition and these elements often overlap, thereby making real classification somehow difficult.

The literary category of modern drama in Nigeria concerns documented plays and production process that took after the Euro-American theatre style. The history of the development of literary drama in Nigeria can be traced back to the church as was the case in the medieval period in Europe. The church used such entertainment forms as concerts, operas and cantatas to propagate the gospel and it was in form of foreign entertainment. These later had a tremendous influence on the early nature of the modern Nigerian theatre. Even when Nigerian theatre scholars tried to pull away from that tradition to embrace the indigenous entertainment forms, elements of the previous entertainment forms still intermingle and blend to give birth to another form of drama. That is the reason why Obafemi cautions that; “These theatres are not mutually divergent in spite of their distinguishing qualities because even the seemingly exotic theatres of Soyinka and Rotimi share certain attributes that we find in the ‘Folk Opera’ of Ogunde and Ladipo”(67).

Drama classification in Nigeria should, as a matter of fact, adopt flexibility in its approach to account how the theatrical elements in them facilitate the appraisal of the drama/theatre as good or bad. Clark gave a broad grouping of Nigerian theatre as “Yoruba Folk Opera” and the “Literary” (57). Akinwale also further classified it into, “the classical phase, the liberal phase, the protest phase and the popular or community theatre phase” (93). However, despite what seems like complications in its grouping, scholars tend to agree that theatre development in Nigeria should be grouped and discussed under the following (with each having its popular exponent): “Folkish Popular Drama, Ritual Drama, Restorative Drama, Recreative Drama, Drama for Development and Folkism” (Obafemi 67).

Folkish Popular Drama, whose exponents are Chief Hubert Ogunde and Moses Olaiya, is a refined form of Yoruba ‘Folk Opera’ and it derived its raw materials from Yoruba culture and some entertainment form of colonial experience. It was very popular and featured around the 20th century. It relied much on its performance style, dramatic contents and organizational structure to make its artistic appeal. This drama, though popular in those days, was not properly documented. This drama enjoyed the patronage of both the elite class and the illiterates.

Ritual Drama evolves from man’s quest to reaffirm his loyalty to the ontological order. Soyinka argues that ritual brings a community together to participate in a ritual event that “intertwines with all other activities that produce the life of the community, trading, farming, building, social governance, etc” (The Interpreters...11). It is a process of renewal and re-affirmation to the existing order. Man performs this ritual either individually or collectively to appease the divine for some expectations or to show appreciation for favours received such as bumper yam harvests, hence the New Yam Festival and so on.

Drama is widely believed to develop from rituals in ancient Greece as they perform rites in honour of their god Dionysus for fertility. Drama in this period was expected to conform with a universal model as propounded by Aristotle with Mimesis as its major characteristic. Other characteristics are Plot, thought, character, diction, Music and spectacle. However, these model have undergone many modifications and today it is no longer the ability to apply these qualities of drama that count for successful work or otherwise but the ability to pass across the message successfully. This ritual has been the plat form on which most of the older generation of dramatists drew their raw materials

According to its exponents (notable among whom include: Ola Rotimi, Wale Ogunyemi and Zulu Sofola) Restorative Drama was born out of the desire to correct various inadequacies observed in the ritual theatre which seemed embedded with classical traits. It was an experiment to restore to the Nigerian audience their cultural and entertainment heritage in the new idiom of modern theatre practice which was mainly in language and cultural nuances. The audience is the focal point of this theatre. Their aim was to demystify the aura surrounding the myths and radicalize the notions and break the languages which were often poetic and esoteric into simpler forms.

Folkism is still under experimentation with Sam Ukala at the fore front in both practice and theory. Although some Nigerian plays such as *Ozidi* and *Once upon Four Robbers* adopted a tendency that tilts towards folkism, it has not fully utilized and exploited the vibrant artistic resources of African folktales.

Theatre for Development is focused primarily on participation and self reliance through conscientization/ motivation of people to improve their lives through improving the life of the

community. Michael Etherton was its exponent in Nigeria although it has been in practice in other parts of Africa and Europe.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Gender Theory/ Feminist Theory

Gender scholars across the globe have come up with various postulations on gender studies and feminist views. This work is anchored on Alice Walker's Womanism theory and Catherine Acholonu's Motherism theory which conceptualize gender on complementarity instead of egalitarianism. The work also leans on the postulations that support the definition of gender in terms of biological distinction of male and female which determine the various roles assigned to each group by the society. In this section also, mention will be made of some views on feminism that reject complementary role for women to men and seek equality with men in all spheres. The section will also discuss briefly the view that opposes the definition of gender in terms of biological distinction claiming that the distinction is historically and culturally manipulated.

According to Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi; “The conceptualization of gender in Africa is male-based and western oriented.” She further calls “for a re-visit of African gender theory.”(copyright/and.net...). But some scholars like Henry Kam-Kah, are of the view that not all African societies are gendered along male ideologies. This view holds that some African societies are matrilineal and have female dominant ideologies, for example the Laimbwe land in Cameroon-according to Kam-Kah.

Ify Amadiume, and Oyewumi Oyeronke on the other hand are of the view that Africa is a genderless society since there is no clear cut role assigned to man or woman. According to this view, each can perform the role of the other. However scholars like Chikwenye Ogunyemi, and

Desiree Lewis hold the view that Africa is gendered and that there is male dominance but not to the extent of Western concept. The view holds that the concept of oppression/dominance is relative since women and men as well could be oppressed. Therefore they sought for a more balanced concept that could take cognizance of the role of men and women as complementing each other. Hence, the concept of womanism was conceived. Womanism seeks equity and justice not equality (egalitarianism) as the western concept of feminism advocates.

Complementarianism does not seek male superiority over women nor women subjugation but advocates for men to play their God-given/natural role while women do the same. Matt Slick opines that; “complementarianism is the view that males and females complement each other in their different roles/duties.”([https://carm.org/...](https://carm.org/)). In the home for example, woman is expected to bear children while man is to lead and protect/provide (for) the family. Each should complement the other and not each viewing the other as superior or inferior in their respective roles. This work leans towards this theory and advocates for roles to be assigned based on perceived biological difference of male and female.

In a discourse on gender through her seminal work published in *Signs*, Chikwenye Ogunyemi charts a new cause in the perception of the idea of the type of feminism blowing across the globe as it concerns Africa. She questioned the rationale behind the extent to which the Western women understood the peculiarities and realities in Africa to be able to dictate to her (Africa) on the issue of women marginalization or otherwise. Taking this further, Lewis in an article entitled: “African Gender Research and Postcoloniality: Legacies and Challenges” states:

She [Ogunyemi] coins the term ‘womanism’ as alternative to feminism, arguing that African women and men have been united in common struggle against colonialism. Ogunyemi’s work remains a crucial milestone in radical African women’s effort to

independently name themselves while contesting the appropriating ways in which many western feminists have spoken for them. (31)

This analysis suggests that feminism is western oriented and incorporates the western idea of gender concepts at the detriment of the African counterparts. Western white women were/are at the forefront of feminist movement which has been making waves in that part of the world and to some extent, they are succeeding primarily because of their peculiarities. The western world especially Europe and America were dominated by patriarchal ideas before the great industrial revolution transformed the system in favour of women. Prior to the revolution, men were the great providers to their various families and as a result, they wielded tremendous influence on their household and behave as they liked. Tosh writing on this, agrees that as long as the nineteenth century patriarch provided for his family, he could regard himself a 'good father' and was, thereby, licensed to absent himself emotionally and in the process, wreck huge damage on his family (15). Also in support of the overbearing influence of men in Europe before the industrial revolution, Kanitkar quoting Arthur Mee, affirms that,

...the sexuality of natives is never mentioned and women, both white and native, seldom appear, except in service roles or to occasion brave acts of rescue by men. Women did not enter the world of the boarding school, Oxbridge College, the regimental dinner or the gentleman's club. Rather, they were cosigned to their natural roles as the gentler souls at the side of great men. (Kanitkar: 185)

Thus, the condition of women in the West then was very deplorable since they solely depended on men (husbands) for their survival. Their major role then was to attend to domestic matters and play some subaltern roles that were economically disempowering. Western women during that era did not believe that women could also perform some of the roles men did especially with

regard to economic matters. The Second World War helped a great deal to impact some knowledge on the women who had to take up positions left vacant by men in the industries in order to prosecute the war. Arguing in this direction, Sheilla Ruth affirms that,

During the World War II, however, conditions changed. Positions left empty by men gone to war and jobs in the burgeoning industrial sector had to be filled by women... jobs that, until then had been deemed “for men only” were effectively accommodated by women, and they learned an unforgettable lesson. There is no masculine or feminine occupation. (28-29)

As earlier mentioned, industrial Revolution and the transformations it occasioned even before the World War II also aided the Western women’s awareness in the economic opportunities available to them and the weakening of masculinity by this incident, which was the backbone of masculinity and which thrives on economic power, money, authority and so on just like its predecessor; patriarchy. So the eroding of this power from the men, dealt heavy blow to masculinity as a movement since many men became alienated from work and subsequently unemployed. Women on the other hand became gainfully employed and in the process also became breadwinners and family financiers. Willis in support of this assertion states:

The paradox is that while many working men were alienated from their work, nothing has proved more damaging to them and their sense of the masculine than unemployment, which took away independence and control over family finances. (42)

This ascendance to the position of family financier and ultimately breadwinner, made the women to reassess their role as keepers of the home and providers of less valued services. As a result they began to clamour for role reversal and claim that men could equally do the house chores and other domestic matters since they (men) were no longer providing for the family. They also

opine that even where the men can provide for the family and the women also are economically empowered and can provide for the family, gender role should be shared equally. Perhaps this was the main motive and argument behind the formation of feminism which later became a movement in Europe and America and the other so called third world countries. Moving in this direction and giving reasons behind feminism, Shaw and Lee state two main ideas behind the formation of feminism:

First, feminism concerns equality and justice for all women, and it seeks to eliminate systems of inequality and injustice in all aspects of women's lives. Because feminism is politics of equality, it anticipates a future that guarantees human dignity and equality for all people, women and men. Second, feminism is inclusive and affirming of women, it celebrates women's achievements and struggles and works to provide a positive and affirming stance towards women and womanhood. Feminism is a personal perspective as well as a social movement. (10)

No doubt, the struggle for equality with men was (is) at the centre of feminism and some feminists even advocate for supremacy over men. To such group, women could do without men since, to them men have become irrelevant and therefore constitutes nuisance. They argue that they could even raise children without them. But some views have cautioned on this and warned about its consequences both to the family and larger society. For instance, Lyndon talks of the 'elimination of the father' and bemoans the loss of certainties about the father's role in the light of the feminist argument that is effectively redundant (42). In the same vein, Blenkenhorn used the term 'fatherless America' to refer to what he sees as a nation of children growing up bereft of fathers around the home (71). It was even reported that a man, Robert Mochrie deliberately killed his wife and four children including himself; the possible cause of his action is traced to the influence of feminism. Beynon captures the scene succinctly and states:

It appeared that Robert Mochrie calculatedly killed his wife and four children before killing himself. In the nation-wide press coverage that followed the horror, the possible causes of the crime were explored. Here was a man, the psychologists approached for their views were quoted as asserting, who could not live with setbacks or blows to his authority in either his public or private life and it was this that drove him down the terrible, destructive road he eventually followed. (132)

No doubt feminism, as with the case of other movements, has its flaws and successes and where it succeeds in one setting it may fail in another. It is also a fact that in every movement of such nature, some people stand to benefit while others may be disadvantaged even among the same group. Feminism, as claimed by its proponents, has recorded many successes in the lives of women all over the world. It was because of this movement that women could vote and be voted for, women could have access to contraceptives, could have equal pay for equal work with men and so on. In the words of Shaw and Lee:

Imagine a world without feminism. If you are a woman, you would not be in college. You would not be able to vote. You could not play sports. Contraception is illegal. So is abortion. You are expected to marry and raise a family. If you must work, the only jobs available to you are in cleaning or clerical services. And you have no legal protection on the job if your boss pressures you for sex or makes lewd comments. Your husband can force you to have sex, and if you were sexually abused as a child, most likely no one will believe you if you tell. If you are sexually attracted to women, you are considered mentally ill and may be subjected to an array of treatments for your illness. (11)

From the foregoing analyses, it could be observed that what the feminists claimed to be advantages are mainly self-centered for women and not for men as sometimes claimed by them (feminists) that the movement is (was) for both 'women and men'. The successes also seemed euro-centric and class oriented. Some of the points they considered advantages might be viewed with contempt by other women from other socio-geo-political locations. Such point as 'access to

contraceptives' and being 'sexually attracted to fellow women' might not find a welcome space in Africa and some of the other less developed countries.

It seemed feminism, as a movement focused mainly on the lives of the Western white women who have become elitist then but were being marginalized by their male elite. So they sought ways to resist the marginalization. For instance, giving account of the origin of women's movement in the United States, Shaw and Lee contend that it was because of the ill treatment meted out on the American women delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840 that prompted the formation of the movement in the U.S.A. According to them, the women were not allowed to sit among the men but were consigned to positions behind the 'curtain and not allowed to voice their opinions because they were women'.

This led to the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 which was 'conceived as a response to the experience of Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton' who were the delegates to the London Convention. (7). At 'initio, the movement was perceived as anti-men and being all out to fight male ideology. This has led to some critics of this movement to regard it, in the words of Shaw and Lee, as having '...been associated with angry, hostile women who have an axe to grind and no sense of humour; it is declared that feminists hate men and selfishly want to create new systems of power over men' (14). Also reacting to the consequences of feminism, Beynon laments that men are at the receiving end of the successes recorded by the women in the United States of America. He is of the view that the process is being abused even to the detriment of certain emotional women. According to him:

In some parts of the U.S.A a man can be prosecuted for domestic violence even if the woman insists that she was not abused. It would appear that 'growing numbers of women who have otherwise welcomed the opportunities won by feminism are rebelling against such apparent injustices. (139)

Also towing the same path, Sommers agrees that feminism has led to the pathology of ‘natural’ masculine traits and further states that pro-feminist education has resulted in reverse sexism in schools. Boys, according to her, are constantly confronted with the notion that men are by nature brutal and emotionally damaged (102). Further to the views that oppose feminist ideology, Bly who is regarded as an influential person in the study of gender in America, ‘calls for the recovery of some of the old male certainties’ and bemoans the lack of a masculine presence in what he calls “Society of Orphans” in the United States. In his view American men have been stripped of moral authority, economically disadvantaged by the courts and are the victims of an uncaring matriarch (82).

From the foregoing, it is unexpected that women and indeed men from other less industrialized countries of the world especially the poor, are going to resist this kind of feminism which is already threatening the corporate existence of the countries it originated from. It could be observed that the feminist movement failed to take cognizance of the peculiarities of other countries. It is truism that differences abound in culture across all countries and what works and succeeds in one country (society) may not succeed in another. Therefore, it is not the way western women perceive gender that the African women, for example see it. Reacting to the conceptualization of women’s freedom as entrenched by African feminists, Kolawole asserts that the:

African woman’s conceptualization of freedom is not based on the erosion of her feminine attributes and outlook, but in asserting her feminine qualities...African femininity is manifested in female fashion designs and other physical adornments that are unique to women. The focus on hairstyles and fashions that distinguish her from men is very important to her...The African woman cherishes her role as a home-maker as well as her status as a mother or a potential mother. (30)

In a similar way Oyewumi argues that subjecting African realities to Western type of gender studies could breed lack of comprehension since the social categories and institutions obtainable in the two divides are incommensurable. For instance, according to her, the adoption of feminist concepts to express and analyze African realities is the major challenge of African gender studies. She further claims that the notion of man/woman duality opposition is not common in many African cultures. Therefore she cautions that rigid application of such Western concepts to the African situation would bring confusion. Consequently, she (Oyewumi) states that:

Interpreting African realities based on these Western claims often produces distortions, obfuscations in language and a total lack of comprehension since the social categories and institutions are incommensurable. In fact, the two basic categories of woman and gender demand re-thinking, giving the Yoruba case...as I argued in my book *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*.(7)

Based on such argument, many gender scholars have come to reason on the need to relate gender studies to the peculiarities of the component entities, taking cognizance of their culture, religion and other socio-politico variables. Arguing in this direction, Bakare-Yusuf points out that when these foreign categories are adopted on their face value, they distort local structuring dynamics and mode of understanding. Going further she affirms the need for the gender researchers to be faithful to the local cultural specifications in terms of experience and social structure. Stressing further, she observes that:

The point is rather that when ‘foreign categories are adopted uncritically, they can distort local structuring dynamics and modes of understanding. It is true that as a first order principle of inquiry, gender may well be sufficient to capture the complexities of Oyo-Yoruba social realities. However, the more general point is that the threat of mistranslation works both ways. Just as the western gendered terms of woman and man do not translate directly into Yoruba, neither does the system of seniority necessarily

translate into other cultural context. In this case, the crucial issue is remaining faithful to the specificities of local cultural experience and social structure. (66)

Based on the foregoing contentions, Steady in her work, observes that the adoption of Eurocentric paradigms of feminist discourse has led to ‘an abstract mapping of stratification systems rather than a more profound interrogation of institutions that determine such parameters of social enquiry’. Citing Africa as an example, Steady contends that gender is not a static ‘metaphor for power relations’ since not all men or women have power. In her view, power is not only vested in political organizations in many African societies, other religious and social institutions can confer power on people (47). Also arguing in this direction, Cleaver maintains that ‘men as well as women may be disadvantaged by social and economic structures’ but ‘through empowerment processes both men and women can be liberated from the confines of stereotyping, resulting in beneficial outcomes for both genders’ (2). Shaw and Lee also recognize that not all men are advantaged by gender inequality hence in their plea for men to ‘understand how gender privilege works they state that the same social constructions of masculinity that privilege men also limit them’ (16). Collins opposing the white feminist assertion that women are being oppressed by men argues that the oppression is not perpetrated by all men but by the privileged white men. She further contends that they also oppress their fellow ‘less privileged men’. She opines that:

The allegedly ‘masculine’ qualities that you probably listed are only acceptable when exhibited by elite white men, or when used by Black and Hispanic men against each other or against women of colour. Aggressive Black and Hispanic men are seen as dangerous, not powerful, and are often penalized when they exhibit any of the allegedly ‘masculine’ characteristics. (60)

Women on the other hand are not left out. They also oppress or marginalize their fellow women. The so called elite women lord it over the working class women who are sometimes less advantaged economically and otherwise. The women elitist group often claims to fight for all women. They opine that their struggle against women oppression is for the liberation of all classes of women, their class or race notwithstanding, hence their clarion call for all women to join the women movement (feminism). But this claim has recently come under serious attack by women themselves especially those from the less privileged class and women of colour. They contend that the gains of the movement are enjoyed by the women of class who are privileged by either race or other empowerment indices. One of the critics of this type of women movement (feminism) is Bell Hooks who bemoans the “opportunistic appropriation of feminist thinking by white women which has corrupted the feminist politics”. She emphasized that:

It is this opportunistic appropriation of feminist thinking that consistently corrupts feminist politics, sending the clear message to disenfranchised poor and working class women and men of all races that feminist movement is not for them. Given this message and the white supremacist agenda that is perpetrated by white power feminism, it is not surprising that people of colour who do not understand the history of the movement, who may not have access to the revolutionary feminist thoughts and praxis, usually see feminism as a threat and do not see the uses this opportunistic white women have made of it. (33-34)

Relating the experience to Africa, Nwadike and Nwadike affirm that female elites which comprise mostly intellectuals and technocrats often hovered around the First Ladies seeking and taking up appointments in their shadow cabinet as special Advisers, Personal Assistants, Secretaries, Speech Writers, Contractors, and Praise Singers. Going further, they argued that:

The wives of Heads of State and Military Administrators assumed the title of First Lady and claimed to represent the interest of women. On that account, large amounts of money were regularly doled out to them, without any accounting system to operate empty programmes and questionable projects purportedly for women. (146)

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that men and women suffer the same fate depending on the social structure in question. There is power-play at work among women as well as men, some men also cry out the same marginalization on the hands of the privileged men and even women. Women elites who happen to be among the privileged class oppress their fellow women and men too. It all depends on power acquisition and how it is applied by the privileged group against one another or against the other. Thus, Nwadike and Nwadike towing this line, observe that “artistic representation is also charged with underlying gender and political connotations reflecting varying degrees of power-play” (Can these Wings Fly?...143).

This work also studies the treatment of gender in relation to the biological traits of sex. While some gender theorists uphold the definition and study of gender in terms of biological distinction of male and female, others oppose it on the ground that it is socially and historically constructed. Eurocentric gender scholars are in majority of the proponents of gender treatment in relation to biological difference of male and female. African feminists form majority of the opposing views in this direction. It could be understood that the western society around the 18th century was patriarchal in nature and regarded both male and female genitals as the same, referring to any perceived physical difference as ‘a matter of degree’. Freud for instance regarded women as ‘small men’ because of their physical characteristic of having the clitoris which he described as a stunted penis similar to that of a castrated man. In fact, Freud regarded women (girls) as inherently inferior to men (boys) because of the physical difference. In Freud’s view as quoted in Rieff:

Women are simply ‘small men’ or castrated men with the characteristics of a stunted penis (the Clitoris). This physical feature is, to Freud, a mark of natural inferiority which women can do very little about. Not only does Freud aver that girls feel biologically at a disadvantage, inferior, because they did not possess the penis, he affirms that they are in a grossest sense something less than boys. (17)

Commenting on this, Kisiang'ani agrees that the western society was highly gendered along biological sex of male and female in the period referred above and even now but cautions against the reinforcement of such code in Africa in this new millennium. He blames the perceived women marginalization on the wholesale importation of the western gender theory into Africa which privileged men more than the women. He bemoans the continued rigid application of such western categories of sex in African soil and further observes that the trend is still fashionable in the West since one could undergo surgical operation to correct certain hormone imbalance in order to belong to either male or female. He earnestly makes a case for gender studies in Africa to 'rethink critically' dominant contemporary conceptions of gender. He (Kisiang'ani) suggests that the reason for this is:

...Because current Western categories of sex and gender continued to be treated as fairly rigid. Each member of the binary pair is understood as being in sharp opposition to the other. Biologically, one is either male or female. Ambiguity of sex is disallowed, even to the point of surgically 'correcting' bodies whose physical features are indeterminate. One's gender and sexuality allegedly derive from, and correspond to, one's sex. (19)

From the foregoing it might not be wrong to say that it is this notion of the understanding of gender along biological praxis that prompted the type of feminism generated and in operation in Europe and America. The type that focuses on the fight against men marginalization of women and which tends to base the argument along the pole of male and female dichotomy. Some African feminists who have Western orientation, imbibe this trend in gender research whereas those who may be referred to as 'home grown' oppose the idea. Steady affirms that gender is similar to sex difference of male and female and further observes that "It is often viewed as a metaphor representing relations of power. However, analysis of power is usually restricted to

male/female power relations only, ignoring power relations based on race, class, ethnicity, age, nationality and so forth”(48).

Amadiume contends that the gender distinctions is not noticeable in Igbo society and affirm that ‘either sex can assume socially viable roles as male or female’. In her discourse on sex-gender distinctions, she reveals what she perceives as the racism and ethnocentrism of earlier studies of Igbo society by Western scholars and proceeds to give a cogent reason on why biological categories could be misleading in the study of sex and gender in Igbo context since male and female gender play the same role (23). Supporting this view, Oyewumi, using Yoruba society as an example in her book: *The Invention of Women*: states that:

With regards to gender then, its absence in Yoruba language means the ‘woman’ theorized in many Western feminist discourses in terms of negation and limitation has no equivalent in Yoruba culture. Yoruba women are not perceived as powerless, disadvantaged, and controlled and defined by men’. (xii)

Some gender scholars have, however taken them up in this assertion and argue that the fact, for example, that Yoruba society has no term/language for ‘gender’ does not mean its absence. They argue that gender is still in operation there although it might be in different form (Subterranean).

Bakare-Yusuf in opposition to this claim, argues that even the assigning of roles in Yoruba culture according to seniority is fraught with ambiguity and argues that, Oyewumi “has no way of addressing the complex relationships in which people play with the normative structure of seniority to their own advantage” (73). Therefore Bakare-Yusuf opines that Yoruba society being polytheistic in nature is more susceptible to accommodate enculturation than Oyewumi assumes. She further exonerates the Western scholars from this and asserts that the

motive behind the Western discourse on gender in Africa is to elicit more research/work in that area. She states that:

In contrast, the Yoruba society's polytheistic form shows it is ready to accept and absorb difference than Oyewumi admits. Hence, beneath the surface of language, gender distinction (as with other allegedly second-order modes of power structure) has always been at work in Yoruba society. The only thing Western discourse has done is to articulate it and invite more work on it, thereby raising it to critical discourse plane. (78)

The foregoing has clearly shown that gender involves what it takes to be male or female or masculine and feminine. And from the various arguments, what is central to it is the biological difference which may be male, female, neuter or other physically perceived difference but the fact remains that difference exist and the difference is biologically or naturally created. This is why this study leans on theory/theories that tilt(s) towards the discourse on gender in relation to the biological sex difference of male and female (men and women). Womanism as a theory is not against the study of gender in relation to man and woman but in the distribution of power (role) which it advocates for equity through complementarity.

The argument that African society was not patriarchal in nature before the colonization process by the West is a subterfuge by some overzealous African theorists to debunk the gains made in that direction by some well meaning Western scholars. Many African theorists are in agreement that the African society was (is) a patriarchal society and the signs of it are manifest in almost all the human activities including music, worship, farming, costume and so on. They also contend that the roles are assigned based on sex difference. Ekwueme, in affirmation to this view further observes:

In general, sex division is the norm. Men and women dance in their own respective groups...men dance groups may not have female members except in those rare cases where a woman of distinction in the village may have taken some special men's titles. She may be a member of the group but under no circumstances may she actually take part in dancing in public. In women's groups, however, there is usually (but not always) a man or several men who are fully-fledged members of the group, assisting with such things as administration, discipline and certain actions forbidden to women by local traditions. (73)

Contributing to this assertion, Nwadiuwe and Nwadiuwe in their essay on "Dramatic representation of women elites" note that the postcolonial feminist contention is that "African women are considerably shackled by culture, tradition and patriarchal norms and conventions" which, according to them are "favourable to men" (142). Also corroborating this view, Ibekwe gives further elaboration on the assignment of roles according to gender based on biological sex of male or female in Igbo society. She comes up with what she terms 'gender determinants' which form the basis for gender role in Igbo society in particular and Africa in general. Ibekwe thus contends that the roles can be broadly categorized into two: specific and general roles. The specific roles include such activities that come from nature such as giving birth by women and as a result such roles as weaning and other related activities are the sole responsibility of women. Such roles that embody knowledge or information or which may require secrecy, men may wish to make exclusive to themselves (138). The foregoing has also argued convincingly against the theory that portrays Africa as a 'genderless' society where either sex can play the role of the other. Ekwueme (Gender Distribution...) further states that "gender function has been so arranged and segregated that men arrogate superior functions to themselves and inferior functions to women" (31). Majority of African women are not oblivious of those facts and that is why they agitate for the type of gender theory that will strike a balance and ensure equity. Supporting this notion, Mama Comments:

Discussants argued that there is a pressing need for ‘home grown’ theory, particularly in view of the fact that the experience of the African women differs so much than that of the Western women. It was suggested that this may be one of the reasons why the teaching of theory is so out of touch with Nigerian women’s experience. While it may be incumbent upon us to draw on theories formulated elsewhere, perhaps it is necessary to re-operationalize some of the basic concepts used in women’s studies, so as to ground them in our experience and local conditions. (67)

Womanism seems the answer to this call because according to its proponents African women have their peculiarities and should be allowed to speak for themselves. Such womanism proponents as Ogunyemi (31), Sofola (James:150), Nwanya (126) and their likes agree on the need to follow the path of gradual transformation to dismantle any perceived woman marginalization instead of the fire brigade approach propagated by the Western feminists. They also agree on gender role that is based on natural/biological distinction of male and female which ensures order and continuity of the society. This is because male and female possess inherent traits that are assigned by nature differently. Men for example are viewed as being violent in nature while women are perceived as soft, fragile, gentle and so on. Ridley in support of the biological traits in men, of aggression and violence, comments ‘men are biologically predisposed to aggression and that violence is fundamental to being a real man’ (15). Sommers also affirms that ‘men are by nature brutal and emotionally damaged’ (17). Women, on the other hand are projected as being “kind, affectionate, eager to soothe hurt feelings and so forth” (Haralambos:768). On the negative side, some female (woman) traits as listed by Collins include “passive, follower, emotional and weak” (60).

Womanism adherents oppose the idea of male chauvinism. In as much as they do not oppose the idea of male leadership, they abhor male oppression of women in any form. They advocate for the establishment of those social structures that would recognize the importance of

women as human beings who possess all it takes to act and live as such and who also possess the capabilities to contribute immensely to the progress of the society. They reject the notion that the place of women is in the kitchen and child-bearing. They agree that women possess other potentials which are comparable to their male counterpart and which should be allowed to materialize for the good of the community/society. This theory opposes the idea of excessive feminism which tends to project the European/American culture at the expense of African culture.

Womanism as a movement does not oppose or reject the idea of women liberation but they want both sexes to compliment each other. In their opinion, no sex could do it alone if meaningful development is envisaged. They seek purposeful and well articulated system that would encourage gradual transformation. They also disagree with the attack on African culture and tradition by the feminists on the ground that it encourages diabolical obnoxious practices. They maintain that despite its shortcomings, the African cultures still have good sides and are prone to change. Quite unlike what most feminists (who want to attract cheap-western popularity) write about African culture as being evil, womanists believe that certain aspects of the culture are meant to regulate human conducts within the society for harmonious co-existence. They advocate for gradual and tactical approach to the issues of women liberation and cultural abolition. Njideka Nwanya sums it up this way:

The African women have therefore disassociated themselves from the brand of feminism making waves in Europe and America and have adopted a more reliable approach-womanism, which aims at a general, social and cultural transformation. (125)

Womanism theorists advocate for gender balancing that will take into account some vital variables obtainable in African societies such as culture, religion, economy, history and socio-political engagements. This school of thought seems to enjoy some level of patronage from male elitists groups and some women conservatists. They appear resolute in their stand on gender issues unlike the feminists who approach the issue from diverse fronts. Some try “to establish the relationship of class operation, to sexual repression, product, reproduction and re-procreation” while some “question the subjugation of women to men in patriarchy” (Nwanya, 118).

Womanism is a call by black women and indeed women of colour, to unite and project a common course peculiar to their society instead of relying on radical feminist’s movements with white women background and championing Western Feminist agenda. The movement includes mostly black women of Afro-American descent. Some scholars refer to this movement as ‘black feminism’ because of their ardent concern for the good of the black people, not only women but men as well. They are concerned with enthronement of equity and justice and not only gender related issues but racism as well. They see gender oppression as having similar characteristics with racism and class. Collins in analysis of the situation states that:

By broadening the analysis beyond the confines of race, we can see the varying levels of rejection and seduction available to each of us due to our race, class and gender identity. Each of us lives with an allotted portion of institutional privilege and penalty and with varying levels of rejection and seduction inherent in the symbolic images applied to us. (61)

Womanism as a movement is analogous to nationalism for the black women all over the world. From their standpoint, it is not only for the liberation of women but for the liberation of all black

people under oppression by whatever guise- by men or their fellow women. Sometimes adherents of Western oriented feminism fail to grasp the subterranean meanings inherent in such concepts and (mis) interpret them in their own way especially in terms of 'liberation'. For instance, Angela Miri understands feminism as "...popular struggle of women for their liberation from the various forms of operation they endure" (168). She is of the opinion that the goal is the struggle by women for emancipation from subordinate position to an equal position with their male counterparts. It is therefore pertinent for women activists to read between the lines before taking side or making categorical statement, although one is at liberty to make choice but one should be well informed on the issue at stake before taking a stand. It's a common feature for critics to jump into conclusion on works they did not fully understand. In similar way, some feminists (mis) understand some works as feminist oriented whereas they (works) treat something quite different. In this way the study continues to be complicated and seem uncoordinated. Kafewo in support of this laments that:

One is at a loss how critics readily read feminist undertones to literary works just because they are written by women or even men or because there are some feeble attempts to raise one or two issues of women. When this happens, these critics never ask questions, nor read between the lines, they simply go to town with the answer that women oppression has been found even when the text states something patently different. (25)

By and large, the thrust of this work is on genderism, womanism as a feminist theory is adopted as one of the theoretical frameworks because it supports equity and justice for all sexes and which discourages the current fight against men by radical feminism. Womanism seems to envisage and incorporate all the variables that often interrelate in the society to generate gender obfuscation such as class and racism, and strive to proffer answers to them. It is necessary we have a look on how gender relate with some societal institutions such as culture, politics, economy, education and psychological issues, so that a clearer understanding of the interplay of these variables with gender, helps to open more spaces for gender discourse and apprehension.

2.3 Gender Relations in Society

Culture/Traditions

As earlier stated in this work, gender does not mean only masculine or feminine (male or female) but a combination of other socio-cultural factors that inter-relate to make them, play the role of boy or girl, man or woman, husband or wife in later life. Culture has been described or defined by many scholars in various ways but the central point is that it is what determines the way people of a particular society live their lives. For example, from a general perspective, “a culture consists of a knowledge, beliefs, values, customs and artifacts that are acquired and used by its members during daily living” (Gamble and Gamble 35). Ekei also affirms that “...cultures involves not what people have undergone, in fact, it includes the experiences they had lived in common, perceived or sensed as a people. All these live unique features that mark them out as a common group of people as opposed to the peoples” (285). Doki in a similar way sees culture as operative in “a home in which family ethics, codes of conducts, conditions, aspirations and mannerism are accommodated. Every member of this home therefore learns unconsciously the ethos and provisions there from without much difficulty” (189).

Culture in the context of this study refers to the people’s way of life. It therefore entails the totality of their living-their way of dressing, eating, farming, dancing, greeting, speaking and worship. Culture includes such values and norms as their set of beliefs and social institutions which often manifest in songs, folklore, artifacts, language, dances, socialization and foods.

From the foregoing, it is evident that culture and gender are closely related and tend to permeate one another. Culture as a way of life of a people aids in the socialization process in such society and the socialization process helps to shape the conduct of the people within the

society. Okeke while citing Burne and Daves as it relates to the Ugandan girl-child in terms of socialization and gender role states:

From the moment she takes her first steps, she will be regarded as inherently inferior to her brother. She will continually be battling against prejudicial attitudes and unfair work practices in a culture that places little or no value on her contributions to society... More often than not, she is regarded as a productive piece of property than as a person toiling long hours only for her husband to be paid. (2)

It is not surprising that culture has been at the receiving end for gender matters (tensions). The feminists see it as being responsible for their woes because it is perceived by them as encouraging male domination and female (women) subjugation in the society that practices patriarchy. Culture on the other hand is perceived by masculinists as soothing and something that is important to engender societal norms for the progress and peace of the society. Feminists view culture as being manipulated by the masculinists to further their hegemony over them (feminists) and some of them even call for total abrogation of cultural practices in every society. They bemoan the ordeals they often pass through in the hands of men because of cultural practices which help to demean them. According to them, men promulgate all sorts of discriminatory laws in the name of culture, to intimidate women and deprive them of their rights and possessions. They contend that several of the cultural practices are gender discriminatory and in favour of men.

Several of these dehumanizing practices tend to be gender discriminatory. The treatment of a widow after the death of her husband is a nightmare when seen. What happens to a man who loses his female partner? Recent reports of such callous treatment on widows in some parts of the communities in the South East have been upsetting and have continued to agitate the minds of concerned individuals and organizations. (Mbanefo-Oluoha: 328)

Feminists argue that even the perceived physical differences between male and female should not be used to judge or discriminate against women since the assignment of gender role based on that is also a product of culture as dictated by men. They argue further that such perceived differences did not matter ab initio since some societies regarded the differences as a 'matter of degree'. They insist that whatever is attached to the roles played by each sex in a society is caused by social factors which are often fashioned by men to further propagate their hegemony over women.

Feminist scholars of this view reject the use of biological sex to determine man or woman. They contend that it is inconsistent since it is a product of history and not biologically rooted. They argue that, for example, in some societies female genitals are regarded as incomplete male genitals and therefore regard male and female as the same since the difference is only a matter of degree. It is further contended that in the Western society this was the practice until around 18thc when the notion changed and the clear distinction between male and female became popular. So feminists of this concept hold the view that the notion of the biological difference is a product of history. Linda Nicholson insists that:

The notion of human bodies being separated into two sexes is not historically consistent. Male and female genitals were considered inherently the same in Western society until 18thc. At that time female genitals were regarded as incomplete male genitals, and the difference between the two was considered as a matter of degree. In other words, there was a gradation of physical forms or spectrum. Therefore the current perspective toward sex, which is to consider women and men and their typical genitalia as the only possible natural options, came into existence through historical roots. (83)

Feminist movements in Africa that are Western-oriented, view culture and patriarchy as being synonymous since they complement each other. They see culture as the vehicle which propels patriarchy and most of their agitations are also directed towards cultural reformation or outright

abrogation to pave way for the so called modernism. Modernism in this sense means equality, and egalitarian society in which men and women share equal responsibilities. Therefore they attack the institutionalization of culture in many societies and why it was the handiwork of men. They opine that culture is the bane of women predicaments in most African societies. According to this view, women are not allowed even to have a share of their late parent's property since they would be married out to another family. They bemoan such age long cultural practices that have remained adamant to change and which they claim, have contributed to their misfortune. Omeke in support of this view states that:

In some cultures in South Eastern States of Nigeria for example, women are barred from inheriting property from their late parents especially parents whose marriages were contracted under customary law. The protagonists of this age long practice argue that since a man's female children would be married off outside their families, it would be wrong to allow them have a share in the estate of their deceased parents as well as benefiting from whatever awaited them in their husbands homes. (381)

Scholars with this view also attack the ideologies prevalent in patriarchal society which they perceive as working in tandem with culture. They argue that such ideologies are fashioned by men to further marginalize them. They believe that culture and ideology wield tremendous influence on gender matters and most of its paradigms apply negatively to women to make them unable to realize their full potentials. "It is evident that certain paradigms in society apply only to women to make them unable to attain self realization and fulfillment" (Uko: 130). Scholars with this perception argue that the prevailing ideologies and its cultural manifestations in any given society are the handiwork of male chauvinists who use them to boost their ego and further intimidate the female folk. They opine that such ideologies and culture are often wrapped up in proverbs and rituals as propagated by patriarchy. This view further contends that in such

societies, proverbs are often designed and managed to suit male purposes with the intent of making women inferior and subordinate to men. These are then carefully articulated and embedded in language and therefore endure overtime.

On account of the dominance of the male gender in Igbo culture proverbs are often designed and managed to suit male purposes in socio-cultural matters. Igbo culture portrays women as inferior and subordinate to men and such are carefully and consciously built into linguistic expressions and used over generations. (Ezenwa-Ohaeto: 21)

Many scholars agree on the position that there is male dominance in most African societies and sometimes attribute it to the origins of creation. They argue that this view has always been with the Africans consciously and has continued to guide their conduct in the society. According to them, the culture, the religion, the languages, the names, the type of vocation, and ‘even the biological and psychological structure’ about man all attest to man’s superiority over woman. They opine that male dominance has always been with the Africans and has permeated their system. Yerima observes that:

The ‘masculine traditional canon’ has always dominated the African consciousness concerning beliefs and existence. The culture, the religion, the languages, the names, the types of vocation, even the biological and psychological structure of man as determined by the environment and nature have always re-emphasized the dominance of the male over his female counterparts. (59)

While feminists who hold the view that women are being subjugated by men, lament that they are unable to realize their full potentials because of the system in which they find themselves, masculinists oppose this view and argue that some women still achieve great ideals despite the perceived or alleged cultural inhibitions. They contend that women could achieve many things

even in the most culturally patriarchal society. They further argued that history, literature and other documented evidences show examples of women who defied the stumbling blocks purportedly placed by culture/patriarchy to excel above their female counterparts or even men. In the words of Akwang:

Yet within this debilitating framework of patriarchal social structuring, humanistic writings such as history and literature, and religious documents cast a rare breed of women who defied inhibitory, discriminately and negatory societal dispositions against their kind to excel. (46)

Taking it further scholars of this view argue that women should not blame men or patriarchy as a system for their perceived misfortunes which may be favourable to some men, rather they should work hard like their male counterparts to excel. It is further argued that history is full of list of women of re-known who surmounted all the obstacles to succeed. According to them, such women wield enormous influence and affluences on issues of public interest sometimes at the expense of their male counterparts. In support of this argument, Bolanle notes that:

History is replete with figures of outstanding women such as the Omu of Onitsha, Madam Tinubu of Lagos and Abeokuta, Nana Asmau-the daughter of Shehu Usman dan Fodio, and the women Rioters of 1929, many of these women commanded vast resources and wielded political power. (315)

Some scholars on the other hand, are of the view that women are responsible for whatever situation they find themselves. They argue that women are capable of changing their situations but where they allow such situation to prevail, it is because they allow it. Theorists of this thought perceive women as having all the wherewithals to challenge their conditions for their betterment and not remaining docile and in lamentation. They do not see culture or patriarchy as posing much cumbrances on women progression if truly women are focused and determined.

They are of the view that most women are not focused in their goals and sometimes lack unity of purpose thereby rendering themselves vulnerable before the opposite group. Udengwu in this direction affirms that “Women are largely responsible for their own backwardness and they are the ones to change their condition, positively... if the fringe position of women in the society does not change, it is because women allow it” (48).

This view is also shared by Amadiume as she admits that “women have more individual choices and freedoms’ but lack power in unity “as they find it hard to agree and act in unison” (26). Furthermore, these theorists contend that the so called ‘marginalization’ of women has no basis as women have been known to play important role in formation and transformation of various societies. They argue that those who hold the view that women are marginalized, are either not aware of the roles women have played in the past to shape their various societies or are deliberately doing so in order to find a new ground to launch fresh attack on masculinity or other unknown agenda. Buratai observes that:

While women are usually portrayed to be absolutely ‘marginalized’, the basis for this assumptive position is neither consciously oblivious of the role which women have played in the formation and transformation of their societies or, it actually seeks to nullify it in order to create the necessary space within which alone, this contest could be launched and pursued anew and over entirely new and unrelated agenda. (35-6)

Advocates of culture/masculinity also stress that society is better maintained by adherence to cultural norms since these help in no small measure to ensure good conduct. They argue that it was since the African societies began to neglect their culture in preference to the Western culture that all sorts of decadence found their way to the fabrics of African societies. According to them, African culture has all it takes to maintain a vibrant society with minimal bitterness and rancour as presently experienced. They bemoan the way some feminists portray African culture as being

all barbaric and of no value, and further lament that they give the impression that the African culture has nothing good for women and children and therefore call for its abrogation. These theorists emphasize that certain aspects of the culture are tailored towards inculcating morality in the members of the society and this has helped to maintain law and order in such societies especially in the pre-colonial era. Onukwube affirms that:

What occupied the mind of every African man of pre-colonial time was how to keep the taboos of his community or how to appease the land in case of violation and by so doing, help the entire community enjoy a peaceful environment. The Igbo was not an exception. To achieve this, the Igbo had to know the taboos, learn it from birth as part of their socialization and carefully avoided the violation of any of the community's taboos. (156)

By implication, these scholars argue that it is the inability or neglect by Africans in modern times to keep the taboos of their community/society that spilled over to the larger society thereby engendering various corrupt practices as there is no longer fear of reprisal consequences on the perpetrator. According to Bacon, taboos can be described as ‘...prohibition applying to something that is forbidden or set apart because it is sacred, consecrated or unclean and therefore considered dangerous’ (208).

Gender in Politics

Gender issues, no doubt, have continued to generate some tensions in many societies in modern times and have become a force to reckon with in the national discourse of many nations especially in relation to women (feminine). In Africa for example, there is noticeable women agitation in terms of political representation. Apart from culture/tradition, politics is another field which women/feminists view as being dominated by men and which has invariably become their bane. They argue that women are not given equal opportunity as their male counterpart to

compete in the political arena. In their view, the process of taking part in political contests are structured to the disadvantage of women. Arguing in this direction, Nwadiuwe and Nwadiuwe (“Clipped Wing...”) comment as follows:

Nonetheless, a cursory look at Nigeria’s political landscape reveals an imbalance in gender participation. The process of participating in democratic institutions of state is determined by cultural, economic, social, political, psychological and legal factors and much of these appear to be constraints to women in Nigeria. The number of women seeking or holding elective positions in the current democratic dispensation remains low. (482)

In a similar stance, some scholars contend that the democratic history of African nations is replete with male dominance in politics. They further argue that this male dominance is not healthy for the society since men have shown ‘woeful failure’ in the political arena. Therefore they advocate for women to be given a chance to prove their mettle. “The democratic history of African nations is dotted with male dominance of the political process. It is also a documentation of the woeful failure of male politicians in the political arena. It becomes reasonable therefore to advocate for a change in favour of the females” (59). Commenting in this direction also, Orjiakor affirms that “One major revelation of the past decade of democratization experience in Nigeria was that the females were found to be more patriotic, sincere, committed and less corrupt than the males who for a long time have dominated politics in Nigeria” (143).

Theorists of this thought also argue that the women’s backwardness is a reflection of the society’s backwardness and that it is quite conspicuous, the underprivileged status of women in Africa. “It is no longer possible to escape the fact that the underprivileged status of women, their relative backwardness, leads to an essential backwardness in society as a whole”. (El Saadawi:1). Therefore, Afolabi in support of this view recommends that women should be encouraged to go

into full time politics in Nigeria in order “to bring some elements of sanity, human warmth and kindness into it” (134).

However, some scholars have argued that women are not ‘messiah’ to salvage the society from its predicaments as viewed by feminist theorists. They contend that some of the women are worse than their male counterparts when entrusted with power and public fund. In their view, the First Lady syndrome in Nigerian politics for example has sometimes portrayed women as corrupt and incapable of entrenching modesty in public affairs. They contend that the activities of these women have contributed in no small measure to ‘submerge many African states’. Amadiume observes that the First Lady syndrome is a significant source of corruption in African governments (*Daughters of the Goddess...23*). Also Wole Soyinka lampoons this syndrome and other corrupt female politicians in Nigeria and describes them as “the sore of the nation” (9). Female elites are not exempted from this allegation of corruption since, according to this view, some of them are appointed into the Head of States’ cabinet as junior ministers or other positions of authority and they also key in to the path of their corrupt male counterparts. “Some female elites were also appointed into junior ministerial positions and these women followed the corrupt line of the men in power”. (Nwadinigwe and Nwadinigwe; “Can these Wings...” 145). Some critics have therefore argued that despite setting up of many committees and other agencies for women development, the condition of women especially in the rural areas, still remain deplorable. Aina observes that:

Despite the setting up of a National Committee on Women and Development since 1982 to increase the participation of women at grassroots, rural worker’s organizations/associations among others, both in decision making and implementation of projects that affect women, the condition of Nigerian women especially in the rural areas remained harsh. (1)

In affirmation to this line of thought, Nwosu notes that “despite obvious women liberation movements, the subordinate role of the women seems to persist...” (39). Some of these feminist critics therefore advise women to look inward and have a rethink on the way they go about the struggle since women themselves are part of the problem. They argue that revolutionary change which seeks to be truly focused for betterment of the society must begin with the uprooting of the oppressor inside of the people. It is not merely the identification and fight against the perceived oppressors but the ability to change our ways first. As Audre Lorde points out: “The focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us” (123). Also calling on the feminists to go back to the drawing board, these scholars challenge women to be united and show solidarity to their course instead of heaping the blame elsewhere. They call on the elitist women (the privileged) to stoop and hear the complaint of the less privileged women so that they could use their position to assist them instead of relying on men to come to their aid. They equally admonish the less privileged women not to be contemptuous of the privileged women since the expected positive transformation is likely to be achieved through them. Using the White women as example, Collins bares her feelings thus:

For a while, I categorized all affluent White women as being superficial, arrogant, overly concerned with material possessions, and part of my problem. But had I continued to classify people in this way, I would have missed out on making some very good friends whose discomfort with their inherited or acquired social class privileges pushed them to examine their position. (65)

By and large it could be seen that while some scholars agree that there is female marginalization in the political arena in Africa, and argue that this has led to the escalation of corruption and other vices in the society. Others oppose this view and contend that even where women are given

equal opportunity with men, society could not do better since the women are also corrupt like their male counterpart. They therefore call for attitudinal change on the part of the women towards one another.

Gender in Empowerment

Empowerment in this context will be treated against the backdrop of gender in relation to educational and economic empowerment of women and men's perception of the phenomenon. Empowerment can be regarded as a process of making people who are at one time docile to become aware of themselves and what is happening in their environment, and be able to challenge the situation where necessary. Obadiogwu describes empowerment as:

...a process, with the help of which powerless people, communities and organizations become more aware of the dynamics of power in the context of their own lives. In doing so, they gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals. (543)

What is central to the definition of empowerment is 'process'. This is because it is on-going and not 'finished' and it is always aimed at achieving certain goals for the benefit of the individual concerned and the society at large. The process of empowerment could come through formal or informal means but the ultimate goal is for the individual/people to gain control over their lives. To Shor, empowerment is "a social process that helps people gain control over their own lives and communities by acting on issues that they define as important" (79).

Educational Empowerment

It has been argued that women were disadvantaged in many spheres of the society because they were not educated. Their inability to acquire western education in the pre-colonial and colonial periods was perceived as the bane of women's backwardness. Consequently

feminists attack men for being responsible for this backwardness since they systematically prevented them from participating in the educational process. This view contends that even in the societies in Africa that were matrilineal in nature before the advent of colonialism, men hid under the guise of colonialism to dissuade women from attending school and thereby further subjugated them. Scholars of this view are of the opinion that colonialism encouraged gender dichotomies and reinforced men superiority over women. They argued that men saw the potentials of western education to empower people therefore they appropriated it to themselves.

Kam Kah arguing in this direction states that:

Colonial rule in different parts of Africa generally created or reinforced gender dichotomies. Colonial economies were in the hands of men. In matrilineal societies of North Mozambique like elsewhere in Africa, women were dissuaded from going to school and were subordinated to men. (104)

Western education according to this view, contributed greatly to the subordination of women especially during the colonial rule since the colonialists encouraged male dominance. Men were encouraged to acquire education by the imperialists and this contributed immensely to the privileged position men found themselves even after the colonialists have gone. These scholars argue that even with the exit of the imperialists, the African men still follow the bad trend. They contend that subsequent writings from male works speak volume of the issue of women marginalization. They use those works to further intimidate and buttress the point that women are docile and unintelligent creatures who should only be seen and not heard. Most of the masculine critics therefore urge women to strive to debunk this claim by embracing Western education and charting a new course in literary works that should promote the ideals of women. In support of this view, Ekwierhoma calls on female writers who wish to challenge sexism to

adopt new ideologies in their writings that would seek to emancipate women and promote them in all spheres of life. These ideologies need to incorporate concepts that “decry the negative, stereotypical roles women play in texts scripted by men in their emphasis on ‘masculinist’ tendencies in texts” (37).

Continuing, this concept contends that examples abound in many male-authored works where women are derided and treated as novices who cannot differentiate their right from their left. They argue that these works were mainly written by the first generation of African male elites who saw them as veritable avenues for propagation of the male-centered ideologies. It is further claimed that these masculinists often create female characters that are docile and sometimes corrupt and incapable of contributing positively to the society, to lampoon and make caricature of womanhood. Some of these works especially in drama portray women as prostitutes, self-sacrificing, indolent, ‘chosified’ perpetrators of all negative activities and even as witches. In their works, some of these early dramatists like Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Gabriel Okara and Ola Rotimi cast such female characters that conform to the masculinists critics’ assertion. Wole Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forest* presents Madam Tortoise as a prostitute and also in his *Kongi’s Harvest*, Segi as a woman is equally portrayed as a prostitute.

J. P. Clark and Gabriel Okara depict female characters that possess supernatural powers but use them for negative activities. J. P. Clark in *Ozidi* presents Oreame as a woman who has supernatural powers but uses it to terrify her community instead of protecting them. The heroine Woyengi, in Gabriel Okara’s play *Woyengi* is also presented as a woman who possesses some supernatural powers but uses it in negative mystical light. Ola Rotimi in his earlier works took the side of the masculinists as was the case with his contemporaries. In *The Gods Are Not to Blame* Queen Ojuola is presented as a woman who is incapacitated and can not protect herself

from the evil spell of the gods and even from the domination of her husband. In *Kurunmi*, Rotimi depicts Mosadiwin as a docile woman who has little or nothing to contribute to the society. Also Sikira and Mama Rashida in Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* are portrayed as women who are very inactive in life and who depend on their husband for their sustenance. They have been over subjugated by their husband, Rahman Lekoja- Brown who dishes out orders to them instead of engaging them in normal communication.

However, some scholars argue that many women have been 'liberated' and that women now occupy sensitive positions and have become a force to reckon with. They attributed this to liberalization of knowledge through western education. They contend that women can now contribute positively to societal issues and can be assertive and self-confident. This is as a result of the acquisition of western education which was formally the exclusive preserve of the male folk. Through this women now contribute positively by challenging some of the policies that could be detrimental to the women or even to the society at large. This has enabled them to occupy positions at both national and international levels. Commenting in this direction, Asanike states:

In the past, their lack of education could be regarded as the major reason for their poor placement in positions of authority. However the reverse is the case now, with their increased educational standards, public awareness and enlightenment which had contributed to their self-confidence and assertiveness in national issues. This has propelled women to vantage positions for more international and challenging national assignments which include ambassadorial postings, ministerial portfolios and as speakers in some state houses of Assembly. (148)

It is further argued by this view that due to this increased awareness and empowerment through education, women are challenging and winning the struggle against male stereotyping in literary field. Many women have taken up the mantle in literature to write and correct the erroneous

impression created against women. Not only female elites, some male writers, even of old breed, have also changed from their earlier perception of women to a new one which portrays women in a positive light. Onwueme in affirmation to this, comments that not all Nigerian male writers are chauvinistic. She cites Femi Osofisan as one male dramatist who has been fair in his creation of female characters'. She further gives example of such characters as Titubi/Moremi in *Morountodun*, Yajin and Funlola in *The Chartering and the Song*, Ibidun in *Red is the Freedom Road*, Alhaja in *Once Upon Four Robbers* and Olabisi in *Farewell To A Cannibal Rage* (115). Also using Ene Henshaw as another example, Worugji states that "Ene Henshaw unlike most African male authors has tried to give a positive image in his portrayal of female personality (141). In his *This Is Our Chance*, Princess Kudaro is depicted as one who has acquired western education and who applied it to the good of her people.

However, despite the advantages of acquiring western education by women, some critics view it as being nauseating and responsible for many matrimonial failures. They argue that some women when they become educationally empowered, no longer respect their husbands or societal norms which help to maintain peace in the homes/society. These critics argue that some women when they acquire western education allow it to swell their heads and challenge every laid down policy even the good ones. This has led to many family break down and societal strife. They therefore call for women elites to also study and imbibe the cultural norms/nuances of their respective societies so as to be truly liberated since those norms also have positive openings for women. Supporting this view, Sofola cautions:

I have always said that the only way that African women of today, with the European orientation which we call education, can be liberated, is to study the traditional system and the place of women as defined by it. There was no area of human endeavour in the traditional system where the women did not have a role to play. (James: 150)

Yerima Ahmed is another scholar who likes women education empowerment but abhors negative application of it by some women. In some of his works, he presents women characters who are educationally and economically empowered but who apply it negatively to their own detriment and that of the society. For examples in his plays *TheWives* and *TheSisters*, Tobi. The protagonist in *TheWives* is presented as a woman who is educationally and economically empowered but who uses her social status negatively by indulging in extra marital affairs with other men. In the same vein Funmi, the protagonist in *TheSisters*, is a woman elite who has acquired western education and is also economically advantaged but who has no sense of decorum. Although they married but the meaning of sanctity of marriage is nothing to them, therefore they become prey to men's licentiousness thereby calling their dignity to question.

In *ThePortraits* and *TheMirrorCracks*, the picture of women is equally depicted as ones who are incapable of maintaining good homes once they are educationally empowered. Tola and Tundun respectively are presented as 'women of letters' but who allow that to get into their heads and neglect their family duties thereby putting their family/marriage in the lurch. In Utoh-Ezejugh's *Our Wives Have Gone MadAgain!*, despite being a woman herself, Utoh exposes the inadequacies of empowered women and portrays how it is possible that women could even outsmart men in corruption and other negative activities when empowered. In the play, the women led by Chief Mrs Irene Okpiribe, who are empowered educationally and economically, throw all the decorum and positive attributes of femininity to the dust and perpetrate all manner of atrocity in order to acquire political power. In the private sphere, they are presented as despots and people without conscience who could even kill at the fall of a feather, and in public they are bestial and their bestiality far outweighs that of men. However, the playwright has, after

experimenting with both sides of feminism and masculinity, decided to adopt the theory of womanism or African feminism in her later works. African feminism (Womanism) seeks not to wrestle power from men and become the head or play equality with men in all spheres of human endeavour but to play complementary role to them and make men realize and respect the dignity of women as human beings. They advocate for this change of attitude through subtle means and not through violent revolution. Her later works such as *Nneoma: The African Doll's House*, *The Night of A Thousand Truths*, *Forest of Palm Trees*, *Calabash of Death*, and *Olamma*, all speak volume of this concept. From the foregoing it could be deduced that women education empowerment is necessary but the way it is applied in the family /society by some educated women needs to be re-assessed. While training in western education, women especially of African descent should not forget their root.

Economic Empowerment

This is another area where women have cause to challenge men. Feminist theorists have argued that because women are economically handicapped, they are equally backward and unable to challenge their situation thereby remaining subservient to men. They contend that if women are economically empowered, they would be able to surmount all the obstacles impeding their way to self actualization and assertiveness in some issues at family/societal level especially those that affect them. According to them, it is even forbidden for women to own property in most African societies. Oyewole observes that:

It is a taboo in most African countries for a woman to own property especially land or house. Even in the situations where land is bequeathed to a woman by her parents or relations, other male relations in his family still find ways of depriving the woman of what they feel is their exclusive property meant for the male sex. (66)

This concept also argues that even the development strategies often formulated and directed towards alleviating the sufferings of women especially the rural women, such interventions have failed to change the economic status of the women. This, they argue, is often because of the way it is designed and implemented sometimes by men who seek further exploitation and oppression of women. They posit that such formulations often focus on the women condition while other problems confronting women are over looked. Nneji comments:

Undoubtedly, some existing development strategies and grassroots interventions have failed to make a significant progress toward improving the status of women. This is because they focus on the use of welfare, poverty alleviation and managerial approaches and fail to address the underlying structural factors that perpetuate the oppression and exploitation of women. (370)

Feminist scholars also contend that colonialism acted to exacerbate women economic disempowerment by introducing economic changes that systematically excluded women from the source of economic production and subsequently from power structure of the society. In this direction, Kam Kah, noted that:

Economic changes introduced by colonial rule affected women's status and political roles in that they were not viable and educated to participate in political activities. Patriarchy became the order of the day. Colonialism also introduced rigid roles which excluded women from the power structure of society, church and government in many African countries. (106)

Feminism critics however argue that women participate on high proportion when compared to their male counterpart in the areas of food production, retail and wholesale marketing of goods at local and regional trade. This could provide economic empowerment for them. This also attests

to the viable roles women played in the past and still play in some communities (societies). “African women accounted and still account for a high proportion of the work involved in food supply: in farming itself, in processing drying and storage, and in both retail and wholesale marketing for local and regional trade (Agbaje: 167). These critics also contend that there is growing difference between the economically empowered women in urban areas and those of the rural areas. They posit that this difference needs to be resolved first in any discourses on women empowerment since this has contributed immensely to the oppression rural women (and urban poor women) endure. Onyemaechi Udumukwu affirms that, “for a start the discourse on women’s right needs to resolve the difference between the rural and the urban woman. This is inevitable because that difference itself has become the occasion for a ‘new kind of chain’ (79). Scholars of this view also criticize the World Bank and caution women on the kind of ‘equality’ being propagated by the bank which centres on women having access to the production of goods and services instead of focusing on the ability of women to contribute to the country’s GNP in terms of trade and dollar reserves. According to *Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN)*, gender equality in the context of World Bank means equality in “access and opportunities for women to participate in the production of goods and services than contribute to a given country’s GNP, trade and dollar reserves” (95).

Masculinist theorists argue further that men are now at disadvantaged positions in economy since most men are excluded from jobs that were traditionally male reserve. They contend that women now occupy well paid jobs than men and are making significant progress in professions and business where men used to dominate. Coward observes that:

...there is now more evidence of exclusion of men from traditionally female jobs than of the exclusion of women from traditionally male jobs. Neither are women any longer

confined to poorly paid work, but have made significant advances in the professions and business. (63)

Scholars further argue that men have become 'victims' of the feminist struggle and that it is no longer the issue of men advantage over women but women advantage over men. They lament the ugly situation this trend has brought in the lives of men and the society. This view therefore cautions against the continued economic empowerment of women. Faludi in her later works agrees that men have become victims of excesses of feminism, "men have in fact become victims of the many successes of feminism. It is no longer a simple matter of male advantage and female disadvantage: it is not always women who are now being disadvantaged" (53).

Critics also contend that when women are empowered economically, some of them use it against their fellow women who are economically and educationally backward. These women are known to oppress their less privileged fellows even more than the perceived male chauvinism. According to them, many instances abound where women especially the so called *nouveauriche* use their wealth to oppress their fellow women instead of channeling it to the course of women emancipation. All that the *nouveauriche* women care about is to make the money by all means sometimes by conniving with some corrupt men. In Onwueke's *Tell It To Women*, for example, the two women characters that are educated and well empowered: Ruth and Daisy do not show respect to their rural women counterparts. They treat them as illiterates and people who cannot reason for themselves unless they, the elites, do the thinking for them. That is why the rural women led by Adaku repudiate the elite women's totalitarian approach and this, no doubt deals a serious blow to the cause. Also in Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Who Owns This Coffin?*, Madam Ekwutosi and her accomplices break away from their spouses in the name of

fighting the women cause but at the end, their antics are discovered, they are not fighting for the overall interest of the women but for their selfish interests as they are found to be full of vices and debasement. This makes the narrator in the play ask "...Do some militant liberationists speak only for themselves or for the silent majority too?" (*WhoOwns...*17). It is pertinent to note that women economic empowerment, as necessary as it is, should be done with caution. Before such empowerment is done the person's (woman's) pedigree should be taken into consideration to avoid encouraging further oppression of the downtrodden women.

Gender in Socio-Religio Factors

Socio-Religio factors also pose challenges to gender agitators especially the feminist theorists who view such factors as also contributing to women marginalization. They claim that men use religion and other social variables to intimidate women and force them into compliance since disobedience or questioning of such doctrine is viewed as sacrilegious and attracts severe penalty. They argue that religion and culture work hand in hand to perpetuate patriarchy since they are invented by men to continue to propagate their ideologies which are in favour of women inferiority. This concept also opines that men document these things as history and pass them on to generations thereby ensuring continued male domination in the society. In their view, this documentation ensures the 'institutionalization of male domination over female' while women themselves are used to spread the story. Ezenwa-Ohaeto commenting on this, states:

It will not be wrong to say that the author of the Christian Bible, the Islamic Quran and the designers of African mythology were all men who had ensured that the content of their stories deeply institutionalized male dominance over female while using women (as story tellers) to further institutionalize their (men) stories (his-story: history) and women were made to be deeply involved in the exploitation and marginalization under the guise of tradition. (32)

Scholars arguing in this direction opine that religion as imported into Africa in the name of Christianity and Islam and as propagated by the colonialists no doubt, encouraged men's domination over women. They argue that the colonialists systematically destroyed African religion which had some openings for women, and planted their religion in order to ensure that women were schemed out of the colonialists' business. They further argued that those colonialists branded the African religion all sorts of names and associated it with evil practices only, of which all the adherents were already Satan's candidates and a passport to hell fire. According to them, the colonialists emphasized male dominance in their religion and recommended sexuality on the basis of man/woman relationship while any other relationship apart from that, was termed evil and that the heterosexual relationship must take place within marriage. Supporting this view, Waswa Kisiang'ani affirms that:

While Africa's traditional religious practices are summarized as pathways to Hell, volumes of work are produced on both Islam and Christianity. The dominant narrative of religion in Africa is the narrative of these two alien religions that have, without doubt, perfected women's marginalization and domination by men to a fine art. (15)

Stressing the argument further, he comments: "As we have indicated before, the Western conception of gender in its rigid form has been effectively reinforced by the Christian (and Muslim) religious texts. Both texts also emphasize man's domination of the woman while recommending that sexual act should only take place in a marriage and along heterosexual lines" (19). Soyinka, in his play: *The Trials of Brother Jero* also satirizes the use of religion to blindfold people. In the work, Brother Jero uses religion to hide his inadequacies. He owes Amope, Brother Chume's wife huge sums of money but in return promises to be shielding Amope from being beaten by her husband. Amope later challenges the authenticity of the

religious claim of Brother Jero and reveals that secret although she has suffered beaten in the hands of her husband.

On the other hand, some critics have argued that religion/social factors are not responsible for women marginalization but that some of these feminists are all out against the ordering of things in the universe during creation. They argue that women perceive the ordering of things according to ontological order as being lopsided and in favour of men. Therefore their major fight is against this system of ordering things in the society in line with creation which is subsumed in culture and tradition. Towing this line, Anyagu states:

In truth, however, the major fight of most feminists has been against patriarchy and the ordering of things in the society in obedience to culture and tradition which aid male dominance. Some scholars, while sympathizing with those feminists, see them as misdirected critics and view them with contempt. (32)

Scholars who share this view contend that the moral decadence and other vices prevalent in the society today are as a result of the neglect of religious institutions and disobedience to the laid down doctrines. They contend that it is because of this that women now engage in various nefarious activities without regard to morality thereby putting the society in crises. According to them women do all sorts of immoral acts in order to be economically empowered so as to challenge men. Observing this trend, Adelaja notes that:

It is sad to note that even girls in our higher institutions of learning have been in the business for some time. A survey across the nation's ivory towers indicate that the female hostels have been turned into a place for prostitution rather than centres of excellence, even middle men are there, demanding substantial of course fixed amounts of money from their clients. (152)

Also in their view, critics of this concept have attributed marital crises to disobedience to ontological orders by women. They argued that there is now high rate of marriage divorce than in the past which has led to the incidence of many children living with single parents. In affirmation to this, Mbaka laments: “The divorce rate has increased outrageously, and the consequence is that there are more children living with single parents today than there were previously” (105). However, some critics, while consenting to male leadership cautions men to always be ready to make some sacrifices by conceding certain things so that peace and justice will prevail. In her words, Omartian intones: “So while God gives the husband a position of leadership in relationship to his wife, He also requires the price of self-sacrifice from him” (98). Some feminists nevertheless agree that “avoiding conflict is more important than achieving equality. They, like their male counterparts use selective perceptions as a form of self-protection” (Rhode: 44).

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that feminists link women marginalization also to socio-religio factors but this assertion is also debunked by feminists critics who attribute the prevalent moral decadence in many African societies to lack of obedience to the ordering of things in the universe according to the supernatural forces. Therefore women are advised to adhere to religious ordinances and respect God-Head while men are cautioned to be tolerant and make sacrifices so that both genders can co-exist peacefully for societal progress and development.

Gender in Psychological Issues

Gender scholars have also linked some psychological issues to gender bias. While feminist critics argue that women suffer more psychological problems because of the trauma

they experience through oppression in the hands of men, masculinists on the other hand, contend that men are more traumatized because of the influence of feminism. Hence, genderism encompasses intricacies and aspects of both feminism and patriarchy.

Thus, Scholars with feminist view argue that women are better placed to discuss gender oppression because they experience it more than men whom they accuse of subjugating them. They argue that sometimes it is difficult to perceive that women are being oppressed because it is like a cage shaped by forces and barriers which are not by accident or occasional and therefore could be avoided, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one from whichever direction one wants to escape. Frye further affirms to this and comments:

It is now possible to grasp one of the reasons why oppression can be hard to see and recognize: one can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some goodwill without seeing the structure as a whole, and hence without seeing or being able to understand that one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged, whose motion and mobility are restricted, whose lives are shaped and reduced. (68)

Feminists also contend that gender bias works like racism in that those perpetrating it often times do not even know they are doing it simply because they happen to belong to the privileged class. According to this view, men often deny gender bias since they fail to recognize it because it does not affect their lives. That is why women are more sensitive to gender imbalance than men. In agreement with this view, Rhode asserts that:

Part of the explanation lies with selective perception. Men often deny bias because they fail to recognize it. They usually don't need to, it does not significantly affect their lives. As with race, part of the privilege of dominance is the privilege of accepting without noticing its benefits. For obvious reasons, women are more sensitive to gender inequality than men are, but some perceptual blinders persist among both sexes. (43)

Gender theorists also contend that men often unleash violence against women especially when they perceive the strides of progress being made by proactive women reformists. They usually perpetrate it through some women of passive character who easily become pawns in their hands. These women are used to sponsor other gullible women to rise against progressive women group sometimes through violent means. This is aptly captured in the characters of Anehe and Wa in Onwueme's *Wazobia* who are used as tools by the men in power to try to dethrone Wazobia. Also in *Emotan* by Salami, Eki is another character the men used to unleash violence against her fellow women. She engages in fighting her colleagues and inciting other women (market women) against Emotan their leader. Eki is known to be loquacious and a rumour-monger who fathoms and spreads all sorts of unfounded allegations against Emotan and even accuses her of consulting "oracles as she eats food" (58). Violence against women, according to the United Nations, refers to:

Any act of gender based violence- that is violence directed against a woman because she is a woman- that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. (1)

Bringing the declaration down home and in relation to Nigeria's peculiarities, the 2006 National Gender policy explains violence against women (in part) as reflecting "the extent to which women's human rights are threatened thereby leading to the voicelessness of women in many issues concerning and affecting their lives" (7).

Many scholars agree that men are, by nature, violent and they exhibit violence in various forms and levels according to the situation. Scholars like Seidle concedes that men are violent and that the experience of violence is central to their lives and something they may not do away with-

“indeed, for many men the experience of violence in one form or another plays a central part in their lives, something they constantly have to display and be prepared to display” (83). Also Morgan supports this view and states that “men are violent by nature” (70). Scully generalizes all men as “having a biological capacity for violence and rape” (57).

Masculinist theorists argue that the violence exhibited by men is often in defense of honour and to repel feminists attempt at emasculation of men. They argue that women have taken men for granted and therefore there is every need for men to display their masculinity. According to Polk, “extreme violence in defence of honour is definitely masculine, confrontational violence is distinctively masculine (or if performed by a woman, then she behaves like a man)” (188). In furtherance of the argument, masculinists posit that men are the ones being marginalized by women and as a response, men therefore express themselves by exhibiting toughness in order to maintain honour. According to Messerschmidt “The marginalized male expresses himself through a collective toughness, a masculine performance observed and cheered by his buddies, members of the macho street culture have to maintain a strong sense of honour” (186).

Critics of feminism argue that men are the ones most affected, psychologically by the feminist movement which has aided men unemployment while women are employed and therefore become the breadwinners. They contend that this has become the ultimate humiliation men suffer since they now play subaltern role by doing housework while their wives become suppliers of household needs. Bernard comments that “for the workless” doing housework while being supported by a working wife was “the ultimate humiliation” (8). They further argue that men are now made to perform duties meant for women and also to satisfy women’s appetite. Men now engage in ‘stripping’ business to satisfy women appetite and also as a form of employment. Talman laments that the spectacular masculinity of the 1990s is no longer

articulated in the battlefield or car races, but, rather, in drag or strip shows, where unemployed and ‘incompetent males’ perform to satisfy female appetite (12). In Utoh-Ezeajugh’s *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!*, men are presented as being marginalized and oppressed by women. They suffer all sorts of humiliation from the hands of women including domestic violence and sexual abuse. Men are depicted as being incapacitated and disempowered and therefore unable to fend for themselves and household. The text indeed, is a portrayal or prophecy of what should be expected if women feminists eventually take over power from men.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that neither extreme feminism nor masculinity posses the magic wand needed to bring or enthrone gender equality in the society. Each of the concepts has its major flaws which are detrimental to the progress of the society if allowed to thrive alone. Therefore there is need to seek for a theory/theories that could strike a balance between the two extremes of feminism and masculinity so that there would be mutual respect and co-existence between the genders.

This study, having taken a critical look at the various contentions and postulations, anchors on Womanism or African gender theory (Complementarity) which seeks to strike a balance between the two dominant gender movements. Womanism does not advocate for male domination or chauvinism but for men to recognize and treat women with respect and give them what is due to them. Womanism advocates for equity and social justice. It is not against women agitation for liberation but it calls for caution and decorum in the struggle so as not to disrupt social order and encourage immorality and other social vices. A clearer view of Nigerian female dramatists/playwrights showing the diversities and ramifications of gender as a phenomenon are reflected in their representations in the selected creative works as presented here in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

Presentation and Description of Analyses

3.1: Tess Onwueme: Bio-data and Background

Drawing from the blurbs of her plays; *Tell it to Women*, *The Reign of Wazobia* and *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen* published in 1995 and 2000 respectively, Tess Onwueme was born in Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State, Nigeria. She is married with five children. She attended University of Ife from where she obtained her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in 1979 and 1982 respectively. She also obtained her doctorate degree (PhD) from the University of Benin, Nigeria in 1987. She taught in many universities in Nigeria and America before she was appointed Distinguished Professor of Cultural Diversity and Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, Wisconsin where she currently works.

Tess Onwueme is widely acclaimed as one of the most prolific female writers in Africa who uses her works to champion the cause of women and the proper application of this course to engender peaceful co-existence among men and women for a better society. She is one of those female writers in Africa who resent the kind of western feminist ideology and refuse to be hoodwinked into chanting women marginalization without getting to the root of the fundamental conflict with a view to resolving it. According to Amuta, “Onwueme is not fixated or merely conditioned by the fashionable stance of presenting the female angle” (53). She is one of the few female writers to have emerged in the literary circle in Nigeria in the advent of written literature. Thus she came into prominence with her literary works which address the issues of male stereotyping which were quite dominant in most literary works of that time, and at the same time project the women problem as engendered by such male chauvinism. In her literary

creativity she seeks to jettison male chauvinism and excessive feminism with a view to striking a balance between the two for a sustainable development. Having travelled widely and thus widely experienced, she has passed the stage of literary experiment as observed in her earlier works such as *The Broken Calabash*, to the stage of assertiveness in which she states her stand on the nagging issues clearly.

Tess Onwueme is an internationally acclaimed writer who has won many laurels as one of Africa's finest women writers. In 1994 she received the Nigerian Achievement Award from Network Nigeria, Inc. which named her Nigerian Achiever of the year in Literature. It is also glaring to note that it was that same year she was conferred a distinguished professor of cultural diversity, and professor of English, at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. She was the first to occupy such post since it was only created a year earlier. She was also awarded the Martin Luther King/ Caesar Chavez Fellowship at Wayne State, U.S.A in 1989 after the premiere of her play; *The Broken Calabash* at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. One of her plays; *The Desert Encroaches* also won the Association of Nigerian Authors contest for drama in 1985 and this was where her fame as a writer with exceptional attributes began. What is central to Onwueme's plays is a call for concerted effort at encouraging social change and inculcating new ideas through conscientization processes. She has attended many international conferences and seminars where she presented papers. In 1998 she was at Sweden where she participated on UNESCO organized roundtable discussion on global culture, a conference she so much cherished and described as prestigious gathering of intellectuals and global policy-makers on this subject of culture which has become her life cultural studies.

Onwueme has (among others) the following creative works: *No Vacancy* (2005), *What Mama said* (2003) *Then She said it*(2002), *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen* (2000), *Tell it to*

Women (1997), *The Missing Face* (1997), *Three Plays* (1993), *Legacies* (1989), *The Reign of Wazobia* (1988), *Mirror for Campus* (1987) *Ban Empty Barn and other Plays* (1986), *The Desert Encroaches* (1985), *The Broken Calabash* (1984), *A Hen Too Soon* (1983), and *Why The Elephant Has No Butt*, (2000) a novel.

3.2 Tess Onwueme's *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*

Shakara: Dance Hall Queen was published in 2000 and it is basically about two classes of women: the nouveau-riche and the destitute. It is about the condition of women who are empowered and those who are not. Literarily, the play is about a young teenage girl Shakara (Nwaebuni) who detests poverty and is set to commit every atrocity in order to overcome her condition. In her quest to get rich quick she drops out of school to engage in prostitution so as to make quick money. She hates her mother because of destitution and blames her for not being like other women who “made it”. In her desperation, she wishes that her mother should be exchanged with Madam Kofo who had made it. Because her mother is poor, she sees her as having no wisdom and therefore does not heed to her advice. She finds excuse for her promiscuity on the ground of destitution just as her elder sister Kechi does with religious extremism.

SHAKARA: (*Charged*) But what? What Mama? I'm tired of hearing but – but – but! How can anyone go through life like this? Why should I be so young and so ashamed of myself? Yes, I am! And for good reasons too. When am I ever going to have the chance to live like my mates? Eh! Do you know how often I get taunted by other kids about my old worn out second hand clothes? (24).

KECHI: Don't you dare play with my Lord! Satan! Away with you! Out of my sight you Born Again Pagan! (Kechi Pulls a piece of firewood from the pile and aims it at her sister) (31).

Shakara in her bid to get rich quick also sets out to indulge in illicit drug business against her mother's advice but is nabbed before she could even begin. Also presented on the same matrix but in opposite direction is Dupe, Shakara's friend who is the daughter of the well – to – do, Madam Kofo. Dupe despite having all the goodies of life still detests her mother on the ground that she (her mother) does not care for her but devotes most of her time to business. She also hates her mother on the ground that she hid the identity of her (Dupe's) father from her. Paradoxically, Dupe wishes that Omesiete, Shakara's mother could be her mother while her mother – Madam Kofo becomes Shakara's mother.

DUPE: You have mine. Take her. And please, keep the change. All I want is to be a thousand miles away from that woman.

SHAKARA: I wish I could be near (*Giggling*) You have mine. But sorry. No change to take or keep. You know her. More wretched than a church rat. Just nothing... to keep. What is there to keep in poverty? And in walking misery such as my mother? What is there to keep? Nothing, Dupe. So each day you wake up, count your blessings (8).

Dupe, also like her friend, Shakara, is a wayward girl. She is also rebellious and stubborn too. She truly loves Omesiete, Shakara's mother because she was the person who nurtured her when she was very young. Because of her ardent hatred for her mother, she is the one to report the illicit business of madam Kofo, her mother, to the new Commissioner of Police which eventually leads to the arrest and death of Madam Kofo.

Madam Kofo and Omesiete are also two contrasting characters presented in the play. Both of them although having contrasting pedigree yet have some similar background. Madam Kofo dropped out of school because of unwanted pregnancy just like Omesiete who was

deceived out of school by her erstwhile husband. Both of them came from very poor background and despite their parents determination to train them at any level in education, they erred by not taking education serious. The play equally presents the dialectics of life between the rich and the poor women. Madam Kofo is rich while Omesiete is poor. Despite being older than her, Madam Kofo treats Omesiete like her maid and oppresses her from every angle. In the play, Omesiete is presented as the golden hen that lays the golden egg yet she suffers in penury. She is employed by Madam Kofo to tend to her 'holy weed' which she does with dexterity yet instead of appreciation, she is constantly met with threats from Madam Kofo. She is also presented as a woman with integrity who has learnt her lessons and would not demean herself esteem no matter the odd. She rejects Madam Kofo's offer for business partnership despite her state of abject poverty because the business is illicit and decides to quit the shanty accommodation instead of joining the illicit trade.

OMESIETE: (*Walking tall*) You may use me in any other way, but certainly not in this way
 Madam. I am poor. I know that I am very, very poor. But Madam, I can not be anything
 else but me. Madam, I cannot leave my own dance to dance somebody else's dance.
 Can't you see? (126).

MADAM KOFO: If you do not accept, be ready to move out of this place. Today! Not one
 more day! Not one more day! Understand! (127).

Omesiete thus decides to toe the path of honour and suffer depravity alongside her obedient daughter, Kechi. It is noteworthy that she is the one who eventually takes care of Madam Kofo's daughter, Dupe when she (Madam Kofo) finally dies in the play, her daughter Shakara is also released to her.

Madam Kofo, on the other hand is presented in the play as one who flouts her wealth around and who is interested only in herself. She is too self centered and has no room for charity. In the play, she oppresses Omesiete, her fellow woman and would not allow her a breathing space. She treats her like a rag despite all the benefits she derives from her including looking after her daughter, Dupe, when she is away on business trip. Even this kind gesture is also misinterpreted by Madam Kofo to mean that Omesiete has bewitched her daughter (Dupe) and she would not want Dupe to have anything in common with her (Omesiete) family because of poverty. She believes in class distinction and wants her daughter to go after their likes. She perceives the daughter of Omesiete (Shakara) as being responsible for her daughter's unbecoming attitude and would not see any blame on herself for not given any attention to her daughter's upbringing.

MADAM KOFO: Ahn no! Stop right there! Leave my innocent child alone. You people are so determined to spoil her ... Ruin my poor baby for me. Eh? (131)

Apart from dealing in illicit business of drug trafficking, Madam Kofo is also presented as a wayward lady and a woman who indulges in excessive alcohol consumption. She cherishes freedom as a single parent and does not see anything good in marriage but runs to men friends whenever she is in trouble or quarrels with her daughter. She fails to see the need for husband in order to maintain a good home and give good parentage to her daughter who yearns for a father. She is also presented as a corrupt business woman who has all the go-getter attitudes in her. She is ready and willing to offer bribe or any other gratification to the law enforcement officers or concerned authorities in order to get whatever she needs. She has no room for decorum and sets bad example for the children. Thus her daughter and Shakara emulate her in her habit of drinking

and smoking. Her death is significant in the sense that it is a reward for cruelty and a big lesson for those who would like to follow her footsteps.

The dialectics of good and bad on the issue of men/ women relationship are also highlighted in the play. On one hand, men are presented as good and caring, and also determined to rid the society of corruption and other malpractices. The Character, Shanka was the one who gave succor to Madam Kofo when her parents sent her away because of her unwanted pregnancy. He sheltered her and it was from there that she made her connections. He has been of immense help to Madam Kofo and acts as foster father to Dupe and helps calm nerves whenever Madam Kofo is embroiled in fiasco with her daughter. He is also portrayed as a man who is very serious with his job and who would not allow personal interest to stand on his way of justice. Despite his intimacy with Madam Kofo, he still has the courage to lead the team of Policemen that arrested her. Shanka would not accept any bribe nor agree to any term for settlement apart from those prescribed by law.

On the other hand man is presented as corrupt and incapable of maintaining discipline. The Character, Chief Chairman aptly represents this. He is the big wig behind Madam Kofo's atrocities since he gets gratifications from her in the form of sex and money. As a law enforcement officer, he uses his position to shield her from being arrested by the other officers. He is even involved in the packaging and sale of the drugs. Whenever a new Commissioner of Police is appointed, he would find a way of penetrating him by bribery and thus continue to protect their illicit business. He is also presented as a poor family man who did not train his children well. One of his sons; Prince Justice is the one who took excess alcohol and slept off after having illicit sex with Dupe. When he is arrested by the police, he is let off the hook when they realize that he is the son of their boss-Justice (Chief Chairman). *Shakara: Dance Hall*

Queen highlights the gender spirit of the elite class women and destitute women and the absence of the power of collectivism in achieving a popular goal of gender balancing. It highlights the dichotomy between the rich/ educated women and the poor / illiterate women and how it is difficult to blend them together in the committed struggle for women liberation. The elite class

women oppress the poor women and the poor or less privileged women view the elite women with contempt and suspicion.

OMESIETE: But herself! Ha! The rich and powerful ones! Who would have told me that a woman like me would turn out to be the thorn in my flesh? (41).

The play also highlights the need for proper parentage in the good upbringing of children since the two examples of single parenting on the parts of the elite, and less privileged women have failed.

3.3 Julie Okoh: Bio-data and Background

From available information, Juliana Omonukpon Omoifo Okoh was born at Ubiaja, Esan East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria on 5th August, 1947. Her father, Chief Augustine Azamuoisa Omoifo was a civil servant who served under the colonial masters hence he saw the need for proper education of his daughter(Julie). Young Julie started her primary school education at Sacred Heart Demonstration Primary School, Ubiaja but later transferred St Benedict's Primary School from where she obtained her First School Leaving Certificate. She subsequently gained admission into Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School, Uromi from where she got five credits in West African School Certificate Examination in 1966.

She had a stint at Ministry of External Affairs, Lagos. While working there, she enrolled for G.C.E ordinary level and passed all her papers. Thereafter, she also enrolled for G.C.E Advanced level and also cleared all her papers. Following this feat, her employers sent her to the Federal Training Centre, Lagos as a bilingual secretary. While in that training she was able to secure an admission, with tuition waiver and work-study Aid, to study in the United States of America. She graduated with B.A(French and English literature) from Loyola University, Chicago, U.S.A in 1976. She also obtained her M.A. (French Literature) from the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada in 1979 and PhD in Francophone/Anglophone Theatre and Drama (1991) from the University of Bordeaux¹¹¹, Bordeaux, France.

Professor Juliana Okoh is an astute lecturer with more than thirty five years teaching and research experience cutting across Nigeria, Canada, France, and the USA. She is a professor of Theatre Theory and Criticism from 2004 to present. She was a Fulbright Fellow at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, USA (2000-2001), Guest Lecturer, University of Massachusetts at Amherst USA (June, 2001), Head Panel Discussant, BTN Kent State University, Ohio, USA (July, 2004), Panel Discussant, “Contemporary Women Playwrights” American Society of Theatre, and so on. She has performed stage reading of her plays: *In the Fullness of Time*, *Edewede*, and *Aisha*, in Broadway, New York; Winston Salem City, North Carolina and Smith College, Northampton, all in USA and France, in the area of women and cultural studies.

Currently Julie Okoh is a playwright, an educator and a social activist. She has taught courses in Dramatic Theory and Criticism, Playwriting, Comparative Literature, Feminist Theatre, and Women and Cultural Studies. Her published works include: *Mask* (1988), *The Mannequins* (2000), *Who Can Fight the Gods?* (2002), *Trials* (2008), *Closed Doors* (2007), *Who*

is Afraid of Job Interview?, *A Haunting Past* (2009), *A Man of the World* (2013), *A Cry for Democracy From a Mustered Seed: Story of IPS* (2015) and *Throes of Leadership*. She also has over forty published articles on theatre, and social, political, cultural and gender issues in both French and English languages in local and international journals. Professor Julie Okoh has also served in administrative capacity as co-ordinator: Preparatory French Certificate Programme, HOD, Department of Creative Arts, Member Convocation Ceremony Committee, Faculty Representative in various committees/Boards, Post Graduate Programme Committee, Director, Institute of Arts and Culture, among others. She is also a member and Fellow of many notable professional bodies and associations and has many honours and awards to her credit. Professor Julie Okoh is happily married to Professor J.D.Okoh and the marriage is blessed with four children and four grand-children.

3.4 Analysis of Julie Okoh's *Our Wife Forever*

Our Wife Forever is a play predicated on the conflict of culture between the past and the present as it affects women who have lost their husband to the cold hand of death. It is basically about the inhuman treatments that widows undergo in Africa and other parts of the world, and how these obstacles should be dismantled by sheer dint of courage and determination, including empowerment on the part of women. It portrays the dark side of culture in a patriarchal system where widows are made to undergo various forms of excruciating pains in order to establish their level of innocence or otherwise in the death of their husbands. It also portrays the nature of the rights of inheritance in a male dominated patriarchal system where women are not allowed to inherit property. The play also dramatizes the issue of love in marriage and the need to allow one make a decision or chose whom to marry. Apart from highlighting the need for will-writing especially on the part of men, the play also lights other issues affecting widows in the society

such as rape, financial predicament and defamation of character as well as complicity of older women in the perpetration of such evil acts.

Literary, the play is about a woman named Victoria who was married to Hector. Her husband Hector has just died and she is in widowhood state where she bemoans the loss of her husband and the irritating attitude of her husband's relations as typified by Thomas. She is still in this pensive mood coupled with her stomach problem, when her husband's bosom friend; Felix, arrives. They talk on a number of issues pertaining to her condition as a widow and through this exposition, the ill-treatment she faces as a widow is craftily established.

FELIX: You've never really told me about your experience of widow hood rites. What exactly did they do to you?

VICTORIA: Horrible, horrible things! Any time I remember them, I feel anger inside me. I feel sick. I feel like going to crush the head of all those who subjected me to those inhuman ordeals (20).

This phase also sees the introduction of Thomas; Victoria's brother In-law who is the rightful person to "inherit" her according to tradition. Victoria is highly determined to repel the advances of Thomas no matter what custom or tradition says. This segment of the play also provides the reader with some comic relief. Victoria has just fallen to the floor because of her stomach ache, Felix is about lifting her up to help her to the seat, and at that particular point in time, Thomas enters and sees Felix almost on top of Victoria. He could not believe what he sees. He accuses Felix of meddling with his intentions. After some arguments, he is asked by Victoria to leave. He tactically leaves but they are oblivious that he is eavesdropping. When he is satisfied that he has heard enough, he bursts again into the house in the pretence that he forgot his cap.

THOMAS:I forgot my cap. That's it over there. By the way, if you people think you can deceive me, you are fooling yourselves. *(Starts to mimic Felix)* "If you need me, I will not abandon you." All right, we shall see.

VICTORIA: So, you were eavesdropping on me. Why don't you mind your own business? (34).

Thomas is a typical traditionalist and someone who does not give up easily on a course he decides to pursue. Despite insults meted out to him by Victoria, he persists. He keeps surveillance on Victoria through her kids and goes to the house to dish out orders despite protest from Victoria. He sees Felix as a rival and one who is determined to snatch his late brother's wife from him. Thus he draws a battle line between him and Felix on one hand and him and Victoria on the other. At one time he went into Victoria's home and carted away all the home appliances and other property of his later brother, Hector. He tries hard and applies every trick to woo Victoria to his side but does not succeed since Victoria even tells him to his face she does not love him. When he becomes fully convinced she can not make up her mind in his favour, he resorts to character defamation and threat. This idea also does not work out for him. He decides to use charm on Victoria in order to seduce her. He nearly succeeds but for the timely intervention of Faith, Victoria's maid.

THOMAS:*(He blows out some air)* Sleep. I say sleep-sleep-sleep! *(She remains motionless. He removes his trousers, spreads her legs apart and is almost about raping her).*

VICTORIA:*(Struggling feebly, screams.)* Jesus! Help! Help! Help-oh-oh-oh! Help!.

(While both of them keep on struggling, Faith comes in running, stops suddenly, opens her mouth widely, her eyes distended with bewilderment. Runs off only to run back almost immediately brandishing an axe).

FAITH: You rap-rap-rap-rap-rapist! (74-75.)

At last he decides to eject Victoria out of the house and issues her a warning to pack out since she refused to be their wife by not re-marrying him (Thomas.)

Victoria remains unshaken of the threat and with the help of her late husband's friend, Felix, they are able to engage the services of a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) who is Felix and Hector's school mate. It is worth note that Thomas, out of jealousy, has included the name of Felix in the suit and this also accounted for the more reason why Felix resolves to pursue the case to a logical conclusion no matter the odds. So the court case progresses and Victoria is not certain whether they will win the case or not because of the seeming corruption in the judiciary since Thomas and his people could use their wealth to bribe the jury.

However, with the help of the SAN and his colleagues, the case is ruled in favour of Victoria and therefore the house and other property are no longer to be sold nor acquired by Thomas and his relations. That marks another defeat of culture by modernity. The right of inheritance as stipulated by culture is thereby defeated. Following this victory, Victoria and Felix now have a common bond and share intimate relationship which later blossomed into marriage. Victoria is now free to marry whoever she loves and desires, not being coerced into entering marriage institution by cultural dictates. This is another area modernity triumphs over cultural inhibitions. Due to the court ruling, Victoria not only secures right to own property but also her right as a person and human being capable of making independent decisions. Her assent to marry Felix is also welcomed by her children who are willing to have "uncle Felix" as their step father. Felix undertakes to treat Victoria as his partner and not as a subordinate and share equal responsibility with her in every task.

Finally, the play is a feminist work that underscores the need for women to fight for their right in the face of subjugation and oppression by men in a patriarchal system that has culture as dominant ideology, the culture, nevertheless is biased in favour of men. It is a call for equality between men and women.

3.5 Irene Salami: Bio-data and Background

From the blurbs of her plays, *Sweet Revenge*, and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, and the Internet (<http://dinfa..>) Irene Isoken Oronsaye Salami hails from Edo State, Nigeria. She is a professor of African Drama, Women and cultural studies and children's theatre at the University of Jos, Nigeria. She is the Head of Department, Theatre and Communication Arts in the same university. She has published many plays and has been acknowledged as one of the most dynamic and phenomenal female playwrights in Nigeria. Most of her recent plays deal on gender issues, with women ideological domination as their thematic preoccupation. She has written and presented many papers at seminar and conferences both nationally and internationally. She is one of the most acclaimed third generation female playwrights in Nigeria and a vanguard of women liberation. Some of her published works include: *Emotan (A Benin Heroine)*, *Plays for Junior (An anthology of nine short plays)* *Queen Sisters (Ubi and Ewere)*, *More Than Dancing*, and *Idia the Warrior Queen of Benin*.

3.6 Analysis of Irene Salami's *Sweet Revenge*

The play *Sweet Revenge* deals with the gender issues of women subjugation by men and women resistance to such subjugation and successful attempt at subverting it. It is a play that touches on gender related issues ranging from marriage disappointment, male chauvinism, to female

enthronement. The play is a clarion call for women to unite in order to liberate themselves from male dictatorship and oppression.

Literary speaking, *Sweet Revenge* is about Aisosa, a medical doctor wife of Sota Ojo who abandons her medical practice in obedience to her husband while he travels abroad in search of the Golden Fleece.

Sota left for London on a four –year PhD programme with a firm promise to his wife that he would return immediately after successful completion of the programme. On reaching England, things began to change, He was carried away by the grandeur of the developed countries and even after successful completion of his programme, he preferred to stay back in London. He has now lived in London for eight years and has even got married to Cheryl, a white lady who has a child for him. Sota is utterly carried away by the euphoria of the Western world that he almost forgot about his home-wife and children. The monthly allowance he promised his wife, Aisosa, is not forthcoming neither does he care to enquire after his Nigerian family welfare. It happens that the country is returning to democracy and the senatorial seat for Sota's constituency is zoned to his local Government and his people wrote requesting him to come home and contest.

SOTA(He reads the mail further)

The senatorial seat has been zoned to our Local Government. You are our best choice for this position, the best suited for it. You have always written to us about the need for good governance, you fought for it from over there, now return home to us immediately. You belong here (1-2).

So, with this invitation, Sota confers with his friend Regie who also lives in London and they convince his expatriate wife-Cheryl on the need for him to answer the call. Regie and Cheryl try to drill him on the need to fight for women liberation in Nigeria when he eventually becomes a senator but Sota continues to express pessimism on his ability to do that.

REGIE: That is why you are going there. Sota you are going there to join others to change things.

Change attitudes, change values positively. You are going for change Sota.

SOTA: Changes don't happen so fast. There are other things we must consider.

CHERYL: What do you mean? Nothing concrete beyond promises you mean? I thought you said that men and women fought for your country's return to democracy, so why sideline the women? (10).

Sota eventually sets out on the mission of representing his people in the senate.

When he finally arrives in Nigeria, he becomes disgusted with almost everything he sees at his house including his Nigerian wife- Aisosa. He sees her as a bore and wants to get rid of the marriage by all means probably to pave way for his British wife to arrive. He becomes a complainant and would complain and jeer at his wife at the slightest mistake. He would complain about her size, about her costume, about her food, about her children even about her sex life. This is despite the fact that Aisosa is managing alone to keep the family from the money she gets from her parents. She even used part of the money to build a house for the family. This also is a source of worry for Sota. She, it was, who mobilized the women and convinced the men to vote for Sota. He would appreciate none of these instead he thinks he won the election because of his prowess and good disposition and that it was the men who saw to his success.

SOTA: Nosa, I really appreciate your contribution to the success of my election as a senator.

NOSA: Well, you should show your appreciation to our wives, Aisosa and Ede mobilized the entire women of our senatorial zone and they responded in solidarity (18).

Sota as a senator begins to see himself as not fit for people like Aisosa in terms of social standing. He looks down on her and would not take her along to Abuja because of his new social status. Despite warnings and advice by his friend Nosa, Sota goes ahead to discard Aisosa and goes to live at Abuja as a senator of the Federal Republic. He eventually brings his British wife-Cheryl and daughter Rieme, to live with.

This is one of the greatest mistakes he made. Meanwhile, Aisosa who is down with tears because of the ill treatment meted on her by her erstwhile husband- Sota begins to gather herself again and sought for legitimate means to survive. Their friends Nosa and Ede his wife come to her assistance and take her to Abuja. Aisosa searches for employment but is not lucky to secure one because of her long absence from the medical practice but eventually she is able to get one in which she is handsomely rewarded:

AISSOSA: The usual thing! ‘You’ve done very well, but you’ve been out of practice for too long.

We don’t want women above 30 years for this job’, (30).

AISSOSA: Ede, surprise, surprise! I have a job. Remember I was offering voluntary services at the Benin Branch of National Medical Research Centre? Well the National Director was the chairperson of the interview panel. He gave me a job there straight away (32).

With this job, Aisosa becomes revived again. She is not only offered jumbo pay but paid arrears also which enables her to settle all her outstanding debts. She is gradually becoming a fulfilled woman and the memories of the past are fast fading.

As the play progresses we see where Cheryl eventually discovers that Sota has another wife in Nigeria. Through her dexterity, she is able to trace Aisosa and get the full jist of Sota Ojo's pranks. Being an honest woman, Cheryl would not have any nonsense from Sota. So after confrontation with him, she calls it quit with the marriage and confiscates the ten million pounds Sota deposited in her London bank account. She seeks the opinion of Aisosa on the disbursement of the money but Aisosa advises her to return the money to Nigerian government. Cheryl on return to her country, London seeks for a way to compensate Aisosa for her (Cheryl) seeming complicity in the saga. To this end, she is able to secure an international award for Aisosa which propels the latter into fame.

Back to Sota Ojo's legislative business, he has fallen apart with the women of his constituency who voted him into power. When they pay him a visit at Abuja, in his usual pomposity, he treats them with disdain and even goes ahead to invite the police to have them locked up:

SOTA:I have no time for cheap humour, women. Get off my premises or you face the consequences (46).

POWER:That was how the policemen came and arrested us charging us with disturbance of peace and trespass of private property. (47-48).

After this incident, the women go back home and remobilize and recall him from the senate. It is from this point that his travails reach crescendo and marks the turning point in his life. With this

unfortunate incident, he becomes pauperized and has all his property sold. The worst is that none of his close associates could help him. It is only Regie and Nosa who offer to assist but he rejects their advice and is still full of himself and even goes ahead to accuse Nosa of wife-snatcher.

With the vacancy created by his recall, Aisosa is eventually chosen by the women to fill the gap because of her outstanding qualities. Initially she is reluctant to accept the offer because of what the society would say. But with much encouragement and persuasion from the women, she eventually agrees. She performs her legislative duties so well that she is elected for the second term not only as a senator but a senate president with honour and awards. Her erstwhile husband Sota later come calling. He swallows the humble pie and begs Sosa for reconciliation which she turns down.

SOTA: Don't sound so unforgiving. Even God forgives us our sins when we ask forgiveness (83).

AISOSA: That is true. We had wonderful moments but you blew it all, our lives together ended when you left for England several years ago. Sota, you know what? You can't put back the hand of the clock, no matter how hard you try (84).

His erstwhile friend in Diaspora- Regie is later made a minister of petroleum resources in the Federal Republic.

3.7 Julie Umukoro: Bio-data and Background.

Drawing from online account, Professor Julie Umukoro hails from Ase in Ndokwa Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. She attended St Mary Magdalene Grammar School, Ashaka (1971-1975) where as President of the Dramatic Society

the first seed of theatre was sown in her life. In 1980, she won the Oyo State Council for Arts and Culture Literary Prize for both drama and poetry during the Oyo State Festival of Arts and Culture (OSAFAC80). She holds a Diploma in Theatre Arts from the University of Ibadan (1982) a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts from same institution (1986), a Master of Arts in English Studies from the University of Port –Harcourt (1996) and a Doctorate Degree in Theatre Arts from the University of Ibadan (2004).

Prof. Julie Umukoro is a Fulbright Scholar, a Professor of Theatre Arts and former Head of Department of Theatre Arts, University of PortHarcourt, Nigeria. As a social activist, a philanthropist and a leading voice in the campaign against women marginalization, she is among the front-liners in the campaign to promote the girl-child education. With a background in theatre and a passion for semiotic-studies, she has over the years carried out research on aspects of materials culture, particularly in the study of costumes and artifacts in non verbal communication. With numerous contributions of published articles in journals as well as books, she has carved a niche for herself in the academia. She is an accomplished dramatist and literary critic. Some of her published works include *Marriage Coup*, and *Adam's Family*. She is happily married and the marriage is blessed with children.

3.8 Presentation of Julie Umukoro's *Adam's Family*

Adam's Family is a play that dramatizes the plight of middle class families in Nigeria. It is a play that attempts to show – case the travails of middle class workers in a country that is on transit and how men and women relate in the struggle for survival beginning with the family. It explores the relationship that exists between husband and wife- and by extension, men and women in a society that is corrupt and insensitive to the yearnings and aspirations of her

citizenry. The play mirrors the family comprising man, woman and children as they inter –relate with one another (especially the man and woman) in the committed struggle for survival. It goes further to ex-ray the state of a non-working class woman- a house wife, a woman that is not empowered educationally or otherwise but who has been properly exposed to modernity. The play indirectly highlights a family that is patriarchal in nature and the condition and attitude of the women within the system.

On the surface, the play is about Micky Adams who travels to the United Kingdom and lived with his family for ten years. Because of his love for his country Nigeria, he returns to contribute his quota to the country's development. As a middle – class Nigerian, he is faced with enormous challenges as a result of bad leadership on the part of government. The irony of it, is that despite his determination to maintain self integrity and see how he could help reform the country through such virtues, no one seemed to notice as corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. His immediate family would also wish him to join the bandwagon but he refused and persisted.

Through series of incidents which formed the plot, the playwright was able to put across the message of corruption and ineptitude leadership in Nigeria and the struggle of few honest people to survive in the system despite all odds. Although the playwright might not have set out to premise her work on gender issues in particular, yet the thematic preoccupation aptly captures the issue of man –woman complementarity known as Womanism in feminist postulations. This will be further treated in the course of this work. The issue of corruption induced by adult model which boldly influence teenagers is also treated. Plotting of the play is episodic in nature to tarry with the title and predominant theme since happenings or incidents in the family do not occur

sequentially. A cursory look at the interaction between the lead characters: Miky Adams and Janny Adams will perhaps, throw more light on the gender matter.

Miky Adams no doubt plays the role of the head of the family (leadership) as man but his wife while acknowledging this, still observes inadequacies on his leadership and often wishes to complement him. But that chauvinistic attitude persists in him and he would sometimes take decision without seeking his wife's opinion

AUNTIE TERRY: So much noise making in this house, one can't even have a simple afternoon nap.

DAD: Hey woman, stop your sanctimonious Chatter, this is my house and I have every right to be noisy if I want. I'm the head of this family and so I wield control over the Adam's family. The hour of reckoning is here and I will preside over it (101-102).

DAD: It's your duty to keep the home in order.

MUM: Oh, as the breadwinner you go out to work and I stay home. Staying home means taking the blame for everything (55).

The issue of corruption and leadership failure on man's side is also depicted on the scene where Miky's children refer to him as a fake dad despite his struggle to live above board. Male despotic tendencies also feature in the character of Miky Adams as he once exhibited it by beating his wife in front of his children.

ALICE:M-UK-ala Adam and not Miky Adam?

VICKY:Then Dad is a fake Daddy.

ALICE: No way mum, I don't believe that; not with the act of hooliganism he put just now.

VICKY: He is simply a bully (58).

It is noteworthy here that despite this act of hooliganism, Janny Adams would not demean her husband by castigating him before the children in order to win sympathy. She still preserves his self esteem before them and wants the children to treat their father with due respect. This is act of complementarity, she did not want to be treated in Isolation with the husband but for both of them to be recognized and respected as their parent. She recognized the fact that she could not go it alone neither could her husband, because such may spell doom for the progress of the family.

MUM: No, my love. He isn't fake. He is a kind and loving father.

ALICE: I hate him.

MUM: No, my daughters. In fact, your father is the finest and kindest man I have ever known.

He's gradually becoming dehumanized by the harsh realities of the Nigerian society. He is a struggling man and a man of principle to the core. For all the ten years we spent in Britain he never lifted his fingers against me (58-59).

For better understanding and appreciation of the play, the scenario in Adam's family can be equated with the typical middle class Nigerian family and the struggle of woman hood to create and maintain decorum. It is a fact that many Nigerian women of average social class still recognize the role of their husbands as the leaders and would sacrifice even their freedom to ensure peace and progress. Sometimes such women are faced with challenges often emanating from friends or relations who would cajole them for being submissive. They would remind

them about their right to freedom and the need to be assertive or at least secure equal status with their husbands. Auntie Terry in the play exemplifies this:

AUNTIE TERRY: What are you fretting about, little sister?

MUM: Fretting over what Micky will think of me finding this place in disarray.

AUNTIE TERRY: You certainly think the world of that husband of yours? Micky this! Micky that! Don't you ever have an opinion?

MUM: I don't give a damn, what you think!.

AUNTIE TERRY: Don't give a damn about yourself? Just listen, it could have been more soul-lifting if you had said: Big Sis, I don't like seeing my home in disarray.

MUM: Well, I don't and Micky doesn't either (97).

Despite her level of submissiveness, Janny Adams would not allow room for intimidation or subjugation. She would always tell her husband her feelings but would not insist on her choice. She recognized the fact that men are also not infallible so she easily offers her corrections but in a more subtle manner. Sometimes as a human being, she reacts violently to press home her points but as a good housewife she calms down when advised or pleaded with. This is one of the qualities of virtuous women who would recognize the position of man in the family and also wish that man recognizes woman's role also. In essence what the playwright is conveying is that men could also make mistakes since they are humans and that they should admit their mistakes. It also points to the fact that no gender can go it alone-men and women in particular should inter-relate if development could be achieved. The paradox in Micky Adam's state of forgetfulness alongside his wife clearly portrays this. Micky Adams has blamed his wife and even ascribed her rate of forgetfulness to something like mental problem just because she forgot to unplug the pressing iron. Later Micky Adams makes the same mistake and forgets his

briefcase and choice tie as well. His wife then wonders what this his action could be ascribed to-
psychiatric or nuts?

DAD: Your mind drifts ever so often and I can't help wondering... perhaps I am wrong, but don't
you think you should see a psychiatrist?

MUM: Forget? Forget.

DAD: (*Breaks into a laugh*) Yes, Darling. It's human to forget things, isn't it?

MUM: (*Laughing*) Oh, Sweetheart, aren't you going nuts also being inconsistent? (68).

DAD: I would have betted I was wearing my blue tie.

MUM: You forget, I guess (*in a sneering tone*).

DAD: Hey don't rub it in any further. You have already gotten yours back at me. Going nuts in
same as mad, isn't it?

MUM: Not quite, dear. One is mild, the other is harsh (69).

From this scene it is clearly evident that men could make mistakes but are prone to corrections depending on the manner of approach. They are ready to change and get on well with the women provided their ego is not deflated. Men could even offer assistance to women and encourage them achieve lofty ideals in so far as they (women) recognize and accord respect to them. It is a fact that many men would prefer offering assistance to women rather than their fellow men. What remains then is for women to recognize this and use it as a powerful tool to attain greatness. Many heroine have done this and used men to achieve their goal without being confrontational.

By and large, Umukoro has once more added her voice to the clarion call for societal transformation beginning with the family. She has shown that there will be peace and progress when men and women co-dwell in mutual understanding and respect with women complementing men.

CHAPTER FOUR
INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSES

I4.1 Class Oppression: Onwueme's *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*.

It has been argued that women also marginalize/oppress fellow women when they assume power and that women lack solidarity and unity of purpose. To begin with, let us discuss the term “oppression” briefly in order to understand how it is treated in the play under review. Oppression comes from the word “press”. When we talk about press, our mind readily cast back to the idea of squeezing, molding, flattening or by reducing something in size by removing something such as air, gas or water from them. Thus we can talk of pressing iron which is used in pressing clothes, printing press, pressing button and so on. In this manner, we can relate the term to pressure as applicable to abstract ideas such as when we talk of “being pressed” and “being pressurized”. One fact about “press” is that something must be responsible for the “pressing” in order for the effect to be felt.

Something is therefore referred to as being pressed or oppressed when it is caught between two or more forces which allow it no room for escape. The forces or barriers are so closely related that they form a network capable of catching their preys (victims) from every direction so that no room for escape is created. The prey(s) or victim(s) therefore suffer(s) some deprivations and marginalization in the hands of the oppressors who exploit and use them as tools for their selfish ends.

According to Frye:

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are

systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in: all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby trapped. (67)

Men have been accused of being responsible for women oppression and the fact that women could also oppress fellow women is often over-looked. Women under the aegis of feminism challenge men for being responsible for all the woes or misfortunes that women suffer and accuse men of devising means by which they gag women and make them docile and mute. In this direction, Ezeigbo notes that:

A great handicap of women is their inability or rather reluctance to speak out in asserting their rights or in protesting against injustice and oppression. Women have the tendency to suffer in silence. Society has always prescribed silence, reticence, compliance, patience and gentleness as the greatest virtues of the feminine gender. (15)

However, recent studies have shown that women are no longer confined to this state of inactivity. Indeed some women have been found to be eloquent and assertive in their conduct in both domestic and public spheres. Prominent among these women are dramatists and creative writers who use their works to champion the course of women liberation. Tess Onwueme is one outstanding woman activist who has used her creative works as a dramatist to fight women oppression and other societal vices including class/racial prejudice. Her plays speak volume of her commitment to the cause of women emancipation from men and even women oppressors who belong to the bourgeoisie or elites class. Onwueme is acclaimed as one African female playwright who has consistently shown fidelity to gender materials in her dramaturgy. Of her fourteen plays, twelve are gender plays. They include: *The Broken Calabash* (1984), *A Hen Too Soon* (1983), *Ban Empty Barns and Other Plays* (1986), *Mirror for Campus* (1987), *The Reign of*

Wazobia (1998), *Legacies* (1989), *The Missing Face* (1997), *Tell It To Women* (1997), *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen* (2000), *Then She Said It* (2002), *What Mama Said* (2003), *Desert Encroaches* (1985) and *No Vacancy* (2005).

Intra gender oppression is a reality with a lot of social implications. There are a number of reasons why playwrights, especially female playwrights, have at one time or the other, resorted to gender issues in their creative endeavour. Foremost among these, is the desire to use gender issues to comment on contemporary matters of their times. Apart from this overriding factor, there have been instances when playwrights have to approach gender sources for their creative materials, because they felt the need to challenge aspects of their culture and history which have long been the subject of derogation and misrepresentation. At other times, the overriding factor has been the desire to popularize aspects of gender imbalance which were not sufficiently known to many people, in order to push such aspects into people's consciousness. In addition to the instances already cited, there have equally been times when playwrights' movement into gender matters had been dictated by the desire to correct existing versions of gender issues. In fact, in recent times, playwrights have at one time or the other had reasons to refer to gender sources in their dramaturgical undertakings.

Here in Africa, some of the female playwrights (apart from Tess Onwueme) who have also written in this vein include Irene Salami, Julie Okoh, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Stella Oyedepo, Zulu Sofola, and other emergent playwrights like Julie Umuokoro. Many of such gender materials are connected with the people's lived experience and its consequences in African communities. A notable category of gender plays are those written with the sole aim of correcting prejudicial gender opinions. A good example of this type of gender play would be Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*. The dramatists sometimes, as a measure of

their commitment to gender reality and nationalistic commitment often focus on the social and cultural aspects of the plot at the expense of religious (moral) factors. Salami for example adopts this technique as her own way of criticizing patriarchy and derogation of the political institution that encourages gender imbalance. But paradoxically, by concentrating on the significance of feminism, salami also succeeds in highlighting the moral lapses of feminist movement.

This is the sense to which it can be argued that Onwueme's *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen* is set to correct some impressions about feminism as the anti-dote for women liberation. Onwueme presents Omesiete as a victim of feminism. Omesiete is presented in the play as a woman who is not empowered both educationally and economically. She dropped out of school in preference to marriage which later crashed leaving her a single parent with two daughters to cater for. Because she is educationally disempowered, she could not find a lucrative job, therefore she settles for menial jobs thereby becoming economically disadvantaged also. In the process, she does all manner of casual work to which she is paid on daily basis. However, she feels a sense of relief and job security when Madam Kofo offers her a job in her (Madam Kofo) farm to tend to her "weeds".

OMESIETE: Child, you do not understand. I'm getting on in years, you know. How can I live the rest of my life carrying heavy bags of cement? Huh! My bones are getting weak. They need rest.

KECHI: But you're still in labor... I mean you're laboring.

OMESIETE: I know. But this is different. I'm no longer a daily-paid laborer. It's more stable. Then I have this small place to rest my aching bones. Don't you know we'll be paying

more or remain homeless if we didn't have this place? It's more dangerous out there, you know. (40)

With this employment, Omesiete thinks that her burden would be lessened probably because her new employer is a fellow woman, but she is mistaken- Madam Kofo later proves to be worse than men. Madam Kofo sets a certain amount of money to be deducted from Omesiete's monthly salary as house rent for the shanty apartment she gave to her. She (Madam Kofo) would not even give her a breathing space to make up for the rent but would always harass and threaten her with quit notice whenever there is a little problem between them. Not only this, she cuts or ceases Omesiete's salary at will whenever there is a misfortune at her farm even if the fault is natural and does not emanate from anybody. One of the claims of feminism is the need for women to help each other but through the conduct of Madam Kofo, it is proven in this direction that women may not be the expected "messiah" to liberate others from difficulties.

In the play also, Onwueme highlights the plight of women who are not educationally or economically empowered. She tends to suggest that when a woman does not struggle to empower herself educationally or otherwise, she should not expect miracle to happen, even her full membership of any feminist movement may not suffice since there is class distinction inherent also in such bodies. A disempowered woman would always play a subaltern role even in matriarchy or patriarchal society. Omesiete is used in the play to portray the travails of women who are not empowered. Apart from the house rent issue, she also suffers humiliation at the hands of Madam Kofo who would cajole her even in the presence of her children and treat her as a maid despite the fact that she is an adult woman just like Madam Kofo, her oppressor. She will bump into Omesiete's apartment at will even without observing any protocol and there and then harass her with some harsh words and derogatory remarks.

MADAM KOFO: (*Strutting.*) Well, Missis-what-do-you-cal-yourself? (*Pause*) I wouldn't be that harsh on that child if I were you. After all, she's not the cause of your misfortune, is she? (*OMESIETE still staring at her boss.*) Yes, Ma'am! "Missisi!" That girl is not one of the pests eating up my precious weeds, is she?... But see now how ungrateful you have become. Ruining my business. and ...trying to take my child away from me.

OMESIETE: (*Stunned.*) Me? Who? What? Ma...?

MADAM KOFO: Stop right there! Don't "Ma" me. I'm not older than you. Am I? (*Silence*) so stop acting so...so... I've been wandering looking all over the place for my daughter. Until I found her here. (35)

In this manner Madam Kofo has continued to harangue Omesiete who seems to accept her condition and submit to fate. She often bemoans her condition and regrets the mistake she made in the past by not completing her education. So, by implication it could be understood that when a woman is not empowered, her fellow women would even oppress her more than men. Madam Kofo would not spare her the agony of reminding her the past and her pitiable condition which she (Omesiete) is responsible for. She accuses her of bewitching her (Madam Kofo) daughter, Dupe and making her (Dupe) turn against her mother. She goes further to accuse her of jealousy and planning to ruin her business-something Omesiete is not guilty of but which she must condone because of her condition in order to retain her job. Even in midst of these accusations and harassment, Madam Kofo still refers to Omesiete as an ingrate who does not appreciate all the good things she has been doing to her.

Class distinction is also evident in the way Madam Kofo relates with Omesiete and their children. Because Madam Kofo has made it to the top as a rich woman, she looks down on other women and treats them as destitutes. She draws a clear line of class distinction between her daughter Dupe and Omesiete's daughter, Shakara. What annoys her most is the realization that

her daughter is befriending Shakara, a poor woman's daughter. She could not tolerate such and fears that their poverty could affect and influence her daughter's future. Therefore she determines to do everything possible to get rid of the relationship or even do away with Shakara. She has, on several occasions advised and cautioned her daughter against developing any intimate relationship with Shakara who came from a very poor background as such, might affect her future adversely. She confesses that she has no room for the poor and would even want them swept out of the town and even from the churches.

MADAM KOFO: As I was saying, dear, those lazy wretched poor are so sneaky and stubborn. I have no patience with them. Littering the entire place. (*Spits.*) Even in churches nowadays. They are there. Everywhere. Praying and calling on God to save them. Wipe out their poverty as if God is Director of the World Bank. And the IMF runs on charity. My dear, if you go to border? Ah! The poor trading on miracles! I just don't know what this country is turning to. And the foolish government is not doing anything about it.

DUPE: What do you want them to do?

MADAM KOFO: Ban them! Sweep them out! All of them!

Apart from hauling insults on the poor and accentuating their psychological trauma, Onwueme, through the character, Madam Kofo, depicts how women also unleash violence against their fellow women. It has been argued that men are known to be associated with violence and that violence is usually committed or directed against women. This has been one of the reasons for feminist movement which is geared towards curbing men's excesses in terms of violence against women.

Through the activities and conduct of Madam Kofo, it is clear that women also perpetrate physical violence against women. Madam Kofo has just arrived from her drinking spree with her men friends or what she calls business associates, and discovers that her daughter, Dupe has also been in the same mess in her absence. She has been having parties and merriment with her friends including Shakara, whom her mother specifically cautioned her to avoid because of her poor background. In annoyance, Madam Kofo beats her daughter and chases Shakara around the compound. Shakara who tries to escape by jumping through the wall but unfortunately couldn't, is caught by Madam Kofo who gives her the beatings of her life. She uses her shoes and other available weapons to unleash physical assault on the helpless girl.

MADAM KOFO: (*Pursing SHAKARA.*) And more? (*The struggle intensifies. Madam Kofo is still holding onto PRINCE's collar as she tries to stop SHAKARA. PRINCE too is struggling as he's choking. In the melee, SHAKARA finally pushes her way through and runs towards the gate. But THE GUARD/ALAWO has locked the gate. She tries to fly over, but stumbles and falls. MADAM KOFO's shoes are now flying up in the air as she runs after her. Finally, she's caught up with SHAKARA and pins her down. Caught in a dead-end, SHAKARA groans.*)

DUPE: (*Struggling with her mother.*) My friends, please! Please, Mommy!

MADAM KOFO: (*Pushing her away.*) Friend? Indeed! Out! Out of my sight! You piglet! (*Beating Shakara.*) Caught! Yes! God catch you! Judgment! (*Frantic.*) Alawo! Don't open the gate! (99)

Through the character; Madam Kofo, Onwueme as a seasoned dramatist is also able to depict the issue of exploitation. From the treatment meted out to Omesiete, it is clear that Madam Kofo is not only maltreating her but also exploiting her. When Madam Kofo observes that pests are attacking her weeds, she lays the blame on Omesiete and quickly penalizes her by using her salary to augment for the cost of eradicating the weevils. From their discussions/conversations, it

could be understood that Madam Kofo is not paying Omesiete what is commensurate with her service. Omesiete works round the clock but Madam Kofo could only pay her a stipend at the end of the month. There is no set time for work or break. Omesiete would start work in the farm early every morning and return home at dusk. From the text, it is clear that there are no day(s) in the week that Omesiete or the other labourers could observe as work-free day as enshrined in labour laws.

It is also deduced from the play that Madam Kofo could not afford to purchase insecticides or fumigate her farm against pests but forces Omesiete to be killing the insects probably with her bare hands. This also contravenes labour laws and international best practices which requires employers to provide their workers (employees) with tools or materials to work with. Apart from the foregoing, it is also discovered that Madam Kofo is also using Omesiete for other secret services such as keeping secret of the so called “business” and ensuring that other workers do not expose the illicit business. In essence, Omesiete works as a gardener, a “fumigator”, a Secret Agent and also a domestic servant for Madam Kofo who reward her with only providing food and shelter over her head.

MADAM KOFO: It’s your business to keep the secret... keep them quiet. That’s why I pay you.

Not so?

OMESIETE: So now you pay me to shut people up? Am I the people?

MADAM KOFO: (*Vehemently*) Seeds! Your duty is to kill insects and keep them quiet. Is that too much to ask for keeping a roof over your head with a full stomach? (37)

It is interesting to note that Omesiete’s answer to this question fully underscores the point that she, too understands that Madam Kofo is exploiting her. She replies thus: “Half-empty, Madam”.

Another interesting point to note about the way Onwueme handled the issue of intra-gender conflict is in characterization. The characters in this play are mainly women or broadly categorized: Females. Perhaps the motive behind this is to portray the fact that even if the society is dominated and ruled by women, there is no likelihood that the much-talked about gender equality will be actualized. From the text, it is seen that the key players of the sequence of events are women/females with Madam Kofo taking the lead. It is also depicted from the play that with or without men, women could excel or fail depending on the individuals' effort. Madam Kofo and Omesiete are two women with similar circumstances. Both of them are women from poor background who have made mistakes in their earlier upbringing. They both dropped out of school because of love for pleasure. In the process, they got impregnated and opted for marriage but while Omesiete gave birth as a married woman, Madam Kofo delivered her baby out of wedlock since her presumed "lover" denied her. Ironically, Omesiete was also thrown out of marriage with her two daughters and she struggles as a single parent just like Madam Kofo. Another striking fact about the duo is that their parents, despite their meagre income, were determined to train them in institutions of higher learning but they messed up the offer.

However, one major difference exists between them. While Madam Kofo exhibited some attributes of feminism by being courageous, fearless and determined to succeed, Omesiete portrayed some womanism attributes of being calm and calculated in going about life. In the process Madam Kofo became economically empowered and finds herself among the nouveau riche while Omesiete became disempowered economically and educationally thereby she finds herself among the poor. It could be noted that Madam Kofo got her wealth through illicit means by indulging in drug trafficking and "corporate prostitution". She is presented as a debased woman who would do anything to make money or protect her so called "business". In

the real sense of the word, Madam Kofo represents the cause of radical feminist ideology while Omesiete represents that of womanism or what can be termed “liberal feminism” which encourages women to apply decorum in the pursuit of their goals. Onwueme in portraying this character seems to subscribe to Emenyi’s call for:

African (female) writers...to produce a ‘new woman’ whose possibilities are neither defined nor limited by gender signification but who approaches life with courage and compels circumstances, through personal ingenuity and constructive insight to submit to her convictions. (81)

It could be adduced that Omesiete, although perceived to be poor, still maintains her integrity and would not allow her condition to make her debase her womanhood. She has learnt her lessons from her past and determined to change by leading a clean life; Madam Kofo on the other hand is also determined to succeed in life by either hook or crook and she eventually made it through the crook. But the paradox is that while she succeeds economically at the expense of morality, she eventually pays the supreme price for her excesses and does not live to enjoy the wealth. Omesiete, on the other hand fails economically but succeeds in dignity of human person (morality) and this pays off in her staying alive to take care of her children and that of Madam Kofo’s daughter. In essence and by implication the playwright is throwing a challenge for women to make a choice between radical feminism and womanism or liberal feminism. Just like in her other plays; *Tell It to Women* and *The Reign of Wazobia* and others. She has consistently shown that neither excessive feminism nor patriarchy is ideal for any progressive society instead a movement/ideology that strikes a balance between the two should be adopted and encouraged.

From the forgoing discourse it could be inferred that women also oppress women and that feminism as being propagated by the Western women can not benefit all women. The truth is that there is a gap between the rich women or what is known as “women of class” or elites and

the poor women or the so called disadvantaged women. The women of class hide under the umbrella of feminism to woo the less advantaged women to their side to support them in their struggle to wrest power from men. Once that goal is achieved, they would turn back to harass and oppress the less advantaged or less privileged women.

It is noted that radical feminism and similar women ideologies tend to discourage virtues or morality since they opine that such morals are often tailored by men to subjugate women from ascending to the top. It is therefore women/feminists who made it to the top by any means, that are being celebrated by feminists at the expense of those women who achieve success through gradual and legitimate means.

4.2 Feminism and African Culture: Julie Okoh's *Our Wife Forever*

The issue of feminism and African culture is topical in postcolonial Africa. Thus, its centrality in the thematic pre-occupation of Julie Okoh's *Our Wife Forever* as well as many emergent dramatists is not unexpected in a society where cultural practices persist. Feminism and African culture are always in conflict since African culture is perceived by feminists as being responsible for their marginalization because they claim that men hide under the umbrella of culture to perpetrate injustices against women. Feminists have always described gender in relation to assignment of roles to biological sex of male and female by the society and they contend that this assignment of roles is often done by men who appropriate the lucrative and less tedious ones to themselves. Feminists argue that human beings are born male or female or neuter but it is the society, acting under the guidance of masculinity/patriarchy that categorizes them into two broad groups of man and woman using cultural influences. Bassow in this direction describes gender as "behaviour and attributes expected of a person based on being born a male or

a female” (7). Aluede agrees that: “such roles structure our choices and guide our behaviour in acceptable manners within the community we operate” (58). From the foregoing definitions, it could be inferred that gender and culture are closely related. Hariland describes culture as:

A set of rules and standards that, when acted upon by the members of a society produce behaviour that falls within range of variance which the members consider proper and acceptable. (30)

Anyanwu also describes culture as “a common living experience shared by a particular people” (21). Feminism as a movement geared towards eradication of the perceived gender imbalance against women, is no doubt in constant conflict with cultural practices in most African societies. Where they are not calling for its amendment, they are calling for its outright abrogation. Women perceive their subordinate condition in Africa as a result of culture and tradition which favour men at the expense of women. According to them they (men) often perpetrate the injustices by fashioning ideologies that are woven into the societal structures and treated as societal norms in which every member of the society is expected to conform. Women activists claim that men, under patriarchy are so clever that such ideologies are hidden and prove difficult to detect by gullible minds and therefore difficult to tackle. In their opinion, women under the influence of culture, are made to play subaltern role and are recognized and treated in relation to men. They are sometimes regarded as a piece of property owned by men. A woman feminist, Simone de Beauvoir aptly captures this notion and laments that the woman is:

...defined and differentiated with reference to man and not man (he) with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute – she is the other. (16)

Women gender activists in Nigeria, and indeed Africa lament their condition and status in the society which are largely shaped by culture and tradition – and by extension; religion. They accuse men of dominating every sphere of human endeavour even language. According to them, men often use proverbs to assert their superiority over women. They fashion proverbs which are often designed and managed to suit their purposes in socio-cultural issues. The ability to apply or understand these proverbs in speech is regarded highly in typical patriarchal society and women are often excluded from using proverbs when communicating. In typical African society, the ability to apply proverbs correctly while making a speech by a man attracts great respect to that man. A man who is unable to understand or apply proverbs in speeches or conversations with fellow men is often regarded as a misfit or whore.

Men in such society sometime, view the man with contempt and treat him as a “woman”. It is in this context that African women are struggling to be liberated and recognized as human beings with all the sensory organs just like their male counterpart. But there seemed some variations in women’s attitude towards domination and marginalization by men. While some African women see this phenomenon as women not being able to be heard or contribute to societal issues, others perceive it as women not being able to be at the same level with men in all spheres of human endeavour. That has been the reason why many women approach the issue of gender imbalance with varying dimensions in their works. Some women write to advocate for complete abrogation of culture and tradition in African societies, some call for cultural reformation, yet others solicit for cultural revival. With their increasing empowerment through education, women now have the creative arsenal to project their struggle and direct their cause to whichever way they deem fit. Apronti cautions that the writer:

... must be in the vanguard of those who articulate the goals of our continent, formulating our aesthetic, serving our community, and raising the level of political and cultural consciousness of the people. (16)

Perhaps it is in this direction that majority of African feminists have dissociated themselves from the kind of feminism that has been making waves in Europe and America. They want the type of feminism that should be ingrained in Africa and recognize all the peculiarities prevalent in African societies. Feminism as practiced in the West seems to declare total war on men and categorize all men as bad. Their ideologies are tailored toward wresting all the powers from men whom they accuse of “having enjoyed enough.” To them, men have had enough and had oppressed women over the years and time has come for women to retaliate. They claim that despite all the men’s movements that were geared toward favouring women, men still dominate and launch into backlash at the slightest opportunity. African women, (with African orientation), on the other hand reject the notion that all men are bad. They do not see the struggle as being all out to fight men but perceives it as a struggle to correct all perceived social/societal imbalances.

This is because, according to them, their problem is not only men but a combination of other factors including race, class, colour, creed etc. They, as a matter of fact, sometimes regard men as partners in progress since some men also suffer the same fate as women in the hands of the more powerful men and women or the so called privileged class. African women with this type of mentality do not see the Western women as fighting for their (African women) interest rather they view them as fighting for their selfish interests and using them as a means to achieve and sustain their goals. African feminism recognizes the culture and religion of Africa but not those that encourage harmful practices. Proponents of this type of feminism argue that its ideology is fashioned and propounded for all women of African descent since it is grounded in

African culture, taking cognizance of the shared experiences of African women. Indeed, Ezenwanebe describes African feminism or womanism as:

... a call for equity and fairness in the relationship of men and women in order to build a society where men and women co-exist in equal dignity, mutual respect and self actualization. It is a protest against, and the quest for freedom from all forms of social and cultural oppression of African women. (188)

African feminists recognize biological and social roles of men and women and do not see the dethronement of male supremacy in order to achieve equity as most ideal for the struggle. That has (perhaps) informed the reason why many African female playwrights have satirized Western feminism in their works. For example Stella Oyedepo uses her play *The Rebellion of the Bumpy – Chested* to criticize the type of Western feminism where women of class or debased women contrive to achieve their selfish ends by claiming the fight for all women irrespective of race, class or colour. In the play, the major character, Miss Ara Sharp (Captain Sharp) who decides to be a single woman tries to organize all women into a global alliance in form of global sisterhood whose sole aim is to liberate women from men or masculine domination. Men in the sisterhood ideology are identified as “enemies” who should be fought and defeated. Members of this movement reject marriage and qualities associated with femininity.

In Julie Okoh’s play under review (*Our Wife Forever*) the issues of gender imbalance and culture are well highlighted. Right from the prologue to the epilogue, all the incidences and actions in the play speak volumes of the cultural undertone of gender imbalance. The claim by women feminists that men often hide under the cloak of culture to oppress women is well treated in the play. Not only the issue of women subjection by culture is depicted, the play also touches on other salient areas that need discussion such as the need for “will writing”, older women

oppression of younger women, the need for love, the need for women empowerment and also the need to pray. But the focus of this study is on the cultural aspect as it affects women. In the play, Okoh presents African culture as it affects women especially when they lose their husbands. The various travails and trauma they undergo in the name of culture are well highlighted.

Using Victoria as a case study, African women are presented in a matrix of being in hell when they lose their husbands to the cold hands of death. They are presented as undergoing many unpleasant experiences at the hands of men and even older women especially they relations of the deceased husband who might capitalize on the situation to exploit the woman. The woman is depicted as having no choice but to comply but in the play, Okoh tries to debunk this assertion and prove that women have choice and can fight for their rights when such rights are unnecessarily trampled upon.

African culture has often been accused of being responsible for maltreatment of women who lost their husbands. Women and men feminists blame culture for all the woes that befall widows in African societies where men use culture to harass and intimidate women into submission to their (men) selfish desires. Women in such societies are also made to undergo some excruciating pains in the course of widowhood just to make them prove their innocence on the death of their husband. Such ordeals are so repugnant and nauseating that the widow is likely to fall sick or die after such experience. The lead character in the play Victoria has just lost her husband; Hector and she is emerging from the widowhood period. She has been subjected to all forms of ill treatment during the period in order to prove that she was not the one who killed her husband. According to her, she was made to drink the water used to bath the dead body of her husband, she was made to go without bathing for the period the widowhood rites lasted, she

was escorted to the evil forest very early in the morning to dispose of the widowhood paraphernalia, and other painful treatments including shaving of hair and sleeping on mat.

FELIX: You've never really told me about your experience of widowhood rites. What exactly did they do to you?

VICTORIA: Horrible, horrible things! Anytime I remember them, I feel anger inside me. I feel sick. I feel like going to crush the head of all those who subjected me to those inhuman ordeals.

Speaking through the character; Felix, Okoh reiterates that the widowhood practices are not exaggerated but real. Felix has been feigning ignorance of the magnitude of the widowhood ordeals by asking Victoria whether all those stories told about the plight of widows at the death of their husbands are actually true. Victoria re-assures him that they are all factual. This is one area where the playwright might be faulted. The widowhood rites as depicted in the play are no longer tenable in most African societies especially in Nigeria where the play is set. Perhaps Okoh is writing to attract the sympathy of the Western scholars or feminine activists with western orientation to the cause of women in Africa.

This is one of the reasons why African and third world female playwrights are accused of writing with bias, sometimes to please the western audience who always are thrilled by the projection of African/Third World countries in bad light. They are fascinated to read or view articles that ridicule the image of such countries and portray them as barbaric and people without conscience. The widowhood rites as narrated in the play are too serious to be true. Some of the rites could be believed if the play was written about sixty years ago or subtly after the Nigeria/Biafran feud. But for a play written/published in 2010 (about seven years ago), to be

talking about a widow drinking the water used to bath the body of her husband, is too good to be believed.

It is a fact that nowadays, with the increasing influence of Pentecostalism in Christendom and other reformations associated with modernism, these widowhood rites and other obsolete cultural practices are gradually paving way for modernity. Widows in Igbo land for example are now finding it difficult to barb their hair on the demise of their spouse let alone performing other obnoxious rites as stated in the play. It is also stated in the text that the widow's hands are tied in her front and that she could not make use of them throughout the mourning period. Even if she wants to scratch, someone else would do that for her. This also is doubtful and may not be tenable in most African countries/societies. By and large, Okoh has succeeded in expressing and stating her angst against the bad side of African culture and calls for concerted effort to do away with such.

Another ugly side of African culture raised in the play is the rape episode. African culture is often linked with encouraging rape or sexual harassment against women. This is one of the points that women feminists and indeed all feminists raise against men/patriarchy. They accuse men of being responsible for sexual assault on women in patriarchal system where women are not allowed to make a choice. In such societies, women could not reject sexual advance of their spouse even if they (women) are not disposed to it. They are always expected to comply or else they would be accused of infidelity and failing in their marital obligation. In this light, the tenet of this culture seems to align with the Christian biblical teaching of the need for wives not to refuse their husbands request for sex.

African men, in truth do not consider having sexual intercourse with their wives even against their wish, as a rape or something bad. This is why African women with African orientation call for the type of feminism that should take cognizance of African peculiarities in its ideologies. Tension or conflict is likely to be aggravated in a situation where an African man wants to make love with his wife and his wife refuses and even goes on to accuse him of rape. A typical African man may not endure that. In the play, Thomas is presented as a typical African man who is a traditionalist to the core. He believes that women have no choice over issues of marriage or family affairs. That is the reason why he tries to force Victoria, her sister-in-law to have sex with him despite her objections.

THOMAS: Shshshsh! Keep quiet! (74).

VICTORIA: Shameless rapist! Since my husband died he has declared an unceasing war against me. Against life itself! Seeing that he cannot subdue me verbally, he wants to use his gun on me! My God! Thank you Father. Thank you for saving me. (75)

Thomas' action however is not typical of a true African traditionalist. An African man who truly upholds the tenets of African culture would abhor what Thomas did since he has not performed the customary requirements demanded of him before he could inherit her. Thomas' action is an exception rather than the rule in African culture in terms of rites of inheritance. The likes of Thomas, as depicted in the play, are the more reason why western scholars and gender activists perceive African culture as harbouring rape. African culture has always stood against rape in the real sense of it, not the way it is interpreted by western feminists and masculinists who claim that men could also be raped by women and vice versa.

Gender activists also argue that the right of inheritance is lopsided and in favour of men in most African cultures. They accuse African men of denying women their right to own properties and even posit that women are even seen and treated as part of the property a man owns. In some African societies, women are forbidden to own houses or landed property. any of such property is treated in relation to the woman's husband or son. That is the more reason why a woman in Igbo land for example, who gives birth to no male child, automatically loses her husband's land/house if the husband dies. While sharing landed property, an Igbo man is expected to do so only among his male children. The man's daughter/female children are expected to marry off to another man where they are expected to be part of their husband's assets.

However, this right of inheritance is not general in all African societies as often insinuated. For example in most part of Yoruba societies, as already discussed in this work, female daughters get equal share of their father's property with their male siblings. Nevertheless, in the play under review, the dramatist presents the issue as still in vague in many African societies and posits that not only do men own properties they also inherit and own women as well. According to the play, that is the main reason why an African man treats and regards a woman/wife as a piece of property. again this is aptly captured through the action and speech of Thomas who is desperate to have Victoria, his late brother's wife, as part of his inheritance alongside other properties.

VICTORIA: Enough! You came to see me. So tell me what's on your mind and get out of my house.

THOMAS: Did I just hear you say your house? (*Laughs*) Hi-ho-ho-ho!

Since when have women in this country started to own houses?

VICTORIA: This is my house. I suffered to build it. It is mine. (49)

The issue of inheritance is not culturally universal in African culture. Some African societies encourage equal share for all the children of the deceased parent while some discriminate in favour of male children, yet others reject the idea in its entirety. Igbo culture for example, reject the idea of sharing properties especially landed property to female children since they are expected to marry off to another man. In the context of the play, could it be strongly argued that this culture is right or wrong judging from the religious point of view as it affects marriage.

The Christian religious tenets uphold the doctrine which encourages a widow to remarry after the death of her husband if she could not stay to nurture the man's children. The dialectic is, if the woman remarries and moves into her spouses' house, what becomes of her husband's house? If she moves into the man's home with her late husband's children, will they change the man's (late husband's) name so that the children start going with the "new husband's" name? Will it not amount to disrespect and ingratitude to the spirit of the deceased so behold his house and children going to another man? These are some of the salient issues/questions that ought to be asked or considered when condemning or regarding this aspect of African culture.

In the play under reference, Victoria is depicted as having two children for her late husband: Hector, a boy and a girl. After his death, she decides to remarry and move into his spouse's home with the two children. The playwright however has not treated the issues/questions raised here. As for the baby girl, there might be no much problem in later days since she might marry and also forfeit the house but what of the baby boy who might later grow

up to become a man and probably seek after his father's property and identity? What of his identity? Would he forsake being identified as the son of Hector Imodu and take on that of Felix Tanker? Wouldn't that be a disservice to the spirit of the dead man whom Victoria has continued to chant his eulogies to portray how she loved him?

VICTORIA: So, I'm really now a widow!

FELIX: Unfortunately.

VICTORIA: Whom do I call again to help me do this or that? How do I cope? From where do I begin? Since he passed on, everything seems to be at a standstill. All of a sudden, life becomes very, very difficult. Hmm! Switching from wifhood to widowhood takes a twinkle of an eye. But getting used to the new status seems to take eternity. To tell the truth, I'm not finding it easy to do, at all. (16)

The point being raised here about the re-marry issue or freedom of women to exercise their right is how do we relate it to the bad side of Africa culture? Victoria herself has confessed in the text that but for the spirit of Hector, the love they shared and the kids she would have joined Hector in the grave. Her decision to remarry, does it affect the kids favourably in the future? Human beings being what they are, when she starts bearing children for Felix, wouldn't one envisage some problems which might arise out of discriminatory tendencies on the part of Felix? It is the position of this study that widows should strive to remain at their late husband's family when children are already involved. African culture is not akin to Western idea about life. That is why African women feminists call for caution in the quest for enthronement of feminists ideologies into African soil in its raw form as imported from Europe/America. Africans have their own peculiarities and these must be taken into cognizance when formulating any policy for the African societies/continent. Certain aspects of African culture cannot just be wished away in preference to the European/American ideologies. In the words of Steady:

Women's indigenous groups can provide important leveraging mechanisms for women and are instrumental in promoting sustainable development project. So rather than dismiss African cultures as archaic, we need to conduct more studies using culture as the paradigmatic framework that has the potential of producing action-oriented research capable of transforming society and empowering women. (55)

Superstition is also another aspect the African culture is criticized by the feminists and Western scholars alike. They accuse the culture of being laddened with rituals and diabolism often tailored toward inflicting harm/injury to people especially women. In *Our Wife Forever*, this aspect is also highlighted. Thomas who is presented as a core African man and a traditionalist has tried his best to lure Victoria to his side as a wife/sex partner but has always failed in each attempt, finally resolved to apply talisman in order to have his way. At first he seems to succeed but when his victim calls on the name of God, help comes in the person of Faith who chases him away with axe.

This incident signifies the supremacy of God above every other power and the triumph of Western religion over African fetishism. This is another area where Okoh's approach to feminism differs. She has introduced the concept of religion in feminist ideologies. Studies in most feminine works have shown that one thing African feminists and their western counterparts share in common is their militant stance against religion. They view religion with contempt and regard it as a microcosm for patriarchy. Christian and Islamic religions are often accused by these feminists as fashioned by men to continue to dominate women. They regard the contents of the Christian Holy Bible and the Holy Quran as stories concocted by men to further their patriarchal ideologies. Thus Okoh's style in adopting and infusing religious concepts into feminist ideology calls for further investigation. Perhaps Okoh is calling on other feminists to think of the moral aspect of the struggle rather than focusing mainly on the socio/politico issues.

Another important point raised in the issue of superstition is the voodoo style of Western talisman. One thing that is often glossed over by African scholars/critics is the castigation of African culture in preference to the Western ideologies. When Victoria used the voodoo power in form of kungfu against Thomas, it was termed physical education/exercise but when the same incidence is replicated by Thomas, it was called superstition.

African culture is also viewed by its critics as not allowing women any choice in marriage. According to these critics, women are often forced by their parents to engage on early marriage or many whomsoever they prefer. The woman has no choice than to agree even if she does not love the man. Critics argue that this type of marriage is never stable and has accounted for many divorce often recorded in African societies. But the question is: African societies and the Western world which have/has the highest rate of divorce? Freedom is one of the tenets of feminism and it is on record (already discussed here) that feminists are succeeding in this area but the question is, has it succeeded in stemming the tide of divorce rate and other marital problems prevalent in modern societies? Proponents of African culture argue that although parents made choice for their daughters in marriage, this has not contributed in marriage instability as witnessed nowadays. In the play under review, Thomas emphatically states that our forefathers did not marry because of love yet they lived happily.

VICTORIA: How does one survive in a loveless marriage?

THOMAS: Wait-wait-wait! Let me ask both of you some questions. Did your fathers and mothers, your grandfathers and grandmothers marry because of love? Did they even know one another before they were betrothed? In those days, spouses were chosen for young men and women. They lived happily and divorce was a rare thing. So, what are all these talks about love in marriage? Please, away with sentiments. Let's face the essential.
(59)

The playwright nevertheless, presents marriage as soothing when it is contracted on love. Victoria in the text, is portrayed as having a sense of fulfillment when she finally married her heartthrob, Felix. Another striking point raised in this play is the issue of single or double parentage: which one allows women to actualize their potentials? From the play, Okoh implies that women may not achieve much when they are single but need the support of a man to succeed. As a single parent, Victoria is nursing the fear of losing the case against Thomas, but when Felix comes to assist and both of them work things out, they achieve victory. This implies that Okoh, though a feminist, is advocating for feminists ideologies that should not exclude men, but treat men as partners in progress. This is quite unlike other feminist female playwrights who would relegate the role of men (if at all it is recognized) to the background and celebrate single parenthood.

4.3 The Politics of Social Change: Irene Salam's *Sweet Revenge*

It is sometimes argued that the issue of gender and the manner the early dramatists baulk at it in terms of enlightening the masses, possibly gave rise to the ideological leanings of emergent playwrights. These playwrights (dramatists) have been given different tags by various scholars depending on what school of thought one views the issue. Some regard them as “new dramatists” while others call them “radical dramatists”, or “Marxian playwrights.” Whatever tag they are given, what is important is that this category of playwrights see theatre as a weapon that should be placed in the hands of the masses for their liberation. They oppose the Aristotlean conventionalist idea of the theatre and insist that theatre must be used in the service of the people to liberate them. recently, they have been in the forefront of the category of theatre popularly called Community Theatre or Theatre for Development (TFD). As Obadiogwu puts it:

In opposing Aristotlean theatrics with its anti-dialogical matrix and fatalistic acceptance of the ways of the world, Community Theatre offers a dialogical cultural action for the emancipation of the oppressed masses. (ix)

Modern African playwrights are the products of the societies that mould them. They do not live in isolation; therefore they draw their materials from the happenings around their environments. In Nigeria and indeed most developing countries the issue of gender injustice and corruption is endemic. People struggle to get to power and lord it over their fellow country men and women. They do not seek to acquire power because of their zeal for patriotism but for self aggrandizement, on attaining political power, they amass wealth... from the peoples' treasury and stark it away in foreign bank accounts. Most leaders distance themselves from the masses and even expect to be revered like demi-gods by the same masses from whose sweat they feed fat.

Radical/female dramatists as social crusaders believe that the people cannot fold their hands and watch helplessly. Such dramatists, aware of the potentialities of the theatre, employ it in the service of the masses to bring down the oppressive structures. This is the more reason why themes of the works of this category of playwrights revolve around what Kalu Uka in his foreward to Nwadigwe's *Udoji* described as "... misgovernment and official graft by those who see election into government not as 'service' in a patriot, but as a Machiavellian opportunity for deception, denial of popular expression... (*Udoji*, vi).

What is therefore central to the work of radical/female dramatists is the issue of "revolt" or subtly put, "protest." They are protesting against the social injustice and deprivation meted against women and the less privileged in the society. These dramatists often celebrate collective heroism quite unlike the old order where individual heroism is celebrated. They deal with topical

issues and dramatize the plight of women and the masses and seek to bring social change especially in the political order. In such plays the women and masses are encouraged to boldly face the gender imbalance and other injustices by protesting the social, political and economic imbalance induced by the lopsided and oppressive conditions in which they exist. From the level of plotting, character portrayed, and conflicts, the thematic preoccupation is topical of the society, and economic environment with an emphasis on the issue of gender imbalance, and political commitment.

From their ideological standpoint, there are so many “wrongs” to be corrected in contemporary society. Thus this category of dramatists have little or no time for formalism which is concerned with the structures of language in which content is merely the motivation for form. Emphasis is shifted from form to context. Formalism has been the major dramatic tendency in Nigeria especially among the first generation playwrights. They lay emphasis on the plot, imagery, characterization and Aristotlean canons of dramatic composition.

Irene Isoken Salami is in the vanguard of those female dramatists who use theatre as a medium to conscientize the masses/women, who seek to place the tools of the theatre in the service of the masses for their liberation, who are in disagreement with the formalist postulations of Aristotle – Salami sees art as playing transformative role in the society particularly in engendering social/political change. According to Sanchez, “art penetrates society and society penetrates art” (112) – this is a dialectical interpretation and mediation of art in society. Emergent female playwrights in Nigeria in the mold of Irene Salami deploy their works in a committed quest for the actualization of an equitable society. Their works seem to be in complete disagreement with the theatrical ideas of the first generation playwrights – who seem to uphold

the tenets of conventional dramaturgy which sought to protect the ruling ideologies of the bourgeois elites.

Irene Salami grew from the cradle in Edo, Nigeria and thus was well grounded in gender matters as it affects women in Nigeria. Her deep knowledge of these aspects of gender issues are evident from the feminist flavor of her works. She uses these experiences to the advantages of the women and masses by re-writing the patriarchal ideology of her fatherland from a committed perspective. Such ideologies were traditionally crafted to suit the taste of men in a patriarchal system. So, what Salami does is to re-interpret the ideology/mythology in such a way as to suit her transformative vision for the women and the oppressed. In other words, she turns the myths to reflect her revolutionary ideas to liberate the women and achieve social change.

Indeed, Salami disagrees with the “tragic vision of the Soyinka generation” (Eni: 80) which, to her, does not encourage mass deliberation and women advancement through proper conscientization. Irene Salami believes in using the arts (theatre) to achieve a set goal in women advancement rather than mere aestheticism in terms of art for art’s sake. Thus she seems to subscribe to Osofisan’s idea of ideological commitment to social change. According to Osofisan:

The narration we invent as artists are already corrupted by the lives we lead, and by the very forms we choose for our compositions. No moment/mean, no single moment in the biography of any fable is innocent or neutral. No strategy of storytelling is ideologically pure, uncommitted, uninfected or unfecundated... The creative process invents and is invented in turn by ideology. (Eni: 83)

In the play under review (*Sweet Revenge*) Salami deconstructs the popular and prevailing ideology that men are best suited for political power. Through proper crafting of the plot, she is able to convey the message that women could, not only occupy highest political offices in the

land but equally perform better than their male counterparts. Using the character, Aisosa Salami portrays the fact that women could do and undo when it comes to politics since they are more than men in population. Politics is a game of numbers and the numerical strength of the women is brought to bear on the successes they recorded in removing Sota and enthroning Aisosa. The play touches on many issues bothering women such as marital disappointment, women empowerment, Diaspora, women cohesion/unity, sexism and by extension nationalism. These variables are the moving forces that propel the plot to the main theme of the play which centres on women subjugation in a patriarchal society and women's resistance to such marginalization and eventual victory. These are the indices of social change which need to be examined to assess how they inter-relate to bring about the desired social change.

One of the issues raised in the play that propels the lead character to action is the issue of marriage disappointment. Aisosa's husband Sota Ojo decides and asks her to pack out of the house. He is secretly paving way for the arrival of his British wife-Cheryl. Aisosa eventually packs out of the house with her children despite the fact that she is the brain behind Sota's success in the election and also she is the one who built the house that Sota ejected her. Because of this incident, she has no choice than to start life afresh thereby facing many life's challenges since she had abandoned her job as a medical practitioners in obedience to her husband who prefers her to be and remain a housewife. Necessity they say, is the mother of invention and it is out of necessity and frustration that Aisosa eventually moves to Abuja with the help of her friends Ede, Nosa and Regie. These people are their family friends and have always been with them through thick and thin. They have tried all their best to dissuade Sota from taking the inhuman decision of throwing Aisosa out of marriage, but he could not bulge. It is this decision that later ruined him despite Nosa's warnings.

SOTA: Nosa, I am very sane. I know what is good for me. I have my plans well laid out and Aisosa does not fit in anywhere. She does not befit my new status.

NOSA: New status? What do you mean Sota? Aisosa does not deserve this treatment. You disappeared from the scene for eight years and when you returned you were presented with a house she built in your name, her parents died within a space of one year apart and you neither came nor sent her money for any of their funerals, she cared for your family, single-handedly raised funds for and organized your sister's wedding, nursed your mother here for four years while she was sick, and her reward for all is that she does not befit your new status, a status she facilitated? What is wrong with you Sota? If you dare carry out your plan you will be disgraced. (19)

Salami through this character; Aisosa also portrays the dark side of patriarchy which encourages women marginalization. Aisosa was the one who built the family house when her husband was away. But on arrival, her husband Sota, who is presented as a male chauvinist, appropriates the house to himself and drives Aisosa out. Through this issue of marriage, Aisosa's endearing qualities are exposed and this is the main reason why she won the heart of all who came across her. She is presented as a prudent and caring woman who uses her resources to fend for, not only members of her family but others in need. She is depicted as a faithful wife who does not see the need to debase her womanhood no matter the odds.

In the play also, Aisosa takes care of her mother in-law when she falls sick and it is stated that her mother in-law is very fond of her and even prefers her to her son, Sota. She also takes care of her husband's siblings as evidenced in sponsoring of her sister in-law's wedding. It is through the marriage that all her virtues as a good woman are portrayed and also this made

Sota's British wife, Cheryl to admire and respect her and which eventually culminated in the many successes she recorded internationally. Through the costuming, Salami is also able to depict Aisosa as a respectable woman who is very conscious of her status as a married African woman despite her level of educational attainment. When her husband complained bitterly about her mode of dressing which is typical of African woman, she simply reminds him that she is a married woman and cannot afford to go on trousers as desired by him.

SOTA: What is this you are wearing? You look 60 years old for God's sake. Why can't you wear trousers?

AISOSA: [*Shouting*] Sota Ojo stop harassing my life, I've had enough. What do you take me for? I am a woman and not a girl Sota (25).

Despite her commitment to the ideals of marriage as a necessity for the women struggle, Salami presents, (although through subtext) the dialectics of marriage in feminist ideology. From the text, it could be inferred that while in marriage, Aisosa could not actualize her potentials, she was tied down by marriage demands which required her to be submissive to her husband and which helped to hinder her pursuit for lofty ideals. But when she became a single parent, she was able to actualize her potentials and not only became influential but a Senate President. This issue raises a critical point in feminism on the way it is practiced and what ideology it intends to portray. Does it mean that women who are married happily with their husbands cannot attain lofty heights in the political space? Is it only when they become single parent that the door of success is flung open to them? Answers to such questions are not only relevant to the understanding of feminism as a movement but could throw more light on what true feminist

ideals represent. Feminism is often accused of being biased as marriage since many of its proponents are lesbians who do not cherish heterogeneous marriage.

The issue of women empowerment is also highlighted in the play as one of the moving forces that engender social transformation. Aisosa is presented as a woman who is academically sound – a medical doctor. She has been doing very well in her profession until her husband demanded of her to resign and face family work. She obliged and thus became a housewife. In the process she became economically disempowered and as a result she could not actualize her potentials. Perhaps the playwright uses this aspect to expose how patriarchy works to hinder women from self actualization since without economic empowerment, all other empowerments are subsidiary. It was not until Aisosa secured a lucrative job that her talent as a leader became manifest. May be, men under the aegis of patriarchy or masculinity have used this issue as a weapon to further marginalize women so that they could remain in subaltern position.

In the play, Aisosa was able to excel because she also became economically empowered apart from education empowerment which is a precursor to the it. With this empowerment she was able to exhibit her sense of generosity and charity. It is also presented in the play that with economic and education empowerment, women could rule and dominate men and even oppress them. Because of empowerment, Aisosa was able to defeat Sota and brought him to his knees begging. When Sota became weighed down by financial problems, he could no longer maintain his ego as a man, having tried all avenues without success. At last he decided to humble himself and go to his erstwhile wife Aisosa for assistance and to ask for forgiveness.

AISOSA: So this is your last and only bus stop?

SOTA: Sincerely it is and please don't turn me away because I sold the house in Benin to pay up some debts. Sosa, if you don't take me in I will lose my sanity. I was carried away by the glamour and power of my new position then that I forgot myself and those that really meant so much to me. *[Rises in an attempt to hold Aisosa, but Aisosa put forward her two hands]*. Sosa darling, please forgive me as you had always done in the past. I will remain faithful to you forever. (83)

This scene captures also the dialectics of women empowerment and men's empowerment. Sota from the conversation admits that he allowed power and glamour to enter his head and blur his sense of reasoning and that was why he treated Aisosa the way he did. Because he was economically and politically empowered, he looked down on everybody including those who assisted him mount the throne. He did not use the wealth and affluence wisely but instead used them to harass and oppress women. Perhaps Salami intentionally created this character to portray men's oppressive attitude and bias against women.

She presents the ugly side of men under a patriarchal system where men could be callous and uncaring men is also depicted as corrupt and too self centered. Sota made some money which serving as a senator but he stashed them away in foreign accounts and used some to enjoy life by engaging in infidelity. He does not care about anybody and throughout the play, there is no evidence that Sota helped anybody including his friends and domestic staffers. Aisosa on the other hand is presented as a role model and joy of womanhood. She is depicted as possessing all the attributes of feminist ideals and perhaps represents what the society should expect in the event of women taking over political and economic powers. Acting in opposite direction, Aisosa used her wealth and affluence to touch lives. She invented a drug that was named after her and used for the treatment of malaria. She used her wealth to assist less privileged people in the

society and not only women. Despite her position and status she still maintains her chastity and humility, doing domestic chores. She was caring and accommodated even the members of her estranged husband's family.

Another issue that calls for discussion in this review in the issue of diaspora. Sota left Nigeria to London to pursue a PhD. programme which would last for four years but which instead lasted for eight years. While there, Sota became fascinated by the glimmers of the western world and seemed to forget his country. He even got married to a white lady and had a child from her. He was not even prepared to come back to Nigeria but for the invitation from his kinsmen and constituents to come home and vie for the post of a senator since it was their turn to produce a senator. In doing that, they considered the facts that while at home he participated actively in the political process to disengage the military which was in power then and also the activities of his wife Aisosa who was endeared to the community. They probably must have thought that Sota was the same Sota they know before he left for England. But little did they know that he has changed because of the influence of western pop culture. He was no longer the same Sota that championed the cause of the masses and risked his life just to see that fairness and equity were enthroned through democratic means. By his attitude, the playwright highlights another pertinent question of the practice of inviting people in diaspora to return home and occupy one position or the other in discrimination against home grown professionals or elites. Sometimes their long stay and absence from home blurs their judgments of the events at home. They tend to treat home matters in relation to their imbibed western ideologies. At other times they feel a sense of superiority over those at home and probably think they are the most qualified and being sought after. They usually see it as an opportunity to amass wealth or have a share of the so called national cake. This is revealed in Sota's discussion with his British wife Cheryl:

SOTA: Cheryl, you have to understand Nigerian politics. In some instances, people from our locality invite us to represent them. This is politics of window of opportunity. If this opportunity is not utilized, it closes up and may not open up again. This opening is an honourable gesture. With such honour bestowed on you, you have no choice but to respond positively by not turning down the people's request. Cheryl, you see I have no choice in this matter. This is beyond me. It is difficult to refuse this invitation and offer. Refusing this request will alienate my children and me from my people and community forever. Remember how hard we in the Movement for Democracy back here fought for our country's return to democracy? (5)

Paradoxically, Sota who returned home to take the senatorial seat later disappointed his people but Aisosa who was homegrown became a blessing to the people when she assumed office as a senator. Salami might have intentionally brought the two logical situations together to allow the audience decide whether inviting people from the diaspora to return home and represent the people is better than choosing people home based. The playwright may also be asking the question why Aisosa was not chosen to represent the people from the onset. Was it because she is a woman and therefore cannot represent the people?

From the presentation, the playwright has made her point. The people have experienced both representations and passed their verdict. The women have triumphed over men. It could also be inferred that Sota's disposition as a masculinist even before he left Nigeria must have affected his sense of judgment, not only because he has been acculturated in Western lifestyle. He has little or no soft spot for women. On the other hand, Regie his friend who also stayed in London is a different man with different perception about women. He feels that women are being

marginalized and that Sota would use his position as a senator to aid in redressing the issue of women marginalization. But Sota would have none of such admonitions.

REGIE: Things are not really that bad Cheryl, but Sota you need to champion the fight against the attitude of shutting women out. As a nation we must constantly be conscious of the fact that Nigeria is made up of men and women. Mainstreaming women into governance is a task we must all carry out at any cost. (11)

The issue of women cohesion/unity is also well highlighted in the play. Women have often been accused of lacking unity and sense of purpose. Critics argue that this quality has constantly rubbed off women their struggle to enthrone equity since they cannot speak with one voice. This has often led to women pursuing the issues at stake from various dimensions. As a popular adage has it; united we stand divided we fall. Women are also accused of being suspicious of one another in their dealings and sometimes the elites or privileged ones among them oppress the less privileged ones or the so called rural women.

In the play, Salami tried to debunk this accusation by portraying how both the rural and urban women could work together in order to achieve success. She suggests that with unity of purpose, there will be no limit for women in the actualization of their set objectives. In the play, the characters portrayed as women were all united irrespective of their status or educational background. With one voice they decided to dethrone Sota by recalling him from the Senate. Also with one voice they selected Aisosa to replace Sota in the Senate. Their level of education could be deciphered from their approach to issues and language used. For example, Madam power power is presented as an educated person who has good command of the English language and approaches issues with diligence whereas Madam Show Dem has a different orientation and

is presented as one who has poor knowledge of English language and speaks pigeon English reflecting her poor educational background.

SHOW DEM: My people make una forget Sota. If person get broad, you no dey ever see de broad, you no dey hear from am, no be say she no get broad be dat?

POWER-POWER: [*Standing*] What I will say is for us to give Sota a long rope and give him an opportunity to tender us his apologies. (49)

It is a fact that women have numeral strength and this advantage is deftly applied here leading to the overwhelming vote the women recorded that facilitated Sota's recall and Aisosa's enthronement. In this scene also women are presented as being their "sister's keeper" and no longer "brother's keeper". The characters Salami contrived to facilitate the humiliation of Sota are all women but although they belong to different class yet they came together to save their fellow woman from humiliation and embarrassment from Sota. Cheryl, Sota's British wife, on sensing that Sota might have a wife at home decided to dig further in order to unravel the mystery. With the co-operation of the maids who took her to Ede, Aisosa's bosom friend, Cheryl was able to grab the gist which eventually led to her meeting with Aisosa. It was this meeting and fraternity that eventually unseated Sota and worsened his condition. Cheryl not only compensated Aisosa for the damage done to her marriage but made sure that she was internationally rewarded. The union of the two signifies that men could be in danger when women are together and decide on one goal.

CHERYL: You heard me right, bigamist. You thought I would never know. You think I am a fool? It is a small world you know. Honourable Dr. Senator Sota Ojo. How appropriate? For six years we have been married and you cleverly kept this a secret. Today your secret

is out. Blown out by the wind of destiny. Your can of worms has been thrown open to the view of all, Sota. (56)

SOTA: Thanks madam. I do not need you to lecture me on morals. So both of you have finally met? The cat is out of the bag eh? I am now an enemy to you both? (57)

From the foregoing, one point becomes clear, that is Salami is not interested in Aisosa per se but in her qualities. These are extreme decorum, courage, self sacrifice and self determination; attributes necessary for the struggle for women emancipation. Hence Salami upholds the manner in which Aisosa in the play used these qualities and attributes. Hence Aisosa at the end of the play proudly defeats patriarchy and enthrones feminist concepts. In the play Aisosa's personality or social standing greatly enhanced the cause of the struggle hence there is need for women feminists to maintain good disposition at all time.

4.4 Masculinity and Womanism in Nuclear Setting: Julie Umukoro's *Adam's Family*

The issue of gender imbalance and societal development is topical in postcolonial Africa. Thus its adoption and usage as creative raw materials by many emergent playwrights is not unexpected where gender bias crisis persists. The crisis has always been between men and women acting under the aegis of masculinity and femininity respectively. The issue of gender imbalance has continued to generate much cohesion in many societies that its proponents have gone through many stages or movements in a bid to find lasting solution to the episode. Masculinity for example began through patriarchy as a form of moderation to the perceived

excesses of patriarchal system. The primary aim of masculinity was to reclaim some of the lost qualities or identities of man which came as a result of the feminist movement. Masculinity does not believe that everything about patriarchy is bad as being portrayed by feminism. The movement is out to challenge the feminist ideologies which are making waves across the globe especially in Europe and America where men are being emasculated thereby rendering many men to behave/become like a woman. Masculinity insists on those attributes that men are recognized and treated thus differentiating them from women. Masculine scholars believe that the general public still entertain the view that a lot of differences exist between men and women. Affirming to this notion, Beynon states that:

The still widely accepted view among the general public is that men and women fundamentally differ and that a distinct set of fixed traits characterize archetypal masculinity and femininity. This is reflected in popular sayings such as 'Just like a man!' or 'Just like a woman!' and in the kinds of features found in popular magazines along the lines of 'How manly is your man?', with a list of attributes to be rated or boxes to be ticked. Masculinity and femininity are often... as polar opposites, with men typically assumed to be rational, practical and naturally aggressive and women, in contrast, are held to be expressive, nurturing and emotional. (56)

Based on these perceived differences, masculinists repel further advances by feminists aimed at emasculation of men folk and also call for reclamation of those lost attributes of man. However masculinity as a movement has gone through many phases such as the traditional masculinity, the bourgeois masculinity, the Hegemonic masculinity, and the Imperial man. In all these phases, one thing that is central to their ideologies is the issue of man's superiority and how to guard this quality from eluding man. Although there might be some intra differences among men in this movement but the unifying factors is the protection of men's interest against external aggression.

Feminism on the other hand is out to challenge the masculine claim of superiority and to deconstruct this feeling or assumption from the minds of women and men who share the same view as they do. Feminists contend that men and women are equal at birth because they possess all the attributes of human beings and are born either male or female but it is society under the prompting of men, that decides which sex is superior or not. Like masculinity, feminism has also gone through various stages in its moderation and quest for a workable option that would guarantee equity or women superiority. Matriarchy for example was formed as a movement to counter patriarchy. A society where women dominate and lead is often referred to as a matriarchal society. Feminism therefore can be regarded as the offshoot of matriarchy but with refined women ideologies which seem more radical in nature. Feminists want women to become subjects of study instead of the traditional norm of regarding and studying women as objects of study. This approach, according to them will help put women at the center and make them partake in the discuss of issues concerning them. In this regard, Shaw and Lee, opposing the traditional mode of studying women, posit that:

Instead, a woman as subjects of study implies both active agency on women's part and a challenge to role male domination and other systems of inequality like racism and classism. In other words, when we are subjects of study as in women's studies courses, our experiences and voices have informed analyses about our lives. This means that all women, across all our differences, are included. It also means that traditional notions regarding men as "humans" and women as "others" must be challenged and transcended.
(1)

Despite all these different approaches to the study of feminism/women, the trend continues. Feminism has been categorized into various forms just like masculinity. There is the Marxist feminism, the bourgeois feminism, the nature feminism, and the liberal feminism.

Currently, African women and other women of colour have come up with another version of feminism known as Womanism which is viewed as having the propensity to address women issues as they concern Africa and other third world countries. There is also the third generation of feminists who do not see the need to continue the struggle against masculinity since they seem complacent with the situation arguing that women have been liberated and instead of fighting for more powers, feminists should concentrate on guarding the gains already recorded.

Women in Africa do not subscribe to this concept since they still perceive the attitude of men in the continent as domineering. In as much they cherish the tenets of feminism which encourage women liberation from certain aspects of masculine/patriarchal tendencies, they want the approaches to this liberation to be a gradual process which should probably begin with the women themselves spanning to other members of the family, the community and society at large. In this regard, women are called to embrace formal education which should form their tool in this liberation struggle. When women are formally educated, they could challenge men in writing using their creative ability to unravel the myths surrounding patriarchy and promote women ideals that could eventually lead to women emancipation. Ekwierhoma in this direction, admonishes women to “decry the negative, stereotypical roles women plays in texts scripted by men in their emphasis on ‘masculinist’ tendencies in texts” (37). By implication Ekwierhoma is calling on women to embrace formal/western education which should empower them to write and express their feelings.

It could be recalled that one of the reasons usually adduced for men’s continued domination and subjugation of women is that men were privileged to acquire western education earlier than women. Feminists often accuse men of appropriating the western education to themselves during the primordial times when they discovered the values inherent in it and

perceived it as a potential weapon which would aid in their further subjugation of women. In those days women were not allowed to attend schools lest they acquire knowledge and use it to challenge men. Moreover, women were thought to belong to another man/family, therefore training them would amount to empowering another man/family. In agreement with this assertion, Akunyili in an online article, concurs that the boys:

... were those who were sent to receive the education that the Whiteman gave. The girls stayed at home... The major reason their father did not send them to school was because – as it was said – they belonged to the compound of another man... The son is taken as the one who will bear the family name because the daughters will be married out as is the case in any patriarchal culture.

From the foregoing it is clear that men are the challenge of women and it is this challenge that generates tension in the society in terms of gender conflict. Women/female writers of recent have continued to use their creative prowess to draw attention to this social problem and seek redress. Men on the other hand are not relenting. They use materials from their creative arsenal to repel this challenge and maintain the status quo. It is pertinent to note that gender conflict like other social problems, usually starts from the nuclear family and spread to the larger society through contacts and interactions.

Julie Umukoro seeks to tackle this problem from the family point of view since nuclear family has been observed and reckoned with as a force in any discourse on societal matters. It is from the families that the society emerge, therefore the attitude or precisely, the domineering attitude of members of a particular society reflects the trainings or orientations they receive from the family. In the play; *Adam's Family* Umukoro presents the issue of gender inequality as it exists in the nuclear family where man is at the head of family affairs. This, no doubt, is typical of many African families where patriarchy is the norm. Through dexterity in her plot and

characterization, Umukoro is able to convince the reader/audience that both man and woman can co-dwell in peace when they understand each other and act out their assigned national roles. In this context, the woman allows the man to lead while the woman plays a complementary role, with each other recognizing and respecting one's personality. This is what the African women are advocating under the aegis of womanism or African feminism, which according to Hudson – Weem, is:

... neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism. Africana womenism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in our culture, and therefore, necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, needs and desires of African women. (5-6)

In the play under review, the lead characters; Micky Adams and Janny Adams are presented as husband and wife who understands and cherishes each other. As they co-dwell, each acts out his/her natural role – a sort of division of labour. While Micky Adams is the head of the family and takes major decisions affecting the family, he does this with the consent of his wife. Janny Adams on her part performs domestic chores and plays supportive role to her husband. While her husband goes out to work, Janny would stay at home and attend to domestic matters such as washing, cooking, sweeping, cleaning, going to the market to purchase food items and other related duties. In essence, Janny Adams is a typical housewife who is not economically empowered. But from the play it is understood that she is highly exposed to life having been to the United Kingdom and lived with her husband for ten years before they finally came back home to settle. She sees to the duty of nurturing the kids and keeping the house in order. Her husband is the breadwinner who goes out to work and fend for the family.

MUM: Oh, as the breadwinner you go out to work and I stay home. Staying home means taking the blame for everything.

DAD: As a good housewife you're expected to make sure everything is in place. Three nights ago, you forget to lock the gas cylinder and gas filled the whole place. This house might have burnt down but for my timely intervention. Last night, you went to bed with the electric kettle on, my usual routine checks saved us from disaster. You simply aren't security-conscious, otherwise you would have discovered long before now that the tap wasn't locked. (55)

One striking point in this conversation is the fact that Micky Adams despite being the head of the family and assigning domestic matters to his wife, still assist her in that direction. Each night, before he goes to bed, he would cross check around the family to correct any mistake her wife might have made. This also is a sign of complementary gesture which helps to douse gender tension. Micky Adams also sees to it that water is provided regularly despite the inability of government to provide regular water supply to her citizenry. Indeed this aspect of gender concept as it is portrayed in the text is a catalyst that propels gender equity. This is what womanism is struggling for its actualization.

However some feminists view gender role as a bane of women marginalization since they claim that the roles are arbitrarily assigned by men. Therefore they struggle for its reversal because, according to these critics, men assign the most lucrative yet less tedious jobs/roles to themselves while the more tedious and less lucrative ones are left for women. This has always been the trend in gender conflict, while men are struggling to preserve the status quo, women are struggling equally to dismantle the social structure. Umukoro has added her voice to this trend by

stating that the gender roles could prove a boost to good gender relationship when men and women understand each other and live according to their natural endowments.

Another area the playwright depicts in her contribution to gender issues is on the need for love and mutual respect among men and women. From the play, Micky Adams is, no doubt in love with his wife and his wife is equally in love with him. Both of them accords each other mutual respect. None of them could castigate the other at his/her back but instead respects and protects their integrity even before their biological children. For example, when Micky Adams mistakenly hurts his wife out of annoyance, the children are contemptuous of him and threatens to start disrespecting him but Mrs. Adams quickly dispels the impression and re-assures them that their father is a good man and the type of husband every woman would pray for.

ALICE: No way Mum, I don't believe that; not with the act of hooliganism he put up just now.

VICKY: He is simply a bully.

MUM: No, my daughters. In fact, your father is the finest and kindest man I have ever known.

He's only gradually becoming dehumanized by the harsh realities of the Nigerian society.

He is a struggling man and a man of principles to the core. For all the ten years we spent in Britain he never lifted his fingers against me. (58)

Through this conversation, Umukoro deftly depicts the need for mothers to inculcate the spirit of discipline and love for the opposite sex instead of maligning them. When children start in time to understand the need to live with one another in peace, the much needed gender equity and social justice will be naturally enthroned. But in a situation where children are being taught about the need to hate the opposite sex and hold them in suspicion, gender equity and social justice are

likely to elude such society. This is because each sex will be struggling to protect its interest thereby generating tension in the process.

Through this scene also the true concept of womanism is clearly portrayed. Womanism does not seek to malign men but to demand that men recognize and treat women with respect and as partners in progress. This is where the concept of feminism as practiced in Africa is quite different from what is obtainable in the West. A woman feminist, with the western concept of feminism, would not condone that act of hooliganism exhibited by Micky Adams (although not intentional but out of annoyance). She would quickly misinterpret it as domestic violence and begin making case out of it. In the process gender tension is created and blown out of proportion. Police could even be invited and the man could be arrested and detained. When he comes out of detention, one could then imagine the type of relationship that might exist between them. Thus gender tension/conflict is magnified instead of achieving equity.

This might be the main reason why gender conflict is more pronounced in the West than in Africa and other developing countries. In those countries, men and women still act according to their natural endowments although there might be some exceptions but it is normal since in every role there must be an exception. As women in the western world are fighting and harassing men over gender imbalance, men on the other hand are grouping and winning sympathy for eventual onslaught against feminism. Many men in the western world are now calling for a return to the “old order,” as depicted in majority of articles emanating from such divide.

Another point the playwrights as necessary for gender justice is the issue of morality. This point is often glossed over by feminist critics as not necessary for gender equity. Feminism as practiced in the western world has no room for morality since they perceive religion (which

engenders morality) as being hijacked by men and which has become a veritable instrument in the propagation of masculinity/patriarchy. They often accuse men of employing religion to intimidate women since according to them, religious texts are deliberately written to favour men and subjugate women.

In the play, Umukoro reiterates the need for morality to be adopted/employed in the cause of the struggle for social justice and gender balance. As is typical of her style, Umukoro presents a dialogic version of the moral concept as it concerns gender/sex. According to social grouping of functions, women are expected to exhibit high sense of morality but in the play, the revenue seems to be the case. But nevertheless, the couple understands each other and there is no problem. In the text, Micky Adams is presented as a man with an impeccable character and high sense of morality. Despite the pervasive corruption that has permeated every aspect of the society, he would not bulge nor soil his image. In contrast his wife Janny would like him to behave like the Romans when the lives in Rome since a popular adage has it that when you cannot beat them, then join them.

MUM: Have it your way, I don't care whatever you say, it wasn't my fault.

DAD: Whose fault then, mine?

MUM: Yes you! In other homes, they don't go through the hassles we go through to survive here. Somebody once said, when you are in Rome you behave like the Romans. It follows that we must do what others are doing. Look across to our neighbours, the Awanis, they've got a generator, a water storage tank, a gardener, a houseboy... (36)

DAD: You know me too well, I cannot sell my dignity and neither my birthright for a mess of pottage. Not me. If we can't go to London there are other places of interest to visit, so let

me make that my business. You'd better go about the business of cleaning the rooms.
(54)

The issue of immorality on the part of adults (single women) is also depicted in the play. Feminism is often accused of harbouring lesbianism and other social vices in the form of women freedom. This however, exerts much influence on children especially young female adults. From the studies so far made, most of the proponents of radical feminism are single women who have either refused to marry or divorced and live as single parent. This condition of living single is what feminists indirectly desire and often refer to as freedom. From ideological standpoint, majority of the feminist works depict single women or women of single parentage as having the propensity to excel more than those in marriage. In other words, it implies that feminist ideology celebrates divorce or singlehood as it affects women. From the works of feminist scholars with western orientation, most of the female characters in the cast that are portrayed as debased women, are the ones that later triumph while those that might possess some moral principles are depicted as failures.

Bad conducts by adults influence children more than good conducts. In the play, Janny Adam's sister, Aunty Terry who is presented as a divorced woman, perpetrates all types of social vices ranging from excessive consumption of alcohol, smoking, to adultery. As should be expected, Adam's two children who are all female and in an adolescent stage pick up this social malady and in no distant time they start to practice what they have seen Aunty Terry do. In the process one of the girls; Alice drinks to stupor and nearly passes on but for the timely arrival of their parents who have gone out to attend a party. It is then that they realize that Auntie Terry's bad conduct actually influenced the children.

JANNY: What's the meaning of all this? (*rushed over to Alice.*)

VICKY: Drunk, Mummy, dead drunk. Alice is drunk. I warned her never to fiddle with that stuff but she wouldn't listen.

JANNY: What stuff... ah ah... drunk? How? When? Where? What? I'm just so stupefied.

MICKY: I don't suppose you are directing all those questions at me. It's Theresa's doing and yours. You don't have to fret. I warned you, didn't I? This is the dividend of giving up your place and authority to your elder sister. (118-119).

One striking point that is very noticeable in this episode is the fact that Umukoro is trying to deconstruct the myth that portrays single ladies/single parents as having the propensity to excel. Using Auntie Terry as an example, it is recorded in the play that she has married two times and divorced two times. As a result she becomes frustrated and behaves anyhow. In other words, the playwright is presenting singlehood as frustrating and something that is undesirable and negative to the cause of women emancipation. She deliberately casts the two children of the Adams who are females perhaps to buttress the point that morality should begin with the family especially with the female children who are expected to join the crusade for women liberation and social justice in their later life.

The issue of empowerment is also highlighted in the play as a contributing factor in the quest for gender equity. It is noticeable that both Micky and Janny Adams are determined to give their female children the best of western education in order to empower them in the future in both education and economic empowerment. In this way they could be able to participate in the cause of the struggle against women/gender imbalance in a dignified manner. Umukoro recognizes the efficacy of women education in engendering women emancipation hence she

encourages it. The Adams engage the services of a teacher for a private lesson to their kids. This is to ensure that they perform better in their educational pursuit.

VICKY: Don't you remember him? Our new lesson teacher!

ALICE: Yes, Dad, Mr. Bazooka...

MUM: (*Overhears the name as she enters with Jerry cans.*) Oh yes, it escaped me to tell you that the new teacher, Mr. Bazooka was here earlier for his lesson fee. (40-41)

It is pertinent to note that Mr. Adams, despite being empowered both academically and economically still accords his wife all the respect she deserves. This is in contrast to the leanings or assumptions of the feminist concepts which hold that men are able to subjugate women because they are empowered more than women. They contend that men become abusive and assume the sense of superiority over others (not only women) when they are fully empowered and that was the major reason why women were dissuaded from acquisition of property and partaking in formal/western education. Micky Adams conduct has assisted in no small measure to debunk this assertion. With understanding and love, men and women could co-exist in peace and harmony, thus engendering societal/national development.

Umukoro, apart from the foregoing points, also employs the art of costuming as a dramatic technique to drive home her argument. The characters in the text are presented as dressing properly except Auntie Terry who is depicted as a debased woman with pervase character. She adorns herself with indecent dresses and walks almost nude while at home. One of the criticisms of feminism is its lack of the sense of decorum while pursuing their objectives. "The end justifies the means" syndrome seems their watchword. In the play, Umukoro makes

strong argument that the goals of feminism could still be achieved using decent/modest means and this is one of the approaches which African feminism/womanism recommends.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Observations and Findings

Nigerian female playwrights in the years before and immediately after independence wrote to either uphold the notions of the imperialists/masculinists about women in Africa or to correct the biased notions. Still others wrote to magnify and eulogize those aspects of the Nigerian culture that promote goodwill and social justice/gender equity or to condemn those aspects that encourage harmful practices. Emergent or committed Nigerian female playwrights write to correct social injustice occasioned by gender imbalance and corruption in official quarters and the society at large. Many modern Nigerian plays still dig into gender matters to get raw materials for their creative work. Some of these are obtained from the colonial or imperialist perspective and its destructive influence on African culture and civilization/development. The colonial experience left deep scars on the African psyche, especially in the area of cultural, political and gender conflicts. Waswa Kisiang'ani captures this view when he affirms that:

As a result, the colonial agenda undertook to train Africans to hate themselves, their values and their uniqueness. For instance, Europeans told Africans that their scanty dressing was an expression of backwardness, without considering the fact that it merely reflected an adaptation to the hot tropical climate. In contrast, European's ample clothing was never viewed as reflective of their uncompromising attitude toward the tropics (or as a response to the temperate climate of Europe) but as evidence of their impeccable modesty. (12)

These have spilt over to gender conflict and have become a recurrent theme in female dramatic works such as *Sweet Revenge* and *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*. Indeed, many creative works by women emanating from the continent have to do with either one or two things in connection with

gender matters and culture as in Julie Okoh's *Our Wife Forever* and Julie Umukoro's *Adam's Family*. Elements of colonization or its aftermath abound in modern Nigerian drama. It is either the writer refers to it directly or alludes to it or further harps on its legacies (aftermaths). Colonial experience has greatly affected literary works (drama) in Africa. It has influenced the perception of gender relationship in the continent. Gender conflict has therefore crept into the psyche of the African women and has become a phenomenon. Majority of African female playwrights now adopt it as raw material for their creative endeavour. The four female dramatists under review in this study namely: Tess Onwueme, Julie Okoh, Irene Salami and Julie Umukoro are clear examples. This study further observes that these dramatists approach gender issues differently but with considerable representation and commitment.

Tess Onwueme, one of the early female dramatists in Nigeria had in her early plays dwelt on the issue of gender and African culture. Her earlier works speak volume of her level of commitment to the representation of gender issues in Nigerian literary drama. She was writing in tune with the age she found herself which leaned towards culture in every societal issue. It was almost the age of Zulu Sofola, Efua Sutherland, Ama-Ataidoo and Flora Nwapa who wrote to attack the inhuman side of African culture that subjected women to untold hardship. These women did little to project the virtues of feminism.

However, they were not to blame entirely for this lapse because at that time, everything woman, was viewed with suspicion and considered feeble and of no relevance. So their writings were often aimed toward placating men/Europeans. This is why most critics of African female playwrights have been directional, focusing on the old generation of playwrights like Zulu Sofola, and Efua Sutherland, even long after they have been over exposed internationally and won many laurels. Their argument may be that there is always something new to talk about in

their works. However, this study observes that the younger and even much younger generation of Nigerian female dramatists have been doing some good works too and should be given some measure of exposure as well. Their levels of representation and commitment to gender matters, politics and national development can be measured by their thematic preoccupation, their characterization and critical debates their works engender among scholars, critics and practitioners.

In *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, Onwueme displayed her level of commitment and representation to intra gender conflict rather than the conventional inter gender conflict. This play, no doubt placed her in the same ideological class with Stella Oyedapo and Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh. The plotting and indeed all the theatrical elements were tailored towards being in conformity with modern or radical theatre. No individual hero is celebrated rather collective heroism is celebrated. In the play, the moving force and all that came into play within the progression of the text is collective interest based on the issue of gender imbalance. Other actions are auxiliaries to the main context. The play as a radical drama discourages empathy and rousing of emotions on the audience but instead demands reasoning and proactive measures to combat the menace. The masses in radical theatre are expected to be active participants in formulation of the text and in performance. Onwueme's approach to gender can be gleaned from the play. A close study of the text will reveal that Onwueme was out to correct some gender misrepresentations as propagated by western oriented feminists. She felt the need to correct aspects of feminism which have long been the subject of contention and misrepresentation. She thus approaches gender issue from a committed and corrective perspective. Onwueme as a dramatist and feminist felt the need to correct aspects of feminism which have long been the subject of derogation and misrepresentation.

In fact, in reviewing the text, Nina Adams writes about Onwueme:

Through the voices of women, in *Shakara* and her other plays, Onwueme draws out universal themes of conflict between rich and poor, modern and traditional – and the conflict of the inner-self is a recurring motif. Faced with the unfairness of a world which subjugates loyalty and honour while rewarding cruelty and selfishness, Described as “the Ibsen of her culture, the playwright who dares to raise new issues,” Onwueme uses the dramatic form to express an optimism for the future, for change and a challenge to the repressive powers over people’s lives (BBC on Air...)

Her corrective mission in the play thus became clear from the onset. But this study observes that though Onwueme’s effort at feminism reformation is praiseworthy, she succeeded in offering no pathway to the problem.

It is also found that Onwueme’s fidelity to gender materials have benefited her work in other respects. For instance the play’s highly episodic frame is held together by the rich pop music and religious songs which form part of the overall dramaturgical strategy for the text. The songs, for one, help in no small measure in defining the various moods as the play progresses into the climactic conflict between the rich and the poor, the evil and the righteous or right and wrong. It reaffirms and projects the efficacy of music to douse tension in volatile situations.

Onwueme’s affirmation in the superiority of men as seen in her earlier works is revealed in the encounter between Madam Kofo and Police Officer/Shanka. Shanka, a male/man is made to defeat Madam Kofo, a female/woman. The Police Officer/Chief Chairman who has been aiding and abetting Madam Kofo in the illegal deal, was later arrested leading to Madam Kofo’s arrest and eventual death. Thus signifying that women could only succeed to some extent where they are enjoying support from men. Although Onwueme may be attempting to follow major gender/feminist concept and details, this scene clearly brings out Onwueme’s commitment to the

course of gender equity. Her main concern from the findings of this study was to correct feminism flaws as regards the gender prejudices against women. From the play, the conducts of Madam Kofo were virtually presented as “unjustifiable” since they were targeted at her fellow woman. This is the sense to which it can be argued further that Onwueme was committedly pro-feminist in the play by emphasizing the intra-gender injustice inherent in the actions of Madam Kofo.

Another finding of this study is Onwueme’s deviation from concentrating on gender and culture. Her earlier plays have dwelt on the issue of culture and how it affected women in their quest for self actualization. She was experimenting with the issue of African culture and what it held for women in their struggle for emancipation from men domination. In the play under review, Onwueme tactically avoided the issue of culture. Perhaps her reason might be to argue that culture, afterall, might not be responsible for the various forms of marginalization and oppression women go through. Feminists have consistently argued that African culture is inimical to the progress of women agenda since it is the handiwork of men usually tailored towards women subjection. They claim that African women could not record much progress because of the influence of culture which inhibits them. According to them, once the ceiling of culture is dismantled, the sky would be the limit for women to achieve. But in the play Onwueme seems to take a swipe on feminists on this point by presenting the fact that women oppression or subjugation could persist even without cultural inhibitions since women themselves could also be the source of the problem. Onwueme, after experimenting with culture and gender, must have come to conclusion that gender could not exert such magnitude effect on feminism as it is often generally believed. She seems to call on all women to look deep inside and put their house in order before waging outside conflict.

Another finding of the study is the dialectics of good and bad on the issue of men/women relationship. In the play, men are presented as caring and well mannered, ready to do everything possible to rid the society of every vice, on the other hand men are also presented as corrupt and incapable of maintaining discipline. Shanka, a man and police officer is presented as a fine gentleman who has an impeccable record of service. He it was who assisted Madam Kofo when she was thrown out of the family by her parents. He also acts as foster father to Dupe, Madam Kofos' daughter and settles any misunderstanding between mother and daughter. He would neither give nor receive bribe in the course of his duty. It is observed that he was the one who dealt the final onslaught to Madam Kofo by arresting and detaining her which later led to her death. This was despite his intimacy with Madam Kofo. In contrast, the police officer, Chief Chairman is presented as corrupt, always indulging in illicit affairs. It was he who aided and abated Madam Kofo in the illicit business of drug trafficking. He is also presented as having bad influence on the upcoming youths as typified by his son, Prince who was arrested but later released while "enjoying" with Madam Kofo's daughter.

Another point observed in the play is the absence of spirit of unity among the feminists (women). There is a clear dichotomy between the rich women and the poor women as represented in the text by Madam Kofo and Omesiete. Madam Kofo is presented as a nouveau-rich who flouts her wealth around, and uses it to oppress the less privileged women. Omesiete, in contrast is presented as a destitute who is both economically and educationally disempowered. Madam Kofo treated her as a maid and regarded her as an object rather than a subject. Because Madam Kofo was economically empowered, she saw herself as being on top of the world and would not afford to identify with the less privileged women whom she often referred to as "wretched" and "stinking". Through the two characters, Onwueme depicted the futility of trying

to bring the two classes of women together in the committed struggle for gender equity. The poor women will always hold the rich women in suspicion and vice versa.

It is also observed that single parentage is damaging to family values. The children reared in such families are sometimes deficient of certain core family norms which could only be imbibed in duo parentage. In the play the children of both Madam Kofo and Omesiete represented by Dupe and Shakara respectively are presented as perverse and highly irresponsible children who could corrupt even the angels. The children were reared/nurtured by single parents. In other words, the playwright might be asking feminists to reconsider making the issue of marriage/family a prerequisite in the struggle. Children, who are well trained, will grow up to become a woman/man and carry on with the ideals of the gender issue. On the other hand, children who have no proper upbringing will continue to generate strife and crisis in the society when they become adult.

It is also found that exploitation existed in the relationship between Madam Kofo and Omesiete. From the text, it is depicted that Madam Kofo did not only maltreat Omesiete but also exploited her in all ramifications both economically and mentally. Madam Kofo failed to provide insecticide/fumigation for Omesiete to use in killing the insects that attacked the weeds yet when she noticed the problem she threatened Omesiete with using her one month salary to augment for the cost of eradicating the pests. Omesiete also worked round the clock in the farm since she had no set time for start or close of work. It is clear from this point that Madam Kofo did not pay Omesiete what was commensurate with her service. She only paid her a stipend as monthly salary. It is also portrayed that apart from attending to weeds, Omesiete also did other jobs for Madam Kofo which included acting as her secret agent and performing other domestic duties for her.

In *Our Wife Forever*, Julie Okoh clearly brought to bear her high level of commitment to the issue of gender and culture. Her works are usually characterized by the clash of culture with feminism in which feminism eventually triumphs. Perhaps, this must have arisen out of her experiences in earlier life which were marked by contact with various cultures in Nigeria since she had to travel with her parents who were often on transfer to new locations as was typical of missionary workers in those days. Her deep knowledge of African/Nigerian culture, tradition and cosmology boosted her works and this was made more manifest in *Our Wife Forever*. She subverted the African culture by over projecting its flaws and turned it to the advantage of feminists. The positive side of African culture is played down and the negative side well highlighted to attract sympathy for the feminists and arouse interest for eventual action. This subversion was so crafted as to suit the taste of the feminists and also reflect the playwright's revolutionary ideas, to liberate women. This approach is in total disagreement with the "compromise" stance of early Nigerian female dramatists whose works virtually cautioned women against culture challenge. It clearly portrays Okoh's leftist ideology and brings to the fore the politics of feminism and culture.

Julie Okoh's supreme strategy in *Our Wife Forever* is to initiate a dialogue between tradition and modernity. Thomas is depicted in the play as a traditionalist to the core. He is presented as one who is very adamant to change and not only that; he would also do everything possible to protect culture. On the other hand, Victoria and Felix are presented as people who cherish modernity and loathe culture/tradition. In other words Thomas and his people represent culture and tradition while Victoria and Felix represent modernity. The death of Victoria's husband, Hector, provides the opportunity for the playwright to present and tackle the issue to a logical conclusion.

Through the widowhood rites, Okoh is able to highlight and project the inhuman and ugly side of African culture. This is not by accident, Okoh is not concerned about what the culture holds out for men since men are the designers of culture (according to feminists and critics) but the plot is intentional in order to expose and project women travails. In this context, various dehumanizing and excruciating cultural practices are meted out to Victoria while she is undergoing widowhood/mourning period such as drinking water used to bathe the dead body of her husband, shaving her hair, abstaining from bathing, going to the evil forest at 2am, eating with unwashed utensils, sleeping on mats, spraying of ashes all over the body and fasting. Apart from the ones listed above, the widow is also expected to remarry to her late husband's family or forfeit any right of inheritance to her late husbands' estate/property. The widows' travails, according to the culture/tradition are multiplied in the case of a childless widow or a widow who bore only female children. In such case, the widow is usually made to go back to her maiden home and remarry if she so desires.

In the text, Okoh seems to understand this fact very well in her characterization. Victoria is presented as a widow with two kids: a boy and a girl. This automatically qualifies her as a member of the family but with one other condition that she should remarry to Thomas, her late husband's junior brother. The plotting is well articulated and presented with dexterity. It is this issue that propels the plot and other incidents are created to complement the thematic pre-occupation. If Victoria has been presented as a widow without children her case would be quite different and might not have aroused the interest and sympathy as when she is with children. By the fact that she also has a male child puts her in a better stead to take the action she takes by challenging her husband's relations in court. The plotting also reveals that Thomas always shows more interest on Junior, his nephew and late Hector's son than he does to Hope, his niece and his

late brother's daughter probably because he takes Junior more as a member of their family than Hope who is expected to marry off to another family in no distant time.

Indeed, Victoria had undergone some processes of transformation necessary to garner enough experience/facts for the challenge. She has stayed with the older women and other traditionalists during the mourning period and experienced what women go through, and that made her to take a firm stance to fight the social malady in the name of culture. For Victoria to have been in that condition and experienced it and yet not resolved to challenge it would have placed her to be in alignment with cultural conformists as witnessed in the first generation African dramatists. Her new experience taught her to fight on the side of what she believes to be true and morally upright since she is also presented as having recourse to prayer whenever issues that seem insurmountable creep her way. From her obviously Marxist perspective, the widowhood incident stands for Okoh as prime instance of women suppression through culture and a situation where the socially/culturally marginalized women always resolve to take their fate in their hands. This, at least represents the way Julie Okoh projects the matter in the play.

Julie Okoh's dramaturgy is deeply rooted in the politics of feminism and culture. She argues that the body of works produced by female dramatists of her generation represents, essentially, a "refutation" of the first generation female playwright's position. The first generation African playwrights had actively participated in the colonial administration and were conditioned to obey rather than complain or question certain policies that were inimical to women's advancement. Describing this situation, Cary states that "The girls and women (of Africa) know that speech is none of their business. They do what they are told. They fix their sleepy eyes on the speakers and allow their usual trains of feelings to continue" (170).

This description amply gives a glimpse of what the situation was in the days of the first generation African female writers. The colonialists encouraged patriarchy and women were subjugated. Their opinion was never taken serious and anyone who dared the position or situation of things was seriously penalized. In this light, the first generation dramatists had the tendency of either writing to please the colonialists by subjecting certain positive aspects of African culture to ridicule or highlighting and glorifying the negative aspects in order to conform to the negritude movement which was in vogue then.

This trend of events unfortunately continued after independence. Many African female playwrights/writers who began writing immediately after independence towed this line. However, the artistic trend began to change with the emergence of the second generation African female playwrights. Some of these writers began by satirizing the former creative trend and highlighting their lapses but were not categorical in their stance on the matter since some of them also experienced colonialism and were somehow affected. Thus, such dramatists portray some “grim and somber epistemology” which Osofisan describes as a “mirror of history” which they and their “contemporaries have lived and experienced.”

But this study finds out that Julie Okoh, Onwueme, Salami and recently Umukoro and indeed other Nigerian female playwrights have a different background and therefore different approach to gender issues. They sought to represent gender from a populist perspective as committed artists. While Onwueme (in her earlier work) and Okoh were primarily concerned with culture and gender imbalance, Salami and Umukoro are concerned with socio/politico matters and gender imbalance in their approach to gender issues. Perhaps the reason must have been because of the time difference since they began writing at different periods. Generation of playwrights in Nigeria who began writing immediately after independence usually reflect

cultural undertone in their writings while the later generation seem to perceive it as being overstretched and therefore engage mainly socio/politico matters in their approach to issues. Onwueme, for instance in her earlier works *The Broken Calabash* and *A Hen Too Soon* engaged the issue of culture to drive home her gender message but in her later works such as *Tell it to Women* and *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, she adopted socio/politico matters in her approach to represent gender issues.

Our Wife Forever also exposes the weakness of older women, especially in the village, to protect the cause of women. Okoh presents them as being used by men to further oppress women. In the play, it is these older women that are used to execute all the obnoxious policies of the men in the name of culture. It is they that ensure Victoria performs all the cultural/traditional mourning rites required of widowhood. This conversation clearly brings out the point.

THOMAS: There are some women among them.

VICTORIA: Those old women, do they participate in the discussion? All they do is to concur with the men in whatever they decide. Then later, they ensure that the female members of the community comply unfailingly to the decisions. By so doing, they serve as an agent of oppression to their fellow female folk. (53)

The above point shows that women lack solidarity in their cause. This is one of the criticisms of feminism as a movement that sometimes sing discordant tones in their approach to women liberation. While some see women condition as humiliating, others view it as soothing and necessary to preserve culture and maintain discipline.

The issue of empowerment is also found in the play. It has often been argued that women need to be empowered both educationally and economically in order to prosecute the gender

inequity struggle effectively. Where women are economically and, or educationally disadvantaged, they may not fight their cause to a logical conclusion since they would be inhibited by one social/economic factor or the other. From the play, Victoria is able to begin the fight against discrimination of women in property ownership/acquisition, and bring it to successful conclusion because she is empowered both economically and educationally. She is presented as a working class woman and a woman who has attained a certain level in public/civil service. Apart from being able to cater for most of her needs because of being empowered, she is also able to maintain her dignity as a woman, a virtue that is often lacking in the representation of feminists in literary/creative works.

It is also found that Okoh, in her attempt to project the inhuman treatment often meted out to widows in Africa in order to buttress the severity of the phenomenon, could also be accused of being biased towards African culture. It could be argued in this direction that she is writing to please not only feminists but the western world who always look for written materials emanating from Africa/Third World countries that would portray the continent as harbouring evil. In this context, it could be further argued that perhaps Okoh is seeking to attract international attention where her crusade would be recognized and given adequate attention. This has always been the trend in, not only African female writers but majority of African/Asian writers who sometimes seek donor assistance from the developed countries by engaging in creative works that would appeal to their (developed countries) taste.

The play under review highlights only the bad and inhuman aspects of African culture that are no longer in vogue in majority of African countries. For example in most communities in Nigeria, where the play is set, almost all the widowhood rites mentioned in the text have been either amended or abrogated completely. It is very rare nowadays to hear or talk about a widow

drinking the water used to bathe her dead husband's body in order to prove her innocence. Even in the case of shaving of hair, many women no longer observe that since the movement of Pentecostalism crept into Christendom. So Okoh is flawed here for over projecting the negative side of African culture while overlooking the positive aspects.

Another finding of this study is the dialectic of love as presented in the play by Okoh. Love is supposed to be enduring and self sacrificing no matter the odds. In the text Victoria is presented as a woman who is very faithful and who loves her husband Hector, even in death. But events in the play later portray Victoria as not being faithful to her husband Hector in death. From the exposition of her lovely disposition to Hector and other virtues she is attributed with, it is expected that Victoria would not have decided to re-marry, let alone her late husband's bosom friend. Felix raised this issue when he discovers that Victoria is in love with him. This conversation aptly captures the mood:

FELIX: Yes. Well I started to experience once in me the rebirth of forgotten tender feelings. At first, I tried to repress them, but they started growing inside me. I was confused and afraid. I didn't know where they were leading me. So I decided to stop coming to your house, hoping that the distance would kill the feelings.

VICTORIA: Oh, so that was the reason! Even when I called you, you wouldn't answer the telephone.

FELIX: I didn't want to offend my late bosom friend. (86)

In remarrying to Felix, by implication, it portrays Victoria as not being faithful to Hector because the two kids she has for him, what would become of them. Would they change their surname to Felix's or still maintain Hector's. This is most especially in the case of Junior who is

a male child and who is expected to step into his late father's shoes. In a similar case, the house that Victoria appropriated to herself through court ruling, whose property will it become? From the text, it is understood that she built the house alongside Hector but now she is re-married to Felix, will the house still remain hers and by implication Felix? When Junior becomes a man, where will he call his father's house? This is because Felix is likely to beget some issues through Victoria and this might raise some family problems as is typical of human nature especially in Africa. This is one of the areas where African culture is relevant and perhaps justified in its stance on allotment of property to male children.

It is equally found that Okoh depicted the issue of morality in terms of children's respect for adults. This aspect is presented in a negative manner and goes to confirm the argument that feminists often negate the implications of morality in their struggle for women emancipation. In the text, Victoria is presented as having a deep passion in her hatred for Thomas, her late husband's junior brother. Because of this, she does actions that should ordinarily prove unbecoming of a good African woman. She addresses Thomas harshly and further ridicules him behind by cautioning Junior to be careful about Thomas, his uncle. This is a sign of sowing seeds of discord in the children which, when they grow, will result in serious strife between the issues of both Thomas and Hector. It could be argued, though, that she did it possibly to warn the kid about the dangers that might come from Thomas becoming intimate with them. But this is not the best approach. It could have been better for her to approach Thomas and voice out her feelings and probably warn him to stay away from visiting the kids at school.

Finally this study finds that the feminist struggle succeeds in the play because it is based on the right class of women. The instance of carrying out the court case is possible because it is placed in the hand of enlightened and empowered woman who has the ideological education and

focus to initiate and sustain the process to a logical conclusion. *Our Wife Forever* is therefore based on the right feminist struggle premise because the onus of carrying out a logical women liberation movement is in the hands of the elite class and not the less privileged women but they should all work together if success is to be achieved in more practicable manner that should avoid court actions.

In Irene Salami's *Sweet Revenge*, the issue of politics of social change among men and women is well captured. Salami is among the post Onwueme generation of Nigerian female playwrights who is also in agreement with Onwueme's later postulations. She believes in using theatre as a tool to conscientize the masses/women for eventual liberation from the shackles of poverty, inhuman treatment and deprivation. This is well articulated in *Sweet Revenge* and the message is not only conscientization but a call for the masses/women to participate actively in the process of achieving political and social change. This is in line with postulations of the "Epic Theatre" of Bertolt Brecht and its expansion to "functional theatre" by Augusto Boal who opined that theatre should be "of the people, for the people, and by the people" (Boal, ix). In this way the people will not only "spectate" and "empathize" but become actively involved in proffering solutions to their problems. By so doing those people or institutions that are discovered to be impeding women progress/societal development are either re-educated and converted or overthrown and shown the way out for women, and indeed the society, to progress.

This is the situation in *Sweet Revenge*. In this play, Sota who is elected through the effort of the women, to represent their constituency in the Senate is discovered to be the obstacle on the path of progress for women liberation. The people/women did not sit and contemplate or empathize but they became actively involved and with the power of unity and determination, they were able to oust him by recalling him from the Senate. This is the idea of the emergent

female Nigerian playwrights who criticize the poor condition of women and indeed things in Africa. They do not believe that theatre only holds “mirror” to the society but that theatre (drama) while holding mirror to the society should also point the way forward. To this category of Nigeria female dramatists, among whom is Salami, it is not enough for drama to expose societal ills and suggest possible solutions without advocating for gross active involvement of the people to see the problem(s) solved and sustain the new status quo.

Another finding of the study is that the play *Sweet Revenge* is putting across its message through the playwrights writing technique. The play’s highly episodic frame does not give room for rhetorics of the “old order” which were more concerned on the formalist aesthetics of the work rather than the message. Through the use of well articulated dialogue and imagery, Salami was able to establish the mood of the event, its historical roots and the solemnity it deserves. This is quite evident in the prologue of the play. With this exposition, the reader is not left in doubt about what to expect. They know the problem and their artistic appetite is tickled to see how it will end. The reader is mentally conditioned on the seriousness of the issues at stake and follows keenly to see its end. This is not the case with many older generation African female playwrights who toe the path of formalism and individualism.

In such works the real action or theme of the drama is hidden at the beginning and continued to be revealed as the play progresses. In other words there must be “cause and effect” or more still, the play must have a beginning, middle and end. This is because most of those dramatists were performing or writing for the rulers or political class who have a “finished view of the world” and who will not condone works that would “empower the masses.” The emergent female playwrights are ostensibly writing for the women/masses whose view of the world are “beginning to emerge” or with the dynamic societal trends and therefore, they have little or no

time for the embellishment philosophy. What appears paramount is putting across the message in such a way that should be understood by the people it is meant for.

The role of men in engendering political and social transformation and by extension – societal development also comes into question here. In this work, Salami did not assign any clear cut revolutionary/transformational role to men. In fact, she subverted the conventional roles required of them by customs and traditions. Men were presented as corrupt and incapable of engendering social transformation or political sanity although some of them were presented as playing supportive roles to the women. Unlike in *Our Wife Forever* where Okoh presented men as playing active part in the social transformation initiated by women, Salami subjugated the role of men in this direction and instead assigned the leading role in the transformation to women. One striking feature in the plays is that men were always involved in the struggle although with varying degree of involvement. In Onwueme's *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, men were presented in dialectical matrix as being both evil and good. Women were made to choose which side to follow. In the play *Madam Kofo* chose to align with the Police Officer/DPO who was presented as corrupt instead of aligning or listening to the advice of another Police Officer, Shanka who was presented as a man of honour. In the end, women were presented as having failed quite unlike the other plays where women took the side of men with honour and their struggle became a success. This goes to buttress the point that women need men and men equally need women in the struggle for gender equity and societal development.

From the script, it could be understood that the women were able to succeed in their exploits because of the level of unity/cohesion they maintained. The elites carried along the less privileged women and prodded them on areas they failed to understand. There was striking sisterhood fraternity existing among them. Those who have, shared what they have with the less

privileged and whatever that was consigned to the constituency was equitably shared among them. Whatever decisions made were collectively discussed and sanctioned by the women. Whatever affected one among them, equally affected others. That was why Aisosa's predicament in the hands of Sota her husband was seen and taken up by the women as their project. With one voice they agreed to recall Sota from the Senate and none of them decided to become a saboteur in the process. They recognized their power which hinged on numerical strength over men and utilized it fully to their advantage.

In Tess Onwueme's *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, the women were not united, instead the wealthy oppressed the less privileged and there was no spirit of oneness in them. They were suspicious of each other and in that case, the quest for women liberation failed. The women, represented by Madam Kofo and Omesiete were poles apart, while Omesiete was poor and adopted honourable ways of living, Madam Kofo chose to be rich through hook and crook and threw virtues to the dogs. She eventually paid dearly for this. Julie Okoh depicted women as being united in the play under review. In the play women were presented as being their sister's keeper, the haves helped the have-nots. Represented in the play by Victoria and Faith, women were seen to be helping each other: while Victoria helped to provide economic empowerment for Faith by paying her sewing training fees and buying sewing equipment for her, Faith on the other assisted Victoria in domestic chores and was even her savior when Thomas wanted to rape her. She pursued Thomas away from the house thus signaling men's defeat which finally came through the court verdict.

Umukoro also subtly highlighted this issue of women cohesion. In the play *Adam's family*, Janny Adams was shown at one time trying to align with her sister; Auntie Terry in apparent solidarity against what she perceived as her husband's excesses against Auntie Terry.

But being a modest woman, she tactically withdrew when she noticed that Auntie Terry was debased and has sold honour to the dogs. In that case, she pitched her tent once more with her husband who was proved right by the excesses of Auntie Terry. Thus men were vindicated in the play.

The theme of the play *Sweet Revenge* which centres on women subjugation by men and women's resistance and victory over men is clearly highlighted through the activities of the women personified by Aisosa and her friend Ede and co-estranged wife Cheryl and the women politicians. In postcolonial government in Nigeria and indeed Africa, the women/masses are still subjected to untold hardship occasioned by the greed of the so called political class usually dominated by men. The women/masses are often denied their fundamental human rights and marginalization/deprivation become persistent in African societies. With much hopelessness and suffering, the women/masses are bound to react one day. This is one way of restoring responsible leadership and ensuring sustainable development. This was witnessed in the play when the women (Aisosa) could no longer bear the excesses of the men (Sota) and thus confrontation became inevitable. Through this ideological confrontation, the oppressive man was overthrown and woman placed in his stead thus women became liberated as well as the deprived masses. This is what is being advocated by many emergent African female playwrights, for the African women/masses to take their destinies in their hands and challenge the powers that be.

Another finding of the research is Salami's handling of marriage issue. Like most feminist advocates being accused of single parentage and lesbianism, Salami presented women as being capable of actualizing their potentials when they are "free" and not bound by marriage. In the play, Aisosa was unable to achieve the lofty height she attained when she was married, but when she became a single parent, she was able to excel and became, not only a Senator but a

Senate President. In other words, the playwright is implying that women could perform better when they are single than when married. This is the case with the plays under review in this study: *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, and *Our Wife Forever* except *Adam's Family*. In *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, Onwueme presented the dialectic of marrying or not marrying. Madam Kofo was not married and she made it economically and became rich although through illicit means, Omesiete also was presented as a divorced woman and a single parent but she did not make it economically since she decided to toe the path of virtue. In contrast Umukoro presented a picture of a woman who married and remained in marriage. She did not achieve fame but enjoyed peace and marital bliss as well as honour and dignity.

In Julie Umukoro's *Adam's Family*, the issue of masculinity and womanism in nuclear family was well depicted. Through the epic narration of the various incidents in the text, the playwright was able to pass across her message. Happenings in the family do not occur sequentially, hence the highly episodic nature of the plot. Through characterization and dialogue, the mood of each "situation" was set and the reader was not left in doubt as per what to expect next and this aided in the fluidity of the text otherwise it would become bored. Another technique adopted by the playwright to pass across her message is costume. Through the depiction of costume, the true character of the Adams was revealed as modest family. When their two female kids who were approaching thirteen years of age and adolescent age tried to dress in an immodest manner, Micky Adams quickly cautioned them sternly:

MICKY: (*Noticing Alice*) Hey, Alice, what... what kind of dressing is this?

JANNY: What is wrong with a simple spaghetti top... they are just casuals for the home.

MICKY: Exactly my worry. Because Theresa thinks them okay, you don't see anything wrong with your girl appearing half nude. Now, Alice, go get that nasty top off will you?

Through costuming also the character of Auntie Terry who was presented as an immodest woman was also revealed. She dressed almost naked and that manner of her dressing was gradually affecting the children of the Adams, hence Micky Adams stern warning to his daughter. Onwueme also captured this issue of immodest dressing on the part of debased women/girls. In *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen* Shakara was presented as a wayward girl who had lost all sense of decorum. She dressed in the so called "hot pant" and walked the street almost nude. In *Our Wife Forever*, Okoh depicted Victoria as dressing moderately and sometimes in Hector's attire which was interpreted to mean that she had stepped into the man's responsibilities. Such imagery conforms with Kam Kah's description of handing over of women's gowns to men as a symbol (in Laimbwe land) for men to relinquish power to women. According to Kam Kah:

They (women of Laimbwe land) metaphorically handed over their gowns to the men-folk symbolically asking them to give women a chance. This was a very forthright message and today if nothing else, Laimbwe women are providing effective leadership and sharing in the economic and socio-cultural life of the Laimbwe villages with the male leaders. (117)

The issue of costuming was also depicted in *Sweet Revenge* where Aisosa was presented as a respectable woman who dressed properly like an African woman despite her level of education. In the text, man was presented as immodest and one who encourages women to go almost nude. Aisosa refused to be intimidated by her husband, Sota who teased her of dressing like a "village girl". Aisosa reminded him that she was a married woman with respect and not a girl.

Another finding of the study is the need for women to prosecute the liberation struggle from the family point of view. The family remains the bedrock of societal development, where the family foundation is weak, the society suffers but where the family foundation is strong, the society benefits. Umukoro captured this view succinctly in her plot. An ideal family is made up of husband, wife and child (children) and this is well depicted in the characterization of the text. The characters comprised Micky Adams, Janny Adams and the children. Other characters were made auxiliaries to the major characters as relation or visitors to the family. The play explored the need for balanced parenting in the training of children. From the play it could be gathered that both Micky Adams and Janny Adams have different roles to play in the upbringing of their kids. While the man used harsh posture to caution the children, the woman used soft manner to admonish and correct them. In this way the kids were portrayed as responsible and promising.

What is striking in the four plays of the Nigerian female dramatists is their representation of family background in their various works. This underscores the point that family background is necessary in the committed struggle to gender equity. However the representation captured each playwright's approach to the issue. For instance in *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, Onwueme presented the families as "broken" and the members were presented as bad examples for the feminist cause. Madam Kofo had a broken home and her case was even worse since she did not marry in the first instance. She begot her child out of wedlock and that must have accounted for her non-challant attitude towards the training of her only child. She later paid dearly for that lapse. In contrast Omesiete was presented as a woman who was determined to give the best training to her children. But being a single parent and also economically and educationally disempowered she could not do much. Her daughter, Shakara made mess of the situation by her wayward life.

In *Our Wife Forever*, Okoh also captured family background and presented Victoria as a single parent who was struggling (with modesty) to raise her family. She lost her husband to the cold hands of death and since then, life, according to her has been “meaningless.” She was also depicted as being concerned for the proper upbringing of her children. In *Sweet Revenge*, Salami also presented family issue. Aisosa once married to Sota and the union produced two children but the children were raised up by Aisosa alone since her husband was away to England. And when he finally arrived home, he even divorced her, leaving the kids to follow their mother. Aisosa was determined to give the best training to her children.

Another finding of the study is the need for love which would breed mutual respect for the couples in marriage. Umukoro depicted through the characters of Micky Adams and his wife Janny Adams that men and women could co-dwell in peace and harmony when they understood each other and act out their natural roles. While the man plays leading role, the woman complements him by supporting. The man, on the other hand recognizes and treats the woman with respect. This is what Africana feminism or womanism is advocating and it is well depicted in this text where the Adams act it out among themselves in their daily living. Micky Adams was presented as a traditionalist who believed so much in African culture despite his long sojourn in England. Despite his patriarchal nature he still lived happily with his family, according his wife and children their deserved respect.

Onwueme presented a different perspective to this issue in *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*. Love was absent in the families presented in the text. Omesiete married but since there was no love and respect for each other, the marriage broke down. Madam Kofo was impregnated and thrown out of school. She did not even marry. This probably accounted for the recurring strife in the play with the cause of women in jeopardy.

Julie Okoh, in *Our Wife Forever*, portrayed an ideal family between Victoria and Hector when Hector was alive. But after the death of Hector, the situation was no longer the same. Victoria had to wage various wars with her husband's relations, although she later found a man who promised to treat her like Hector by loving and respecting her person.

Like in *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, Salami depicted the absence of love and mutual respect in the family between husband and wife. In the play, Sota declared that he was fed up with Aisosa and would want her out of the family house, a threat he eventually carried out. In the same vein, Aisosa had developed cold love for Sota and began to treat him with disdain. All these culminated in the eventual breakup of the marriage.

Another important finding of the study is on the area of empowerment. In the text Umukoro placed the tool of empowerment on the man. It is noteworthy that the man made good use of the empowerment to the advantage of his wife and children. Despite being the breadwinner of the family, Micky Adams still respected and treated his wife with love and respect, providing for her and the kids. His wife in the same vein supported him by doing the house chores and attending to other domestic matters including taking care of the children. In the other plays under review in this study, the issue of empowerment seemed the source of the various conflicts that were witnessed in the texts.

In *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, the issue of empowerment became a source of worry for women since those who have, used it to oppress the have nots. Madam Kofo was economically empowered but she used it to oppress Omesiete who was less privileged. Also in Julie Okoh's *Our Wife Forever*, empowerment was presented as a tool necessary for the struggle in women liberation. Victoria was empowered both educationally and economically and therefore she was

able to challenge the repressive and obnoxious customary laws and came out victorious. In *Sweet Revenge*, like in *Our Wife Forever*, the women were empowered and well equipped to face the challenges. Salami depicted Aisosa as a woman who was well empowered educationally, economically, politically and socially. Sota was also presented as a man who was also well empowered but later lost out and became disempowered economically. Aisosa was able to cope up with the depressing condition she was subjected to by Sota, because she was educationally empowered and was able to secure a good job. All the female playwrights seem to agree on the need for empowerment especially economic and educational empowerment in the struggle for women emancipation.

5.2 Contributions to Knowledge

The study has produced a functional link between gender and its representation as variables in dramatic arts. The study has moved beyond the conventional recognition of gender as raw materials to interrogate the romanticization of gender imbalance and their relevance in post colonial African development.

The study has also provided a clear landscape for discussing the works of younger and emerging writers in comparison with the older generations. In global literary discourse today, emphasis is being shifted to trends in new writings. This study is not only compliant with the global trend but has also critically interrogated the dialectics of popular struggle and its realities in the 21st century Nigerian society.

The concept of representation is often associated with the rich and powerful. However, this study has succeeded in establishing that representation is mass-oriented, populist and inculcates the followers or citizenry and not merely the wealthy. The study thus succeeded in

presenting a functional reinterpretation of representation in human development and the place of gender in achieving a better tomorrow.

Finally, the study has provided a model for gender scholars and activists through an interpretation of themes and characters in the sample plays that serve as symbols for gender understanding. The study thus underscored the social function of drama as a development resource.

5.3 Conclusion

Theatre practitioners/female playwrights across various generations have continued to draw from gender as raw materials to enrich their creative work. Although gender issues have been major sources of raw materials, their usage in African drama are quite distinct. While the older generation used it to correct certain wrong perceptions about gender in Africa and her culture, the emergent playwrights or modern dramatists re-write or adapt it for revolutionary/reformative ideals. That is why Oyewumi's argument that "...the two basic categories of woman and gender demand re-thinking" (7), strongly supports this study.

Tess Onwueme and her contemporaries have remained active on the Nigerian stage with plays from their different background and they have been able to challenge improper policies especially on gender matters. They have fought, using artistic weapons from their creative arsenal, for the enthronement of (gender) equity and justice. The fact that they have not relented shows their commitment to their cause as socially responsible female playwrights. This tendency is also visible among some of Onwueme's younger compatriots. They have shown some level of unwavering commitment to the call for gender equity and social justice. Indeed some of the older generations of Nigerian playwrights (including men, like Wole Soyinka, and Ola Rotimi) later

joined the bandwagon in advocating for the use of drama and theatre to challenge societal ills and subsequently overthrow the oppressive structures. Gender issues are highly sensitive and sometimes political. It calls for concerted effort on the part of both male and female playwrights to tackle the problem. As Wa Thiong'O, affirms:

Gender and female elite issues are highly political, creative writers cannot totally avoid the political issues of their environments because even where the writer has not ordinarily been actively involved in politics, such writer will often get 'suddenly involved in the hot political power struggles of the day'. (73)

As the world reels in the second decade of the new millennium, it is remarkable that tradition of literary and theatrical activities have continued to gain momentum in Africa. This is not surprising since the populace understands the truly functional impact of drama and theatre in their lives. The young generation of Nigerian female dramatists understand the importance of being truly representative. They have therefore, not departed from the ways of their theatre forbearers exploring traditional idioms and nuances in a creatively new way to reach out to their target audience. This constant shift of emphasis has aided in making them remain relevant to contemporary needs of dynamic society.

The question of style and language are equally important. The theatre in Nigeria and indeed Africa is as good as useless if the audience for whom it is meant cannot be reached. Dramatists or female dramatists in particular, should therefore be selective in their choice of words (language) and the style to be adopted to pass across the message. African theatre will continue to remain relevant as long as it continues to communicate with her primary audience.

For theatre to be used in fostering social transformation and national development through revolutionary tenets, there must be high level of commitment on the part of the dramatists/female dramatists both the already established ones and the emergent ones. Part of this commitment is anchored on their approach to gender issues. Committed Nigerian female dramatists suggest that gender issues should not haunt the people. The examples of Onwueme, Okoh, Salami and Umukoro, from their plays studied in this work, show that gender issues should not be an element for prejudice and mere documentation. Gender, from a committed and representative perspective, should be a tool for restructuring the present and paving a way for a progressive future.

It is also pertinent that Nigerian female dramatists, while dwelling on gender matters should not lose sight of their major responsibilities which, according to Leslie Ogundipe are: “first, to tell about being a woman, secondly, to describe reality from a woman’s view, a woman’s perspective” (57). In this way the womanism ideals will be told and related by the right people who actually propagate them and not by charlatans.

5.4 Recommendations

A critical study of two generations of Nigerian female playwrights or dramatists has been made in this work – the older generation is represented by Tess Onwueme and Julie Okoh, and the younger generation is represented by Irene Salami and Julie Umukoro. In all these generations, there have been striking similarities and differences arising from societal influences on their choice of theme and style of writing. A new wave of dramatic and theatrical activities is brewing in the country and while the old has not given way and may not intend to do so, the new generation is fighting and seemingly, it is succeeding in its fight for recognition.

However, later generations of playwrights especially the emergent ones are not given enough recognition. Literary critics have continued to focus on the old generation of playwrights like Wole Soyinka and Zulu Sofola. Whatever may be the argument in favour of this directional attention, it is the recommendation of this study that the younger generation or new and emergent dramatists be given some measure of exposure as well. It will also project to the outside world that Africa is not suffering artistic stagnation since she has talents apart from Soyinka, Sofola and their contemporaries. Julie Umukoro's *Adam's Family* represents the generation of emergent female writings that need proper attention and exposure by literary critics. It is surprising that *Adam's Family* which has been widely staged, has not received the beam of searchlight from the Nigerian critics. The important message contained in the play will, in the opinion of this study, be adequately publicized and also serve as a guide to budding Nigerian female playwrights, if they received the required critical attention. The play is rich as radical dramatic piece with reformist undertones necessary for gender studies.

The study also recommends that emergent dramatists should not stop at writing only. They should strive to find a suitable way of bringing out their works to practices. Thus the premiere of *Adam's Family* before publication is commendable. New and older dramatists should form and maintain theatre troupes to advance their experiment. They should look beyond the practice of some old generation female playwrights who wrote mainly for stage performance in the university theatre or well structured theatres in the city. There should be a difference between them since the new generation is more concerned with functional theatre which will aid mass enlightenment and conscientization for eventual revolution. Some old generation dramatists like Hubert Ogunde adopted this strategy during the clamour for Nigeria's independence, it was

found to be effective. Therefore emergent playwrights/female playwrights could equally adopt same (but in a more refined approach) to fight persistent corruption in the society.

The study further recommends a concerted effort by all stakeholders at cultural revival. Those good aspects of African cultures should be highlighted as much as possible by dramatists while those that portray Africa in negative light should be discouraged and discarded. Modern playwrights should avoid as much as possible the temptation of infusing elements of superstition in their works. This element is absent in all the selected plays except *Our Wife Forever* where little attempt was made at introducing it. The study views this approach as positive and worthy of emulation.

There should not be over romanticization of gender imbalance or women marginalization in as much as various generations of female dramatists draw their raw materials from gender issue. This is more pronounced in Julie Okoh's *Our Wife Forever*. In her attempt to represent all the perceived injustices meted out to widows in Africa, Okoh falls prey to the lure of western feminist concept that portrays African culture as dehumanizing in every aspect without any good or positive side. Julie Umukoro's approach to gender in *Adam's Family* is a good model; she presented African culture as not being a barrier to the actualization of the women course.

In charting a feminist course, men should be involved in certain stages. They should play advisory/supportive role to the women folk. This is because without men involvement, as seen in the texts reviewed, the goal of the feminist cause may be difficult to achieve. It is proved from the texts that some men are pro-women and they support the women cause. Women should not view all men as evil.

The study recommends a more active role and involvement of women in modern African drama to reflect their important potentials and contributions and in line with global trends in human development.

The study equally recommends the use of popular language in the composition of modern African plays to enhance effectiveness. While multiple ethnicity and colonialism has imposed the use of foreign language in Nigeria and African countries as *Lingua Franca*, dramatists should water down their language, infuse local linguistic elements, use proverbs, local idioms, dictums and folklore. The linguistic examples of the selected female playwrights in the plays studied are recommended for future dramatic writings to enable the works retain local colour and African flavour.

Finally, this study recommends that modern female playwrights should exercise some level of caution in their agitation for women liberation. This study supports gradual non-violent transformative movements to press home their demands but where men turn deaf ears to such, women should not be violent or abusive but persist in their non-violent approach.

It is also the recommendation of this study that leaders read, watch and learn from the themes of populist drama to gain insight about popular participation, commitment and societal development.

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