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AMA ... is a journal of Theatre, Film, Humanities, and Cultural Studies. It is a peer-reviewed journal published by the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. The journal affords Academics opportunity to publish scholarly articles in the areas of Theatre, Film, Culture, other media and Humanities. Articles on Performance, Critical- theories, Literature, Culture, Film and Cinematic Art, Music, Religion Fine and Applied Arts, Book Reviews, Interviews and other areas are accepted for review and publication by the Editorial Board of *Ama ...* Manuscripts not more than twenty-five (25) pages, typed double line spacing in twelve points Times New Roman should be submitted electronically to: amajournalunizik@gmail.com or amajournalnau@gmail.com. No dead line for submission, articles are considered in order of submission

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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

With emerging trends in theatre research and scholarship, *AMA: Journal of Theatre and Cultural Studies* has maintained its stand as a dependable and reliable resource material in inter-disciplinary scholarship.

This Volume: Vol.15, No. 1, of 2021 is an eloquent testimonial to the resilience of the editorial team in ensuring a continued history of astute research and scholarship in order to guarantee adequate learning and pedagogy.

Although the articles in this volume have individual trusts, they are inadvertently related in a collective call for the revitalization of the dramatic, performing and media arts. It is actually what can be termed an "awareness" volume as the essays bother on advocacy.

Awaritoma Agoma's discourse on Solo performance titled "Solo Performances and the Restructuring of the Theatre Curriculum: A Study of Tunji Sotimiri's Performance in Solo Africa" makes a case encouraging teachers and students of Theatre Arts to pay special attention to Solo acts. He traces that evolution of Solo performance and outlines the benefits to the individual actor, the institution and the society. Similarly, Emmanuel Iroh advocates for the use of dramatic techniques in the pedagogy of prose in secondary schools. His work, "Adaptation of Novel to Dramatic Drama for Classroom Teaching: The Efficient Secondary Commercial School, Uyo Experiment" explores the use of drama as an alternative way of teaching prose and as a means of ensuring better understanding.

Martina Omorodion in her essay "Good Governance in Nigeria: The Place of Women" equally calls on women to rise up to their responsibilities as co-equals with their male counterparts in the society. She advocates for the active participation of women in politics. As Martina recognizes the fact that women are beginning to make little impact in politics, Kelechi Ogbonna and Chisimdi Ihentuge call for the utilization of the ethnic identity as a unifying factor for the political and economic growth of the nation. In their essay, "Exploring Positivity in Ethnic Identity for National Re-Integration in Nigeria: A Multimedia

Perspective" is a call for policy makers to cash in on our seeming 'unity in diversity to galvanize a united nation.

Canice Nwosu takes the role of teachers of drama further in his "The Teacher of Teachers as Developer of Human Resources: A Re-appraisal of Dan Uwandu's 'Child Development through Drama'". Here he extols the virtues of a teacher and submits that teachers are nation builders because they are character molders as well as nation builders through the formation of persons they instruct. Likewise, Felix Gbenoba, shows how the medium of drama is an effective way for the interpretation of poetry in "Drama as Style for Enhanced Patronage of Modern Nigerian Poetry: A Reading of Selected Poems in Hope Eghagha's *The Governor's Lodge*". He draws semblances of drama in the poetry of Hope Eghagha and explores how these dramatic elements have helped in a better comprehension of the poems. Equally, in "Nigeria's Female Dramatic Creativity: An Analysis of Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Salami's *Sweet Revenge*", Rosemary Asen calls for an end to negative cultural practices against women. These practices, the author contends, hinder the growth and development of the womenfolk. It calls for the assertion of female rights and better collaboration amongst themselves. And Chibuike Abunike calls for a reduction in violent movies in his work "Examining Domestic Violence through the Film Medium in Nigeria: An Analysis of Selected Films". This lessening of violence in movies he believes can be achieved through proper censorship.

In another wake-up call, Josephine Odunze proffers solutions towards the revitalization of the Abuja carnival. Her essay, "The Defunct Abuja National Carnival: Towards a Rekindling of the Dying Embers" seeks avenues towards the renaissance of the Abuja Carnival. She contends that the carnival is a veritable source of revenue and great tourism potential. As Josephine is calling on cultural administrators to bring forth resources towards the rebirth of the Abuja carnival, Onyeka Ebekue and Somtoo Arinze-Umobi in "Between the Nollywood Classroom and Nollywood Practice: Absence of Synergy or Synergy of Absence" are advocating that there should be a synergy between the Nollywood film practitioners and the Nollywood academia for quality assurance in Nollywood video films.

The use of signs and symbols in dances as expressed in some war dances is explored in Tochukwu Okeke and Judith Ume's

discourse in “The Significance of Cultural Symbols in *Ogbo* traditional War Dance”. The authors use this work to underscore the importance of symbols in traditional dances and explain how such signs aid the audience’s understanding of the performance. Charles Nwadiuwe and Ebuka Ilukwe make a call for an overhaul of the Nigerian Creative Industry in order to create a level playing ground for performers through a review of the Copyright law. The article "Copyright Law and the Challenge of Piracy in Nollywood Business" advocates for stricter penalties for defaulters in the creative business. And, Ver-Or Kachii sums up these calls for a better society in his article "Theatre and Revolution in Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*". Here the author calls for continued use of the theatre as means of sensitization and mass orientation. It is believed that through revolutionary plays like *Hangmen Also Die* that the cries of the masses will be heard and a better society will emerge from the ashes of the old.

We look forward to receiving more articles on this advocacy for the revitalization of the performing arts and similar discourses especially works that encourage interdisciplinary research.

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NIGERIA'S FEMALE DRAMATIC CREATIVITY: AN ANALYSIS OF SOFOLA'S *WEDLOCK OF THE GODS* AND SALAMI'S *SWEET REVENGE*.

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Abstract

This paper focuses on attempts by Nigerian female playwrights to address the socio-environmental issues that affect women in their society. Using feminism as the theoretical framework and with Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Salami's *Sweet Revenge* as the primary texts for analysis, both playwrights' ideas about the source of, and solution to, the issues affecting women in Nigeria are examined. Sofola's conservative approach as captured in *Wedlock of the Gods* focuses on women's troubles in the traditional setting, highlighting a number of negative cultural practices as they affect women. Salami uses the radical approach in *Sweet Revenge* to reflect women in contemporary Nigeria, spotlighting a new set of challenges they must contend with in their quest for liberation and empowerment. This is despite the progress they have made in acquiring education and getting involved in different social and political endeavours. An aggregate of the approaches contained in the two plays indicate that discrimination against women can be overcome by bringing an end to negative cultural practices, assertiveness on the part of women in demanding their rights, as well as greater collaborative efforts among them.

Introduction

Nigeria's female playwrights have continued to address socio-environmental issues affecting women since they came onto the creative scene. Their objective has been to highlight issues that affect women as well as projecting the ways women can overcome such challenges. This is a practice that is consistent with the Theatre of Commitment, an ideological effort by playwrights to base their works on emerging issues which affect the wellbeing of the people. The focus of the ideological engagement of such playwrights is to create an environment within the

text in which “issues that affect the people are portrayed and solutions are proffered” (Rufai-Ahmed Kazeem 137).

In this way, the works of Nigeria’s female playwrights fall into two approaches, the conservative and radical. This is similar to the pattern of the general development of drama in Nigeria. The first set of Nigerian playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi and Zulu Sofola had a broadly conservative approach to issues raised in their works. According to O. Ogunba, these playwrights were concerned with issues of culture contact, conflict and the problems of building a coherent nation out of diverse ethnic groups. The second group of Nigerian dramatists has been termed radical due to their revolutionary approach to the issues they address. They are a group influenced by Marxist thinking; viewing society as being made up of two opposing classes, one oppressing the other. Their works are therefore intended to mobilize and catalyse the oppressed to overthrow their oppressors.

Attention is paid to different issues in the writings of Nigerian female dramatists in line with developments in the society. At the outset, these dramatists mostly shine the spotlight on negative and oppressive traditional and cultural practices that affected the womenfolk; now their writing has expanded to accommodate contemporary challenges facing women in Nigeria while still decrying negative cultural practices. These new emphases are directed at challenges brought about by a developing society and the obstacles women face as they strive to navigate the times.

An Overview of Nigeria’s Female Playwrights

Nigeria’s female playwrights are still few in comparison to their male counterparts. The reason for this may be traceable to the fact that males in Nigeria were afforded Western education much earlier than the females. Moreover, the nature of the family set up in Nigeria and Africa generally presents a disadvantage to women playwrights. Saddled with greater domestic responsibilities than the men, it is an arduous task combining their roles as wives, career women and writers.

Nevertheless, Nigeria has produced a number of prominent female playwrights. The first female Nigerian playwright was Zulu Sofola. Her works, including *Wedlock of the Gods*, *The Sweet Trap*, *Old Wines Are Tasty*, *King Emene* and *The Wizard of the Law*, display her respect for traditional values above every other consideration including female emancipation. Other Nigerian female playwrights coming after her have

been more radical, especially in respect to the issues bedeviling women. Tess Onwueme, another major Nigerian female dramatist, falls into this category. She has been described as a leading voice among female dramatist in Nigeria who is revolutionary in her presentation of feminist issues. Angya (22) regards her as being radical – nonconformist in presenting feminist issues. Some of her plays are *A Hen Too Soon*, *The Broken Calabash*, *The Reign of Wazobia*.

Julie Okoh is another radical feminist. Her work has been described also by Charity Angya (26) as reflecting a concern with women as a marginalized section of the society. Angya states that her themes range from tackling traditional taboos that dehumanize women to the marital dehumanization that reduces women to sex objects as seen in *Edewede*, *Mannequins Mask* and in *The Fullness of Time*.

Tracie Utoh Ezeajugh is also a contemporary Nigerian female playwright. The themes of her play embraces various issues in life but some of them like *Who Owns This Coffin*, *Our Wives have gone Mad Again* and *Nneora: An African Doll's House* are feminist. However, her concerns are different from what usually concern feminist playwrights. Her major objective in the plays is a call to women to re-examines their activities in the struggle for women emancipation and correct the extremes some have indulged in and the selfishness others have displayed.

Stelle Oyedepo is another Nigerian female playwright who tries to show the importance of women in her plays. Her plays include *Doom in the Dimes* and *The Rebellion of Bumpy Chested*.

Theoretical Framework

Feminism has been adopted as the theoretical lens through which this study will be conducted. Feminism has been defined by Tuttle, L. (50) as the advocacy of women's right based on a belief in the equality of the sexes and its broadest use; the word refers to everyone who is aware of and seeking to end women's subordination in any way and for any reason. For Marilyn French, "Feminism is the only serious, coherent, and universal philosophy that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structures" (442). On the basics of feminism, she submits that:

Feminists believe that women are human beings, that the two sexes are (at least) equal in all significant ways, and that this equality must be publicly recognized. They believe that qualities

traditionally associated with women - the feminine principle, are at least) equal in value to those traditionally associated with men - the masculine principle - and that this equality must be publicly recognized. (French 442)

There exist several strands of feminism, including liberal, socialist, Marxist, conservative and radical feminism. For liberal feminism, equality is the overall objective. It advocates that men and women should be given equal opportunities. Marxist feminists on their part believe that capitalism which increases inequality and unhealthy social relations between men and women is the root of women's oppression. They therefore posit that women will be liberated when class oppression exemplified by capitalism is ended. Socialist feminism combines the Marxist and radical perspectives; viewing women's suppression as being based on many factors such as class, gender and race inequalities.

This paper draws on both conservative and radical feminist approaches. Ityavyar D.A and S.N. Obiajunwa argue that conservative feminism is largely derived from the work of early functionalists and socio-biologists. Conservative feminists believe that the biological differences between the sexes are necessary and effective causes of the division of labour by sex in all societies. They believe that women are naturally or biologically inferior to men, and their roles in society should be largely domestic and limited to the home. Such endeavours as politics and the economy should be left to the care of the men. This strand of feminism concedes that men are the leaders while females are good domestic managers of tension and stress in the family and community. The functionalists and socio-biologists therefore advocate for the maintenance of this status quo in all societies to avoid the instability of the social system.

Radical feminism views women's relationship to men as the central problem of women rather than capitalism, culture and biology. Ityavyar and Obiajunwa (21) refer to Firestone's thesis that the biological inequality of men and women has been extended to socio-economic inequality.

The conservative strand of feminism is deployed in the analysis of Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* while Salami's *Sweet Revenge* is analyzed using the tools of radical feminism.

Synopsis of *Wedlock of the Gods*

The play is a tragedy based on the ritual of death and mourning. Two lovers deeply in love – Ogwoma and Uloko – are frustrated in their attempt to get married. This is due to the fact that Uloko cannot afford the required amount of money for Ogwoma's bride price. She is therefore forced to marry Adigwu whom she hates because Ogwoma's family needs the money to perform the rites necessary for the healing of Ogwoma's brother. Fortunately for her, Adigwu dies after three years of the marriage. Rather than complete the required three-month period of mourning and be inherited by her husband's brother as tradition requires, she gets pregnant for Uloko in the second month of mourning. This is regarded as an abomination in the land. All the families involved are scandalized and filled with dread due to the expected repercussions on the lovers. Odibei, Ogwoma's mother-in-law, is bent on revenge for her son whom she believes was intentionally killed so that the two lovers might have their way. The lovers struggle for survival, but eventually Ogwoma is killed by her mother-in-law through diabolical means. Uloko avenges his lover by killing Odibei and then goes ahead to commit suicide by drinking the same poison Ogwoma had earlier drunk.

Feminist Analysis of *Wedlock of the Gods*

Themes

There are a number of salient themes found in the play that are worth examining in the light of this study. These include forced marriage, high bride price, and mourning rites.

Forced Marriage

One of the themes in the play is that of forced marriage. This is a serious form of injustice against women as it is a denial of their rights to self-determination. In many instances the men involved are older than the girls. These arrangements are mostly put in place because of prevailing poverty and greed, as usually the suitor is a very wealthy man or a prominent personality in the society. In some instances, young girls are sometimes given in marriage clearly in settlement of debt or for financial gratuity (Akumadu, T.U 49). In the end, many young girls have had to run away from such arranged marriages to save themselves.

High Bride Price

Closely related to the issue of forced marriage is that of high bride price. The most common reason for forced marriages is the money to be realized from the bargain. This is illustrated clearly in the play. Ogwoma's family forcefully marries her off to Adigwu in order to raise enough money to pay the bills for her sick brother's treatment. Anwasia, Ogwoma's friend emphasises this point in conversation with her:

Anwasia: Ogwoma, our people say that a man's daughter is a source of wealth to him. Your parents needed the money for a very expensive sacrifice for your brother whom sickness almost killed. (9)

Later on in the play, Ogwoma in expressing her anger at her parents' action establishes this fact while speaking to her mother:

Ogwoma: No, it is not the way others are given away to their husbands that you and father threw me away to Adigwu. No, mother, you and father were so hungry that you tied me like a goat and threw me away to a man I hated. (18)

This point is also reiterated by Odibei, Ogwoma's mother-in-law during confrontation over Ogwoma's affair with Uloko while still mourning her deceased husband:

Odibei: One does not have to see a skunk to smell him. I suspected this dog when her people were hawking her for any available man. (16)

It is difficult for women to claim equality with men who have spent exorbitantly to marry them. Feminists have therefore been opposed to the commercialization of bride price. They view it as a reduction of women to commodities for sale. It is along these lines that Akumadu submits that:

Many of the negative cultural practices under survey appear to be founded on the idea of inferior status of women as symbolized by the traditional marriage in that the woman is seen as an article for sale after marriage she is treated as an article purchased. Practices such as wife-inheritance, martial rape, the denial of inheritance and custody right, and lack of economic independence are founded on the idea of women being the property of the man. (98)

Corroborating Akumadu's view, Tiyambo Zeleza asserts that women in such situations are viewed as "pawns and commodities distributed by

male elders” (85). The presence of bride price in marriage arrangements has also been labelled “circulation of women as currency” or “purchased price” (Zeleza).

The haggling involved in negotiating for bride price certainly presents women as articles being bargained for. In some communities there is a graduation of the amount to be paid according to the educational level of the lady involved. This is similar to a commodity being priced according to its value. This, most times, lasts for a long period as the groom and his family negotiate for what they can afford. These practices authenticate Akumadu and Zeleza’s views that high bride prices reduce women to articles for sale.

Mourning Rites

In the play, there are many references to the people’s burial rites. Ogwoma’s room and sleeping arrangements are such that reflect the fact of her mourning. In the introduction to the first scene, it is stated that furniture and other household utensils are placed at random on the floor and Ogwoma’s sleeping place is in ashes by the fireplace. Her dressing also reflects her mourning state. It is reported that she is “suitably dressed for someone in mourning, with only a piece of cloth, which is draped from the bust and reaches to the ankle” (7). In addition, Ogwoma’s movement during her period of mourning is supposed to be restricted. That is why the mother-in-law is very angry when she does not meet her in her room.

All the morning rites in *Wedlock of the Gods* exemplify the dreadful and discriminatory practices towards women in Nigeria. These practices are not applied to men who have lost their wives. In fact, when a man loses his wife in some Nigerian communities, another woman is brought in to sleep with the husband as a way of enabling him to quickly get over the loss of his wife. An example of dehumanizing mourning rites imposed on women is those of Igboland, as described by Gloria Ernest Samuel.

...in Igbo culture, it is a period of agony, pain and insecurity, when the widow is subjected to psychological, social, physical and emotional torture following her loss of husband. At such a period in-laws confront the widow with harmful, obnoxious and dehumanizing practices like drinking the water used to bathe the corpse, forced marriage to a brother-in-law, depriving her of inheritance, food etc. shaving her hair etc. Part of Igbo culture provides that to indicate that a widow is truly mourning for her

husband, not only is she expected to wear black clothes she will allow the married daughters (Umuada) of the community to shave her head and pubic areas with razor blades. Also she is also expected to partake in some dehumanizing rituals. (186)

One of the reasons for the oppressive treatment of widows in Nigeria as captured above is the suspicion that the woman was responsible for the man's death and therefore needs to prove her innocence. Other times, the man's family is angry that the woman did not take good care of the man while he was alive.

Another example of the abusive treatment of widows in Nigeria is found among the Idomas. In Orokam, Owukpa, and Otukpa districts of Idomaland, widows are still subjected to shaving their hair and the demand to wear one type and style of clothing for at least one year (Regina Ode 6). Ode further explains that after the initial mourning period of three months, a period within which they cannot be seen at any public function, they are expected to perform the ritual sacrifice called Obaa're. That is, living in communion with their children. This is to protect the children, especially the male ones, from sudden death in a situation where the widows go into intimate relationships with other men. The sacrifice becomes necessary against the backdrop of the belief that the marriage continues even after death.

The practice of wife inheritance by a diseased man's brother is also a common one in Nigerian communities. It ensures that the marriage of their late son continues within the family. In many instances, there is no love involved; the woman is either forced into it or agrees so as to have someone to take care of her and the children, or because of fear.

Culture and the Nigerian Woman

Culture has been a major reason for the oppression of women in Nigerian society. For instance, the challenges that Ogwoma faces in *Wedlock of the Gods* in her efforts at self-fulfilment all have to do with the cultural practices of her people. Bagu, C. argues that the rights generally enjoyed by the man are denied the woman (80). These harmful traditional practices have continued to hinder the realization of women's rights within the marriage institutions, politics and even religion. Though there have been some positive changes, the rate of change has not been in consonance with the realities of today.

Mary Kolawole, in response to Bagu, is adamant that culture needs to be revisited and deconstructed for any attempt at African women's empowerment, and a search for gender equity and democratization to succeed (80). The deconstruction of culture is possible since it is a man-made system. However, cultural practices are so deeply entrenched that there is a need for systematic and continuous efforts in order to phase out the negative ones.

Zulu Sofola's Feminist Approach in *Wedlock of the Gods*

Sofola's projection of issues in *Wedlock of the Gods* shows that women emancipation is not her focus. Rather, her characterisation and thematic preoccupation centres the importance of respect for culture to the stability of the society. Her projection of gender issues with regards to women's rights is conservative. In the play, Ogwoma's desires and efforts at fulfilment in marriage are thwarted.

Charity Angya, assessing Sofola's approach in her works, submits that Sofola presents a perception that is traditional in terms of her insistence on conformity to traditions and norms of the society. Angya further states that Sofola comes across clearly as a woman who respects tradition and expects that modernism should not corrupt these norms (23). Therefore, radicalism does not help Uloko and Ogwoma, as retributive justice descends from the taboo of a woman sleeping with another man while in mourning for her husband. This is in line with the ideology of conservative feminism which advocates for the maintenance of the status quo in all societies to avoid the instability of the social system.

Salami's *Sweet Revenge*

The play focuses on Aisoso who is greatly maltreated by her husband Sota. Fortunately, she's able to overcome her challenges and becomes a great achiever in her profession as a doctor and in the political arena. Her husband's mistreatment of her includes asking her to resign from her job as a consultant gynaecologist to give her full attention to domestic work. He also gives her very little attention when he goes outside the country for further studies for eight years. She suffers greatly with their four children during these years. He gets married to a Briton called Cheryl. He only comes back to the country when his people send for him to return and run for the office of senator in her magnanimity she mobilizes

women to support him. He wins the election and divorces Aisoso while Cheryl joins him.

However, he gets recalled from his senatorial position due to disrespect and refusal to meet the group of women who supported him to win the election. They had travelled all the way from their locality to meet with him in Abuja. Later, the women's group appeals to her to run for the vacant senatorial seat her husband had earlier occupied. She accepts, contests, and wins. She ends up as the Senate President for two terms. On the contrary, the husband gets into further problems as he becomes bankrupt. Furthermore, his decision to go back to Aisoso is rejected as she would not have him because he is yet to change sufficiently enough to be a good husband and only came back to her out of necessity. She declares that she does not want to have a failed marriage for the second time.

Feminist Analysis of *Sweet Revenge*

Themes

There are four major themes that project feminist concerns in the play. These include women's maltreatment in the marriage institution, women in Nigeria politics, solidarity among women and a new image for women.

Women and Maltreatment in the Marriage Institution

In *Sweet Revenge*, Aisoso represents women who are greatly maltreated by their husbands. Aisoso, a consultant gynaecologist, is made to resign from her job by her husband Sota and give more attention to her domestic responsibilities. Unfortunately for Aisoso, Sota travels abroad for further studies, stays beyond the study period and hides his address from her. He also marries a second wife without her knowledge and barely takes care of her and the children. On his return to the country to contest for a senatorial seat, he considers her below his status. When he wins the election, he divorces her and moves to the nation's capital – Abuja – where his British wife joins him. Sota also sends Aisoso out of the house she used an inheritance from her parents to build in his name. Aisoso's experience in marriage is common among Nigerian women due to the patriarchal nature of the society. Some men behave like feudal lords towards their wives. Women are seen as second class citizens who are in marriages to satisfy the needs of their husbands and can be discarded as it suits the fancy of the men.

Commenting on this, Aduke Adebayo points out that writing by west African women is replete with metaphors of impossible love and luckless marriages (46). African female characters, especially fully self-realized women, hardly relate well to their men in marriages. He further cites Florence Stratton on the experiences of some African women in marriages as captured in writing, to wit:

Their female characters are endorsed in the restricted spheres of behavior of the stereotypes of a male tradition, their human potential buried in shallow definitions of their sex. Silenced, like the slave, by blows—either to their bodies or psyches—they are forced to submit to the necessity of confirming to the externally imposed requirements of their masculine societies. Living in bondage to men, but desiring to live freely and fully, they are bewildered by or see with inner rage at their servitude to a structure of values matched to the needs of others. (Adebayo 46)

This makes it difficult for women who are aware of their rights to remain in marriages where they are abused as rightly observed by Adebayo. These women usually find self-fulfilment outside their marriages either due to the death of the husband or divorce.

Women's Position in Nigerian Politics

Sweet Revenge also reflects the marginalization of women in Nigerian politics. This is seen clearly at the beginning of the play when Sota informs Cheryl of his decision to return to Nigerian and contest for a political position. She asks him which role women will play and he answers that they will be compensated when he wins the election.

Sota's response that women will be compensated is demeaning and also reflects marginalization of women in Nigerian politics. It further shows that very little value is attached to their contribution to the success of political activities, no matter the efforts they put in. Sota later demonstrates a lack of appreciation for women's role in politics when he refuses to meet with a group of female politicians who travel from their base in Benin to his house in Abuja. These are the same women who had earlier been mobilized by his wife to vote for him and had contributed greatly to his victory.

A historical review of women participation in politics in Nigeria by Okpeh, O. Okpeh shows that right from the first Republic, apart from women like Hajiya Gambo Sawaba, Mrs. Fumilayo Ransom Kuti and

Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, most of the Nigerian women were neither seen nor heard in the political arena. Okpe notes that:

Their membership was for instance limited to what was then called the women's wing of these parties. They had no voting right and could not seek any elective office. The women's wing was charged with the responsibility of providing entertainment like drama presentations and cultural dance performances, while the serious business of politicking was conducted by men. (7)

The underrepresentation of women in Nigerian politics can be traced mainly to patriarchy and a suppressive cultural attitude towards women. Women were generally regarded in traditional society as being too weak and emotional to exercise responsible leadership, and their roles limited to the domestic front. However, things have begun to change, with some Nigerian women now occupying some political and elective positions. Nevertheless, there is still a big gulf between the number of female voters and women that occupy elective political offices.

The play *Sweet Revenge* also provides ways to remedy the inadequate participation of women in government. One of them is the policy of mainstreaming women into the electoral process. This is recommended by Regie, Sota's friend when he challenges the latter on his reluctance to involve women in politics. Regie emphasizes that mainstreaming women into politics is a necessity in order to bring about fairness for the female gender.

An example of such a deliberate policy to mainstream women into political participation in Nigeria is the Nigerian Government's adoption of a National Gender Policy in 2007. The policy specifies that women should occupy a minimum of 30 percent of all elective positive positions. However, enforcement of this policy has been poor. Nevertheless, there have been positive attempts, including those by First Lady Patience Goodluck. She strove to get thirty-five percent representations of women in electoral positions. This greatly improved women's participation in politics and governance during her husband's tenure as Nigeria's President. Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (2010) ensured women occupied 16 out of the 42 seats in the Federal Executive Council.

A great motivation in the play for women to get involved in political activities is the collaboration among women that produces results for them. This includes Aisosa's mobilization of women to vote for her husband. The leaders of these women also succeed in getting Aisosa to

contest for the same position after the husband was recalled. She also wins the election and goes on to become Senate President for two terms. Women made good use of their large numbers as voters.

The women are also aware and make use of their constitutional right to recall anyone who is not representing the people's interest. All the above actions by women show that they are not docile or intimidated by challenges faced by women in the political sphere. They are assertive, and collaborate to get their political rights.

New Perspective of Womanhood

Salami's depiction of womanhood in *Sweet Revenge* is different from the images projected by culture, history and early literature. The women in the play come across as persons in their own rights and not dependent and subservient to men. They are subjects rather than objects. They initiate actions and are major contributors to the progress of their societies. These women are courageous and resist marginalization, and are capable of actualizing their desires. Salami's characterization of women is in line with Dorathy Driver's view that writing by women also aims at using

Literature as means of giving autonomous value to women's experience by helping women perceive the political, economic and social oppression to which women were subjected as well as attempting to bring about new standards against which women would be measured and dispensing with the old standards. (203)

In the play, Salami uses the character of Aisosa and the female political group to project the new woman. Aisosa rises from the position of a divorced woman psychologically battered by her husband, and unemployed with four children to regain her career as a medical doctor and become a consultant gynaecologist and researcher with well-trained children. In fact, some of her children are trained outside the country. She achieves these by studying and retaking her professional examinations after eight years of absence from practice. Among other achievements, she invents a new drug that prevents mother to child transmission of HIV. In addition, she contests and wins election to a senatorial seat and later becomes Senate President for two terms.

The female political group depicts the new woman in Nigeria's political terrain. Though some of them are not well educated, they show interest in the political process and are aware of their rights. They collaborate and vote massively for Aisosa's husband and also succeed in their

decision to get Sota recalled. As one of the women succinctly puts it; “Show dem! Make we show am say we be women with power, better power and authority, say we no be bottom power women o, but women with correct power” (49).

Radical feminism in *Sweet Revenge*

Salami’s portrayal of the new woman reflects feminists’ desire for a liberated and empowered woman. The women take radical actions and bring about changes in their lives and societies, playing their parts alongside men to bring progress to their societies. They mobilize fellow women to achieve their goals. The heroism is not individualistic but rather a collective one. *Sweet Revenge* also depicts men as the major problem of women. This is reflected in the role Sota plays in the life of his wife, Aisosa. This is in line with radical literature as the women triumph against oppression and bring about desired changes.

Solidarity among Women

The play also has the theme of solidarity among women as an important factor in overcoming their oppression and also bringing about progress in the society. This is seen in their co-operation in many areas. At the personal level, Ede’s friendship with Aisosa is so strong that she co-operates with her husband to help Aisosa in rebuilding herself after her divorce. They offer Aisosa accommodation along with her four children while Ede greatly encourages Aisosa in her quest to get back her career as a medical doctor.

Cheryl also shows solidarity to Aisosa. When she learns that Sota was previously married to Aisosa, she divorces him rather than regarding Aisosa as the enemy. Furthermore, she seeks her out and apologizes to her as well as giving her the only child of her marriage to Sota. Cheryl further goes ahead to organize an award in Britain for Aisosa for leading an exemplary life in the face of adversity. The women’s actions show that cooperation among them can help them to achieve a lot for their lives as well as the society.

The world of women reflected in Sofola’s *Wedlock of the Gods* is different from that of Salami’s *Sweet Revenge*. The former play communicates that negative cultural practices are the major impediment to women’s progress in the society. Sofola was also unconcerned about the feminist goals of women liberation from unhelpful societal expectations and quest for self-realization and fulfilment. Imoh A. Emenyi asserts that Sofola locates female assertion within tradition

because it is the basis for group experience and that Sofola rejects the label feminist because of its Western connotations (74-75).

Salami's *Sweet Revenge* reflects women in contemporary Nigeria, their progress and a new set of challenges they must contend with in their quest for liberation and empowerment. The play depicts a well-educated woman who rises to the pinnacle of her career and even gets involved in political leadership where she occupies the important position of Senate President.

There are also other active female politicians in the play. These show that in areas such as education, career and political involvement, Nigeria women have been making progress.

Education of the girl child is no longer frowned upon in many parts of the country. However, there has been slower progress in the northern part of the country due to factors such as the traditional antagonism towards Western education and prevalence of early marriage for girls. In the aspect of career, Nigerian women are involved in careers previously viewed as men's domains. Examples include the armed forces, engineering and aeronautics. In addition, more and more women are occupying significant positions. Nigerian women have been appointed vice-chancellors, captains of industries such as banks, heads of Federal and State agencies, among several others. In the political domain, women have been Commissioners, Ministers, Speakers of the House of Representatives and Deputy Governors.

Women's contribution to their progress in the Nigerian society includes forming women organizations to challenge various forms of gender discrimination. According to Mike Odey and Patience Onkutu, Nigerian women have demonstrated that there is strength and much sense in collaborative work. They have pulled their resources together to make their impact. Some of these groups include National Council of Women Society (NCWS), Women in Nigeria (WIN) and National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS) (31).

Conclusion

The two plays analysed x-ray the challenges women have faced and are still facing both in the traditional and contemporary Nigerian societies. From the study, it is clear that the major sustaining force that encourage the suppression of women in Nigeria are oppressive cultural practices. This is clearly seen in Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*. Salami's *Sweet*

Revenge shows that though Nigerian women have made progress in their push to overcome marginalization, they are yet to attain the goal of gender equality with men. Oppression of women in the marriage institution and reluctance to accept them as participants in the political process still occurs in contemporary Nigerian society. However, the plays show that discrimination against women can be overcome through bringing an end to negative cultural practices against women, accepting women as equal participants in development in all aspects of the society, women being assertive in demanding and exercising their rights, as well as greater collaborative efforts among them.

Recommendations

The United Nations goal of gender equality for nations in 2015 was not met in Nigeria. It is therefore important that all stakeholders in the quest for women liberation and empowerment sustain efforts in order to achieve this goal. The government has a major role to play. It is imperative that the Nigerian government reflects gender sensitivity and contrives to mainstream women into development policies. Organizations such as NGOs and international agencies like the U.N.D.F.I.D should also not relent in efforts to empower women. The major factor for the marginalization of women in Nigeria has been identified to be discriminatory cultural practices. It is expedient therefore that gate keepers of cultural practices such as traditional rulers lead in phasing out discriminatory aspects of culture that are obsolete.

Women themselves have a significant role to play in bringing about their empowerment. They must be courageous and assertive to achieve their aim of self-realization and actualization. Collaborative efforts among women should be seen as essential in the quest for liberation and empowerment. It is commendable that formal educational programmes have been introduced in schools to create awareness about gender equality. Examples include gender courses in higher institutions and creative works such as plays that are used to pass across the message of gender equality. These efforts should be sustained.

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