

**UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

***TOWARDS FEMINIST THEATRE  
IN NIGERIA***

**An Inaugural Lecture**

**By**

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## DEDICATION

This lecture is dedicated to the memory  
Of my late father, Augustine Azamuoisa Omoifo,  
A feminist, who first made me realise that  
“What boys can do, girls can also do”

AND

Of my late mother, Esther Otamhakon Omoifo,  
The most humble, pious and caring woman  
I have ever known.

AND

Of my late sister, Mary Iremuetin,  
Who throughout her lifetime was a real  
“Angel in the House”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am highly appreciative of the opportunity offered me to deliver the 95 Inaugural Lecture of the University of Port Harcourt. I am grateful to God for his abundant blessings and guidance, and to the Vice Chancellor of this University, Professor Joseph Ajenka, for making it possible for me to deliver this inaugural lecture before this audience composed of eminent personalities.

Traditionally, an inaugural lecture offers a new professor the opportunity to publicly proclaim his/her academic achievements and concerns, and to articulate his/her plans for the future. Today's lecture is almost seven years behind schedule; I was elevated to the rank of professor with effect from 2005. Mr. Vice Chancellor, I owe you an ocean of gratitude for making it possible for me to finally present my own inaugural lecture today.

Professor Ola Rotimi, the theatre guru, a director, actor, playwright, a theatre practitioner par excellence, the initiator of theatre studies and practice at the University of Port Harcourt, my mentor, delivered his inaugural lecture, Series No 11 in 1991, titled "African Dramatic Literature: To be or To Become", from the Department of Creative Arts. So, in a special way, I hereby express my sincere gratitude to the present administration headed by Professor Joseph Ajenka, for giving me the honour to present the first inaugural lecture from the Department of Theater Arts. For making me the second female professor to deliver an inaugural lecture from the Faculty of Humanities after Professor Mrs. Helen Chukwuma presented hers in 2004, I am triply honoured by my Almighty Father.

Although I didn't start my academic career, from the Department of Theatre Arts, today, I am a professor of theatre, with specialization in theory and criticism. I am abundantly grateful to Professor Ola Rotimi who was able to discern my great interest in theatre, and willingly welcomed me into his theatre

rehearsals and playwriting classes. Through apprenticeship under him, I gained valuable insight into the business of professional play production, hence to him I owe an unquantifiable gratitude.

On this note, I would like to pay homage to my parents for initiating me into artistic performances, and especially to my father for not listening to his relatives who were pressurizing him to marry me off to pay my brothers' school fees when the family was passing through some crises. I also thank my immediate senior sister, Rose Abba, who willingly agreed to part with some of her meagre salary to help father pay my school fees, and my most senior brother, Chief Louis Omoifo, who helped me to get a scholarship from TOTAL CFP for my PhD programme in France. I thank all my siblings for the joy shared in our childhood, and for the continued support through life.

Special thanks to all my former teachers who laid the intellectual foundation of what I have achieved today. My father, Augustine A Omoifo, Anslem Atiomo and Kate Lynch, were the brick layers that laid the foundation stone in Nigeria before Ms. Elizabeth Wilson, Elizabeth Maxwell, John Crawford and Donald Mitchell with financial assistance from Mrs Ruth Bell Billy Graham, raised the structure to lintel level. Faucher, John Langdon and Steve Arnold brought it up to the roofing level before Jack Corzani and Alain Ricard crowned the structure with a gorgeous roof, making it stand out majestically with confidence in the neighbourhood the day it was unveiled before the gathering of town and gown at the University of Bordeaux III Conference Hall. Bordeaux, France.

I hereby thank all the institutions, organizations and individuals that funded my studies abroad: Montreat-Anderson College Work/Study Aid, Loyola University, Chicago Foreign Aid Scholarship Scheme, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada Research Grant, Total CFP Scholarship Award and finally Fulbright Scholarship Award

Some people served as my family throughout my stay in France and in the USA, providing me solace, companionship and laughter when the mood was downcast. Mr. & Mrs. Baker, Prof. & Mrs. Donald Mitchell, Mr. Jean-Luc and Mary-Helene Cutulli, Professor Sarah Marandon and the Reverend Sisters at Rue De Luc, Bordeaux. Thanks for your kind gestures of support and goodwill.

I hereby thank all my colleagues in the Department of Theatre Arts, especially those who have collaborated with me in play productions, with special reference to Friday Nwafor and Columbus Irisoanga. Nwafor, I sincerely thank you for your unflinching dedication and support. I have so many sons and daughters in the department. I cannot name all of you within the limit of this page of acknowledgement, but you all know who you are and I thank you all for your friendship and for responding any time I call for your help. I must also thank all my past and present students for the vibrant discussions we've always had in class. Appreciation is also extended to my former colleagues in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, and to every member of the Faculty of Humanities.

I thank the university community at large for making the residence of my family at Uniport rewarding. I am equally grateful to all the Chaplains and congregation of the Chapel of The Annunciation for contributing to my spiritual growth.

My gratitude also goes to my children, Ebanehita, Uwagbale, Eboseremhen and Oseyi as well as my grand children Emiator, Imade and Imafidon Deimedi, and Kemjika Asaguara, and to their fathers Luigi Deimedi and Chucks Asaguara for bringing joy into my life. Without you, life would have been without a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction.

I wish to thank my husband, Professor Joseph D. Okoh. What a pillar of support! What a symbol of endurance! For your

understanding, patience and caring, I say Thank you! Thank you!  
Thank you!

# ***TOWARDS FEMINIST THEATRE IN NIGERIA***

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## **PROTOCOL**

The Vice-Chancellor,  
Members of the Governing Council,  
Deputy Vice-Chancellors,  
Principal Officers of the University,  
Provost, College of Health Sciences,  
Dean of School of Graduate Studies,  
Deans of Faculties,  
Distinguished Professors and Scholars,  
Heads of Departments,  
Staff and Students of Unique Uniport,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

## **PREAMBLE**

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, The title of my lecture is “Towards Feminist Theatre in Nigeria”. Why feminist theatre? My interest and involvement in performance started from my childhood. On the other hand, the representation of women in literature has always pricked my curiosity, right from my secondary school days. When I was translating, in my Latin classes for School Certificate and G.C.E Ordinary level, Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odysseus*, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, and extracts from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, I never knew they would become useful to me one day. From translating Greek and Latin epics, some of us adopted for our nicknames, the names of the Greo-roman goddesses: Aphrodite/Venus, Diana/Athena, Minena/Arthemis, Fortuna, Lartona, Lucinda, Pomona. We imposed nicknames on other people. A student good in debate was Cicero; the mail prefect was Mercury; a stubborn student was Pandora. Through nicknames, we could discuss freely about our teachers without their ever guessing that we were talking about them. A wicked teacher was Juno. When one of our American Peace Corps male teachers was getting too familiar with one of the Irish girls, they became Robigo and Robiga.

Studying classical works, by Geoffrey Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dante, I found myself comparing the women in literary texts to the women in my community. Classical heroines or vicious women had correlatives in my community. Lady Macbeth was a witch like the other three witches and they were just like Mrs Ogide and the other witches who used to go to the Onojie’s palace to confess their havoc. I could never forgive Triollus for torturing Grisselda for so long and I blamed Grisselda for remaining docile in an abusive marriage. Whereas I was cross with Shakespeare for killing Romeo and Juliet, I praised Pierre Corneille for preserving Rodrigue and Chimene to cultivate their



tender love. I saw a replica of Calphurnia and Julius Caesar in my parents, for my father would never listen to my mother's advice . He was too stubborn and arrogant like Caesar, and, just like Caesar, he was stabbed in the back by his very close friend, Ehijiamhen II, The Onojie of Okuesan.

Besides, my mother suffered gender discrimination both in her father's community as well as in her husband's village. She was the daughter of the Oniha of Ubiaja. By the time her father died, she was the only surviving child. Instead of making her the Oniha, they appointed her step nephew, just because she was a woman. Worst of all, when they shared her father's property, they didn't give her anything. At that time it didn't bother her, for she was comfortably married to a court clerk who also owned a large acreage of rubber plantation on Ugboha road, cocoa plantation at Illusi and Palm fruit plantation at Okhuesan. But when my father had a case in court and my senior siblings were driven home from school for non-payment of school fees, my mother remembered her father's property. She appealed to her relatives to kindly release to her some of her late father's land or plantation for her to sell to liquidate some of her debts. They promised, but eventually released nothing. My mother's story is not different from the story of many women in Nigeria.

I could sense gender discrimination in the world of my childhood. When reading the story about Helen of Troy, I wondered how a mere woman could cause war between two powerful nations. How could Queen Cleopatra of Egypt provoke a battle between Mark Antony and Augustus Caesar? I kept on pondering over the nature of their society. Imagine a woman becoming a queen when my mother couldn't become a chief. Which Uromi or Ubiaja man would want to fight over a mere woman, no matter her beauty? Wait, let me show you the picture of one eccentric Uromi man. Mr. Okoedo had twelve wives at home and many concubines outside marriage. Each wife was

called by her number, inscribed on her hands with the tip of a hot metal object: Mrs. Okoedo No. 1, 2, 3, - 12. When a wife died, she was replaced with another woman to balance up the 12 numbers. He also had a cell in his compound where any defaulting wife was locked up throughout the term of her sentence. I used to nurse severe hatred towards Mr. Okoedo for being so mean to his wives. Any time we were passing the front of his house, which was located on the road to my secondary school, Our Lady of Lourdes, Uromi, we would double up our steps or run for fear he would catch one of us to be his wife, for we heard that was how he acquired some of his wives without their consent.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, with these experiences, when I discovered feminism later in life, I was amazed. I couldn't help admiring the audacity, perseverance and outspokenness of my feminist ancestors and grandmothers, compared to the passivity, docility, and voicelessness of the women of Ubiaja and Uromi. Chairman, Sir, this lecture is about these women. For I want people to understand what I have been doing about the dichotomy in my perception of women from childhood till today. When reading Professor Chidi Ikonne remark in his preface to my play *Our Wife For Ever*, that the Heroine, Victoria and her dead husband, Hector, appear to be reincarnations of the Greek couple, Hector and Andromaque, I quietly smiled broadly to myself.

In beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was made Flesh. With words, Empires have been created and destroyed. With words, wars have been fought and peace restored. With words, man and woman are drawn into relationships where they exchange words to produce offspring. As an artist, I play with words, I create with words. With words, everything is possible. Whether the baby is going to be a boy or a girl, traditionally welcomed into the world with stereotyped attitudes, I know not yet. But, like a woman with prolonged

pregnancy, I climb the delivery table to finally push out today, what has been incubating in me for so many years.

### **1. Introduction:**

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, freedom is taken for granted by us today that, we sometimes fail to remember the years of struggle faced by countless people for the basic rights we all enjoy today the right to vote, to stand in the same room with others, to stay alive and not be branded an evil child and jettisoned into the evil forest for having been born twins; or for having the umbilical cord around the neck at birth. Labeled “osu”, “ogbanje”, “abiku”, many were ostracized and condemned to the periphery of the society into which they were unfortunately born. What about the palace eunuchs that lived a vegetative life deprived of their right to sexuality? When apartheid, colonization, Anti-Semitism and many such atrocities began to plague society, a revolution for a wonderful thing called Freedom became the need of the hour. So, freedom has always been agitated for by people, and women too did not ever stay behind to claim what was rightly theirs. Thus, the birth of women's rights movement emerged when the need for it became crucial. To attain this basic right, struggles, conflicts, bloodshed were encountered by innumerable unnamed women in the course of history.

“Feminist Theatre”, as the name suggests, is based on the principles of feminism. What is feminism? Do Nigerian men and women need feminism? What is feminist theatre? How can the theatre help to propagate feminism in Nigeria if necessary? How has the inaugural lecturer contributed to the growth of feminist theatre and feminism in Nigeria? These constitute the focal points of our discussion in this presentation. But, we cannot answer these questions unless we know what feminism really is, its origin, evolution, movement and ideology. Our approach therefore leans towards historical survey. In her book, *A Room of One's Own*,

Virginia Woolf emphasized the importance of a historical perspective for women's study, explaining that if women could understand what happened to their mothers and grandmothers, they would be on their way to understanding and perhaps, changing their own position. This conviction was also articulated by Simone de Beauvoir, whose monumental work, *The Second Sex*, exercised great influence in promoting feminist movement in the twentieth century. Therefore, our preoccupation in this lecture is to trace the evolution of women's roles in societies and their struggle for basic human rights from pristine to contemporary times. This cross-cultural study shall enable us to clearly discern the convergence and divergence of the perception of woman in different social environments, across the centuries. There are key terms associated with feminism which shall form the entrance to our study: sexism and patriarchy.

### **1.1. Sexism:**

Lerner (240) defines sexism as "the ideology of male supremacy, of male superiority and of beliefs that support and sustain it." She further explains that sexism and patriarchy mutually reinforce one another and that sexism can exist in societies where institutionalized patriarchy has been abolished. She gives the example of socialist countries with constitutions guaranteeing women absolute equality in public life, but in which social and family relations are nevertheless sexist. Sexism involves a reinforcement of behaviour and attitude based on the stereotypical roles people play in a society. Sexism is ubiquitous. It is a reality women face all over the world. No matter what country they belong to and no matter how economically and academically advanced a society is, gender discrimination - be it in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, politics and age - continues to exist in contemporary societies.

### **1.2. Patriarchy:**

According to Lerner:

Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resource. (239)

Historically, the subordination of women (as a group) to men (as a group) is a recent phenomenon. It was a progressive process which took many centuries to become firmly established.

### **1.3. Feminism:**

Feminism means different things to different people depending on race, culture and historical experience. In Nigeria for example, many people understand feminism to simply mean women's struggle to gain equality with men, or to obtain access to positions of power. Feminism is more than that. It is first and foremost a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. On personal level, it is a state of mind, a way of thinking, an alternate perspective from which to understand the world. It means a woman becoming aware of a distortion in her social status as a woman. Seeking to correct this distortion, the woman moves in a new direction in search of autonomy, self assertion and empowerment. According to Barbara Berg:

It is the freedom (for a woman) to decide her own destiny: freedom from sex determined role;

freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that women's essential worth, stems from their common humanity and does not depend on the relationships of her life. (24)

Ann Taylor (43) explains that feminism is a protest against the institutionalized injustice perpetrated by men, as a group, and advocates the elimination of that injustice by challenging the various structures of authority or power that legitimise male prerogatives in a given society.

As a social movement, feminism aims at effecting changes in the prevailing social structures. It incorporates political activism and ideological stance. From ideological perspective, feminism aims at examining and analyzing the situation of women in societies by exposing the complexity of male domination and female subordination with the hope of liberating women from masculine vision of life which has, in various dimensions in different historical periods deified male values to the detriment of women's ethos. On the level of political activism, feminist activities are propelled by the impetus to dismantle all systems that perpetuate inequity and justify violence, generate exclusion and reinforce domination.

A feminist is, therefore, according to Oakley:

someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would require a radical change (some

would say a revolution even) in the social, economic and political order (8).

Feminists believe that the destruction of all forms of inequality and oppression will lead to the creation of a more just, social and economic structures that will facilitate women's participation in national development and in international struggle for economic globalization and solidarity. Feminism is about making people aware of the secondary position women had, too often, been forced to occupy in social and political structures. A broad understanding of feminism includes the acting, speaking, writing, and advocating on behalf of women's issues and rights, and identifying injustice to women in society. That is why Hooks describes it as:

... a struggle against sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a life style nor a readymade identity or role one can step into (51).

Feminism, the construction of new images is a conscious process. It aims at transforming all lives in a meaningful way. That is why Nawal el Saadwi declares:

As for me, real feminism means being revolutionary, To be revolutionary means that one examines the problems of women from all aspects: historically, sociologically, economically and psychologically ... And as a radical feminist, I think you should oppose imperialism, Zionism,

feudalism, and inequality between nations, sexes, and classes. (159)

Feminist activism, therefore, includes attempts made by both men and women to revise cultural value systems and interpersonal relations between the genders based on egalitarian principle. It is because feminism cuts across gender, age, race, culture, religion and politics that Hooks titled her seminal book: *Feminism is for Every Body*. Tracing the matriarchal nature of some societies in her book, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, Marilyn French affirms:

Feminism is the only serious, coherent, and universal philosophy that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structures. ... 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 (442).

## **2. Background to Feminism**

### **2.1. Evolution of Patriarchy and the Devaluation of Women**

The devaluation of women started with the devaluation of the goddess in primitive societies. According to creation myths, during the Paleolithic era, the goddesses were originally the forces of nature, with everything stemming from the earth itself, mother of all. Earth Mother, Mother Earth, Mother Goddess or Great Mother was a term used to refer to a goddess who represented



motherhood, fertility and creation. She was highly venerated, for she embodied the bounty of the Earth. Her offspring were everything from storms to magic glades in the woods. In prehistory, the Eastern Mediterranean, and all of Old Europe, honoured the Mother Goddess as the principal deity. This maternal goddess was the oldest of all the gods, and she was all powerful. She made the rules.

Greece is said to be the root of civilisation. Classical Mythology provides the earliest glimpse of male-female relationships in ancient Greek civilization. At the beginning, the Ancient Greeks worshipped many different gods and goddesses, for they believed that these gods and goddesses controlled everything in their lives and the environment. So, there was a god for every aspect of their lives. The female goddesses were highly placed over the male gods apart from Zeus, the king of all gods, son of Rhea, the daughter of Mother Earth and Heaven. This was because mortals believed that in order to achieve their heart's desires and also receive the blessings of nature, it was easier to reach the female goddesses because of their compassionate hearts, and also because of the "feminine principle" of nurturance and altruism. So, female goddesses such as Athena, Aphrodite, Hera, Hestia, Artemis, to name a few, were venerated and worshipped.

In his *Theogony*, the Greek historian, Hesoid (700 B.C.), described the divine progression from female-dominated generations, characterized by natural, earthy emotional qualities, to the rational and civilizing monarchy of Olympian Zeus. It was Zeus who first instituted patriarchy in Olympia. After killing the carnivorous King Cronus, his father, he subdued his mother, Rhea. Zeus even went as far as usurping women's power of reproduction by giving birth to Athena through his head and to Dionysus from his thigh. This evolution invariably corresponded to a historical change in Greek religion, from emphasis on the worship of female divinities, to that of male divinities (Pomeroy, 11-13).

## 2. 2. Classical Philosophers and Female Nature

Philosophers are intellectuals. They reflect, rationalize and make abstract ideas about the nature of man and the universe. They postulate ideas on how a society could be structured and run. Their origin can be traced to Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B. C. They include Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

### 2.2.i Women in Ancient Greece

Gender discrimination was first institutionalized with the development of city states in ancient Greece. The Greek major thinkers and writers stressed the need for female subordination. Natural law philosophers in particular, claimed that the inferior status of women was due to their "inner nature". With the exception of Plato, they all believed that women had powerful emotions and inferior brains with an IQ lower than that of the male children. Hence, women could harm themselves as well as others. Therefore, it was necessary to protect women from harming themselves and, if possible, incapacitate them. Based on this belief, each woman in the city states of ancient Greece had her own guardian (usually a father, brother, husband or a male relative) under whose protection and control she lived for her entire life. All the Greek natural law philosophers came to regard women along with children and slaves as neither "rational" nor "civilised" (Pomeroy, 57-92).

Aristotle developed the widely adopted idea of rationality, arguing that man was a "rational animal" and, as such, has a natural power of reason. Woman, he opined was deficient of rational faculty. In a section of *Politics*, Aristotle declared: "The courage of the man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying". Since he defined the female as defective and the male as normative, male slaves had the responsibility for the early education of boys rather than their mother. (Sawyer, 17). Women in most city states of ancient Greece had very few rights. Those in

wealthy families did not work. They stayed indoors running their households. They would very rarely get out of the house and, only when accompanied by slaves, during occasions such as festivals or funerals. If a woman was seen alone on the street, people believed she was either a slave, a concubine or a prostitute. When men entertained, their wives were not invited to the dinner. In fact, a woman was forbidden to get out of her room while her husband had guests.

The position of women in ancient Greece was influenced by the special way marriage was perceived. According to Greek convention, marriage was only a formality, a duty of each citizen not an evidence of an emotional bond. Men used to find emotions and female companionship outside marriage – with “heteras” and concubines. Demosthenes in the fourth century B.C. is credited to have said: “We have mistresses for our enjoyment, concubines to serve our person, and wives for the bearing of legitimate offspring.” In fact, wealthy men used to surround themselves with a number of women, each playing a different role in his life. Men had a dominant role in politics and public events. The only public job of importance for a woman was as a religious priestess (Pomeroy, 8-11).

Paradoxically, in the same Athens, very poor women moved about freely without escort. They often worked outside their homes, assisting their husbands in the market or at some other jobs. In their homes, there were no separate areas for men and women. This shows that the more men got economic power, the more women were disempowered, oppressed and subjugated.

However, the sheltering of women was not as common in other Greek cities. Spartan women did not have this restriction. They had more freedom and responsibilities in public life. They were able to go out in public unescorted, participated in athletics contests and inherited land. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. over two fifths of the lands in Sparta were owned by women. Spartan men were

often absent from homes, for they stayed in barracks until they were thirty. Although, Spartan women had much more freedom and a larger role in society, they were still secondary to men. Women gained freedom from men's domination, but left all state matters in the hands of men. In the Greek myth of the first woman, Pandora, as recast by Hesiod, we see the prototype of the Athenian "hysterical" woman. When Pandora opens her infamous box, she releases the evil that now affects humankind.

### **2.2.ii Women in Ancient Rome**

Women in Rome enjoyed some freedom compared to Greek women. A Roman wife could take charge of overseeing male servants and slaves and also of educating both her sons and daughters. Moreover, due to Hellenistic influence, educated women of the nobility could engage in activities beyond domestic concerns. Some occupied leadership positions during the absence of men on military and governmental missions during the late Republic and early Empire. Some wealthy aristocratic women (The Matrons) played high politics and presided over literary salons.

Roman legal theory mandated all women to be under the custody of males. The basic structure of the Roman family or household, revolves around the *pater familias* (the oldest male in the household). Although male offspring were also subject to the authority of the *pater familias*, as adults, they were automatically emancipated upon his death.

Among females, the only automatic legal exemption from the power of the *pater familias* was accorded to Vestal Virgins, a cultic role reserved for a very few. Ordinarily, upon the death of the *pater familias*, the custody over daughters passed to the nearest male relative. Although the guardianship over women gradually diminished due to the assertiveness of some women, a guardian was still required when such women transacted important legal businesses,

Under Augustus, the “*jus liberorum*” was introduced. Under this code, a freeborn woman who bore three children and a freedwoman who bore four children were exempted from guardianship. The underlying reason was that those women who were able to bear the children Rome needed so badly to fight in wars, could be deemed capable of acting without a male guardian. The guardian decided whether a girl should be married or not with “*manus*” – a legal form that released a girl from the authority of her father and transferred her to the power of her husband. If a marriage was conducted with a *manus*, the bride became part of the husband’s family as far as property rights were concerned. But the woman married without *manus* was not a member of the husband’s agnatic family and, hence, excluded from the rite celebrated by the husband and children. In that case, she would continue to participate in her father’s cult.

The status of women in Rome was similar to that of women in Greece, except that occasionally, the former agitated for their emancipation, such as when they reacted against the Oppian Law which put severe restrictions on women’s wealth or when in 42 B. C. Hortensia, a noble man’s wife, led a group of some wealthy women in Rome to the Forum to challenge the Triumvirate: Anthony, Lepidus and Octavian, over the latter’s appropriation of property which rightfully belonged to the wives of their enemy.

The Roman world may have offered some degree of freedom to women when compared to their Greek counterparts, but Roman society was still highly patriarchal and hierarchical to its core, in its legal system, government and domestic organization. If women gained some emancipation it was always limited by these constraints. The male philosophers and writers including Cicero, Seneca, Plautus, Ovid Terence, and especially, Cato, who made himself the custodian of traditional Roman values, all have misogynist attitudes towards women.

### **2.2.iii Women in Egypt**

Ancient Egypt was hardly an egalitarian society where equal rights were accorded to all irrespective of class and gender. However, women were allowed to inherit or own property, sign contracts, marry and divorce according to their will. They appeared in court as witnesses, and were subjected to the responsibilities associated with such rights.

### **2. 3. Sexism in Religion**

Some feminist theorists have observed that organized religions are the most sexist institutions in history. Practically all the religions in the world are male dominated, and most forms of gender discrimination have their roots in these religions. Looking at the Old Testament from pre-historical perspective, it is evident that male domination was greatly reinforced by Judeo-Christian heritage, for when the ancient Hebrew reached the Middle East, they found a Goddess-worshipping culture in Canaan. In order to replace her with their Hebrew male God, Yahweh, the Bible writers vilify the Goddess cult of Canaan. Actually, there was a prolonged ideological struggle of the Hebrew tribes against the worship of Canaanite deities and, especially, the persistence of a cult of the fertility goddess, Asherah (Lerner, 176-178).

Moses is generally regarded as the founder of Jewish monotheism and the Decalogue as its basic law. There was approximately four hundred years between Abraham and Moses. Even after God, appeared to Abraham at Haran where he made a covenant with God, the Hebrew tribes, although they pledged to worship no other God but Yahweh continued to observe idols in the form of household gods. If we can recall, Moses destroyed the worship of the golden calf after receiving the tablet of law on Mt. Sinai. Moses did not see the Promised Land. It was Joshua, his successor, who led the Israelites to Canaan in about 1250 B.C.

In the earliest period the patriarch had undisputed authority over members of his family. In the Decalogue, the wife is listed among a man's possessions, along with his servants, his ox, and his ass (Ex.20:17). During this period, a father could also sell his daughter into slavery or prostitution, which was later forbidden him. By the time of the monarchy, the father's power of life and death over his family members was reduced.

All Israelite women were expected to marry and thus passed from the control of fathers or brothers to that of husbands and fathers-in-laws. When a husband died before his wife, his brother or another relative married her. Although the levirate custom served to protect the widow, it was more of a device to preserve the patrimony within the family. Hebrew men enjoyed complete sexual freedom within and outside of marriage. When tired of a slave wife, not given to him by his primary wife, he could present her to other members of the family. Polygamy was widespread among the patriarchs, but later became rare except with the royalty. Monogamous marriage later became the ideal and the rule.

In contrast, virginity was expected of a bride at marriage, and a wife owed her husband absolute fidelity. Punishment for adultery was the death of both parties (Lev. 20:10), but the Jewish wife had less protection against false accusations of adultery than did her Mesopotamian counterpart. Divorce was granted to the husband on demand, with penalty, but never to a wife. In case of rape, Jewish law forced the rapist to marry the woman he had raped and was never to divorce her. Implicitly, this forced a woman into an indissoluble marriage with her rapist. (Deu. 22: 28-29) In marriage, a wife's inability to produce a son was considered as barrenness. It was a ground for divorce. For this reason, some women would find another wife for the husband to produce sons for the family. Moreover, in the Old Testament women were

excluded from genealogies, and were told that: “your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.”

In the New Testament, women were instructed to be silent in church and to learn from their husbands, “since the man is not of the woman, but the woman is of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man.” Although these pronouncements were not all that was said about women in the Holy Book, however they became the central tenets of European culture. Women’s subordination and inferiority became tradition woven into the fabrics of everyday life, influenced by the writings of scholars. Forgetting that God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him. . . . Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become *one flesh*”, they saw woman as a different category. Churchmen and scholars stressed the role Eve played in causing the original sin, fables and poems portrayed her as a deceitful and unfaithful wife. They refused to see that that very story projected Eve as a very intelligent woman. She was able to rationalise and discuss cogently with the serpent. She didn’t accept his offer until she was sufficiently convinced that she was doing the right thing.

Even in the Old Testament, some societies were liberal, hence it was possible for some women to rule. Deborah, an ancient Margaret Thatcher, judged Israel and gave her people forty years of peace (Judges 4:4; 5:31). Judith and Esther were great leaders. They brought beatitude to men, saved their land and nation. In Corinthians VII it is written: “If a woman hath a husband that believes not, and he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife. Also in Ecclesiasticus xxvi, it is said: “Blessed is the man who has a virtuous wife”, for the number of his days shall be doubled”. In the last chapter of Proverbs, high praise is attributed to a virtuous woman. Also in the New Testament, many women



virgins are named who, by their faith, led their nation and kingdom away from the worship of idols to the Christian Religion during the early Christian Church: Gilia also known as (Queen Gisela of Hungary), and Clotilda of France to name just a few.

Jesus was a feminist. Throughout his ministry, as recorded in the Bible, He was never oppressive to women. He included women among his disciples. Women were highly active in the two or three centuries before male-dominant forces took control of the church. "Paul's letters mention nine women by name, who were co-workers with him in the gospel ministry", writes Reverend David Scholer. Schussler Fiorenza also tells the stories of these women, including the great missionary, Prinscilia, and the prophetic leaders, Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna. She points out that when Apostle Paul says women should not preach in church, it could mean that Paul was threatened by the fact that women actually were preaching (Aburdene & Naisbitt.125). But early Church Fathers, like Augustine, Irenaeus and Tertullian made sure that women were not just kept from leadership, but branded as spiritually inferior to men. By the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas called women defective by nature and "misbegotten men". Aristotle's views on women as imperfect men became the basis of religious beliefs and practices, and were codified in the teachings of the Catholic Church. A typical book in point is the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

The *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*) is an important historical document, written by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger. Their argument in the book is that woman is by "nature" wicked. Her wickedness stems from the fact that there is a defect in the creation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast. So, due to this defect, woman is an imperfect animal. That is why she always deceives.

When a woman weeps, she weaves snare. And  
again: When a woman weeps she labours to

deceive a man. And this is shown by Samson's wife, who coaxed him to tell her the riddle he had propounded to the Philistines, and told them the answer, and so deceived him. (57)

This woman's nature, they emphasized, is the fundamental basis for their declaring that more women than men practice witchcraft. Quoting from ancient writings, especially from the Bible to support their argument, the two authors identified the behavioral and personal characteristics that clearly mark woman as a witch. She is superstitious, wicked (Ecclesiasticus xxv, S. Matthew xix), jealous, lustful and full of wrath. A woman is full of vengeance (Ecclesiasticus xxv, Genesis xxx), impatient and envious like Sarah/Hagar (Genesis xxi), Rachael/Leah (Genesis xxx), Hannah/ Peninnah (I. Kings i) Miriam (Numbers, xii), Martha/Mary Magdalen (S. Luke x) and (Ecclesiasticus xxxvii). "If women could be so jealous of one another what harm would they not do to men?" they pondered. Women are so vengeful and unable to control their emotion, so much so that they would follow their impulse even to their own destruction; for example Laodice, wife of Anticus, king of Syria.

Today, the saying, "The cause of all evil is woman", is very popular. Its origin could be traced to the book under consideration. The authors based their evidence on the fact that all the kingdoms of the world have been overthrown because of women: Troy, was destroyed because of Helen, the kingdom of the Jews suffered misfortune and destruction because of Jezebel and her daughter Athaliah, queen of Judah, Rome was destroyed because of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, so therefore, it is no wonder if the world now suffer because of women. She is able to do these atrocities because she has a slippery tongue with which she could convince man to do anything, her voice being so sweet and seductive:

For as she is a liar by nature, so in her speech she stings while she delights us. Wherefore her voice is like the song of the Sirens, who with their sweet melody entice the passer-by and kill them. For they kill them by emptying their purses, consuming their strength, and causing them to forsake God. (6o)

The *Malleus Maleficarum* serves to reveal the relationship between religious doctrines and social norms. It demonstrates that perceptions of female nature as evil and carnal are historically created, and also shows how some forms of social power produce norms that can have life and death consequences. “A man and a woman shall become one body and one flesh united in the Lord”, says the Creator, but the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarium* created a hiatus between them, with woman bedecked with an arsenal of viciousness to destroy her opponent, man. Every part of her body: hand, eye, tongue, heart is stigmatized. Finally, the authors strongly advise their target audience to avoid such creature, if they want to stay alive to fulfill their calling.

It may be necessary to point out that the book was written to serve as a guide for a specific group, the clerics. However, as soon as it was printed, it went from hand to hand and affected people’s perception of woman. From then on, men invoked the Bible to justify the physical abuse even of their wives. The Inquisition used the 15<sup>th</sup> century document *Malleus Maleficarum* as its authority, to persecute women as witches, and thousands of women were burnt alive as witches



### Burning of witches

“The tendency to sexualize, trivialize and demonize women is part of the tradition of biblical interpretation,” says Sister Schneiders (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 125). Sarah Grimke also supports this idea when she writes:

The New Testament has been referred to, and I am willing to abide by its decisions, but must enter my protest against the false translation of some passages by the MEN who did that work, and against the perverted interpretation by the men who undertook to write commentaries thereon. I am inclined to think, when we are admitted to the honour of studying Greek and Hebrew, we shall produce some various readings of the Bible a little different from those we now have. (86)

Some experts in Islamic studies have pointed out that the Koran, Islam’s holy scripture does not brand women as unequal and inferior. They insist that their religion is not to blame for women’s narrow roles in many Islamic countries. It has to do with how a government interprets Islam, they say. During the prophet

Muhammad's time women played active roles, but were later subjugated because of local customs. Benazir Bhutto became head of Islamic Pakistan. That could not have happened in Saudi Arabia or in Nigeria. Today, Islamic law is interpreted differently to reinforce women's subordination and oppression by narrow minded people, all over the world.

Although few women were able to achieve relative power and freedom within the framework of female subordination, over time their situation worsened. Noblewomen, nuns and craftswomen, had more options and opportunities in 1200 than in 1500 centuries. It was not until the Renaissance that many European traditions were challenged.

#### **2.4. Women in the Renaissance**

The Renaissance brought about great evolution in world view. It witnessed the transition from aristocratic feudalism to dynastic monarchy, the spread of education and printing press, the Protestant Reformation, and the Scientific revolution. All these led to the questioning of many European traditions. The dramatic political changes that emerged brought along a new social system all over Europe. The absolute monarchs centralized their power and governed by new methods. They ruled through appointed bureaucracies. But privileged women participated in these new systems as members of their families: wives, mothers and daughters. Thus, they functioned in their traditional female roles.

However, life in the palace created new roles for women. Daughters as well as sons could become courtiers and gain favour for themselves as well as for their family. Hence, numerous privileged women became courtiers and participated in the courtly life in various ways such as queens and surrogates. Some women were trained in all the arts: music, painting, dancing and acting in pageants and in the entr'actes of operas. They wrote poetry and prose.

Although, gender discrimination receded to the background, but the Revolutionary upheaval which first started in France before spreading to all over Europe curtailed the world of privilege and opulence. According to Trevelyan in his *History of England*, during this period, parents arranged marriages for their daughters. He goes further to explain that:

The daughter who refused to marry the gentleman of her parents' choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room, without any shock being inflicted on public opinion. Marriage was not an affair of personal affection, but of family avarice, particularly in the 'chivalrous' upper classes. (Woolf, 42)

Betrothal often took place while one or both parties were in the cradle and married when they were scarcely out of the nurses' charge. Even up till the sixteenth century, it was still the exception for women of the upper and middle class to choose their own husbands.

That is to say, during the Renaissance marriage was what defined a woman. She was who she married. When unmarried, a woman was the property of her father, and once married, she became the property of her husband. Just as the family schooled their daughters in the arts and rituals of the court, so also did they prepare them for their traditional roles and functions.

## **2. 5 Humanism, Education and Gender Stereotyping**

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed the upsurge of great enthusiasm for secular learning. Although, the specifications of classical writers like Aristotle and Xenophon served as models for the descriptions of a wife's duty, Humanism opened scholarship to some privileged women. European's privileged and educated men encouraged the intellectual development of the female members of their families. This enabled women to

participate in the philosophical and religious speculations that characterized this rediscovery and appreciation of Greek and Roman authors. The English humanist, Sir Thomas More advocated for the education of women believing that education would make wives better companions to their husband and better teachers to their children. Desiderius Erasmus also saw the instruction of a wife as a way of inculcating in her, proper attitude toward her husband.

However, this increased participation of women in public affairs was not without opposition. The vehement opposition from some writers such as John Bunyan, was so aggressive that it led to the persecution and emigration of some women to the Netherlands and America. The reaction also provoked the debate over the question of “woman’s nature”. Starting from Paris, learned men engaged in constant literary and philosophic debate over the value of women, known as “The Debate over Women”. Thereafter, in Venice, Berlin and London, writers of tracts, treatises and pamphlets argued on issues such as: “What is the nature of woman?”; “How does she treat men in and out of marriage?”; “Can she be educated?”; “What kind of education?”

For three centuries, men tried to answer these questions in their writings. In poetry, in prose, in novels and books of advice for courtiers, in legal treatises for lawyers and judges, learned men of these centuries presented traditional negative images of women as the writers of *Malleus Maleficarium*, all aimed at forestalling the education of women.

As a result of the controversy generated by the “Debate over Women”, Greek, Roman and Hebrew ancient attitudes towards women were reaffirmed in the new voices of the humanists. In their writings, the traditional differing standards of sexual behaviour for women and for men were restated, and they sharply differentiated girls’ and boys’ schooling. While they designed for boys an education that heightened their faculties,

trained their reason, and expanded their expectations, they advocated for the young girls an education focused on suppressing what male scholars believed to be the negative aspects of ‘women’s nature’. They were revolutionary in their views on education of men, but traditional concerning that of women.

## **2.6. Women in Neo-Classical Period**

The Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries were the era of Scientific Revolution, a time when Europe’s learned men questioned and dismissed some of the most hallowed precepts of ancient European traditions. Thanks to scientific discoveries, they examined and described anew the nature of the universe and its forces, and the nature of the human body and its functions. Men used telescopes and rejected the traditional insistence on the smooth surface of the moon. Galileo, Leibnitz, and Newton studied the movement of the planet, discovered gravity and the relationship between the earth and the sun. Fallopio dissected the human body, Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood, and Leenwenhock found spermatozoa with his microscope. For women, however, there was no Scientific Revolution.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, when men studied female anatomy, when they spoke of female physiology, of women’s reproductive organs, they ceased to be scientific. They suspended reason and did not accept the evidence of their senses. Tradition, prejudice, and imagination, not scientific observation, governed their conclusion about women. Science affirmed what custom, law, and religion had earlier postulated. According to Anderson and Zinsser, Malebranche, a seventeenth century French philosopher, highlighted that the delicate fibers of the woman’s brain made her overly sensitive to all that came to it, thus she could not deal with ideas or form abstractions. Her body and mind were so relatively weak that she must stay within the protective confines of the home to be safe. Archbishop Francois de Fenelon also observed:



A woman's intellect is normally more feeble and her curiosity greater than those of a man, also it is undesirable to set her to studies which may turn her head. Women should not govern the state or make war or enter the sacred ministry. Their bodies as well as their minds are less strong and robust than those of men. (337)

Concerning procreation, the male scientists discovered the spermatozoa, but not the ovum. They believed that the semen was the sole active agent in reproduction. Anatomy and physiology confirmed the innate inferiority of woman and her limited reproductive function. They also proved, as scientific truth, all the traditional negative images of the female nature. They accepted Galen's erroneous view that the ovaries were internal testicles. Explaining their strange placement, he said that is "to keep her from perceiving and ascertaining her sufficient perfection" and to humble her "continual desire to dominate". (98)

The French sixteenth century doctor and writer Rabelais took Plato's view of the womb as insatiable like an animal out of control when denied sexual intercourse; the cause of that singular ailment is "hysteria". Other 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century writers on women and their health, adopted all of the misogynistic explanations of the traditional Greek and Roman authorities. The male remained the key agent in the woman's life. She was innately inferior, potentially irrational, and lost to ill-health and madness without man's timely intervention.

## **2.7. Women in Enlightenment**

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, just as there was no Renaissance or Scientific Revolution for women, there was also no Enlightenment

for women. Enlightenment thinkers questioned the validity of all the traditional values. They championed the right of commoners, the right to citizenship, the rights of slaves, et cetera, but not the rights of women. Before women's education was discouraged, some women were able to develop themselves intellectually. Starting first in Paris, these women had opened up salons which gradually spread all over Europe (London, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Copenhagen etc) between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Issues concerning national economy, politics, philosophy, literary and artistic concerns were debated in the salons. Salonieres were privy to court secrets and political decisions, for the salons were frequented by statesmen and ambassadors as well as intellectuals and artists. Some women became so powerful and influential that they could influence artistic and literary reputation as well as political policies. But when the chips were down, the salonieres were condemned because of their witty, independent, powerful knowledge, and sometimes libertine attitudes. Almost all the enlightenment philosophers and writers who themselves enjoyed and profited from the salonieres access to power, were the first to condemn these women and to reiterate the most limiting traditions of European culture regarding women.

John Locke, the English philosopher, had a profound influence on Enlightenment thought. He opined that every man had an equal right "to his natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any man". But the same John Locke averred that women and animals are exempted from "natural freedom" and that they should be subordinates. According to Anderson and Zinsser (115-121), the Scottish philosopher, David Hume, after praising his experience during his visit to Paris salon simultaneously condemned France, which, according to him: "gravely exalts those, whom nature has subjected to them, and whose inferiority and infirmities are absolutely incurable. The women though without virtue, are their

master and sovereigns". Joseph Anderson and Richard Steele's journal, *The Spectator*, consistently condemned women who encroached on male territory by being too independent, too forward, or too impertinent. Napoleon Bonapart's personal pleasure in the Paris salons did not prevent him from condemning women's participation in politics and advocating more traditional roles. He argued that disorder results when "women leave the state of dependence where they should remain" and that "states are lost when women govern public matters". G.W.F. Hegel, The German philosopher, who was a frequent guest at Rahel Levin's salon in Berlin in the 1820s, expanded the criticism, citing men's traditional fears:

If women were to control the government, the state would be in danger, for they do not act according to the dictates of universality, but are influenced by accidental inclinations and opinions. The education of women goes on one hardly knows how. (Anderson, 115)

The contradiction between male writers, artists and philosophers' personal pleasure in the company of the salonieres and their public condemnation of such women is mostly obvious in the consistent criticism directed at women who dared to relate to men as intellectual or cultural equals. Typical examples are Moliere's satires on female pretension to culture and learning in his plays : *Les Precieuses Ridicule* ( *Precious Women Ridiculed*) (1659) and *Les Femmes Savantes* (*The Learned Women*) (1672), both aimed at Mme de Rambouillet's salon and the precious women who attended it. Voltaire did almost the same thing to the woman with whom he lived for many years, Emile du Chatelet. She was one of the most learned women of her age, famous for her scientific writings and her commentary on Leibnitz. In the same

manner, Rousseau condemned the Parisian salonieres in his influential novel, *Emile*:

I would a thousand times rather have a homely girl simply brought up, than a learned lady and a wit who would make literary circle of my home and install herself as its president. A female wit is a scourge to her husband, her children, her friends, her servants, to everybody. From the lovely height of her genius, she scorns every womanly duty, and she is always trying to make a man of herself like Mlle de L'Enclos. (48)

In England, the word "Bluestocking" was derogatively used to apply to learned women. Magazines, journals and reviews featured sarcastic comments upon the Bluestockings and their productions.

In order to avert such acerb criticism, scholarly women reverted to asserting their femininity through the performance of traditionally female activities such as breast feeding, child rearing, cooking and sewing. "A man is, in general, better pleased when he has a good dinner upon his table than when his wife speaks Greek," declared Samuel Johnson, a frequent guest at the Bluestocking gathering in England. In France, Denis Diderot, Mercier Florian and other French playwrights made idealized family life the centre of their drama. Artists did the same with their painting of women surrounded with children, serving food to their families.

The glorification of female domesticity became common in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and it went hand in hand with a condemnation of other choices. Writers and artists glorified the innocent, uneducated heroine as could be seen in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded*. By the end of the eighteenth century, the salonieres were repudiated in favour of more traditional

women . In France, female political activities were outlawed in 1793 and any woman who dared to contravene this injunction was sent to the guillotine. One of such victims was Mme Manon Roland, famous for her liberal salon. After her death, she was disparaged in contemporary newspapers: “Mme Roland was a mother, .. but she sacrificed nature by desiring to rise above herself; her desire to be learned led her to neglect the virtue of her sex, and this neglect, always dangerous, ended by leading her to perish on the scaffold”. For participating in politics, some ended up on the scaffold like Mme Roland, while others, like Germaine de Stael, fled the country. From then on, the French salon, which was replicated all over Europe at its peak, was now discarded. Women were sternly warned to devote themselves to providing good homes for their husbands and children rather than meddling in politics. Accordingly, many women of the upper and middle class changed their behavior to conform to the prescribed domesticity.

The tradition was re-enforced by formal education. The segregation in education which Rousseau outlined in his influential novel, *Emile*, was religiously implemented. Boys were sent to school while girls were kept at home. It also underlined the way children were brought up even at home. Male children were trained to be physically strong and courageous, to learn how to support themselves. Girls were taught to be good housewives and mothers, to be religious, obedient, and self-effacing.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the French, Prussian, and Austrian governments banned women and minors from participating in all political activities and even from attending meetings where politics was discussed. In every European nation , women’s right to participate in politics was seen as a dangerous encroachment on male territory, and as upsetting the natural functions of the sexes.

## 2. 8. Modern Theories on the Evolution of Male Dominance

Since the nineteenth century, many scholars have tried to explain the evolution of patriarchy and the devaluation of women from different perspectives. Sociologists, such as Parson and Murdock, attribute the subjugation of women to biology; Sigmund Freud hinges his anthropological speculation on Oedipus complex, best expressed in his *Totem und Tabu* (1913) inspired by the work of J.J. Atkinson, who in turn was influenced by Darwin.

Bachofen in *Mother Right* (1861), J. F. McLennan in *Primitive Marriage* (1886), Morgan in *Ancient Society* (1887) and Engel in *Origin of the Family and Private Property* (1972), base their theories on the concept of "Mother Right". The underlying idea is that, at a point in the historical evolution of man, women were mostly in charge of family affairs because the men were always absent from home because of war or hunting. Moreover, the era was characterised by polyandry and group marriage because of the nomadic and primitive nature of life at that time. So, whereas it was easy to identify a child's mother, it was not so with father. For this reason, "Mother Right" with its matriarchal tendency and influence lasted for so many years.

Engels further explains that primitive society was communistic and egalitarian. There were no classes or domination like we have today. The concept of family did not exist. The "family" emerged within the clan system at the stage of Barbarism and the development of settled communities, which coincided with the "Neolithic Revolution" characterized by increased productivity and a large influx of wealth. So with the creation of wealth came new contradictions:

Thus, on the one hand, in proportion as wealth increased, it made the man's position in the family more important than the woman's, and on the other hand created an impulse to exploit

this strengthened position in order to overthrow, in favour of his children, the traditional order of inheritance. This, however, was impossible so long as descent was reckoned according to mother-right. Mother-right, therefore, had to be overthrown, and overthrown it was. (108)

Engels submits, that the overthrow of the Mother Right constituted "the world historical defeat of the female sex"(23). The man took command of the family; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children". (42)

The structural-anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss has also offered a different theoretical explanation through the prism of "exchange system". According to him, the exchange of women marks the beginning of women subordination. It also reinforces a sexual division of labour which institutes male dominance: "The prohibition of incest is less a rule prohibiting the marriage with the mother, sister, or daughter, than a rule obliging the mother, sister, or daughter to be given to others. It is the supreme rule of the gift". The "exchange of women" is the first form of trade, in which women were reified (Lerner, 24). That is, they were regarded more as things than as human beings.

According to Aburdene & Naisbitt (276-278), the archeological discoveries after World War II, often associated with Professor Marija Gimbutas of the University of California, Los Angeles, proffer another version which concerns the invasion of the "Kurgans" on a remarkably advanced prehistoric agricultural society where goddesses were worshipped, and where women and men lived in harmony before the invasion around 3000 B.C. After raping, pillaging and destroying the peace loving people, the Kurgans reduced the Great Goddess, the Great Giver of Life, to

love object or subjugated wife. In her place was the new pantheon of male war gods, often represented by their weapons.

Vice Chancellor, Sir, from our analysis so far, it is abundantly clear that male domination is not a natural phenomenon, for in primitive time, women were in charge of governing the home; and by extension the clan. Men and women lived in peace and harmony. No one sex tried to dominate the other. The question of dominance only came up when men started to cultivate their intellectual propensity and to develop weapons. Today, there are still many cultures all over the world where men are not dominant. This is the assertion of Marilyn French in her book, *Beyond Power*, when she explains that:

Male dominance is not a reality... it is not necessary. There are cultures and situations in which males are not dominant. Men are not always stronger than women, nor does the rule of might lead to male dominance per se, but to the domination of certain individuals, males and females (unless females are purposely excluded by consensus of the males) over all others. (65)

Moreover, in rejecting total dominance by men over women at all times, French goes further to stress that:

Rule of might overlaps with male dominance but is not identical with it. Male are not dominant by nature, or they would always be dominant, in the way females always have the babies. In one sense, patriarchy is an attempt to make male dominance a natural fact. (65)



## Song About Creation

### CHORUS:

God made man  
And made woman  
Woman hosts the devil  
And the devil spoils the world

### 3.1 Refuting Sexist Image of Women: Early European Feminists

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, up to this point, we have tried to highlight the different strategies, exploited by men throughout history, to consistently persist in their attempt to reduce women to silence and subordination. Women were not always conformists; some resisted, some went on exile, others lost their lives for refusing to accept social expectations. The struggle against sexism which later transformed the lives of European women and of women all over the world began in the early fifteenth century with the writings of the French courtier, Christine de Pizan (1365-c. 1430). Pizan is the first woman known to have participated in the “Debate over Women”, “*Quelles des Femmes*”.

In her *Book of the City of Ladies*, Pizan asks several disturbing questions. She wonders why no one had spoken on women’s behalf before. Why is it that the “accusations and slanders” had gone un-contradicted for so long? Her allegorical mentor, “Rectitude”, replies, “Let me tell you that in the long run, everything comes to a head at the right time” (Anderson & Zinsser. 99). That means, the “right time”, the moment to question and reject the ancient premises of European society laid in the future.

However, unlike the Classical and early Christian eras, when men had argued among themselves, from early fifteenth century on, women began to participate in the debates. This is

because they could no longer tolerate the misogynist descriptions of women put forward by learned and privileged men. They did not believe that all women were so evil by nature. They were outraged at the grotesque caricatures of wives, and at the way in which women of virtue and achievement were disregarded and discounted as aberrations. Learned themselves, the female authors saw their own experience as proof that women, like men, had rational minds and could benefit from what their contemporaries considered to be a “masculine” preserve - education. In her letters and treatises, written from 1399-1402, Christine de Pizan asserted that it is wrong to say that the majority of women are not good. In her *Book of the City of Ladies*, she called attention to the disparity between the image of women presented by men and her own experience of women:

I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman, and, similarly considered other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes who had graciously told me of their most private and intimate thoughts, hoping that I could judge impartially and in good conscience whether the testimony of so many notable men could be true. ... I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women. (4)

She declared that her purpose of writing the book was to rectify the adverse effects of centuries of vilification and misrepresentation on women. Thinking seriously about the matter, she wondered:

How it happened that so many different men - and learned men among them - have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and

in their treatises and writings so many wicked insult about women and their behavior ... It seems that they all speak from the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion that the behavior of women is inclined to be full of every vice. (4)

She explained that she could tell of countless ladies of different social backgrounds, maidens, married women, and widows, in whom God manifested His virtues with amazing force and constancy. To counter the denigrating myth about women's inferiority, she chronicled the lives of powerful and virtuous women from Eve to the Queen of France. She called men's condemnations "arbitrary fabrications", "futile words", "wicked insults", "slanders", and the lies of a lecher. She believed that she had proved that rather than being the exception, virtuous women were many. She supported her argument with examples from a wide variety of sources. She presented a positive picture of marriage in which a "woman brings joy to a normal man." She affirmed that bad husbands, not bad wives predominated, that men were notorious for their lack of chastity and fidelity, inconstant and fickle mindedness more worst than any woman.

In countering the negative descriptions of "woman's nature" by men, Christine de Pizan found herself in the position of contradicting some of the most revered authorities of the scholarly and courtly world. Puzzling over how these "insults" could have been fabricated by learned men, Pizan initiated a new line of argument that other women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would take up with equal force. Christine averred that men presented these images out of jealousy, rage at pleasures lost to them, and out of physical and moral impotence.

In like manner, the Spanish writer, Maria Zayas in her rage lamented: "So many martyrs, so many virgins, so many widows and chaste, so many that have died and suffered by the cruelty of

men". She argued that it is "men's cruelty or tyranny" that keeps women cloistered and forbade them education. According to her, the true reason that women are not learned is lack of opportunity, not lack of ability. With education given, book and teachers instead of linen, embroidery hoops, and pillow, women would be just as apt as the men for government positions and university chairs, and perhaps; even more so. Men denied women education so "that they will not usurp their power", and, consequently, women are oppressed and obliged to fulfill domestic chores.

The Venetian Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-1652) forced into a convent by her father to avoid paying a dowry, wrote a pamphlet titled, *Paternal Tyranny* in which she condemned men as "pimps' and procurers who abuse their daughters". Others went further in their criticism of men, accusing them of condemning their "nature". They assert that women are human beings and as such, deserve justice. Others speculated on men's motive in denying women that which was so easily granted to all men. They argued that most women had good qualities: most women were chaste, humble, modest, temperate, pious and faithful. Women could therefore take charge of their own lives. They didn't need to be constrained or made subject to male absolute authority and that, some women could even perform those roles traditionally assigned to men.

In continental Europe, important early feminist writers included Marguerite de Navarre, Marie de Gournay and Anne Marie van Schurman. In the New World, the Mexican nun, Juana Ines de la Cruz (1651-1695), advocated the education of women particularly in her essay entitled "Reply to Sor Philotea". These women mounted attacks on men's misogyny and promoted the education of women. By the end of the seventeenth century, women's voices were becoming increasingly heard, becoming almost a clamour, at least by educated women.

In spite of all their arguments, despite the writers' rhetorical ability, male writers mocked these learned women calling them angry and envious women. Prominent among such men was Alexander Pope. Moreover, the dispute between Richardson and Fielding was closely related to their concern about these emerging female writers and the fear of female emancipation. It must be noted that the advent of women as authors of fictional works encouraged the development of feminism and the fear of it.

### 3. 2 Asserting Women's Humanity

In France, the Declaration of "The Rights of Man and the Citizen", passed in the summer of 1789, inspired a number of women to claim similar rights for women. In her address to the National Assembly in 1791, when asking for equal education for girls and equal rights for women, Etta Palm d'Aelders, a Dutch woman, active in the French Revolution declared: "You have restored to man the dignity of his being in recognizing his rights; you will no longer allow woman to groan beneath an arbitrary authority". (Anderson & Zinsser, 351)

That same year, Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), a playwright and revolutionary, published in Paris, *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, modelled on the 1791 French Declaration of "The Rights of Man and the Citizen", in which she demanded for women's right to absolute political and legal equality. Anderson & Zinsser explain that in the spirit of the revolution, De Gouges summoned all women to overturn unjust traditions

Woman, wake up, the tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe, discover your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism,

superstition, and lies. The flame of truth has dispersed all the folly and usurpation". (351)

She also argued that if women were accountable to the law they must also be given equal responsibility under the law. In contrast to male views, she also considered marriage as a social contract between equals and attacked women's reliance on beauty and charm as a form of slavery. (Anderson & Zinsser, 120-122)

Unfortunately, the Government passed a law in October 1793 banning all women from political activity in France, on the ancient grounds that "a woman should not leave her family to meddle in the affairs of government." That same year, Olympe de Gouges was guillotined. Women activists of the French Revolution were disowned; others like d'Aelders were forced to flee France.

In England, Mary Astell was the most outspoken feminist of her time; the one who did most to develop a feminist point of view about religious and moral questions, education, marriage and the value of women as authors. Her influence continued into the mid-century. Her first feminist treatise, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest*, was published in 1694.

Lady Mary Chudleigh (1656-1710), wrote many tracts under the pseudonym 'Eugenia'. In most of her writing, Chudleigh attacks the belief that women are to worship their husband like gods and also questions the assumption that they are to assume an inferior moral and spiritual status to men as seen in the following extract:

Like Mutes she Signs alone must make,  
And never any Freedom take:  
But still be govern'd by a Nod.  
And fear her Husband as her God:  
Him still must serve. Him still obey,  
And nothing act and nothing say,  
But what her haughty Lord thinks fit. (Kirkham, 9)

Catherine Macaulay (1731-1791) was another great feminist writer of her time. She wrote a controversial feminist work: *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (1790). This is a pedagogical and political work. In it she boldly advocates her love of liberty under the law of rational principle. Her feminist point of view had a great deal in common with that of Mary Astell, although they differed in certain areas. Wollstonecraft acknowledges that this work provides the foundation of her own *Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

Mary Wollstonecraft, is generally referred to as the most outstanding 18<sup>th</sup> century feminist writer and philosopher. Her feminist tract, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written during De Gouges' tribulation, was addressed to the French Minister, Talleyard, urging him that if women are excluded from the new French constitution, France would remain a tyranny. This tract helped to set the stage for advancements in women's right movement. It stands as a testament to the struggle for women's human rights and the unending battle to eradicate social prejudice.

The Enlightenment liberal feminists across Europe shared the following basic characteristics:

- ◆ A belief in rationality.
- ◆ A belief that the soul and rational faculty are the same in men and women. So, they are ontologically identical
- ◆ A belief in education, especially training in critical thinking as the most effective means to effect social change and transform society.
- ◆ A view of the individual as an isolated being, who seeks the truth apart from others, who operates as a rational, independent agents, and whose dignity depends on such independence

- ◆ Enlightenment theorists subscribed to the natural rights doctrine, and demanded for equal right to education of both men and women.

Although many male writers wrote satire to disparage and discourage women writers and authors, there were some Enlightenment male philosophers who defended the rights of women. Prominent among them were Jeremy Bentham and Marquis de Condorcet. Jeremy Bentham, a utilitarian and classical liberal philosopher, spoke for a complete equality between sexes including the right to vote and to participate in the government. He also strongly opposed the different sexual moral standards for women and men. In his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham strongly condemned the common practice in many countries of denying women's rights because of their allegedly inferior minds. Bentham gave many examples of able female regents.

The liberal politician and a leading French revolutionary, Marquis de Condorcet, was a fierce defender of human rights, including the equality of women and the abolition of slavery, already in the 1780s. He advocated for women's suffrage in his articles for *Journal de la Société de 1789*, and especially in his book, *De l'admission des femmes au droit de cité* ("For the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship") published in 1790.

However, they were preceded by John Lilburne, a member of the Leveller party in the English revolution, who asserted that: "all and every particular and individual men and women that ever breathed in the world are by nature all equal and alike in their power, dignity, authority and majesty, none of them having (by nature) any authority, dominion or magisterial power one over or above another" (*Anderson & Zinsser*, 350). The Evangelical natural theology philosophers such as William Wilberforce and Charles



Spurgeon, also advocated for women to have rights equal to that of men, as well as argued for the abolition of slavery.

The 18<sup>th</sup> Century feminists responded to the wind of revolution that was sweeping across the Western World. In the light of these new revolutionary ideas, feminists started to campaign that women be considered entitled to the same natural rights as men. But the male theorists who developed and enforced the natural right doctrine were unwilling to concede to the women's request. This incited more women to join the campaign for women's human rights.

### **3.3 In Search of Democratic Societies**

The history of the modern feminist movement is divided into three "waves" each dealing with different aspects of the same feminist issue. The first wave refers to the movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> through early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which dealt mainly with suffrage and education. The second, which was from 1960s to 1980s, dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities, and the third wave, which spans from late 1980s to 2000s, is described as both a continuation and a response to the perceived failures of the second wave. Within these three periods emerged different kinds of feminism with different ideological orientations which we shall not discuss here. However, some of them are Liberal feminism, Marxist/Socialist feminism, Radical feminism, Psychoanalytical feminism, Black feminism, Ecofeminism, Womanism, Post-colonial feminism and Third-World feminism, Post-structural and Postmodern feminism.

The multiplicity of contemporary feminism seems to give some critics the impression that feminism is a "house divided against itself", whose activism is driven by "penis envy" and, without a sense of direction, is now getting "lost in the wilderness". When I read through such derogatory comments from our eminent critics, I hear the distant voice of Addison who

wrote in 1712, "I think it absolutely necessary to keep up the Partition between the two Sexes and to take Notice of the smallest Encroachments which the one makes upon the other" I hear the voice of the German philosopher, Emmanuel Kant who believed that "Laborious learning, or painful pondering, even if a woman should succeed in it, destroy the merit that are proper to her sex". I hear the voices of the Roman misogynist, Cato, the English gentlemen, John Bunyan and Alexander Pope, and of the French Jean Jacques Rousseau. After reflecting on their acerbic criticism, I come to the conclusion that all of them in the manner of Moliere, are striving to ridicule our precious scholarly women and writers so that they would abandon feminism to reassert femininity just like Geoffrey Chaucer's Gressilda, Shakespeare's Katharina, Samuel Richardson's Pamela and, of course, all the Victorian women with their subservient and self-effacing attitude. So that at the end like the men at Petruchio's dinner table in *The Taming of the Shrew*, our male critics would clap for the feminists they would have succeeded in demoralizing and subduing for behaving so well, according to social expectation.

As far as I am concerned, contemporary feminism is rather a house with many children, each child pressing to draw attention to the peculiarity of her specific problem in a family forum, and none wants her own case to be neglected. And I strongly believe that the United Nations Assembly recognizes this fundamental nature of feminism; that is why since 1949, it has been trying to stimulate a global feminism. In 1946, the UN established a Commission on the Status of Women, and issued in 1948, its Universal Declaration of Human Rights which protects "the equal rights of men and women".

Since 1975, the UN has held a series of world conferences on women's issues, starting with the World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City, which heralded the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985). These have

brought women together from all over the world and provided considerable opportunities for advancing women's rights. Other World conferences were held in Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985). The fourth conference was held in Beijing in 1995. At this conference, a Beijing Platform for Action was signed. This included a commitment to achieve "gender equality and the empowerment of women". The most important strategy to achieve this was considered to be "gender mainstreaming" which incorporates both equity and equality; that means that both women and men should "experience equal conditions for realising their full human rights, and have the opportunity to contribute and benefit from national, political, economic, social and cultural development". (Pietila & Vickers)

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, women won the vote in many European nations. Today, there are different phases of feminism, all having a common base in that, they are all reactions against sexism. All gender resistance feminisms argue that gender inequality has been legitimized by major religions that say that men's dominance is a reflection of God's will, by sciences that claim the dominance is a result of genetic or hormonal differences, and by legal systems that deny women redress in the courts.

Feminists reject traditions subordinating women, arguing that the system of institutionalized male dominance is the chief cause of women's oppression. Feminists look forward to building a new world where everyone would be free from the bonds of patriarchy. This ideological stance involves the radical rejection of core values of traditional societies.

#### **4. 1. Sexism in Nigeria**

There is a general saying that educated, modern, intelligent and liberated women are the pillars on which a society stands. What is the status of women in contemporary Nigeria? Do they enjoy their

basic Human Rights? Do they have equal opportunities with their male counterparts? Do they have protective laws against gender discriminations? How many of them can boldly make their own decision and stand by it without being afraid of intimidation, humiliation, condemnation, ostracism and persecution? Today, women in America and Europe have the same social, political, financial and legal rights as any man, even though there still exists to some extent “glass ceiling attitudes”. Are there provisions for women in Nigeria to enjoy the same fundamental rights with men?

The notion that men and women in Africa, including Nigeria, enjoyed equal rights before the colonial experience has been advocated and contested. The advocates usually argue that in pre-colonial African societies, women occupied very important positions and they wielded great power. No doubt, African historians have confirmed that in some parts of Africa, there were/are evidences of goddess worshipping societies, analogous to the tradition in ancient Greece and Rome.

According to Alagoa, among many Central Delta and Western Delta Ijo, God was simply Woyengi, Our Mother. (35) To support this idea, Alagoa referred to Gabriel Okara’s story about “Ogboinba: the Ijo Creation Myth”, insisting that this story seems to be the ultimate statement of the supremacy of female in Ijo religious thought, and specifically, the centrality of motherhood. Alagoa highlighted that in Nembe religious thought, the Ziba category of goddesses ranks high in the hierarchy of the gods, as wives of the national deity, Ogidiga. Respect for motherhood, leads to the practice of matrilineal system. Today there are still notable matrilineal or matrilocal societies in some countries in Africa, as there are in other parts of the world

Some Critics have argued that it was the white man that brought with him to Africa their sexist Victorian culture. In the case of Nigeria, the critics usually refer to legendary women who

saved their communities and those who have featured prominently in Nigerian history. These women include the Inkpi of Igala, Moremi of Ile Ife, Queen Daura of Daura, Queen Amina of Zazzau, Queen Kambasa of Bonny, Nana Asma'u of Sokoto, Iyalode Efunseta Aniwura of Ibadan, Omu Okwei of Osomari, Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Madam Ransom Kutu. Aduni Oluwole, The Queen Mothers in Benin City, leaders of the Aba Women's Riot, the Omu of Western Igboland, the Iyalode and Iyaloja of several Yoruba communities, and also the collective force of the Ibo's Umuada

The trust of their argument is that, for these women to have achieved so much success, their communities must have been built on egalitarian social structure with equal rights and opportunities provided for every citizen. Moreover, women in pre-colonial African societies were known to be very industrious. They engaged in gainful occupations like the distributive trades and other income generating activities. African women have always had economic freedom, they argue.

However, African feminists do recognize the fact that Africa has produced great women, women that have done great things for their communities. But they emphasize that those women with recognized laudable achievements are just too few compared to the huge population of women in, for example, Nigeria. So, those women achievers may have been the few exceptional women referred to by Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics* when she states:

Throughout history a few exceptional women have indeed managed to resist the full pressure of patriarchal ideology, becoming conscious of their own oppression and voicing their own opposition to male power. (26)

Moreover, the fact that these few women succeeded in distinguishing themselves does not preclude the fact that gender discrimination existed and still exists in Africa, including Nigeria. This becomes very glaring when one takes a close look at the cultural traditions in Africa, which predated the incursion of the Europeans into Africa. In most traditional African societies, women were undervalued. Sexism was and is still prevalent. The extent of the devaluation varies from one society to another.

For example in Nigeria, women seemed to have had more rights and more power in traditional Yoruba society than they had in Igbo society. Moreover, women in Yoruba land can inherit land and property from their families but this is contrary to what is obtainable in most other parts of the country. In Hausa/Fulani culture, men's ideal of a woman has been and continues to be as it was in ancient Greek and Roman societies. The woman is expected to be a docile, faithful, and subservient wife, whereas the man is rarely faithful. His nightmare of her continues to be the wicked woman, fickle and frivolous, a temptress or a whore. Hence, she has to cover herself from head to foot in order not to weaken the man's purity of resolve. The Roman Senate enacted laws from time to time granting freedom to categories of people including women, as their society changed from one stage to another, but Nigerian northern citizens remain static in their perception and evaluation of women no matter the evolutions in Nigerian historical realities.

Nigeria is still basically rooted in patriarchal social structure. And as such, violation of women's basic human rights is prevalent. It is a stark reality that affects a large percentage of women across the country and it cuts across boundaries of age, culture, religion, wealth and geography. It takes place in the homes, on the streets, in schools, at workplaces, in farms, in the markets, in religious places. One only needs to flip through the

pages of the Daily Newspapers to be confronted with gory stories of violation of women's human rights in the country.

#### **4. 2. Dominant Varieties of Sexism in Nigeria**

Sexism encompasses a wide range of human rights violation. As the chart below shows, women may face different forms of sexism at different stages of their lives.

## Gender Discrimination throughout a Woman's Life

Phase	Type
Prenatal	Prenatal sex selection, battering during pregnancy, coerced pregnancy (rape during war)
Infancy	Female infanticide, emotional and physical abuse, differential access to food and medical care
Childhood	Genital cutting; incest and sexual abuse; differential access to food, medical care, and education; child prostitution
Adolescence	Dating and courtship violence, economically coerced sex, sexual abuse in the workplace, rape, sexual harassment, forced prostitution
Reproductive	Abuse of women by intimate partners, marital rape, dowry abuse and murders, partner homicide, psychological abuse, sexual abuse in the workplace, sexual harassment, rape, abuse of women with disabilities
Old Age	Abuse of widows, elder abuse (which affects mostly women)

*Source: Heise, L. 1994. Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden. World Bank Discussion Paper. Washington, D.C. The World Bank*

Violence against women has been called "the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world." Accordingly, the Vienna Human Rights Conference and the Fourth World Conference on Women, gave priority to the problem. Of all gender violations, domestic violence is the most rampant in Nigeria and pregnant women are particularly



vulnerable. Some husbands become more violent during their wives' pregnancies to the extent of even kicking or hitting their wives in the belly, thereby exposing them to the risk of miscarriage and of having babies with low birth weight.



Posted by [Roti](#) in [Home](#) » [Lifestyle](#), [News](#), [Nigerian News](#) on August 18, 2012

According to Mrs Olayinka Uzamat, wife of Azeez, of Agbado Agbado Oke-Aro- Aro, Lagos State, in the picture above: “My Husband has Aborted My Pregnancy with Punches at Least Three Times”. She filed for a divorce in court, saying that the husband even once vowed to kill her when they had a quarrel. She pleaded for the dissolution of their marriage. But the husband in his defence, informed the court that he had never raised his hand against his wife, because he loved her passionately, pleading that the court should not dissolve the marriage for the sake of the children.

In this country, a lot of news relating to domestic violence has been in circulation in the media in recent times. Although men can also be affected by it, women suffer disproportionately. For instance, on June 16, 2011, Akolade Arowolo was said to have murdered his wife, Titilayo Omozoje Arowolo, a banker, during an argument. In Kwara State, Hadiza, the daughter of a retired Chief Justice, Justice Kamaldeen Bello Atoyebi, was also murdered by her Kano-born husband, Mohammed Jemilu, in a hotel in Tafa Local Government Area of Niger State on May 9. In Lagos, a naval officer simply identified as Harry, also allegedly stabbed his female lover, Itoya, also a naval officer, to death at the Nigerian Naval Base, Ojo. Harry was said to have engaged Itoya in a fight over charges of infidelity before stabbing her. In Port Harcourt, a man identified as Emezi, allegedly pierced the right eye of his wife, Igoh, a National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member during a quarrel over domestic issues on October 7, 2011.

In a pilot study carried out in Lagos in 2001, by Project Alert on Violence Against Women, interviews were conducted with women from different social strata: market women, secondary school girls, university women and working class women. 64.4 percent of the 45 interviewed women in work places said they had been beaten by a partner, boyfriend or husband. 56.2 percent of 48 interviewed market women had experienced the same type of violence.

These are just a few of the reported cases of domestic violence. Many women have been sent to their early graves due to unaddressed domestic violence they suffered in their homes. In some cases, vicious acid attacks have left women with horrific disfigurements, in a brutal form of punishment known as an "acid bath". Such violence is deliberately intended to mutilate or kill, and many women have died as a result of the attack. In a workshop organized in Lagos, Stephane Mikala, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Africa program, was outraged by the

level of violence in Nigeria. According to her, on a daily basis, Nigerian women are beaten, raped and even murdered by members of their family for supposed transgressions, which can range from not having meals ready on time, to visiting family members without their husband's permission. Most often husbands, partners and fathers are responsible for most of the violence. She described Nigeria's rate of domestic violence as "shocking," and called on the local governments to do something to stem it. The level of violence against Nigerian women is shockingly high, yet it is rarely officially documented or even talked about at the table where policies are made. It is simply taken for granted.

**4.2.i. Forced Marriage:** This is still practiced in many rural communities in Nigeria. Many Nigerian young girls experience both psychological and physical violence in their marital homes. Hauwa Abubakar died at the age of 12 in 2001. Her father had married her to an old man to whom he owed some money. She was unhappy and kept running away but because of the debt, her parents were obliged to return her to the husband. Finally, to prevent her from absconding again, the husband chopped off her legs with an axe. She died from starvation, shock and loss of blood. No legal action was taken. It was regarded as a family affair.

Subtle forced marriage is practiced by some elites for various reasons ranging from political, religious or business reasons. Many politicians arrange marriage for their children in order to win political favour from their mentors, only for the marriage to break up shortly after. The man may turn to another woman while the problems linger, the society will not frown at him. But the abandoned young woman is expected to remain faithful to him, praying and hoping that he will one day change his mind and return home. Any time it pleases him to be at home, without any cogent reason, he turns the wife into a punching bag.

**4.2.ii Human Trafficking:** Human Trafficking has received global attention. Despite the fact that Nigeria is a sovereign member of the United Nations and a competent signatory to the international instruments against trafficking in persons, the intolerable social phenomenon is on steady increase in the country. According to Ms Amina Abdulrahman of the National Project Office of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Nigeria has been named among the eight countries considered the highest in human trafficking in the world, her counterparts in the despicable crime being Thailand, China, Albania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Ukraine etc. Human trafficking is ranked the third most common crime in the country. Although Nigeria passed, in 2003, an anti-trafficking legislation to deal with the crime, conviction of culprits remains rare.

Sex trafficking has been on for years and it is still prevalent. But recently, it has developed into baby trafficking. Fake maternity clinics, dubbed “Baby Farms” or “factories” in the media are springing up everywhere across the country notoriously in cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Enugu and Aba. The doctors in charge of the “Baby Factories” usually lure the teenage mothers with unwanted pregnancies, (most of them school girls between 14 to 17 years), by offering to help them with abortion. The girls are locked up until they give birth, where upon, they are forced to give up their babies for a token fee of around N20,000. The babies are then sold to buyers for between 300,000 to 450,000 naira for illegal adoption or for use in ritual and witchcraft. Even when the culprits are arrested, they easily buy their way out.

**4.2.iii Preference for Male Child:** Discrimination against the girl-child in Nigeria starts from birth. Some parents are very sad when they are told that their new born baby is a girl. Many women suffer dehumanizing humiliation in their marital homes while

others are unjustly castigated and abandoned on account of the couple's inability to have a male child. The abandonment may be so severe that it results in intense psychological trauma, social maladjustment, despair or even death in some cases. The situation could be worst for unemployed wives, handicapped or sickly daughters and their mothers.

That was the case of Mrs Kuburat Tajudeen as reported in *The Nation* of August 12, 2012. Mr. Tajudeen, 55, director in the office of the Audits General of the Federation, married his wife, Kuburat when she was 20 year old. They are blessed with five children, all girls. However, disappointed due to their inability to have a male child, after 12 years of marriage, Mr. Tajudeen divorced his wife at the Igando Grade B Customary Court. He was asked to pay N100.000.00 as alimony to his wife, which he did, but later broke into the woman's apartment and carted away her valuables worth N1.9 9 million including gold jewelry and the N100.000.00 alimony he had paid to her. Recounting her ordeal, Kuburat said: "after divorcing me, he went and broke into my apartment, packed my things out and rented out the apartment"; since then he doesn't know how the children are faring. The five of them have stopped going to school because there is no money.

Having left his house empty handed, Kuburat was then appealing to the court to order her estranged husband to return her property so that she could start a new life with her children. Before marrying Kuburat, Mr. Tajudeen had earlier broken up a 15 year old marriage to another woman because she was unable to have any issue for him.

Worst of all, the preference for male child syndrome often results in harmful and unethical practices such as female infanticide and pre-natal sex selection among wealthy families. There have been cases of mothers switching newly born babies in maternity wards.

**4.2.iv Paedophilia:** The whole world was shocked in 2000, when Bariya Ibrahim Magazu, a thirteen year old girl, became a victim of blatant gender discrimination in Zamfara State. She was found pregnant and brought before a Sharia court. After interrogation, she was declared guilty of pre-marital sex and was sentenced to be flogged publicly, 110 strokes of the cane. But nothing was done to the three men whom she said raped her on three different occasions. Amnesty International tried in vain to intercede for the little girl. According to report, Magazu, the girl's father was owing the three men some money, so he arranged for them to have sex with the girl to liquidate the debt. Yet none of the four men was found guilty under the Sharia law. Bariya was publicly flogged after having her baby.

The raping of little girls is soaring in Nigeria but nobody is taking it seriously, nobody is doing anything to deter it. A 70 year-old pastor, Alfred Idonije was recently brought to court in Benin city for raping a 9 year old orphan, Hope Cabiru. While testifying, the victim said the pastor forcibly had sex with her on 25th June 2012, after luring her into his room by sending her to buy noodle for him. He had sex with her on three other occasions and threatened to kill her if she ever tells anybody about their affair. Hope had lost her parents and was staying with her grand mother, Mary Akhigbe who narrated how she had gone in search of Hope when she heard a noise from the pastor's bedroom. She then peeped into the room through a window and saw the Pastor on top of Hope. Instead of sending the culprit to jail, the presiding Magistrate Taye Omoruyi granted the accused bail with the sum of N200,000.00. to enable him seek medical attention, on the request of the Counsel of the defendant, Barrister Osa Uwagie. The MAN is on bail, while the little girl suffers psychological trauma all her life.

**4.2.v Superstition:** If witches were burnt alive in Europe in the fifteenth century, the extermination of witches is resurging in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A 70 year old woman, Madame Rebecca Adewunmi, was recently killed by some angry youths in Omuo-Ekiti, accused of being a witch. “It was said that the old woman was killed because a little girl dreamt that the old woman had a hand in the illness of her stepson.” The case was reported to the police, on June 30, 2012 when the incident occurred, but no arrest was made because some community leaders reportedly advised against their intervention. Instead, members of her family are being haunted. Her children have appealed to the governor and the police for protection. According to one of the children: “the town of our birth has since become a no-go area for us, despite the fact that it is where we know as home”, for “those who killed our mother have vowed to eliminate every member of our family,” so, “we no longer move freely about in Ekiti State. They have been looking for means to eliminate us and we have been changing locations and homes. We are helpless in the circumstance”.

Nigeria has a plethora of discriminatory practices against women which continue to keep them trammled. We cannot recount all of them here because of time constraint. Suffice to mention that they include the following:

- ◆ Forced celibacy “the Idegbe system in Delta Igbo and the Sira of Ogoni
- ◆ Prohibition of women from bailing persons in police custody
- ◆ Requirement for Police women to obtain permission from the Inspector General to get married
- ◆ Requirement for female Bankers to put in about five years of service before getting married
- ◆ The issue of inheritance
- ◆ Female Circumcision

- ◆ Demand for a Nigerian married woman to get her husband's consent in writing to apply for a Nigerian passport

Sexism is a major obstacle to women attaining equality, development and peace in Nigeria. It prevents women from enjoying their human rights, fundamental freedom and a life of dignity, free from oppression. Moreover, it also hampers productivity, reduces human capital and undermines economic growth. The continued prevalence of the pandemic in the country demonstrates that the Nigerian government, at all levels has neither domesticated the international and national laws and conventions on gender discrimination and violence, nor shown any serious commitment at implementing them with all the necessary political commitment and resources they deserve. Consequently, gender based violence is soaring steadily in the country.

### **4.3. Factors Favouring Violation of Women's Human Rights in Nigeria**

A combination of factors contributes to the increasing high rates of violation of women's human rights in Nigeria. Some of them are:

- ◆ Lack of Protective Laws
- ◆ Lack of Institutional Support
- ◆ Cultural Traditions
- ◆ Religious Practices
- ◆ Culture of silence
- ◆ Lack of Economic Independence
- ◆ Lack of Safe refuge
- ◆ Prevalence of "glass ceiling" attitude

#### **4.3.i. Lack of Protective Laws**



According to Amnesty International, the Federal and State Governments of Nigeria are partly responsible for the "shocking" high rate of domestic violence in the country, for neither of them is doing anything to stem the tide of violence – and in some cases, they even condone it. The key international agreement on women’s human rights is the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (CEDAW), which is also described as the international bill of women’s rights. Ratified by 185 UN Member States, CEDAW encompasses a global consensus on the changes that need to take place in order to realize women’s human rights. This year marks the 33rd anniversary of the Convention’s adoption through the UN General Assembly in 1979. The Nigerian government has not signed this bill into law.

**4.3.ii Lack of institutional support:** The criminal justice system in our country provides almost no protection for women from violence. The police often dismiss domestic violence as a family matter and refuse to investigate or press charges. Moreover, corruption and under-resourcing in the police force over the years, have made the public to lose faith in that institution’s integrity or capability. As a result, many victims avoid the police, and unless the victim is lucky to be supported by Civil Society groups, seeking redress is almost a waste of time.

**4.3.iii Cultural Traditions:** Even though most African societies are gradually evolving from traditional setting to urban milieu, as a result of industrialization and western education, nevertheless, the attitude of the majority of Africans, as well as their social norms and values are still defined by cultural paradigms. There is still ample evidence of gender myths and stereotyped roles which place women at various points of disadvantage. Besides, subtle and overt discrimination against women are evident in both rural and

urban places. Although the experience of women may differ from country to country and from community to community, by and large, the majority of African women still experience the same debilitating obsolete elements of cultural traditions as their mothers and grandmothers did.

For example, although Nigeria operates both statutory and customary laws, the laws which are explicitly discriminatory against women are found mostly in the various systems of customary laws. These include, in some areas, indigenous cultural traditions and religious laws. Encoded in the traditionalist worldview, these laws constitute the primary obstacles preventing women from gaining their fundamental human rights and socio-political empowerment. As a result, women in contemporary Nigeria are still conceptualized in their relationship to others, and not as persons with their own identity and fundamental human rights. A woman is a man's daughter, wife and mother. That is why in most customary inheritance laws, she gets things through her children, and not in her own capacity as a human being. On divorce, she cannot lay claim to any of her children. If her husband dies, in most communities, the traditional practices proscribe widows from inheriting their husband's property. In some cases, she is inherited along with the other properties the husband has left behind.

**4.3.iv Socialisation:** The family plays an important part in maintaining patriarchy across generations and in socializing children to behave according to social expectation. In general, Nigerian women are expected to behave with subservience to their husbands, Men use violence, or threat of violence, to establish their superiority over women, to keep women in their place and to discourage them from challenging patriarchy. The majority of women in contemporary Nigeria are subjugated, abused, battered and violated every day in their different communities.

The sad thing about it is that these women do not see anything wrong with their condition. This is because they have been socialized to accept their situation as the “normal” way of life. It is not Normal. It is society that makes women believe that it is normal. According to Amnesty International, in Nigeria, many believe that a woman is "expected to endure whatever she meets in her matrimonial home", and to provide “sex and obedience” to her husband who has the right to violate and batter her if she fails to meet her marital duties. For some victims, domestic violence is seen as a sign of love, as a necessary corrective tool for women, or as part and parcel of married life.

It is not normal. It is not natural. It is not Nigerian women’s portion to suffer violence in their daily lives. But, if they do, it is because, according to Kate Millet, men are socialized to have a dominant temperament which provides men with a higher social status. This in turn, leads them to fill social roles in which they can exercise mastery over women. Women develop a passive temperament and a sense of inferiority because they have been socialized to develop such trait. (31-32) She further explains that the prevalence of domestic violence in a society, therefore, is the result of tacit acceptance by members of that society. The way men view themselves as men, and the way they view women, will determine whether they use violence or coercion against women or not.

**4.3.v. Culture of Silence:** Victims of rape, wife battery and incest are usually afraid to talk about their ordeal for fear of stigmatization, humiliation and ostracism. Instead, they prefer to suffer the pang of their defilement in silence. Moreover, domestic violence is usually considered a family affair which the public shouldn’t know about. But this culture of silence only serves to encourage the perpetrators, knowing fully well that nobody will come after them to make them suffer the consequence of their action.

**4.3.vi Lack of Economic Independence:** The inability of many women to escape violence and domination due to their disadvantaged economic status makes them to remain in abusive relationship. Many women and girls depend on the financial resources of their husbands, fathers or families. This forces them to put up with domination for fear of the withdrawal of this financial support. Even for educated women, domestic violence also poses a serious threat to their safety and wellbeing.

**4.3.vii. Lack of Safe refuge:** In February 2012, the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Conference of Women's Shelters (WCWS), under the auspices of U.S. National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) and Global Network of Women's Shelters (GNWS) was held in Washington D.C. Nearly 100 countries were represented. In almost all of these countries, there are many Women's Shelters run across the country where female victims of domestic violence and their children could run to for solace. A place where they could find safety, healing and listening ears without feeling shame or stigma. Some shelters may go extra miles to provide financial resource and legal support for the victims. Some African countries such as Kenya, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa, Cameroon and Mali were represented. They all run such homes all over their countries, supported by their government and philanthropists. Throughout the conference, there was no evidence to show that such homes are available anywhere in Nigeria. Where do Nigerian battered women, raped women, and exploited women go to seek refuge at a time of crisis? Most of them tolerate the violence because they have nowhere to go. Worst of all, believing that the law will not protect them they close their mouths and suffer in silence.

**4.3.viii. Prevalence of "glass ceiling" attitude (Politics of exclusion):** The term glass ceiling refers to a way of treating women as inferior with paternalistic attitude. It creates a barrier in

the progress of the female gender, especially working women. Professor Awe of Ibadan once narrated, how as a senior lecturer, she was not given any official responsibility even when she was abundantly qualified for one, whereas her junior male colleagues were assigned to head various positions in the University. No longer able to bear the discrimination, she went to the Dean of the faculty to express her bafflement. The latter expressed that he was only protecting her interest, for he recognized that she needed time to face her domestic affairs at home. So, she asked the Dean if he had forgotten that she needed to score some points on official responsibilities in order to qualify for the next position, besides, she had not complained to anybody that she was incapable of combining both official and domestic duties. The Dean became confused and she left the office.

This politics of exclusion, is a major factor hindering women's political participation in Nigeria. Political parties are slow to respond to the interest of women candidates because they believe that the demand of politics will conflict with the female political aspirant's domestic and social responsibilities. So, they under-invest in women's campaigns.

This kind of subtle discrimination, practiced by stereotypical society, has the potency of affecting women gravely. It prevents them from having peace of mind. It makes women weaker not only physically but mentally as well. The primary desire of every human being is to maintain a happy life. When a woman is beaten, raped, abused, exploited and harmed, her children and community suffer. When women cannot be equal contributors socially, politically and economically, the communities, and the world suffer. We cannot achieve development and peace while violence against women continues. When women can live free of violence, they will build stronger families, stronger communities, and a stronger world. That is why

today, the campaign against violence against women is of priority on the feminist agenda, as well as that of the United Nations.

#### **5. Feminist Activities in Nigeria**

According to the Egyptian feminist writer, Nawal El Saadawi “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.” (1) Realizing the validity of this observation, the United Nations has directed its members to put in place structures that will ensure total integration of women in national development. Nigeria is a competent signatory to all the International Conventions and Proclamations made under the aegis of the United Nations Assembly to ensure that governments reaffirm their commitment to the goals of protecting women’s human rights. These include the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (CEDAW), The 1994 Cairo “International Conference on Population and Development” (ICPD), The 1995 “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” , The 2000 Beijing + 5).

In compliance to these directives, some efforts have been made to improve the condition of women in Nigeria. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1963) confers a set of privileges which have been tagged fundamental human rights, to all its citizens. These rights are also included in the 1989 and 1999 Constitutions. Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution explicitly states that: “Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly; (a) no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment; (b) no person shall be held in slavery or servitude; and (c) no person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.” The Nigerian government has set up the National Commission for Women and a Federal Ministry for Women’s Affairs. After so many years of wrangling, the Freedom of Information Bill, which guarantees the

rights of access to information held by public institutions, was passed by Goodluck Jonathan in June, 2010. Four States in Nigeria, including Lagos, Akwa Ibom and Ekiti have passed a law against domestic violence.

In terms of public awareness, women groups in different professions and disciplines have been organizing seminars and workshops to sensitize Nigerian women to political self-awareness, and to full and effective participation in the democratic process at the rural and urban levels. Seminars are being organized by Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to campaign against gender violence in the country.

On intellectual level, feminist scholarship and activism have also been going on at the tertiary level of education across the country. As far back as the 1980s, works by Nigerian feminist writers such as Molaria Ogundipe Leslie, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, Mary Kolawole, Helen Chukwuma, Okonjo-Ogunyemi, Gloria Chukukere, Grace Okereke, Catherine Acholonu, Chioma Opara, and Rose Acholonu began to appear and today there is a plethora of critical works by Nigerian female critics such as Iniobong Uko, Theresa Njoku, Emilia Oko, Mabel Ewrierhoma and Julie Okoh.

Feminist historians like Nina Mba and Bolanle Awe have tried to reconstruct the female experience by resurrecting “the buried and neglected female past”. They have done this by recording and documenting the history of exceptional women. The biography of some exceptional women, like Mrs Ransome Kuti, have been written. Others are conducting research on women issues in disciplines such as history, sociology, religion, literature, and the Arts, each aiming at bringing women into focus, and putting them in their rightful position in society..

Essays and articles by male critics such as Charles Nnolim, Femi Ojo-Ade, Ernest Emenyonu, Ezenwa Ohaeto, Chiweizu, Chidi Maduka have also helped to widen the scope of feminist discourse in Nigeria. Their contributions allow the target readers

to have some insights into the male critics' view on Feminism in Nigeria. All these, added together, serve to testify to the growing importance of feminist discourse and activities in Nigeria. The publication of books by feminist critics testify to the growing importance of African feminist discourse as part of the educational programmes in conjunction with numerous courses on women studies being mounted. Gender Studies Units and Centres have sprung up in many Universities. These show how fast feminism is gaining ground in Nigeria.

Nigeria has a ferment of female novelists, playwrights and poets, too numerous to be enumerated here. Suffice to mention that few female dramatists have also brought issues that concern women to the dramatic stage and, therefore, unto the sociopolitical discourse. Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme, Stella Oyedepo, Catherine Acholonu, Irene Salami, Julie Okoh, Falashade Ogunrinde, Chinyere Okafor, Onyeka Onyekuba, Tracy Utoh, Charity Angya , Amanda Adichie are all dramatists who have made woman issues the main concern of their dramatic work. But do the work of all these dramatists qualify to be classified as feminist drama/theatre? What is feminist theatre?

### **6.1. Feminist Theatre Evolution**

Feminist theatre emerged in the United States of America in the early 1970s, thanks to the momentum of the women's liberation movement and the radical theatre practices of the 1960s (Leavitt. 1). The Radical Theatre Movement which includes such groups as the Open Theatre, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the National Black Theatre and the Living Theatre, was motivated by the changes in perception about human beings and their environment (Leavitt 2). The history of the movement reflects a search for adequate methods with which to express these changes in perception. Within the movement are two theatrical styles: experimental theatre and political theatre. Experimental theatre



sought to revolutionize techniques by an ensemble of artistes. Political theatre was specifically political in its method and intent. It analyzed and challenged social institutions, debated political issues, and advocated social change. The goal was not merely to entertain, but to improve the quality of life in the society. Feminist theatre also shares this goal and is, therefore, more political than experimental in its intent.

The women's movement and radical theatre coincided to give birth to Feminist theatre. The women's movement clearly defined the causes of female oppression and thus provided possible solutions to the problems. Political theatre, particularly the Black Theatre Movement and its methods for vividly dealing with the issue of racism, opened the way for the public examination of difficult social issues.

However, actual steps towards a completely feminist theatre were taken in 1972, when a group of women playwrights (Rosalyn Drexler, Maria Irene Fornes, Julie Bovasso, Megan Terry, Rochelle Owens and Adrienne Kennedy) formed the Women's Theatre Council which, though initially not professing feminism, sought to create a professional theatre which would develop the talents of women in all areas of the theatre (Leavitt, 4).

As feminist theatre gathered momentum, feminist drama grew in importance and relevance. Before then, traditional American theatre, dominated by male characters, gave little thought to an accurate portrayal of the female experience. Although some plays have major female roles, the fact that they focused on women does not necessarily mean that they provided an accurate and balanced picture of women. For example, in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, the role of Linda is pivotal. Although this role is a major one, it does not provide a desirable role model. (Leavitt, 81). Linda's unhappiness is clearly evident. However, we perceive her unhappiness from the male point of view. We are not allowed into her own private world. By not

examining the reason behind her emotional state, her condition cannot change.

## **6. 2. Characteristics of Feminist Theatre**

Feminist theatre goes beyond just the mere representation of women's unhappiness on stage. It has its own peculiar characteristics. As the name suggests, feminist theatre is based on the principles of feminism and refers to any dramatic work that centers on the struggle of women for equal opportunities with men, and to be accepted as human beings, instead of being cast into gender stereotypes. Leavitt affirms that feminist theatre is an artistic representation and a political action. As a political enterprise, feminist theatre is committed to raising consciousness. It has political implications in that the dramatists recognize that theatre can be used to resist or support the status quo. However, the distinguishing feature between feminist theatre and political theatre is that there is, in the former, a strong emphasis on the actual day to day experience of women. Hence Janet Brown asserts that feminist theatre is any theatre based on the "feminist impulse". She asserts:

This feminist impulse is expressed dramatically in woman's struggle for autonomy against an oppressive, sexist society. When woman's struggle for autonomy is a play's central rhetorical motive, that play can be considered a feminist drama. (1)

The key word in that definition is rhetorical motive. What is rhetorical motive? As a communication process, rhetoric implies persuasive, didactic and thought provoking devices. Rhetorical drama, says Kaufman (446-459) is "consciously intended to excite an audience to act decisively and to transform their lives and the society that oppresses them." In the same vein, Nathalie asserts:

Feminist drama is a persuasive message designed to influence the beliefs and convictions of both the members of the audience and the members of the theatre ... By using the stage as a speaking platform, feminists argue against their own oppression, seeking a change in their identity as lesser human beings and their subordinate position in society. (50)

Thus, emphasizing the function of feminist theatre as a medium of communication, both Kaufman and Nathalie affirm that feminist theatre is concerned with affecting the attitudes of both the spectators and performers.

On the other hand, comparing feminist theatre/drama to Aristotelian precepts, Keyssar explains that feminist theater is not founded on “self-recognition” and revelation of a true “self”, but rather on a “a recognition of others and a concomitant transformation of the self and the world.” (xiv) The idea of transformation is inherent in feminist theatre. It intends to transform existing cultural traditions and beliefs, with the vision of creating an equitable environment where men and women can enjoy equal rights. Feminist theatre can be perceived, therefore, as an art that is devoted to advocating women’s autonomy and identity. This advocacy is found not only in plays written by women, but also by male dramatists who put feminist political activism into their dramatic works.

Feminist theatre is different from women’s theatre. Women’s theatre may deal with political and social issues, but their goal is geared more towards entertainment rather than social change. The Feminist artist, Myrna Lam, opines that there is no single correct way to present women in drama, but she emphasizes that reaching a final awareness is mandatory for a

protagonist in a feminist drama (Leavitt 13). Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is one of the first plays to exhibit feminist characteristics. At the end of the play, Nora comes to the realization that the loss of her own self-worth is not an acceptable price to pay if she is to remain with her husband. So, she decides to move out to make a life of her own. Awareness is a mental process. How does one achieve this mental disposition? It is through the process of conscientisation.

### **6. 3. Feminist Theatre and Conscientisation**

The primary aim of feminist theatre is geared towards conscientisation. Although theatre has always functioned as a means of teaching moral values and ethics from the time of ancient civilization in Greece and Rome, the idea of using the theatre as a means of sensitization and social mobilization by the oppressed can be traced to the Brazilian social activist, theatre theorist and dramatist, Augusto Boal, who was greatly influenced by the ideology of social transformation propounded by Bertolt Brecht and Paulo Freire. Brecht was a Marxist playwright and theorist who reacted vehemently against the idealist poetics of Aristotle and his disciple Hegel. The latter believed in the maintenance of the natural order of the universe and, therefore, propounded the concept of catharsis and the universal man. Rejecting these notions, Brecht asserted that man is not an absolute subject but the product of economic or social forces to which he responds, and in virtue of which he acts (Sartre, 114). He argued that a theatrical work cannot end in equilibrium. It must, on the contrary, show the ways in which society loses its equilibrium, which way society is moving, and how to hasten the transition. He emphasized that the dramatist should show his images of social life to the masses, for it is this class of people who are mostly interested in effecting changes in social structures, since they are the victims. So, unlike the bourgeois theatre that

seeks to reestablish equilibrium, Brechtian epic theatre on the other hand, promotes a dramatization that will lead to social transformation and towards the liberation of the oppressed classes in particular. Hence, contrary to Hegel and Aristotle who recommended the reinstallation of equilibrium at the end of the spectacle, Brecht wanted the theatrical spectacle to be the beginning of a revolutionary action (Szondi, 89-100, Sartre 157-162). Equilibrium should be sought by transforming society, and not by purging the individual of his emotions. He saw the theatre as a weapon which the artist should wield to propel the spectator into undertaking revolutionary action in the society. This should be achieved through the process of alienation effect, storytelling and audience participation in the theatre performance.

Feminist theatre was also greatly influenced by Paulo Freire's concept of "conscientisation". In the field of education, conscientisation is a methodology of subverting what Freire called a "culture of silence". He advocated a form of education in which teachers and students collaborate in exploring issues together through dialogues rather than the traditional method which encourages a one way dependence of the student upon the teacher. A process he called the "Banking method of education". In such situation, the learner is defined as a passive object, robbed of the opportunity of becoming creative and is trapped in a culture of silence only to repeat later whatever the teacher has impacted in him/her.

Conscientisation, on the other hand, is a process of learning which enables the individuals to perceive issues critically and to take action against the oppressive element in reality. This process involves the active participation of the people in transforming themselves by engaging in dialogues through which they identify their problems, reflect and ask questions on why the problems exist, and then take action to solve them (Zakes Mda. 45). Freire believed that every human being no matter how

“ignorant” or “illiterate” he or she may be is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality and deal critically with it. Conscientisation refers, therefore, to a system of learning which permits the individual to perceive social, political and economic contradictions with a critical eye and to take action against the oppressive demands of reality. It demands reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.

Freire’s ideology has had profound impact not only in the field of education, but also in the overall struggle for national development. Boal harnessed all these ideas to formulate his multiple techniques popularly known as the “Theatre of the Oppressed”, aimed at educating and motivating the oppressed into taking action.

Feminist theatre constructed on Friere’s conscientisation theory is subversive. It is designed not merely as a spectacle for entertainment but rather as a language designed to foster critical thinking, analyzing problems and arriving at decisive decision. It encourages spectators to come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, and to take initiative to participate in the transformation of their society and thereby open the way to a new future. What is the major benefit of such a stance? Awareness leads to commitment.

#### **6. 4. Feminist Theatre and Commitment**

According to Soren Kierkegaard, personal experience and acting on one’s own convictions are essential in arriving at the truth. Kierkegaard held that it is spiritually crucial to recognize that one experiences not only a fear of specific objects but also a feeling of

general apprehension, which he called dread. He interpreted it as God's way of calling each individual to make a commitment to a personally valid way of life. The word anxiety (German Angst) has a similarly crucial role in the work of the 20<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Martin Heidegger; anxiety leads to the individual's confrontation with nothingness and with the impossibility of finding ultimate justification for the choices he or she must make. In the philosophy of Sartre, the word "nausea" is used for the individual's recognition of the pure contingency of the universe, and the word anguish is used for the recognition of the total freedom of choice that confronts, the individual at every moment.

The most prominent theme in existentialist writing is that of choice. Humanity's primary distinction, in the view of most existentialists, is the freedom to choose. Existentialists have held that human beings do not have a fixed nature, or essence, as other animals and plants do. Each human being makes choices that create his or her own nature. In the formulation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, existence precedes essence. Choice is therefore central to human existence and it is inescapable. Even the refusal to choose is still a choice as seen in Thomas More during the case of Henry VIII and Anne Bullen. Freedom of Choice involves commitment and responsibility. Because individuals are free to choose their own path, existentialists have argued, they fully accept the risk and responsibility of following their commitment wherever it leads.

Freedom of choice and commitment are at the nexus of feminist theatre. As we have explained above, the feminists, through all the ages, have advocated that basic human rights which include having liberty of choice, liberty of expression and liberty for women to take their own decision and not be decided for. That means if women are allowed to take their own decisions, they will be more liable to commit themselves more devotedly to

their choice than when they are being decided for. Feminist theatre is committed to advocating women's basic human rights.

### **6.5. Subject Matter in Feminist Theatre**

Feminist theatre often focuses on women's issues. Authors of feminist theatre are known to understand and explain the difference between sex and gender. They believe that though a person's sex is predetermined and natural, it is the gender that has been created by society, along with a particular perception about gender roles. Gender roles, they believe, can be altered over time. The predominance of one gender over the other, is a common concept across almost all societies, and the fact that it is not in favour of women is an underlying characteristic of feminist theatre. Therefore, the dramatic discourse in feminist theatre is centered on the problems women, encounter in society, and the decisions they make based on their personal values and beliefs.

### **6.6. Characters in Feminist Theatre**

The action in feminist theatre circulates around female protagonists who generally, do not readily accept the traditional role of women as decided by society. They are ready to make their own decisions, and to deal with the consequences of these choices and actions. Though the characters may be daughters, mothers, sisters, or wives, the feminist theatre first deals with them as women than as stereotypes. For, it is not these relationships, roles, or stereotypes that give the female characters in feminist theatre their identity. Their identity is defined by their choices and their beliefs which are then associated with these roles. It is important to note that not all works of feminist theatre have happy endings, Women have been ostracized by society for openly demanding equality, and have had to face several negative consequences of their decision to go against the social norms and expectations.



Briefly, for a play to be categorized as feminist, it should integrate some, if not all, of the following features. It should:

- ◆ be woman-centered, identify their problems
- ◆ question gender roles and strategies
- ◆ examine patriarchal traditions
- ◆ question the status quo, hierarchies and power relations
- ◆ challenge assumptions, and social norms
- ◆ increase our knowledge, and raise consciousness
- ◆ aim to improve the condition of women
- ◆ talk about the experience of women in the present economic crisis and the coping strategies of women in relation to men in the household
- ◆ bring about the transformation of women
- ◆ aim at social transformation in the direction of greater gender equity
- ◆ use innovative dramatic methods to convey central message
- ◆ project invisible women playwrights

## 7. **Contribution to Knowledge**

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, I discovered feminism and the feminist movement when I was studying for my Ph.D in France in the late 1980s, thanks to my landlady, Sarah Marandon, who was then a retired professor of English at the University of Bordeaux III, an executive member of (Association des Femmes Diplômées Universitaire) (AFDU) Association of Female University Graduates. She introduced me to the feminist circles in France. Fascinated by their activities, I vowed to replicate a similar organization in Nigeria after my sojourn in France, that is, if such was not yet in existence in Nigeria. That was what gave birth to National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS) at the University of Port Harcourt in 1999. It had for its objectives, among others, to facilitate the empowerment of women in Nigeria,

to serve as a research base for women issues, to encourage an international network among women in academics, and to contribute to the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria. Realising that it would be difficult for me to reach out to Nigerian women if I remained in the French department, I requested to transfer my service to the Department of Creative Arts which later demerged to become two separate departments.

My choice of the Department of Theatre Arts was purely informed by my desire to impact the Nigerian populace with theatre performance/feminist activism. This is because I strongly believe in the power of artistic performance to activate and sharpen socio-political consciousness, and to effectively impact society. Through artistic performances, one can work against gender discrimination, injustice and oppression in all forms while canvassing for a system that has value for justice, equity and respect for human dignity.

### **7.1. Deconstruction of Patriarchal Paradigms in the Works of Julie Okoh**

In consonance with the above objectives, the plight of women in contemporary Nigeria constitutes my major concern. That is why in my critical essays and dramatic work, I examine, analyze and evaluate all those unwritten laws and practices converging to restrict and frustrate women from gaining access to their basic Human Rights, freedom and empowerment.

As a literary critic, I have written more than thirty articles, both in English and in French, some published in Nigeria, others outside Nigeria. The majority of the articles treat women's issues. As a theatre practitioner, I have systematically used the theatre to speak against such crude practices as widowhood rites, gender discrimination, child abuse, sexual harassment, childlessness, and female circumcision. On the issue of female circumcision, I have

written two major plays: *Edewede* (2000) and *In The Fullness of Time*(2000), articles and a book.

My research on the topic reveals that superstition, myth, ignorance about biological and medical facts, preoccupation with virginity and chastity, economic and social security, and especially fear of ostracism made and still make women to rigidly uphold the practice of FGM. My research findings on the topic are also published in the book: *Female Circumcision in Nigeria: Myth, Reality and the Theatre*. This research findings were first presented in a public lecture at Smith College, Northampton, USA, March 14, 2001, organized by The Five College Program in Peace and World Security Studies in Association with the Five College Women's Studies Research Centre and the UMASS Everywoman's Research Centre. The book was serialized in the *Nigerian Vanguard Newspaper*, "Human Angle" section, from August to November 2007, thus creating a forum for the public discussion of the issue. Furthermore, under the auspices of the University of Port Harcourt Graduate Studies Lecture Programme, in 2008, Julie Okoh organized an International Colloquium at the University of Port Harcourt on FGM. Participants from every work of life, including international female experts on Gender Studies gathered at the University of Port Harcourt to discuss the validity of the practice of female circumcision in contemporary African communities. The presentations and discussions at his Colloquium are ready to go to press under the title: *Female Circumcision in Africa: Past and Present*.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, Female circumcision is still practiced in many African countries today, and African emigrants have exported it to Europe and America. The play *Edewede* is being studied in Europe and America today in the areas of Multicultural Studies and Women/Gender Studies. It is one of the plays in the *Anthology of Plays by African Women Playwrights* edited by Kathy Perkins and published by University of Illinois

Press, at Urbana –Champaign. Princeton University Press, New Jersey has decided to reprint the Anthology. This will help to give the play a wider spread in the United States. Moreover, *Edewede* is one of the plays studied by Professor Chantal Zabus of the University of Paris VIII, under the title *Between Rites & Rights: Excision in Women's Experimental Texts and Human Contexts*, published by Stanford University, California.

Another traditional practice that has been vehemently challenged by Julie Okoh is the widowhood rites. Widowhood violence is one of the major problems faced by most women in contemporary African societies. Apart from FGM, it is the most sinister and subtle instrument for reinforcing gender inequality in Africa. The experience may assume different forms in different communities, but the effects remain basically the same. The affected widows suffer injustice and psychological trauma. Widowhood rites are also still practiced in many communities Nigeria and many Nigerian dramatists have treated this topic with great angst: Zulu Sofola in *Wedlock of the Gods* (1977), Felicia Onyewadume in *Clutches of Widowhood* (1996), Stella 'Dia Oyedepo in *On his Demise* (2002), Uche Ama-Abriel in *A Past Came Calling* (2004), Ahmed Yerima in *Aetu* (2006) Jonathan Desen Mbachaga in *Widows' Might* (2008) to name a few.

In the play *Our Wife Forever*, Julie Okoh emphasizes that systems such as widowhood rites, property inheritance, levirate law, associated with widowhood may have had validity and relevance in pristine time. But today, in the face of modernization, globalization, Christianity and internet connectivity, the structures that served to enforce such cultural practices in traditional societies in Africa have been dismantled giving way to capitalism and individualism. Therefore, widows need to be given the right to choose how to live their lives fully in the circumstance in which they find themselves. By so doing, they will be able to raise better children for the society.

The subject of female sexuality has been dramatised in Julie Okoh's plays from different perspectives. A high percentage of young women and little girls experience sexual harassment, rape, incest, and especially paedophilia everyday in this country, yet there is no law against such crimes. So nobody takes the crimes seriously. This is because the law makers and their law enforcement agency, those who control power, are sometimes the perpetrators. While treating in her plays, such as, the *Mannequins*, *Closed Doors* and *Cry for Democracy*, these regrettable ugly experiences encountered by girls in contemporary Nigeria, Julie Okoh dissects and analyzes the psychological trauma suffered by the victims as well as illustrates to them how they could overcome their predicaments and assert themselves in life. She explains to them that the roots of these experiences are traceable to the unscrupulous attitude of our political and religious leaders and elites, as well as to the unwritten traditional laws that enshrine gender discrimination.

Apart from being a gross violation of women's basic human rights, gender based violence constitutes a major social and public health problem in almost every human society. In this regard, Julie Okoh positions the theatre as a potential medium for self discovery and personal healing for the victims. Armed with feminist techniques, she also draws the public's attention to the problems, urging them to wake up and do something about the heinous epidemic.

In the play *Aisha*, Julie Okoh treats the problem of ethnic sentiments and childlessness in marriage. Set in contemporary Nigeria, the play presents the conflicts threatening the marital union between Ehimare, a Christian and an Edo man from the southern part of the country and his wife Aisha, a moslem, and a Kanuri woman from the North. They love each other passionately. But their only problem is rooted in their inability to have an issue after ten years of marriage. According to Adesua, Ehimare's

mother, the union has been cursed from the very beginning because the couple offended their ancestors and gods by defying the traditional norms in order to marry someone from another ethnic group.

The play, built on a fusion of elements from different cultural backgrounds, emphasizes that culture is dynamic. Each culture evolves as it comes in contact with other cultures. There is no culture that is entirely by itself. Every community is made up of people from different cultural backgrounds and they are bound to influence one another in certain ways. The play emphasizes the need for every Nigerian to appreciate and value one another irrespective of tribe, religion, class, and political affiliation in order to work together to engender development in our country. According to Ehimare: "Love is the silent language of life. Without love there can be no communication or friendship. But with love, people of different cultural backgrounds can become unified into one body and soul". (35).

## **7. 2. Feminist Philosophy of Existence in Julie Okoh's Plays.**

Julie Okoh has written abundantly about her country, Nigeria. Her research findings on topical issues are usually dramatized on theatre stage, thereby using the theatre to bring people together to listen to her stories, stories inspired by the daily occurrences in her environment. According to Strindberg, "The theatre is the chronicle of the contemporary world in living images, characters in action, silhouettes of living people, sometimes portraits, echoes of significant events, even the question of time".

So far, Julie Okoh has to her credit about thirty five (35) staged plays out of which twelve (12) have been published. In her plays, while condemning the negative elements of African cultural traditions, she examines their impact on the lives of contemporary African women. By so doing, the audience is made to realize that

most of the traditional practices are mechanisms instituted by society to repress women's liberty and to control their bodies and lives. But Julie Okoh encourages African women to reject this debilitating situation. That is why most of her female characters, instead of negating themselves, are often found striving to transcend their state of immanence in order to gain their status as independent, self-conscious human beings determining and executing their own actions. But they are unable to attain this position until they critically appraise their situation, overcome that crippling fear in them, fear of their master. The need for women to overcome that obstacle to personal growth is a recurrent motif in Julie Okoh's plays as could be seen in the plays: *Mask* (1988), *The Mannequins* (1997), *Edewede* (2000), *In the Fullness of Time* (2000), *Aisha* (2005), *The Trials* (2008), *Closed Doors* (2007).

Julie Okoh's plays are committed to advocating cultural equity and progressive social change with emphasis on women's empowerment. That is why, in her plays, existence is examined from women's perspective. She often deconstructs patriarchal paradigms to develop a feminist philosophy of existence. She tries to make women occupy the centre stage. Arguing against the oppression of women and their subordinate positions in society, her female characters seek a change in their identity as lesser human beings.

In other words, she uses drama and theatre as platforms to preach to contemporary African women about the necessity for them to struggle against all oppressive, sexist, social structures. She encourages them to struggle for their autonomy and empowerment and to act decisively to transform their lives and the society that oppresses them. By so doing, she uses the theatre to influence the attitude of both members of the spectators and the performers, men and women, whose beliefs and convictions

are affected directly or indirectly by the aforementioned discriminatory social structures.

The concept of time and change is a recurrent motif in the plays of Julie Okoh. In each play, she tries to make the spectators and readers understand that culture is not static but dynamic. It is the product of time and history. Today, Africa is developing a new civilization after the previous one was eroded and nearly eclipsed by European colonization and the slave trade. But is this new civilization going to be merely a replica of the old one? Today, we live in a highly scientific, technological, industrialized and computerized age. While African countries must not lose their cultural values, objective, critical analytic and precise mode of thinking have to be seriously incorporated and imbibed in order to make progress and cater for the material welfare of the people of Africa and of Nigeria in particular. Hence, Julie Okoh's plays are committed to advocating cultural equity and progressive social change with emphasis on women's empowerment.

This sensitivity also plays out in a number of other ways including a desire to portray strong female characters, active women who are not victims, but balanced, whole human beings rather than stereotypical cardboard cutouts. The idea of portraying women as positive models and rejecting stereotypes is of particular interest to me. That is why I try to get women's voice on stage. I try to remove them from the margin and place them at the centre of dramatic action, leading them to occupy the centre stage, boldly asserting their personhood. They are often female characters imbued with revolutionary spirit, a sense of hope and empowerment. Strong women who are not defined by conventional sexual roles, objects of desire, but subject in their own right. Hence the acknowledgement of the right of women to centrality and subjectivity is a key issue in my dramaturgy. The creation of a female subject with intelligence, critical focus and the right to speak for herself rather than being a cultural object,



distinguishes my plays from many other Nigerian plays, especially those written mostly by Nigerian male dramatists who populated Nigerian theatre stage with stereotyped female figures.

On another level, to ensure the propagation of feminist consciousness in Nigeria, I introduced in 2002, courses in Women's studies and Feminist Theatre into the Department of Theatre Arts Academic programme. These courses always generate brilliant debates among students in class. Often times, at the end of the semester, some of them would come to me to express how their views about women have been affected by the course.

I have also tried to share my knowledge of feminist theatre techniques with my fellow Nigerian female dramatists. On several occasions, after reading or watching a play written by a Nigerian female dramatist, I'd tell the writer how the play is against women interest. And I'd also give some hints about feminist dramaturgy. I remember one of them, after writing a new play, sent me a copy with a note saying, Auntie I hope you will like this one. I certainly liked it and I let her know of it.

Julie Okoh's plays are staged and studied in Nigerian Universities. BA long essay, M.A Theses, and Ph.D Dissertation are written on the works of Julie Okoh. Her plays constitute objects of discussions in conferences inside and outside Nigeria. Three of her plays have won ANA Award, three others short-listed for awards. She has been invited to many universities in America either as a guest speaker or as a round table discussant. Her play *Closed Doors* which won a national award in 2008 was the only play selected from Africa for the "Working Session on Contemporary Women Playwrights", organized under the auspices of the American Society For Theatre Research (ASTR) which took place in Puerto Rico in 2009. Anyone interested to know more about the plays of Julie Okoh, may type Julie Okoh or Juliana Okoh on Google or Yahoo search engine to get more information.

Taking into consideration my published books and articles, my social activism, and especially the reception of my plays so far both inside and outside Nigeria, Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, kindly permit me to say with humility that I think that, in my own small way, I have contributed to knowledge internationally.

## **8. Recommendations**

Taking into consideration the enormous serious cases of violation of women's human rights currently in Nigeria, I would like to make the following recommendations first to stakeholders in Nigeria, then to my fellow Nigerian women.

**8.1 Domestication of International Treaties:** Nigerian government should take immediate action to meet its obligations under the international human rights declarations, obliging it to protect women from gender-based violence, especially the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW). If this is done spousal abuse, incest and paedophilia should be recognized as criminal offences and not as family affairs as they are currently regarded by our law enforcement agencies

**8.2 Feminisation of Power:** Women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy in this country. This will facilitate women's direct engagement in public decision-making. The higher the number of women in decision making positions, the stronger the attention to women's issues.

**8.3 Establishing and Funding of Shelters:** The Government at all levels- national, state or local - should establish Shelters for female victims of domestic violence. If well funded, these shelters will provide women and their children who have experienced violence, a safe space of refuge, compassion, healing, resources,

and assistance. With secured environment, the women can make decisions about their condition and move on with their own lives.

**8. 4. Engaging Men and Boys:** Women cannot achieve gender equality and empowerment in Nigeria without the cooperation and participation of men. Ending gender-based violence will mean changing cultural concepts about masculinity, and that process must actively engage men, whether they are policy makers, parents, spouses or young boys. Ideas about manhood are deeply ingrained in our culture. Parents should stop socializing their children from an early age, into gender roles designed to keep men in power and in control. Many grow up to believe that dominating behaviour towards girls and women is part of being a man. This is very wrong.

**8. 5. Enlightenment Campaign:**

This includes dissemination of information about women human rights to the public. There is need to educate the populace to appreciate close conjugal relationship rather than the familiar male-dominant culture.

Because gender-based violence is sustained by a culture of silence, every effort must be made to encourage women to speak out against gender-based violence, and to get help when they are victims of it. Women's voices must be heard in order to eradicate violence.

As part of the work to counter gender-based violence, there is need to campaign to health workers, to make them more sensitive towards women who may have experienced violence and need their health services. Stakeholders, especially the police and judiciary, capable of aiding abused women, should also be sensitised on the need to intervene promptly and appropriately in cases of violence against women.

**8.6. Funding Theatre Practice** Integrating messages about the prevention of gender-based violence into information, education and communication projects will go a long way to generate respect for women's human rights in Nigeria and ensure peace in the family.

Feminist theatre, by its very nature, is transformational. It is designed to foster critical thinking, analyze problems and arrive at a decisive decision. It encourages spectators to come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in their environment and to take initiative to participate in the transformation of their society and thereby open the way to a new future. If well funded, Nigerian theatre using the techniques of feminist theatre, will help to create awareness in the minds of the Nigerian populace and help them to overcome their sexist tendency. Where there is peace and trust there is no discrimination or violence.

We therefore call on the Nigerian Government to adequately fund theatre practice in this country to enable the practitioners do their work effectively. All we have been doing, most of the time, is to practice theatre in university Campuses. We need to move out of the university environments, carry the theatre to the rural areas, to community centres, to village squares, to market places, hospitals, prisons, war zone, to anywhere there is conflict. The Brazilian Augusto Boal has done it successfully in the past, we can also try it.

**8.7. Clarion Call to Nigerian Women:** Women have a lot to fight for in this country. It is not enough to write papers for promotion, vie for a high paying job, political position, and contract. We need to be proactive in fighting for the protection of our female children – future mothers of this nation, for the widows, the aged, single mothers, the handicapped, for all these multitude of Nigerian citizens, always neglected in our national budgets. Instead of feeling complacent in our corner, instead of

being suspicious of other women's motives, or pulling down the few successful ones, let us come together to fight for women's basic human rights in this country.

The rights we comfortably enjoy today were fought for by other women. Some were sent to jail, some exiled from their homeland, others sent to the grave for contravening the injunctions against women speaking in public, for demanding for women's right to education and to vote, or accused of encroaching into professional fields considered men's domain. Etta d'Aelders, Manon Roland, Olympe de Gouges, Germaine de Stael, Anne Hutchinson, Sarah Grimke, Angelina Grimke, Millicent Fawcett, Emmeline Pankhurst, and Emily Davidson are some of the women who sacrificed their time, energy and lives for women's progress. What is our own contribution to women's history? Nigerian women rise up! Support one another! Rise up! Rise up!

## **9. Conclusion**

Feminism asserts that women are first of all human beings and as such, deserve justice. The concept of justice for women has changed over the centuries. While feminists may differ on many issues, they are united in their conviction that women are oppressed and that the oppression should end. They all begin by claiming full humanity for women.

Beginning from the fifteenth century, some European women have written asserting their claim to full humanity and the subsequent right to work out their own lives. Feminists have consistently rejected the assumption of women's inferiority. They have argued that what may seem to be inferiority is really inequality, created by centuries of male dominance.

The rejection of man-made and male-centered rules for women links feminists who may differ in almost every other regard. It is the same premise underlying the feminist writings of the fifteenth century that also motivated the movement for

women's liberation of the 1970s. While the specific traditions rejected and the methods for rejecting them vary over time, the starting point for all brands of feminism has been their refusal to accept the prevailing views of women's nature, roles, and relative worth.

While rejecting traditions which subordinate and denigrate women, feminists create new visions of society not only for women but for all humanity. They believe that if the traditions which subordinate women are cultural and social rather than natural and innate, they can be uprooted and the lives of women transformed. If the lives of women are transformed they will be in a position to build a better home, a better country and a better world for both men and women.

The concept of gender equality that focuses on women's rights has come a long way, and feminist literature has played a major role in bringing about changes in the attitude towards women. Yet, a long battle still lies ahead, for it will take a long time for gender equality and the role of women in society to be well understood and accepted in the ideal sense. The battle is still on. Ink is still flowing, words are still spreading in an attempt to sensitize the consciousness of men and women all over the world on the need to revolutionize their perception of woman and thereafter modify their relationship built on egalitarian basis. As for me, I have chosen the medium of the theatre as my pulpit for that purpose. I have tried to reach out to the world with my theatre practice based on feminist principles and techniques.

The Afro-American writer, Bell Hook, says that Feminism is for everybody. Is feminism for you?

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**CITATION ON**  
**PROFESSOR JULIANA OMONUKPON OMOIFO OKOH**  
*B. A (Chicago), MA. (Edmonton), DEA & PhD (Bordeaux).*



Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, this afternoon, I feel particularly fulfilled as a woman as I read this citation on the second female Professor in the Faculty of Humanities to deliver an inaugural lecture, and the first woman to deliver an inaugural lecture in the Department of Theatre Arts.

Born at Ubiaja Town, Esan South East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria on August 5<sup>th</sup> 1947, Juliana Okoh, had a humble beginning. Her father Chief Augustine, Azamuoisia Omoifo was a teacher, a produce examiner and finally a court clerk. Her mother was a seamstress and later, the shop manager in the UAC outlet store owned by her father. They had eight children, Juliana was the fifth. Her parents were not rich, but they were artistically endowed. Her father loved music and played the guitar. Her mother was a traditional story teller, singer, dancer and she participated in “Ikhio” performances. These were satiric

sketches organised and performed entirely by women in the open air, prior to the New Yam Festival. The first son of the family, Louis (now Chief Louis Omoifo), as a member of the Boys Scout, acted in Concert Party performances organized by that group. All these may have influenced the artistic development of Professor Julie Okoh later in life.

Juliana's formal education started in 1953 at the Sacred Heart Demonstration Primary School, Ubiaja, which was an all girls' school, but later, she transferred to Saint Benedict's Primary School, which was a mixed school, because her father wanted her to compete with boys. For her secondary education, she attended Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School, Uromi, from where she got five credits in west African School Certificate Examination in 1966. Her best subjects were English, Latin and Mathematics.

While working with the Ministry of External Affairs, Lagos, after her secondary school education, she enrolled for the GCE ordinary level, after which she sat for GCE Advanced Level. With her brilliant performance in the two examinations, her employers decided to send her for a three year training programme at the Federal Training Centre (FTC), Lagos, as a bilingual secretary. She was still undergoing the secretarial training when she was able to secure in 1972, 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, USA in 1976, M.A. (French Literature) from the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada (1979), DEA in Comparative Literature (1989) and PhD in Francophone/Anglophone Theatre and Drama (1991), both from the University of Bordeaux III, Bordeaux, France.

### **Post Qualification Teaching/Professional Experience**

Professor Juliana Okoh has over thirty five years of continuous teaching and research experience cutting across Nigeria, Canada, France and the U.S.A.

- Professor of Theatre Theory and Criticism 2004 - present
- Fulbright Fellow at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, USA (2000-2001).
- Guest Lecturer, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, U.S.A. (March 2001).
- Guest Lecturer, University of Massachusetts at Amherst U.S.A (June 2001).
- Head Panel Discussant, BTN Kent State University, Ohio U.S.A (July 2004).
- Stage Reading of AISHA, Black Theatre Festival, Winston Salem U.S.A. (July 2005).
- Head Panel Discussant, BTN University of Louisville, Louisville Kentucky USA July (2006)
- Panel Discussant, “Contemporary Women Playwrights” American Society of Theatre Research, Puerto Rico U.S.A (October, 2009).
- Juliana has performed stage Reading of her play: *In the Fullness of Time*, *Edewede*, *Aisha*, in Broadway, New York, Winston Salem City North Carolina and Smith College, Northampton all in U.S.A. These plays are text books on the Reading list in U.S.A and France, in the area of women and cultural studies .
- Visiting Professor Delta State University, Abraka (2008-2009)
- External Assessor Readership, University of Calabar, 2010
- External Assessor for Professorship, University of Uyo, Uyo, 2010
- External Assessor for Professorship, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa, 2011

Today, 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, Women and Cultural Studies.

### **Publications**

Julie Okoh has written and staged more than thirty (30) plays. Her Critical Essays include: *Theatre and Women's Human Rights in Nigeria* (2002) and *Female Circumcision in Nigeria: Myth, Reality and The Theatre* (2006). She has published over thirty (30) articles on theatre and on social, political, cultural and gender issues in both French and English languages in local and international journals.

### **Administrative Experience**

Professor Julie Okoh has served in administrative capacity as follows:

- Coordinator, Preparatory French Certificate Programme
- HOD, Department of Creative Arts
- Member Board of Governors, UDSS
- Member Uniport HIV/Aids Committee
- Member Convocation Ceremony Committee
- Faculty Representative in various Committee/Boards
- Member Task Force on NUC Accreditation Committee
- Member Post-Graduate Programme Committee
- Member Uniport Senate
- Director, Institute of Arts and Culture (Arts Village) Uniport

### **Public Community Service**

Professor Julie Okoh is:

- Founder and Executive Director:, Stanbow Theatre Company
- Co-founder and President, Edo Women Association, Port Harcourt
- Member, Association for Women Advancement (AWA), Uniport



- Member, Catholic Women Organization (CWO), Uniport
- Member, Planning Committee All African Game 5 (COJA) 2003/2004 Abuja
- Adjudicator, National Festival of Arts, Enugu, 2008
- Adjudicator, National Festival of Art ,Minna, 2009
- Adjudicator, CANIRIV (Port Harcourt) 2011

### **Membership of Learned/Professional Associations**

Professor Julie Okoh is a member of the following:

- Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA)
- President; Association of Nigerian Female Authors (ANFA)
- Society of Nigerian Theatre Artist (SONTA)
- Literary Society of Nigeria (LSN)
- National Association of Women in Academic's (NAWACS) and President of Uniport Chapter
- African Literature Association (ALA)-U.S.A
- Black Theatre Networks (BTN) U.S.A
- African Studies Association (ASA) U.S.A
- Equality Now, Democracy in Action (USA)

### **Supervision of Graduate & Post Graduate Programmes:**

Prof. Juliana Okoh has supervised more than thirty Bachelor of Arts Projects in French *Dept of FLL* before transferring to the Department of Theatre Arts in 1995. She has supervised many B.A. Theatre Arts projects, over seven M.A Degree Thesis and one Ph.D dissertation in Theatre Arts. She has been mentoring many students in the Department of Theatre Arts.

### **Editorial Appointment/Consultancy**

Prof. Julie Okoh is:

- Special Editor, Journal of Literary Society of Nigeria
- Member, Editorial Board, Journal of Creative Arts
- Member, Board of Editors African Studio

- Member, Advisory Board, The Crab: Journal of Theatre and Media Arts
- Member, Advisory Board, Journal of Abakaliki Literary Society

### **Major Research Area**

- Theatre Arts, Play Writing, Theory and Criticism
- Gender and Cultural Studies
- Theatre for Development and Conflict Resolution
- Comparative Literature

### **Awards and Honours**

Professor Julie Okoh has received the following awards and honours:

- Academic Scholarship Award (1973) U.S.A
- Academic Scholarship Award (1974) U.S.A
- Who's Who in American Colleges (1974) U.S.A
- Total Campagnie Francaise des Petroles Award (1988-1991) France
- Senior Fulbright Scholar Award (2000) U.S.A.
- ANA/NDDC J.P. Clark Prize for Drama (2005)
- ANA/NDDC J.P. Clark Prize for Drama (2007)
- ANA/NDDC J. P. Clark Prize for Drama (2008)
- ATAS Uniport Award 2011
- SONTA: Life Time Achievement Award (2011)

Professor Julie Okoh is happily married to Professor J. D. Okoh and they are blessed with four children and four grand-children Vice Chancellor, Sir, Ladies and Gentlemen I present to you the inaugural lecturer for the 95<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture

- An academic achiever
- A Life Time achiever
- An academic mentor
- A great female playwright
- An outstanding expert in Gender Studies

- A social activist
- And an indefatigable defender of Women's Human Rights.

**Professor (Mrs.) Juliana Omonukpon Omoifo Okoh**

**By**

**Professor (Mrs.) Philomena Ekeikhomen Ejele**