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Female Empowerment in Nigerian Drama: A Study of Select Plays of Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and Tracie Utoh's *Nneora: An African Doll's House*

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Abstract

Nigerian drama has evolved over the years from its earliest thematic preoccupation of traditionalism to satires, to mythographies and legends. Recent studies reveal a brewing concern for the gender the society considers as weak and fragile, as their rights have been trampled upon by raging patriarchy, culture andtradition, among others. This has made various writers divert in thematic preoccupation to engage the liberation and empowerment of the female gender. This study examined female empowerment and how it has been portrayed in Nigerian drama.The study employedtextual content analysis to find out the underlying images and motifs as they relate to female empowerment. The study was anchored in postcolonial feminism, which seeks to give absolute voice to women to affect the society positively. The study concluded that reorientation, female protection, freedom of the women bill andthe abolishing of cultural perspectives of women as powerless and voiceless would go a long way in reshaping and empowering the society.

Keywords: Empowerment, Value reorientation, Traditionalism, Nigerian drama

Introduction

The traditional African society is one that is characterised by patriarchy, and Nigeria is not an exception. Customs, tradition and polygamy place women as a second fiddle in the decision making process either at home or in the public space. This is reflected in different works of earliest dramatists like Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*, J.P Clark's *The Wives Revolt*, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* to mention a few. It is obvious that there exist unwritten laws of male superiority in all parameters of the society, language and religion. While the females are persuaded to believe that this is true, the males are consciously groomed to see themselves as villain, super hero and unquestionable. This is unconsciously developed from childhood, as the females are conditioned into thinking that being girls, they must do all the work and must help their mothers cook, clean, fetch water and look after their younger siblings. Boys, on the other hand, are socialized into accepting their roles as the defenders of the community. They must learn to withstand pain and never show weakness. So as the girls stay at home and help out with the household chores, fetch water and run errands, the boys follow their fathers to the bush to hunt, farm, till and build. The boys, thus, perceive the female as weak and defenseless against their prowess. This has often birthed the abuse of the females in all manners, ranging from sexual harassment, violation of rights, assault and battery, to mention a few. Oguejiofor (2015) reports that:

> Patriarchal practices are obviously demeaning and clearly oppressive to the female gender. Those aspects could be perceived in forms of; subjugation, abuse, exploitation, sexism, chauvinism, political injustice, girl-child marriage, domestic violence, women trafficking and kidnapping, marital rape, deprivation of various rights and many more. These are some of the dehumanizing and demeaning practices that are often seen in Nigerian society and which are most of the time cloaked in the 'holy' garment of tradition.

(p.55)

From the above, tradition, culture, and religious practices are factors promoting the system, as some cultures mandate widows to drink the water used to bathe the corpse of their late husbands. Widows are often married off to younger members of the family, dehumanized and stripped due to suspected witchcraft accusations, denied access to their children, etc.

These and many more have been portrayed by earliest playwrights in the society, but their female counterparts such as Achonolu, Tume, Irene, etc. have rejected this notion. According to them, the negative portrayal of female characters as weak is questionable as it contributes to the already raging fire of patriarchy. Hence they started writing to re-portray the feminine characters in a different light. Methuselah(2010) aptly comments that "many women playwrights have questioned the images of women in plays written by men. Their claim is that these images are false and not a true reflection of women in real life" (p.1). The reason for Methuselah's submission is because women have been portrayed as ignorant, non-assertive, less able, less skillful and less intelligent in male-centered discourses. In a similar vein, Madu (2002) notes that "female experience is excluded in early male-authored texts" (p.9).

Suffice it to say that when women made their entry into the playwriting space from the 70s, they sawdramatic text as a means of righting all the wrongs against them. They rejected women's subjugation, domination and exploitation in various ways. According to them, women are stronger and less weak; they manage the affairs of the home. As such they deserve to be elevated and given equal visibility space in the society, religion, politics and culture. They redefined and revolted against unfavourable traditions against women and sought to glorify their roles at home. Methuselah (2010) substantiates this viewpoint thus:

> A careful study of literary drama in Nigeria will indicate a mixed grill of imaging of women. On one hand one is presented with pictures of women ranging from witches, prostitutes, nags, temptresses, militants, heroines, ordinary housewives, etc. There are also those who are fearful, effeminate and docile-easily reduced to tears and emasculated. Most, if not all these images come from male authored works. The interface chronicles a complete opposite to this lot. Here women are signified as militant, intrepid and audacious. In some cases, these women have been imaged as cold, calculating and vicious. (p.152)

These female writers believe that women are not created to be weaker vessels by default but they are rather weakened by the heavy imprints of patriarchal system in which the males have put themselves in charge, and also instituted cultural structures that demean and disvalue their female counterparts. Tobrise (1999) reiterates that:

> The earliest works by Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Ola Rotimi and Zulu Sofola are replete with titanic heroes. There is a celebration of the prowess, masculinity and glory of men in most of these texts. These heroes range from great astute war generals like Kurunmi in *Kurunmi* and Odewale in *The Gods are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi, Olunde in *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka, Ozidi in *Ozidi* by John Pepper Clark. However, women characters that are placed alongside these titanic heroes are, if anything, flat, colourless and unimportant, projected within the traditional perspective. These playwrights also objectified women as "weak, choiceless, defeminized, invisible or incestuous. (p.1)

Going further, Yesibo (2013) lends his voice to this argumentum. In his words, the plays authored by male playwrights give only surface light to women while emphasis is placed on her weaknesses as the cause of disaster, misfortune, objects, and evil catalyst. She is the witch, the evil, the infidel, the slave, the worker and never a leader.They

foreground a bias for and against strong female characterization:

> Female characters were largely influenced by traditional values which saw the woman as subordinate to man. The plays authored by male dramatists in Nigeria reveal a multi-focal thrust in the portrayal of women. These dramatists were male writers, whose visions were and are to a large extent traditional as well as cultural. Their texts are phallocentric reflecting the Lacanian position that social arrangements such as culture, language and writing are dominated by the phallus, which is the symbolic order. In these texts, negative attributes are assigned to female characters. (p.79)

Examples abound in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* in which the young bride bethrothed to Iyaloja's son is portrayed as weak and choiceless to the demands of Elesin. Rola in *A Dance of the Forests* is a woman with a vituperous admiration, whose past lovers have in one way or the other met untimely death. In *Kongi's Harvest*, Segi is described as "a right cannibal of the female species" who milks the resources of men like "sugar cane pulp squeezed dry". This stereotyped representation of the image of the women is a negation of the struggle for female emancipation. It places women within a culture as disruption to the peace of the status quo. These representations are "aimed at affirming sexist values, boosting male ego and psychology and strengthening sexist political ideology.

In the words of Evwierhoma (2002),

> This masculinist orientation of (playwrights like) Rotimi is reflected, even in the proverbs that he uses in many of his works. A re-reading of many of his plays shows how a lot of these proverbs are male oriented. These works celebrate male prowess, wisdom, intelligence, wit, tact and boldness. The few that talk about women are dismally negative and derogatory. They project negativity, retrogression and weakness – characteristics attributed to women alone. (pp. 92-6).

This has informed reactionary and counter revolutionary works like Tracie Utoh's *Nneora* (An African Dolls House), a reaction to Henrik Ibsen's domestic popular playtext, Tracie Utoh's *Our Wives have gone mad again* (a response to Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband have gone mad again*), etc. However, a critical analysis of these dramatic texts reveals a 'hidden motive' as these false images of women are an overemphasis of the woman as a super heroine, given their exaggerated content of the brutish, intolerant, insensitive and uncaring portrayal of the male characters. Statistically speaking, apart from the plays of Zulu Sofola of the first generation of playwrights, who chiefly upheld traditionalism in her works, her plays present a clash between old and new cultures and eventually, the old always triumphs, as is the case of Uloko, Odibei and Ibekwe. She believes culture/tradition is an institution established by laws, and any attempt to break these laws or desecrate them is met with stiff resistance. Thus, culture should be respected. The women should submit to this cultural ethos and not question or alter it lest they lose their life in the process. Most of the latter female playwrights in the second and third generation like Stella Oyedepo, Julie Okoh, Catherine Achonolu, Irene Salami, Osita Ezewanebe, Tracie Chimah Utoh-Ezeajugh, Tosin Tume, etc. have in one way or the other portrayed an exaggerated image of the woman in most of their plays as unlimited and unrestricted by law or circumstances.

This projection of male characters as prey and women as predators, in an attempt to represent the images of feminine gender is unrealistic. This is because there are two sides of a coin: not every woman is good and not every man is bad. Hence, the dramaturgies of Irene Salami's *Sweet Revenge*, *Emotan: A Benin Heroine*, *More than Dancing*; Stella Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested, On His Demise*;Julie Okoh's *Closed Doors, The Trials*, *The*

Mannequins, In the Fullness of Time, Edewede, The Mask, etc. evidently showcase the brutality, bestiality and inconsideration of men vis-à-viswomen. This issue is what Ogunleye (2004) sets to address when she submits that "...there are plays that acknowledge the place of women in the "drama" of life. It is not realistic to present women as saints in womanist plays. We are interested in seeing women in plays and also in their various shades of human behaviour"(p.117). From the foregoing, we see the emergence of the female playwright, with four major characteristics, the positive use of female bodies, respectful woman language, expressing and validation of female psyche and showing women's cultural position. These are elements of self-determination, if not self-affirmation. In employing these elements, silence is being debunked and speech or writing encouraged. The solidarity is for the feminine gender, redefining female visibility in social, cultural and political space, disempowering the age long male dominance and poor, derogatory representation of women by male Nigerian playwrights.

These negative misrepresentation of women has dominated and flooded the Nigerian dramatic space, especially as they are chiefly authored by male dramatists. However, it is noteworthy to observe that these male playwrights have also portrayed women to be a non-conformist model, as they berate the existence of harmful traditional practices. J.P. Clark in *The Wives Revolt* gives visibility to the women in the oil sharing formula. Mbachaga opposes the cultural rite of widows drinking their husband's corpse water by empowering Ifeoma to speak out. Despite portraying Mama Rashida as an inherited wife of Lejoka Brown, Rotimi empowers Liza to fight for a just cause and liberates Sikira in the process, thereby giving women a place in the political space.

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Feminism

Over the years, there have been various movements to redefine the visibility of a woman in the social and cultural space, especially as the bulk of our literature is selectively a weapon of male propaganda to subdue the female permanently. One of these movements is feminism that aims at giving equal representation, rights and privileges to both sexes. The various strands of feminism include but is not limited to Ecofeminism, Motherism, Afro-Feminism, Radical Feminism, Material Feminism, Moderate Feminism, Gender Feminism, Individualist, or Libertarian Feminism, Stiwanism, cultural feminism, socialist feminism, and postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminism, as the name implies, is concerned with the liberation of women from the shackles of the colonizer countries, who misrepresent their colonized counterparts by imposing silence on their cultural, social, racial and political specificities. However, postcolonial feminism has two major things to deal with. One is the precolonial representation of women by numerous cultures as weak, inferior and second fiddle. The other is to give them voice from the negative impact of colonialism of women represented as slaves. Postcolonial feminist theory, according toTyagi (2014),

> is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in western locations. While postcolonial theorist struggles against the maiden colonial discourse that aims at misrepresenting him as inferior, the task of a postcolonial feminist is far more complicated. She suffers from "double colonization" as she simultaneously experiences the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. She has to resist the control of colonial power not only as a colonized subject, but also as a woman. In this oppression, her colonized brother is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor. (p.46)

From position, postcolonial feminism aligns itself with the pluralistic aim of revolting against patriarchy as a structure, which exists before colonialism, then colonial oppression of their rights by the colonialist philosophies. It is also concerned with the production of literature by colonized people that misrepresents their identity and gives no

space (absence) for equality between the sexes. They therefore seek to insert the often 'absent' colonized subject into the dominant discourse in a way that it resists/subverts the authority of the writer in his works and questions their reflections as injustice against the feminine gender.

Suffice it to say that post colonialism and feminism have come to share a tense relationship as some feminist critics point out that postcolonial theory is a male-centered field that has not only excluded the concerns of women but also exploited them. Hence, they seek to primarily concern themselves with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in Western locations. It concentrates on construction of gender difference in colonial and anti-colonial discourses, and the representation of women in anti-colonial and postcolonial discourses with particular reference to the work of women writers. According to Omonubi (2010):

> Colonialism was a disengaging experience that obliterated and stifled the voice of women. The colonial strategy of circuitous control created a gender-oriented executive establishment that endures in spite of decolonization. The British government's socioeconomic approaches that handicapped women and the political arrangement that empowered men to rule women are continually blamed for the current disadvantaged status of women in Nigeria. Both strategies robbed women of their traditional authority (p.100).

From the position of Omonubi, colonialism disrupted the traditional system of production in indigenous Nigerian societies, reinforcing the existing systems of social inequality and introducing oppressive forms of social stratification throughout the state. This, coupled with a deep seething patriarchal system, further relegated women to the back of the chair not only in writings but in social, political and religious spaces. Postcolonial feminism, thus, seeks to address these salient issues by emphasizing the need for the female creativity since according to Methuselah(2008) "the significant contributions of African women in traditional African society have been ignored and minimized by men" (p.10).

Data Analysis

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again: Synopsis

Our Husband has gone mad again revolves around Major Lejoka Brown, an astute military officer, who retires to manage his cocoa business. He soon nurses the ambition to become president primarily to eat the 'national cake' and not serve the people's interest. In order to achieve this, he marries a third wife, Sikira, the daughter of the Iyaloja, to win the support of the market women. This is without the consent of Mama Rashida, his elder brother's late wife, and Liza, his Kenyan matrimonial wife. Trouble looms when a letter arrives from Liza of her return home and Major seeks the advice of his friend Lawyer Okonkwo, who devises a plan to forestall the tragedy by taking Liza from the airport to another apartment till the elections are over. Liza's plane arrives ahead of schedule and she arrives home earlier only to meet a saucy Sikira and a receptive Mama Rashida. All efforts by Major to suppress the domestic hassle of Liza proved abortive as she upholds the one man, one wife court agreement; hence Lejoka applies military force. Liza in an attempt to save her home enlightens Sikira to contest in place of Lejoka and also empowers Mama Rashida to go look for somewhere else to expand her chicken business, thereby opening their consciousness to their potential as women.

Nneora: An African Doll's House: Synopsis

The play opens with some masquerades in a market seeking to entertain the market women with their dances. Mama Uduak, one of the shop owners selling food items set out on a table, sends them away so as not to obstruct her sales. Ikenna, a young jobless graduate, soon comes to buy foodstuffs without offsetting his old bills and Mama Uduak quarrels with him for not settling his debt.The intervention of Nneora, a nearby boutique owner, saves Ikenna and later on helps him get a job in a

bank with her affluence. The duo later marry and give birth to four girls, which later became a nightmare for Nneora, as her husband subjugates her, exerts dominance and never gives her a say in matters of the family. Trouble started when Osita threatens to expose their previous escapades if Nneora reneges on their agreement that she sleeps with him for a night to get the loan for Ikenna's treatment abroad. Despite pleas from Nneora, Osita goes ahead to open the envelope kept in his office drawer. The overreaction of Ikenna made Nneora realise her position in the house as a puppet. As far as her husband's ego and honour is concerned, her emotional turmoil or psychological peace does not matter. Linda and Osita soon arrive to clear the air about the whole misconception. Upon discovery that Ikenna's wife is pregnant with twin boys, his countenance changes to that of a subtle husband, but it is too late. She leaves the house that same night with her kids.

Images of Female Empowerment in *Our husband has gone Mad Again* &*Nneora: An African Doll's House*

Ola Rotimi is a visionary writer who perceived what the political scene in Nigeria will become in later years. He takes a comic swipe at gullible retired military men and opportunists who flood the ever accommodating political landscape of Nigeria because they believe it is their right to rule. A woman has no say except to be submissive to the husband, as seen in the character of Lejoka Brown after he saw Sikira singing for freedom.

> **Sikira:** Vote…vote for me. It is true I am a woman but that does not matter. It does not matter because why? Because…
> **Lejoka Brown**: A woman?
> **Sikira**: Men and Women are created equal.

This shock is the plight of many husbands today, who have refused to move with the changing times and are still rigidly tied to the holy garment of tradition. They are now living in total confusion, as women are not questioning their audacity to be unfair in their homes and places of work. The freedom chant in the play is in itself emancipation from the shackles of patriarchy, culture and tradition. The woman's place is no longer in the kitchen like it used to be. Liza who is the catalyst in the play educates and brings this empowerment to their consciousness. The widowed Mama Rashida, who trades in live chickens laments a decline in the trade due to the heavy influx of traders. Liza educates her on the law of demand and supply and also advises her to expand her chicken trade. On the other hand, Liza as seen in this play is not rude or disrespectful. She only demands what is right for a union to happen, which are devotion, loyalty and respect for each other's opinions. Sikira on the other hand is presented as rebellious but voiceless. Liza's arrival brings out the voice of reasoning in Sikira, breaking her off from the psyche of the culture of silence in the African society. This is evident thus:

Sikira: ….I could tell our husband to go to hell

> **Liza:** You must have a good reason to do so, otherwise, it is sheer rudeness…I believe a woman must be loving, loyal…the husband must show some respect for the wife. Afterall, when we boil it down, men and women are all created equal…
> **Sikira:** I like that! Men and Women are created equal. (filled with ideas) Suppose, suppose we form a party?...for politics, all women in Nigeria…then we become prime minister and campaign for election (Sikira yanks a poster off the wall, holds it high above her head like a banner, and starts marching round the living room) then we sing, freedom, freedom, everywhere there must be freedom… (pp. 54-55)

That singular awareness experienced by Liza birthed the ideas on Sikira's mind and gave her the audacity, temerity, and boldness to confront Lejoka, resist subjugation, fight for herself and question the right of Lejoka-Brown to lord it over her preferences, as seen below:

> **Lejoka-Brown:** What is that partly hatched lizard dress for?
> **Sikira**: it is my dress for the election victory celebrations

Lejoka-Brown: … Go take the rag off.
Sikira: B-u-t I-l-i-k-e i-t
Lejoka-Brown: W-e-l-l I D-o-n-t l-i-k-e I-t… now, do as I say quick, or I'll tear off that half peeled banana off the rest of your body.
Sikira: Do as you say, do as you say, always command, command, command! Why don't you show respect and let me do as I want, just once (pp.56-58).

Through this play, Rotimi envisions what the future will look like: a world where women will no longer be afraid of their husbands, a world where women will defy all socio-cultural laws to exercise their rights with men in the society. In contemporary Africa, women are gradually finding their feet more and more in the political space. **Ellen Johnson Sir leaf** was the first elected female Head of State in Africa. She is the 24th President of Liberia from 2006 to 2018. Mrs Okonjo Iweala's appointment at the World Bank and the increase in the number of female senators and ministerial appointments are pointers to this fact. The liberation of Sikira soon extends to her mother, Madam Ajanaku, when she informs the party that men are only after women for votes, no more no less. In the society today, there are increasing cases of objectification, women treated as mere objects of sexual satisfaction, objects of pleasure that can be discarded with limited right of expression or opinion. The voice of empowerment soon dawns on the party members when Madam Ajanaku, taking advantage of her position as Market women leader, announces that if the party must run for elections, then women will only support a woman candidate. "**Madam Ajanaku**: And this time, na woman candidate, na him we want, oh! Woman candidate. No more no less…" (p.67). The party members disagreed and after much deliberations, they finally voted out Major and his militarized approach and endorsed Sikira for the elections.

In Nneora, the playwright is in search of social and political relevance for women, therefore there is a deliberate subversion of the patriarchal tendencies and insensitivities found in Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. It is in every way about the relationship between men and women in a marriage context and how women are often regarded as subservient to their husbands despite their contributions, sacrifices and tolerance. Nneora is a petty trader, established and sponsoring her siblings until she met the jobless Ikenna. She had to use her influence to get him a job, thereby saving him from the brinks of frustration. On getting a job, Ikenna forgot the genesis of his fortune as he condemns the shop and compares it with his position. "**Ikenna**: Your shop? There you go again Nneora. How can you compare a shack in the market, with my executive position in a merchant bank?" (p.32).

The above excerpt reveals a reversal of power, Nneora apparently subverts her position of power to her husband. Despite being the one to get him a job and get him started in his career, he is now the man of the house, the bread winner, the one who decides how and how not the family's money should be spent. He is the one whose word is law, whose wishes are final. His disdain for her shop is a strategy to remind her of her new position of subordination and objectification. His superiority by virtue of his education and his executive position in a merchant bank must be asserted to remind Nneora of her new inferior status, lest she forget. This action of his portrays how men are selfish, inconsiderate and self-centred because they believe the woman once married is no longer a human but a slave to the man and his ego must be massaged. This is reflected thus: "**Ikenna**: And now, I own you, you are solely mine: shop, body and soul…even your feelings belong to me" (p.32). This gender imbalance in the African society has subjected women to objectification. They are only loved because they listen but are unloved when they want to be heard or contradict their husband. This is one of the major causes of the increasing cases of domestic violence.

This violence manifests in the marriage of Linda and Osita, who violate their marital vows, and desecrate their matrimony. When Linda tries to stand on her feet, she is battered countless times for being an illiterate despite the fact that Osita is the cause of her misfortune. "**Osita:***(removes his belt& goes after her)* You are crazy, I said you are mad, look at the mad woman that is issuing orders to me in my

house *(drags her back and begins to flog her*)" (p.68). The typical husbands are hypocritical in actions and speech. Osita fumes because she fights for her right, while Ikenna, who complains of lavishing money when his wife bought things for Christmas, suddenly makes a U-turn should his wife be pregnant with boys.

This is typical of men in our society today. Men want respect and submission from their wives but would never respect or listen to her. They provide for the family but still emotionally violate their wives' feelings and perceptions. Utoh-Ezeajugh's handling of Nneora and her friend Linda shows the strength and fortitude of African women in the face of the most dehumanising treatment. Utoh-Ezeajugh demonstrates how African women should take pride in their role as mothers, without sacrificing their autonomy and agency. To her, a woman must first and foremost understand that she is a woman. She has priorities and preferences and marriage should not take away these preferences, nor create a limitation to express herself.

The playwright also seeks to give a voice of encouragement to the women who are castigated because they only give birth to female children. This obsession of the men towards a male child is psychologically depressing, nefarious, insensitive and frustrating. Ikenna and Osita's mentality is the first mental problem in their marriage. They intentionally and deliberately blame their wives for giving them girls. Their obsession for male children is clearly spelt out thus:"**Ikenna:**...the thought of those noisy girls…to have four noisy girls can be quite distracting…I believe that you will give me a son, in due course to perpetuate my name" (pp.37-38). This reveals Ikenna's desire for male children and his subsequent irritation with their four daughters. This is also evident when Nneora points out the possibility that the twins she was expecting could be girls. He responds irascibly, "What do you mean? Don't tell me you are going to give birth to girls again, oh no!" When she reminds him of the fact that she was not the one who determines the sex of a baby, he tells her: "If I am the one who determines the sex, then I am definitely sure I did not give you girls to carry. After all, I am not planning to open a convent. Girls! ...Not even one this time but two…Oh what have I done to deserve this kind of stigma? (p.102)."

The women are ever supportive in their own magnanimity. Nneora helps her husband get a job. He rose to the position of a manager, but he started disregarding his wife. Linda worshipped Osita, but when he rose to the position of manager, he started maltreating her. The society today is replete with stories of men, who are nothing but are refined in the arms of women, who suffered with them to make them become great. Upon the attainment of greatness, they suddenly dump such wives because they are too ugly, illiterate, and unpresentable or because they no longer belong to their caliber. This accounts for why most women nowadays are intellectually and socially empowered not to suffer with any man who cannot carve a niche for himself out there.

In our society today, this male child scenario exists. Most men who are suffering from this ignorance do not know that, scientifically, a man is responsible for producing the male child because he alone has the Y chromosome. Thus, if a woman cannot give birth to male children, the husband should be held responsible, not his wife. This continued subjugation is the plight of most African wives, who are limited by culture and tradition which demands that they should submit completely to their husbands. The husbands take advantage of this and treat them like puppets without giving them the privilege to air their views.

> **Nneora:** well, what can I say? We have no right to complain and we have no options. We are women and once we marry, we must stay under our men.
> **Linda**: Nneora, wake up! We actually have rights, it is just that we have been brought up in a hypocritical society, where men gang up to steal everything that belongs to us, even our God given right of existence….for centuries, we women have silently endorsed this social gang up (p.70).

The above is a technique by the playwright to

empower the feminine gender in all gamut of expression and all order of socialization. Men in our society today will expect a woman to tolerate their excesses Even if they cheat, lie, pretend, kill, rape, threaten, disrespect or batter another person, the same men would never tolerate a little mistake from their wives because of the deeply entrenched patriarchal psyche and female subjugation that has permeated the length and breadth of the African society, as reflected thus:

> **Ikenna**: Look Nneora, I would gladly work night and day for you, and endure poverty and sorrow for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honour and self-esteem for his wife. And no man will act rationally, if he learns that, his wife is a flirt
> **Nneora:** Thousands of women have stood by their husbands at moments of trials
> **Ikenna:** …..A man cannot be held accountable in matters of fidelity. (p.122)

Going further, Nneora realises she has only obeyed the society and robbed herself of her right to live, freedom of choice, freedom of expression, freedom to love and be loved in return. She is empowered to now make a choice for herself by not disowning her children but rather by celebrating her virtues first as a human because according to her: "I'm first a human before I'm a wife and mother" (p.120). When Ikenna tries to prevent her from going, she finds her voice for the first time in the play. "**Nneora:** You are not in a position to forbid me anything any longer…sometimes, it takes a moment of madness to dispel illusions and experience real sanity. (pp.118-119). Although Nneora had slept with Osita countless number of times, it happened before her marriage to Ikenna. She had even sacrificed so much of herself to get Ikenna that far, but at the end, her morality is questioned. Having had to shoulder family responsibilities when her father died at a tender age coupled with the fact that she had to drop out of school to care for her crippled mother and younger siblings, she had found a saviour and helpmate in Osita; he gave her the capital to start her business and helped settle her siblings. This is a familiar scenario in Nigeria today, where young ladies resort to sexual relationships withmen-often much older than themselves-in order to survive or even pay their way through school.

Conclusion

Women have important role to play in every sphere of life whether in the public or private domain; hence, women should not be marginalized. Since plays mirror the society in which we live, Nigerian male playwrights have a crucial role to play in creating a re-awakening in women to enable them to achieve their potential as the prime champions of change in the society. Nneora as a character in the play symbolizes mother of all. Her resilience and patience is second to none and having realised she deserves the best, she decides to find herself another ray of hope. The play questions the existent patriarchal structure that does not favour women but only promotes chauvinistic tendencies and women subjugation. The play however charges all women to have a rethink in their marriages and to realize that there is more to womanhood than bearing children. The women in the play were exalted, not necessarily because they are empowered to think, but also because they have been resilient and tolerated the excesses of the patriarchal society that takes all from them and gives them nothing. The play itself should not be seen as a feminist play, but as a womanist one because of the virtues of womanhood it celebrates.

Ola Rotimi chooses to foretell the future of politics as a man and woman affair. He uses Liza to drive this message home to the rigid local man, who still exerts dominance on his wife without realising that there is a new world order. Thus, the playwright echoes 'a woman's world' where everything that happens will revolve around women like we have in the society today. Women now recognise and understand the place and importance of political authority and are willing to get involved by all possible means. Suffice it to say that women also share in the daily struggles to earn a living and help in the wellbeing of our societies but are seen as a less important set of humans. The philosophy that women are the "weaker sex" has so much eaten into

the fabrics of Africans that men do not see their usefulness in political offices. To curb these excesses, there should therefore be a fundamental change in gender relations so as to recognize the role of women as complementary partners in the process of development. This is because, for economic growth to subsist, men and women must endeavour to work together to improve the world economy. Moreover, there should be gender sensitization and women protection bill to give a voice of freedom to women in their homes and societies.

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